

“Against all odds, I had become solid”:
Exploring portrayals of change in trans autobiographies

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PhD

University of York

Women’s Studies

February 2018

Abstract

This thesis examines depictions of change in the autobiographical works of three trans people: Raymond Thompson's *What Took You so Long?* (1995), Claudine Griggs's *Journal of a Sex Change* (1996/2004), and Jennifer Finney Boylan's *She's Not There* (2003) and *I'm Looking Through You* (2008). Typically, a trans autobiography follows the life course, depicting feelings of "wrongness" in one's originally assigned gender and the process of beginning to live as the gender with which one identifies; and this shift often comprises social and body changes. My thesis asks, how might the autobiographies I concentrate on unsettle the key changes that underpin them? The subtitle of Thompson's autobiography, *A Girl's Journey to Manhood*, illuminates the central transformation that the narrative maps. However, Thompson portrays his childhood precisely as his boyhood, and depicts "a boy's journey to manhood", rather than a "girl's", undermining the thrust of the narrative proposed by the subtitle. Like Thompson, Griggs reworks the central transformation of her narrative: although she depicts a shift into female embodiment, she also recounts emerging into an emphasised state of transness, which Jay Prosser (1999) explores as a step backwards. Similarly, predicated on a spectral analogy, Boylan's *I'm Looking Through You* plays with notions of change by establishing resonance between her transition and her transformation from "ghostly" to corporeal: "Against all odds, I had become solid" (249). Departing from the genealogy of trans autobiographies, Boylan's spectral motif reworks conventional representations of change. Finally, the autobiographies both evoke and disrupt transformation from the incoherence of the body to embodied "wholeness": my thesis concludes that portrayals of "coming home" to the body, and/or arriving at embodied "wholeness" as they emerge in the narratives are tempered by notions of ongoing unfamiliarity and struggles to overcome the rupture(s) between past and present modes of being.

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Acknowledgements

Firstly, I would like to thank my supervisor, Ann Kaloski-Naylor, for unwavering encouragement and guidance, and for asking insightful questions that helped me to develop my ideas. I could not have asked for a more supportive supervisor.

I would like to express gratitude to the members of my Thesis Advisory Panel, Trev Broughton and Stevi Jackson, for their suggestions and support over the course of the Ph.D. I would also like to thank Gabriele Griffin, for taking me on as a supervisee, guiding me through the beginning of the Ph.D. process, and helping me to refine my research topic.

I am grateful for the support I have received from research colleagues at the Centre for Women's Studies: in particular, I feel very lucky to have met and developed close friendships with Catherine Atkinson and Gemma Gibson.

Furthermore, I am thankful to the Humanitarian Trust for the grant awarded to me in February 2016. The financial assistance provided to me was incredibly helpful during the third year of my Ph.D.

I am particularly grateful to:

My partner, Stuart, who has encouraged me, comforted me, kept me on track, allowed me to rant, and cooked for the both of us when navigating research commitments and part-time work felt particularly challenging.

My family. My sister, Elizabeth, always has words of encouragement. Finally, without the emotional and financial support of my Mum and Dad, I could never have completed my research. Thank you.

Author's declaration

I declare that this thesis is a presentation of original work and I am the sole author. This work has not previously been presented for an award at this, or any other, university. All sources are acknowledged as references.

Introduction: Mapping change(s)

You pass as a guy; I, as pregnant ... On the surface, it may have seemed as though your body was becoming more and more “male,” mine, more and more “female.” But that’s not how it felt on the inside. On the inside, we were two human animals undergoing transformations beside each other, bearing each other loose witness.

– Maggie Nelson, *The Argonauts*

Notions of transformation

What kinds of “transformations” might this excerpt from *The Argonauts* (2015) describe? Maggie Nelson undermines the idea that the concurrence of her pregnancy and her partner Harry Dodge’s transition necessarily sets them on divergent paths. The changes that Nelson refers to, her own and Dodge’s, occur both “on the surface” (83) and, in a more deeply resonant manner, internally. In Nelson’s portrayal, the transformations of pregnancy and the progression into maleness – changes that bring Nelson and Dodge together, rather than setting them apart – hinge on, and have significance beyond, sex and gender. This sense of change as ambivalent and complex is pivotal to my thesis.

In this thesis, I ask: how are changes – pertaining to sex, gender and the body – represented in the autobiographical works of three trans people? I concentrate on Raymond Thompson’s *What Took You so Long: A Girl’s Journey to Manhood* (1995), Claudine Griggs’s *Journal of a Sex Change: Passage Through Trinidad* (1996/2004)¹ and Jennifer Finney Boylan’s *She’s Not There: A Life in Two Genders* (2003) and *I’m Looking Through You: Growing up Haunted* (2008).² Broadly speaking, a trans

¹ The first edition of Griggs’s autobiography was published in 1996 as *Passage Through Trinidad: Journal of a Surgical Sex Change*. The edition I refer to in this thesis is the 2004 *Journal of a Sex Change: Passage Through Trinidad*. In addition to *Journal of a Sex Change*, I focus on Griggs’s partly autobiographical exploration of trans theory and experience *S/He: Changing Sex and Changing Clothes* (1998).

² In this thesis, I also analyse Mark Rees’s *Dear Sir or Madam: The Autobiography of a Female-to-Male Transsexual* (1996). I originally intended to include Rees’s autobiography as one of my core texts. However, my thesis concentrates on depictions of change, and while the autobiographies of Thompson, Griggs and Boylan illuminate various ways of portraying transformation, Rees’s work departs from this focus. Although I do not devote a chapter of my thesis to an exploration of this autobiography, I do draw on many of the ideas that emerge in the text to inform my discussion of the other autobiographies; and the move towards “wholeness” delineated by this text is central to my Conclusion.

autobiography – typically organised in accordance with the life course – depicts an author’s feeling of “wrongness” in their originally assigned gender and the process of beginning to live as the gender with which they identify; often, an author also discusses the body changes they undergo during transition. The tradition of trans autobiographies from which my core texts emerge spans decades,³ and early works – such as Christine Jorgensen’s *A Personal Autobiography* (1967/1968) – emphasise the notion that transness is predicated on “sex-change”: specifically, undergoing hormone therapy and/or gender confirmation surgeries. This privileging of the significance of body changes in early trans autobiographies, and the depiction of gender confirmation surgery as instantly transformative, has been criticised: in “The ‘Empire’ Strikes Back: A Posttranssexual Manifesto” (1991/2006), Sandy Stone criticises trans autobiographies of the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s for the implication of instant transformation, arguing that certain texts overlook the space between genders.⁴ In trans autobiographies of the 2000s and 2010s, transition emerges as a process that might *include* hormone therapy and gender confirmation surgeries, but equal or greater significance is typically afforded to representations of the social dimension of transition.⁵ Culturally, the prevalent use of the term “transition” rather than the now discarded and problematic “sex-change”⁶ signifies the shift in this conceptualisation of change: Julian Carter states that “‘Transition’ differs from ‘sex change’ in its inherent reference to duration rather than event” (2014, 235). I employ Nelson’s depiction of her partner’s transition at the beginning of this

³ See the Appendix for an overview of trans autobiographies from the 1930s to 2018. When I refer to the “tradition” or “genealogy” from which the core autobiographies emerge, I am describing a range of autobiographical works that document the writer’s shift into the gender with which they identify. To narrow my scope, I focus on texts by writers who have undergone body changes as part of their process of transition (whether these material shifts are reported or not). I refer to “trans autobiographies” to denote the tradition of texts that I explore. Other theorists, such as Jay Prosser (1998, 1999) and Jonathan Ames (2005) refer to “transsexual autobiography” or “transsexual memoir”. Later in this Introduction, I clarify my choice of terms.

⁴ However, in “Exceptional Locations” (1999), Prosser argues that trans autobiography’s “key function is to ... document the move between gendered locations”. In contrast to Stone, Prosser suggests that trans autobiography “is less fixated on a singular instant of sex change, offering up instead other less determined spaces of belonging” (90). I return to Stone’s “The ‘Empire’ Strikes Back” later in this Introduction.

⁵ I clarify this shift later in this Introduction.

⁶ However, this term does appear in the title of one of the autobiographies I concentrate on in this thesis; I explore the position of the core autobiographies with respect to this shift in conceptualising transition.

Introduction to bring into relief the text's concern with the territory "between", to emphasise Stone's notion of the space of shift and change, and to introduce the development of representations of transness and transition in trans texts. This territory is integral to my analysis of the depicted change(s) in the autobiographical works of Thompson, Griggs and Boylan – the core autobiographies of this thesis – and I examine how these autobiographies navigate and depict the significance of body and social change.

Similarly central to my exploration of change in the core autobiographies are the articulations of gender and sex throughout the texts, and I examine how these notions of sex and gender might conflict. Certain autobiographical works, such as Kate Bornstein's *My Gender Workbook* (1998), emphasise the fluidity of gender and its capacity for change(s), which opposes the fixed notion of gender that emerges elsewhere: "I think we all of us *do* change our genders" Bornstein asserts, and clarifies that, when we are around other people, "we subtly shift the kind of man or woman, boy or girl, or whatever gender we're being at the moment ... We all change our genders" (8–9).⁷ Bornstein's invocation of the mutability of gender conflicts with, for example, Dylan Scholinski's stated notion of gender as irrevocable in the final chapter of the memoir *The Last Time I Wore a Dress* (1997):⁸ "But where I stood on the feminine/masculine scale: unchangeable. It's who I am" (197). The conflict between these depictions of gender is striking: Bornstein suggests that changes intrinsic to gender are persistent and continual; yet Scholinski emphasises that gender is unchanging, in accordance with one's unwavering self-knowledge.⁹ A

⁷ I begin my thesis with Scholinski's *The Last Time I Wore a Dress* (1997), Bornstein's *My Gender Workbook* (1998) and Nelson's *The Argonauts* (2015) to illuminate diverse depictions of change. However, these texts do not sit comfortably within the rubric of "trans autobiography". *The Argonauts* is an exploration of family and marriage with a person of trans experience, Nelson's partner Harry Dodge. *My Gender Workbook* interrogates theories of gender; Bornstein's specifically autobiographical texts include *Gender Outlaw: On Men, Women and the Rest of Us* (1994) and *A Queer and Pleasant Danger* (2012). Scholinski's memoir focuses on the experience of being diagnosed with "Gender Identity Disorder" during adolescence. I draw from these texts here to emphasise that the category of trans autobiography is not rigid, and to stress that it has been a challenge, at times, to identify which texts belong to this tradition and which hover on the threshold of other genres. The process of compiling an overview of trans autobiographies from the 1930s to 2018, for the Appendix, has been challenging for this reason.

⁸ Published under "Daphne Scholinski".

⁹ In accordance with notions of the self as fixed and the body, by contrast, as malleable, Sarah Ray Rondot asserts that trans autobiographers "tend to focus on how their sex or body-biography (rather than gender) changes throughout their lives" (2016, 531).

similar tension arises between the notions of gender depicted in the core autobiographies: Thompson's portrayal of gender certainty in *What Took You so Long?* (1995) conflicts with Boylan's emphasis on her tentative sense of gender, reported in *I'm Looking Through You* (2008). I establish these tensions between notions of gender to undermine the assumption that "trans" might describe a single identity, and to throw into relief certain complexities that underpin this thesis.

Alongside exploring gender certainty and tentativeness in the core autobiographies, I examine conflicting notions of sex in the texts. In the core autobiographies, notions of sex typically conform to the overview provided by Susan Stryker's "(De)Subjugated Knowledges" (2006) of the commonly held assumption that sex "supports" and is represented by the "signs of gender that reflect it": that "bodily sex, gender role, and subjective gender identity" are assumed to be "a real thing and its reflections" (9). However, as Stryker suggests, what one assumes to be sex, "which we imagine to be a uniform quality that uniquely characterizes each and every individual whole body," in fact comprises many aspects: "chromosomal sex, anatomical sex, reproductive sex, morphological sex" (9). These elements of sex "can, and do, form a variety of viable body aggregations that number far more than two" (9). The body is assumed to be "whole" and sex the same universally, emphasising that these notions are "socially constructed" (9).¹⁰ I probe assumptions about sex in the core autobiographies and explore how stated notions of sex and gender might waver in the narratives. Conceptualisations of gender, sex and the body are central to my analysis of change because I am asking: how do the autobiographers write about the changes predicated on these notions? If gender, in accordance with Scholinski's assertion, is portrayed as irrevocable or immutable in the autobiographies – the notion that one's gender is, and has always been, how one identifies and has always identified – then, in the texts, does change arise in the context of sex and/or the body, and how might these changes emerge? I investigate the body changes on which the resolution of the narratives might rest, such as the passage of the body from

¹⁰ Postmodern theories of sex and gender, such as those of Judith Butler in *Gender Trouble* (1990) and *Bodies That Matter* (1993/2011), Christine Delphy in "Rethinking Sex and Gender" (1993), and Elizabeth Grosz in *Volatile Bodies* (1994), resist the assumption that sex is a natural fact of the body.

unfamiliarity to familiarity, and the transformation from diminished to substantial being.¹¹ These portrayals of change adhere to the sense of transformation that Nelson constructs in the excerpt at the beginning of this Introduction: a sense of shift both intrinsic to, and “beyond”, sex and gender. Drawing on the influential question Jay Prosser poses in *Second Skins: The Body Narratives of Transsexuality* (1998), “of what does this ‘moment’ of sex-change consist?” (66–67), I explore how the autobiographies portray the changes of gender confirmation surgeries, and notions of body “transformation” in this context.¹² While the core autobiographies portray transition – which, in this thesis, I define as the progression or movement from one’s assigned gender to the gender with which one identifies – as fundamentally social change, I explore how they might portray a changed mode of being as a consequence of surgeries. While Thompson and Griggs both focus on the various surgeries they undergo, Boylan elides gender confirmation surgery in her account; and I examine the tension between trans autobiographies in which surgery facilitates instant transformation and accounts such as Griggs’s, which stress the gruelling nature of gender confirmation surgeries.

Disrupting change(s)

The excerpt from *The Argonauts* (2015) at the beginning of this Introduction, which discusses the transformations of Nelson’s pregnancy and Dodge’s transition in a way that moves beyond maleness and femaleness, indicates the broadening of writing about trans in memoir. This notion is pivotal to my thesis: my aim is to explore and develop the ways in which changes are represented in the core

¹¹ While my project focuses on change and the body, I recognise that transness is not necessarily bodily: Sam Dylan Finch argues that trans is “an identity, a sense of self in relation to culturally constructed ideas about gender ... it’s the framework that we place ourselves within to better understand who we are. And it’s *fucking personal!*” (2015, unpaginated).

¹² I explore the forms of change that the surgeries in the autobiographies – phalloplasty, construction of a vagina and mastectomy, for example – effect. Surgical procedures are sometimes assumed to be central to trans lives, and the GLAAD Media Reference Guide on transgender terms warns against “overemphasizing the role of surgeries in the transition process” (unpaginated). My focus on the procedures portrayed in Thompson’s and Griggs’s autobiographies reflects the texts’ concern with surgeries. I address Griggs’s focus on surgery in her autobiography, unique in the delineation of the gruelling aspects of her procedure and process of recovery. I strive to avoid analysing surgical procedures under the umbrella of “surgery”, but to analyse the specific implications, particularly relating to change, of diverse procedures.

autobiographies to investigate how these texts open up ways of writing about trans experience. The autobiographers I focus on discuss changes in ways that set them apart from other writers in the tradition of trans autobiography. While other texts from the period I focus on,¹³ such as Bornstein's *Gender Outlaw* (1994), explicitly experiment with the genre of trans autobiography, I explore how the life writing of Thompson, Griggs and Boylan gently unsettles conventions, motifs and ideas prevalent in the tradition.

I chose to focus on Boylan's *I'm Looking Through You* (2008) because I was intrigued by the uncertainty of self that Boylan depicts. This emerges as a sense of diminishment, which the titles of her works confirm: she calls into question her own corporeality – “I'm looking through you” – and sense of embodied presence: “she's not there”. Furthermore, I was gripped by the spectral analogy Boylan uses to discuss her transition. In Chapter Three, I also focus on Boylan's *She's Not There* (2003) because it is strikingly different to *I'm Looking Through You*. While *She's Not There* adheres to many of the conventions of trans autobiographies that I discuss in this thesis, *I'm Looking Through You* undermines the requirement for trans life writing to pivot on certain integral phases. I was drawn to *She's Not There* by Boylan's depiction of her fluid movement(s) into and from girlhood in her adolescence, and the sense of back-and-forth that proposes the multiplicity of transition in her account.

I decided to focus on Griggs's *Journal of a Sex Change* (1996/2004) because I was gripped and troubled by the author's intricate and protracted depiction of the pain she endured following gender confirmation surgery. In the introduction to *Journal*, Halberstam states that Griggs's focus on pain is unique in the tradition (viii), a concept which I discuss in Chapter Two. I also chose to explore Griggs's *Journal* because, like *I'm Looking Through You*, it undermines the conventional structure of trans autobiographies: rather than narrating the life course, Griggs focuses precisely on her gender confirmation surgery.

Finally, I decided to focus on Thompson's *What Took You so Long?* (1995) because I was intrigued by the discrepancy between the idea of change the subtitle

¹³ The mid-1990s to mid-to-late 2000s.

of the text proposes – the “Girl’s Journey to Manhood” – and the sense of change the autobiography portrays. Furthermore, I chose to analyse Thompson’s *What Took You so Long?* because, in contrast to Boylan’s work, there is a strong and compelling undercurrent of certainty in this autobiography. Thompson’s narrative pivots on his urgency to change aspects of his body that he perceives as “wrongful”, in line with his notion of what his body should rightfully look like.¹⁴

The autobiographies I focus on were published during a thirteen-year period, beginning with *What Took You so Long?* (1995) and extending to *I’m Looking Through You* (2008). During the 1990s and 2000s, ideas and representations of transformation in trans autobiographies begin to broaden; for example, portrayals of gender confirmation surgery vary and depart from earlier representations.¹⁵ I have already referred to Stone’s (1991/2006) criticism of the idea that transition centres on gender confirmation surgery, common to early trans autobiographies. Later in this Introduction, I note that the emphasis of trans autobiographies shifts during the 1990s and 2000s; while certain ideas of change in autobiographies from this period resonate with earlier notions of change,¹⁶ my argument in this thesis is that the autobiographies of Thompson, Griggs and Boylan unsettle significant changes that underpin them.

Specifically, I argue in Chapter One that rather than depicting the “Girl’s Journey to Manhood” proposed by the subtitle of *What Took You so Long?*, the central change that Thompson portrays in his autobiography is that of maturing from *boyhood* to manhood. While Prosser extensively discusses *What Took You so Long?* in *Second Skins* (1998),¹⁷ I contribute the original argument that Thompson unsettles the central transformation of the autobiography and defies the subtitle of

¹⁴ Throughout my thesis I revisit and deepen my reasons for choosing to focus on these autobiographies.

¹⁵ In Chapter Two, I discuss the lessening of the significance of gender confirmation surgeries in autobiographies such as Boylan’s *She’s Not There*, departing from earlier works. In an intriguing sense, Griggs unsettles this inattention to gender confirmation surgeries in *Journal*, and returns to the subject to emphasise the gruelling nature of the procedures she endures.

¹⁶ For example, on waking from gender confirmation surgery Julia Grant (1994) states “I had been freed from the nightmare that had trapped me for twenty-five years. I was free. I was a woman at last” (231), suggesting that her notion of her womanhood rests on her surgical procedure. This is similar to April Ashley’s (1982) description of herself as “a woman in Casablanca” (88) following her gender confirmation surgery.

¹⁷ I discuss Prosser’s work and how our arguments differ later in this Introduction.

his work. Developing the idea of disruption to investigate how Griggs and Boylan are playful with change is similarly an original approach to these works.

Firstly, my focus on Griggs's account of suffering following her gender confirmation surgery in *Journal*, and specifically my argument that Griggs's passage into pain mimics and inverts the "trapped in the wrong body model", differs from existing critiques of this text. While Prosser's "Exceptional Locations" (1999) argues that the deepened awareness of transness Griggs invokes following her gender confirmation surgery arises as a form of regression (105), I explore this entrenchment as concurrent with her passage into the femaleness of the body. I conclude my argument by focusing on the sense of ambivalence in *Journal*, which is similarly ground that has not previously been covered.

Secondly, I depart from existing work on Boylan's *I'm Looking Through You* by proposing that Boylan eclipses her movement into womanhood by privileging her movement into solidity. This differs from Esther Wolfe's (2014) discussion of the haunting motif central to Boylan's *I'm Looking Through You*, which focuses on this analogy as expressive of trans oppression. Developing my argument, my proposal that Boylan undermines her shift from ghostliness to solidity contributes a new dimension to the literature on this work. Similarly, my conception of transformation in this text differs from Sarah Ray Rondot's (2016). While Rondot suggests that Boylan narrates "a continuous subject" (540), I concentrate on the notion of rupture that I argue is pivotal to the autobiography. Finally, I contribute a unique exploration of the resonances between *I'm Looking Through You* and *Jane Eyre* (1847/2006); and I draw on Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar's (1979/2000) notion of doubling in *Jane Eyre* to investigate tensions central to Boylan's gender nonconformity during adolescence.

I develop my argument that the autobiographies unsettle the changes that underpin them by exploring the notion of "wholeness". As I note in Chapter One, I originally encountered the notion of "wholeness" – and specifically the chronological shift from discontentment *into* wholeness – in Rees's *Dear Sir or Madam* (1996). The conclusions I draw develop the notion of "wholeness" that arises in this text: my contribution to existing literature partly comprises my

exploration of how the autobiographies of Thompson, Griggs and Boylan propose and rework the conventional sense of “wholeness” that concludes accounts.

The disruption of certain changes I concentrate on in this thesis is reflected in the title: the quote “Against all odds, I had become solid” (2008, 249) evokes the movement from ghostliness to solidity in Boylan’s work and symbolises more widely the passage into “wholeness” arising throughout the tradition of trans autobiographies. Yet, despite her claim, Boylan undermines her sense of solidity towards the close of *I’m Looking Through You*, as I explore in Chapter Three. I chose the quote because it evokes precisely this archetypal movement and the playful disruption I explore in this thesis.

The field of trans autobiography studies

Explorations of trans autobiographies, and analyses of the autobiographies I focus on in this thesis, have emerged since the 1990s, encompassing Stone’s “The ‘Empire’ Strikes Back” (1991/2006), Bernice Hausman’s *Changing Sex* (1995), Patrick Califia’s *Sex Changes* (1997/2003), Prosser’s *Second Skins* (1998) and “Exceptional Locations: Transsexual Travelogues” (1999), Jonathan Ames’s *Sexual Metamorphosis* (2005) and Juliet Jacques’s “Forms of Resistance: Uses of Memoir, Theory, and Fiction in Trans Life Writing” (2017).¹⁸ One of the first texts to interrogate a range of trans autobiographies, Stone’s “The ‘Empire’ Strikes Back” draws on the life writing of Lili Elbe (1933/2004), Hedy Jo Star (1955), Christine Jorgensen (1967/1968) and Jan Morris (1974) to expose the stereotypes at work in the autobiographers’ portrayals of womanhood. In “Look! No, Don’t! The Visibility Dilemma for Transsexual Men” (1999), Jamison Green is similarly critical of the genre: of trans men’s autobiographies, he states “I have been almost uniformly disappointed to find that every explanation sounds like self-justification ... like rationalization, even when it’s the truth” (130). While encountering outdated gender stereotyping has been one of the challenges of writing this thesis, trans

¹⁸ Califia and Prosser explore aspects of some of the autobiographies I concentrate on in this thesis. See also Dean Spade’s “Resisting Medicine, Re/Modeling Gender” (2003) and Esther Wolfe’s “‘Except that the haunted, hidden thing was me’: Ghostly Matters and Transsexual Haunting” (2014) for existing work on the autobiographies I focus on in this thesis.

autobiographies of the 1990s onwards depart from the conventional notions of gender arising in, for example, those of the 1970s and earlier, and I challenge the pervasive and problematic assumption that trans being reinforces gender stereotypes. Finally, I leave aside works such as Hausman's *Changing Sex* (1995) that depart radically from the field I strive to delineate here.¹⁹

Throughout my thesis, I draw on Prosser's exploration of trans subjectivity, the body and autobiography in both *Second Skins* (1998) and "Exceptional Locations" (1999). In his work, Prosser emphasises the interwoven nature of transness and autobiography: trans autobiographers, he argues, "by virtue of the fact that they write as transsexuals ... write out (and write themselves out) under the rubric of transsexuality" (1999, 89). Prosser refers to this positioning as a "specific and stable subject location", that trans autobiographers' "exceptionality" – key to the autobiographical project – "consists precisely in their transsexuality" (89). Evoking here the shared focus and structure of the genealogy of texts, in *Second Skins* he establishes that intrinsic to trans identity is the autobiographical act: one's published autobiography, he states, is secondary to the initial autobiographical account, which occurs in the "clinician's office" (1998, 101).²⁰ As a consequence of this resonance between trans identity and the autobiographical act, transness "emerges as an archetypal story" that adheres to a specific arrangement, encompassing "suffering and confusion; the epiphany of self-discovery; corporeal and social transformation/conversion; and finally the arrival 'home' – the reassignment" (1998, 101).²¹ This notion of "home" in "reassignment" is crucial to

¹⁹ In *Changing Sex*, Hausman argues problematically that "transsexualism emerged in the twentieth century at least in part due to advances in medical technologies that made physical 'sex change' possible" (vii). Hausman's analysis is unrelated to my focus in this thesis, because rather than undertaking an investigation of trans identities, I explore various ways of representing change in trans people's autobiographies. Prosser challenges Hausman's analysis of trans autobiographies, arguing that in her approach she "mirrors that of the policing clinician who has gone before her" (1998, 131).

²⁰ Of course, this only applies to the autobiographies of those who consult medical authority during transition.

²¹ See also Ames's discussion of a "basic outline" comprising three "acts" in *Sexual Metamorphosis* (2005), and the suggestion of resonance with the Bildungsroman structure (xii). I explore how the structure of trans autobiography might be informed by the medical model. This structure is typical of early trans autobiographies, as I move on to explore in this Introduction, though many trans autobiographies in the 2000s and 2010s continue to adhere to this model. Informed by Ames's discussion, I refer to the literary genre of the Bildungsroman specifically whilst discussing structure throughout this thesis. A Bildungsroman observes the development and often the maturation of a

my exploration of depictions of change in the core autobiographies; and I draw on Prosser's arguments, in this thesis, because he analyses narrative, identity and materiality, which are pivotal to my exploration of change.

Specifically, I concentrate on Prosser's approach, in *Second Skins* (1998), to the "trapped in the wrong body" model, and the material reading of the wrong-body portrayals; I engage with Prosser's (1999) exploration of the journeying model in trans autobiographies; and I approach the exploration of rupture, and the idea that the trans autobiographical project sutures the split of transition, discussed in *Second Skins*.²² However, there are important differences between Prosser's work and my focus in this thesis. While I concentrate, as Prosser does, on autobiographies from the 1990s and 2000s, I also draw on theory more recent than this period,²³ and I explore certain life narratives published in the 2010s. There is a significant interval between Prosser's work and autobiographies such as Jacques's *Trans: A Memoir* (2015), for example.²⁴ Jacques's autobiography is a useful example of life writing emerging during the 2010s that has moved away from the conventional structure and emphasis of trans life writing, a shift that I discuss later in this Introduction. This shift reflects an opening up of discussions about and representations of trans lives and identities: whereas Jorgensen's autobiography (1967/1968), amongst others, depicted and cemented the notion of a singular trans "journey", predicated on the changes of the body, certain texts of the 2010s – including Jacques's – defy the archetypal chronology, undermining the sense of a uniform trans experience. The excerpt from *The Argonauts* (2015) at the beginning

protagonist. Transformation is thus central to the genre. Many trans autobiographies echo the linearity of the Bildungsroman and the emphasis on change, development and "arrival". The idea of "arrival" is central to the conclusions I draw and will be discussed in more detail throughout this thesis.

²² In Chapter One, I discuss Prosser's *Second Skins* in more detail, and in particular Prosser's focus on "body narrative" and its intersection with Thompson's *What Took You so Long?*

²³ For example, later in this Introduction I draw on Rondot's (2016) discussion of similarities and patterns in the structuring of trans autobiographies; in Chapter One, my discussion of the wrong-body model explores the work of Talia Mae Bettcher (2014) and Ulrica Engdahl (2014); and Chapter Three concludes with an exploration of vulnerability that draws on Sara L. Crawley's (2008) exploration of clothing, bodies and LGBT identity.

²⁴ However, Prosser's analysis of trans autobiographies remains pertinent and insightful even beyond the texts of the 1990s and 2000s: my reading of Boylan's texts – both of which emerged after *Second Skins* – is informed by Prosser's notion of narrative as "join[ing]" the "split" of transition (1998, 102).

of this chapter similarly illuminates the complexities of transition. While Prosser (1998) argues that trans autobiographies adhere to a particular structure and certain forms of symbolism, I explore how the core autobiographies – although two of them were published during the 1990s, and also appear in Prosser’s analysis – might undermine common conventions and the typical chronology. While two of the autobiographies I focus on in this thesis are organised in accordance with the life course, the others reveal a shift of emphasis that resists this archetypal chronology.

In addition to his exploration of the interwoven nature of trans and narrative, Prosser introduces the concept of “body narrative”, investigating how one’s body might be read, and returning materiality to that which has typically been theorised as immaterial. By contrast, I concentrate on the representations of change(s) pertaining to sex, gender and the body that are fundamental to trans autobiographies.²⁵ As I noted earlier in this Introduction, I build on an exploration of how these changes are depicted to explore and develop how the autobiographies might unsettle the notions of change that underpin them. To explore how changes might be undermined, I trace the shifts that the paratexts of the autobiographies emphasise: specifically, the subtitle of Thompson’s autobiography, *A Girl’s Journey to Manhood*, and of Boylan’s *She’s Not There, the Life in Two Genders*; and the emergence into femaleness described on the back cover of Griggs’s *Journal*.²⁶

Notions of gender identity

My focus on this subject was prompted by the desire to reflect on how one’s sense of gender and of self might be portrayed in narrative. My specific focus on the portrayal of change(s) in autobiographies published in the 1990s and 2000s stems from current questions and debates relating to the capaciousness of “trans”, a

²⁵ Many of the titles and subtitles of trans autobiographies emphasise the focus on transition, such as Deidre McCloskey’s *Crossing: A Memoir* (1999), Max Wolf Valerio’s *The Testosterone Files: My Hormonal and Social Transformation from Female to Male* (2006), and Chaz Bono’s *Transition: Becoming Who I was Always Meant to Be* (2011). While I have stated that significant changes in trans autobiographies centre on sex, gender and the body, these texts also document changed and changing mode of living, forms of kinship, and so on, and I explore these forms of change in this thesis.

²⁶ The 2004 edition.

taxonomy that encompasses nonbinary and binary modes of being and living. While change is commonly assumed to be central to trans being, various nonbinary identities under the trans umbrella do not necessitate change. Even when “trans” is taken as shorthand for “trans man” and “trans woman” (in which change is often assumed to be key), trans itself comes into being simply when one identifies *as* trans, and does not require that one undergo specific changes, such as moving into the gender with which one identifies.²⁷ Informed by Halberstam’s discussion, in “Transgender Butch” (1998), of the border(s) between trans men’s (Halberstam refers to “FTM”) and butch lesbians’ identities, I am particularly interested in discomfort or dissatisfaction around bodies and gender and how discomfort and dissatisfaction pertain to cisness and transness.²⁸ My own feelings of gender discomfort, which have become keener during this research, have contributed to my enthusiasm for the research (though I do wrestle with reluctance to address my own experience of the ill-fitting nature of aspects of womanhood).²⁹ My exploration of debates around gender and gender identities in no way seeks to undermine or critique any identities or senses of gender or of self. This pertains to my investigation of and engagement with the autobiographies’ notions of change, sex, gender and the body in the wider thesis.

²⁷ See, for example, Finch’s article “Transgender 101” (2016), in which he states, “Not every transgender person will medically or even socially transition” (unpaginated). A valuable example of this idea of identity in autobiography is Rae Spoon’s account, in *Gender Failure* (2014), of coming to the realisation that “All I should have had to do to be a man was to say that I was one” (120).

²⁸ In “F2M: The Making of Female Masculinity” (1994/1999), Halberstam troubles specific categories by declaring both, “We are all transsexuals” (126) and “There are no transsexuals” (127). Recognising that theorising gender and bodies in this way might erase or elide lived trans experiences, Halberstam revisits these claims in “Transgender Butch: Butch/FTM Border Wars and the Masculine Continuum” (1998) and confesses “I admit we are not all transsexual”, but stands by the point that “many bodies are gender strange to some degree or another” (301). Ultimately, Halberstam argues, “It is time to complicate the models that assign gender queerness only to transsexual bodies and gender normativity to all others” (301).

²⁹For over a year during my research, I worked in an administrative role to support myself financially, experiencing an office culture (of mostly women) in which formal clothing was synonymous with conventional femininity. During this time, my idea of myself as an outsider (not only in terms of my feelings around gender) deepened, and it was after leaving the role, and as I started to make good progress with my research, that I began to recognise my feelings around my gender as essentially complicated, and that the urge to move into a more androgynous mode deepened. However, I strive to continually bear in mind that I have not undergone a shift or change similar to those of the three writers I focus on in this thesis, that we identify differently, and thus this area is beyond my realm of experience, and the implications, and complications, of this. But I am motivated to study the certainty of self that is articulated in the autobiographies precisely *because* it is beyond my experience.

In an article criticising nonbinary identities under the trans umbrella, particularly the nonbinary identities of individuals assigned female at birth, Susan Cox (2016) illustrates the tension between (twentieth-century, Western) feminism's opening up of what "woman" can mean,³⁰ and the move of many people towards identifying with non-binary identities under the trans umbrella, such as agender, androgynous, bigender, pangender and gender fluid.³¹ Cox asks, "If discomfort in the female social position means a woman is 'non-binary,' then what does it mean for all the women who *don't* declare themselves 'genderqueer?'" And furthermore, "Are they always a-ok with their lives under patriarchy? Do they never feel restrained by the narrow confines of femininity?" (unpaginated). It is striking that the article elides the experiences of nonbinary individuals who were assigned male at birth, and fails to conceive of individuals whose identities move or shift. The tension that arises in the article centres on the varied experiences of gender. While an individual might find the norms of conventional femininity restrictive and uncomfortable, they might also recognise that womanhood is not or need not be predicated upon these norms. Yet another individual, in line with their felt-experience of gender, and the confining nature of femininity *and* womanhood, might move into a more comfortable nonbinary mode. Further conflict lies in how second-wave feminism has depended on the category of woman in identifying gendered oppression (Gayle Rubin, 1975/2011), which relies on binary understandings of sex and gender.

A wider take on the border between identities is Sita Balani's (2016) reflection on the capacity of womanhood, and Balani's own reflection on lived and/or felt

³⁰ Feminism's approach to trans lives has been troublesome. Janice Raymond, for example, is hostile to trans identities and experience, and in *The Transsexual Empire* (1979/1980) she argues that trans people reify certain gender stereotypes. She suggests that discomfort in an originally designated gender (Raymond favours the term "sex role") reveals discomfort with the restrictive nature of the categories of womanhood or manhood, but that trans people support these categories in their changes; and she insists that trans people are not/cannot be/become the sex or gender with which they identify. Yet Raymond's work is predicated on stereotypes of trans people: there is no consideration of the lived experiences of trans people, and trans men are largely omitted from her discussion.

³¹ While non-binary identities are not the focus of my thesis and might not appear in the core trans autobiographies, I explore debates centring on these identities here to give an idea of my motivations for undertaking research in this area, to indicate some of the current trans and cis gender and body debates, and to illuminate how my research contributes to current trans studies. There is, of course, a gulf between trans men's and trans women's identities such as those portrayed in the autobiographies, which conform to the binary, and transness that connotes fluidity and/or genderless being.

gender: “Despite often not *passing* as a woman, and not really knowing if I *feel* like one, I can’t imagine giving up that term” (unpaginated). She notes that she aspires to a definition of “woman” that is “big and spacious enough to encompass all kinds of people, regardless of what we wear or how we look”.³² This sense of nuance is similarly integral to Hari Ziyad’s article (2016), in which Ziyad describes their non-binary identity as feeling “unlike a man”. Ziyad’s notion of their gender echoes Balani’s reported urge to open up womanhood: “there is nothing specific to ‘manhood’ that I want to keep and nothing about it I am unwilling to challenge” (Ziyad, unpaginated). The difference between the two states lies in Ziyad’s portrayed sense of non-manhood: the felt-sense of gender is its most integral component, here.

By contrast, J. Nelson Aviance’s “I am NOT Cisgendered” (2014) argues that attending to the complexity of identities beneath the trans umbrella insists simultaneously on a simple, singular idea of cisness. For Aviance, the cis label – or, more precisely, the notion of cisness, and the binary understanding of cis and trans – denies “the gender fluidity of those who”, for example, “have a penis and identify as male, but prefer women’s underwear or wear makeup or transgress norms in innumerable other ways” (unpaginated). The notion of cross-dressing that emerges in Aviance’s criticism of the limitations of cisness encompasses some of these crucial debates. As Stephen Whittle (2006, xi) and Sally Hines (2007, 1) note, the cross-dresser identity is included under “trans” when the term is taken broadly. This can cause discord, because cross-dressing individuals might identify as cisgender, revealing that “trans” might encompass within its reach all identities and practices beyond that which is designated as gender normative.³³ Cross-dressing identities pertain commonly to men who wear clothing culturally typical of femininity.³⁴

³² In the article, Balani addresses the assumption that nonbinary identities reveal the shortcomings of the binary identities of man and woman: “I worry that [‘non-binary’] makes being a man or a woman seem complicit ... as though identifying as such is somehow to accept the gender binary and all the violence that comes with it” (unpaginated).

³³ In *TransForming Gender: Transgender Practices of Identity, Intimacy and Care* (2007), Sally Hines states that “transgender”, as a term, “relates to a diversity of practices that call into question traditional ways of seeing gender and its relationship with sex and sexuality” (1).

³⁴ See “GLAAD Media Reference Guide – Transgender”.

While one's cross-dresser identity relies on the practice, it also relies on one's *identification* as a cross-dresser.

And pertaining to trans more widely, the idea that *being* trans relies on *identifying as* trans requires that one possess a strong sense of one's gender identity. In my reading of trans autobiographies, within and beyond the core texts, I have been struck by claims of gender certainty throughout the tradition. In *Conundrum* (1974), Morris's famous opening assertion that she became aware of her gender dysphoria at three or four years old (9) epitomises the prevalence of gender certainty – that persistent ideas of one's felt-gender reach back into one's early childhood – and is the archetypal claim in the tradition. Similarly, Max Wolf Valerio (2006), told by his mother that “someday [he] might be crowned Miss America” (33) is taken aback, and recounts his sense of disbelief: “At this young age, around three, my ambition is to be a soldier, like my father ... I'm not really a girl, and this is all weird girl stuff” (34). Furthermore, Chaz Bono (2011) states that feeling “like a boy” is one of his most vivid childhood memories (13). Throughout my thesis, I explore notions of gender certainty as they arise in the core autobiographies, specifically as they intersect with changes and notions of the body. But to suggest that trans experience is typified by gender certainty insists on a universal understanding of trans, which is problematic and inaccurate for many. Gender certainty is not a requirement of trans being: Sam Dylan Finch (2017) states that “uncertainty around ... identity” does not preclude transness: while “Some of us have been acquainted with our genders our entire lives”, others “are just getting cozy” (unpaginated). However, the certainty of not identifying with one's assigned gender perhaps *is* central to transness; or, the felt-sense that one's assigned gender is uncomfortable, or ill-fitting. Transness might also be experienced as gender's mutability (Bornstein's assertion that “we all change our genders”). Ziyad (2016) states: “It is possible to not be a man and still say you are sometimes, to be one today and not be one tomorrow” (unpaginated). Elsewhere in trans narratives, the self emerges as fragile and uncertain, and I am intrigued by the conflict that this

raises, or the possibility that both certainty and uncertainty of self might inform portrayals.³⁵

Depictions of ambiguity and androgyny in the autobiographical work of Morris (1974), Mark Rees (1996) and Boylan (2003, 2008) inform my analysis of change(s): I examine the disjuncture between the felt-sense of androgyny, and the notion that “androgyny” describes a particular appearance. Moreover, I explore what androgyny has meant in second-wave feminist theory, particularly Carolyn Heilbrun’s *Towards a Recognition of Androgyny* (1964/1993). More recently, “androgyny” has typically evoked an identity, and a look, although not necessarily both for all androgynous people. Kris Nelson (2016) argues that “the definition of androgynous is seriously narrow and extremely exclusionary” (unpaginated), that androgyny is typically defined by, and commonly represented in terms of, thinness and whiteness, and within the parameters of the identity, masculinity becomes genderless. Is androgyny derived from its aesthetics? What can androgyny mean, apart from this? Current ideas of “androgyny” as an identity, as they arise in Nelson’s article, are different from expressions of the androgynous in Morris’s *Conundrum* (1974) for example, in which it is not founded on identity but rather on shifting appearance, the movement from one mode of living to another. Drawing on the question of what androgyny might mean, I probe the implications of my own assumption that Boylan’s portrayed mode of being as an adolescent conforms to ideas of androgyny, although she does not employ the term in her portrayal.

The debates I introduce here employ “trans” in a broad sense, but this thesis is concerned with the autobiographical accounts of three individuals who refer to themselves in their autobiographies as “transsexual”, and who have undergone the shift from living as one gender to living as another, and the changes brought about by hormone therapies and surgeries.³⁶ In addition to engaging with the capaciousness of trans, and certain tensions arising between identities, I draw on

³⁵ Later in this Introduction, I refer to Bono’s portrayals of uncertainty throughout his autobiography, *Transition* (2011).

³⁶ While these debates centre on selfhood, bodies and body changes are integral to common assumptions relating to transness. In *Second Skins* (1998), Prosser addresses the assumption that dissatisfaction with, or discomfort in, the body is central to trans experience, a consequence of which is changing the body, and I explore his approach to the wrong-body model (specifically, as it plays out in Thompson’s *What Took You so Long?*).

trans debates to introduce my exploration of how and where changes arise in the autobiographies: compulsions for change; a strong sense of self that drives (body) change; the fragile self; the mutable self.

Early trans autobiographies

To illustrate the context of the autobiographies I focus on in this thesis, and my reasons for focusing on them, here I provide an overview of the tradition of trans autobiographies beginning in the 1930s and continuing into the 2010s.³⁷ I concentrate on shifts in the tradition during and following the 1990s and 2000s, the period in which the core autobiographies were published. I then move on to address the possible conflicts between theories of autobiography and ideas of selfhood articulated in the core autobiographies.

“Trans autobiography”, in this thesis, refers to the life writing of individuals who identify as and live in a different gender to the one assigned at birth.³⁸ Typically, these texts document a shift from one mode of living to another; however, as I explore in this thesis, in some works this shift is neither necessarily central, nor necessarily recounted. Certain texts, including the three I refer to at the beginning of this chapter – Scholinski’s (1997), Bornstein’s (1998) and Nelson’s (2015) – encompass trans experience but do not sit comfortably within the “trans autobiography” rubric. Helen Boyd’s *My Husband Betty* (2003) and *She’s Not The Man I Married* (2007), and Nelson’s *The Argonauts* (2015) illustrate the complexity at the heart of trans narrative taxonomies: these texts narrate the experience of life with a person of trans experience, and depart from the tradition I describe in that they might be considered trans biography.

³⁷ Jacques’s “Forms of Resistance” (2017) provides a useful overview of trans autobiographies and fiction, beginning with writings on the first gender confirmation surgeries.

³⁸ In certain trans autobiography theory, “transsexual autobiography” (or “transsexual memoir”, as, for example, employed by Jonathan Ames) might designate a tradition of autobiographies more precisely than the compound I employ, “trans autobiography”, because it denotes a specific identity. I avoid the term “transsexual” in this thesis, unless referring to an individual author’s use of the term, and seek to probe the capaciousness of “trans” autobiography, whilst recognising the problematic aspects of the compound.

The earliest autobiographical work that belongs in the trans autobiography tradition epitomises the instability of the genre.³⁹ *Man into Woman* (1933/2004) is an account of the life of Lili Elvenes (referred to as Lili Elbe), edited by Niels Hoyer.⁴⁰ Hoyer, as sexologist Norman Haire states in the introduction to the account, draws on Elbe's diaries, letters and other materials (14) and depicts Elbe's move from living as Einar Wegener (referred to as "Andreas Sparre", in *Man into Woman*), to living as Lili. In *Man into Woman*, Elbe's sense of herself as a woman emerges when she models for Gerda Gottlieb (referred to as "Grete Sparre"). In addition to a reprint of *Man into Woman* in 1953,⁴¹ the 1950s saw the publication of *Roberta Cowell's Story* (1954) and Jorgensen's public emergence as a trans woman following gender confirmation surgery in Denmark. Jorgensen's own memoir, *A Personal Autobiography* (1967/1968), was published during the following decade, the 1960s. Joanne Meyerowitz notes that Jorgensen's public emergence into womanhood was accompanied by salacious accounts of her gender confirmation surgery in the media (2002, 1). Jorgensen's portrayal of trans experience relies heavily on medical discourse. Certain trans autobiographies, particularly those emerging during this period and over the following few decades, are informed by a primarily medical understanding of trans; for the autobiographers whose works report the seeking of medical assistance, the narration of the trans history, the "autobiographical act", occurs before the published account. As Prosser states, only certain trans stories – "of a strong, early, and persistent transgendered identification" – have typically enabled assistance in a medical context (1998, 101).⁴² In "'Bear Witness' and 'Build

³⁹ Stone (1991/2006) notes that Elbe's is the "earliest partially autobiographical account in existence" in "The 'Empire' Strikes Back" (224). *Man into Woman* traverses the genre of autobiography precisely because the work is a compilation of Elbe's materials. However, many of the motifs and devices the text establishes, such as the symbolism between journeying and transition, inform later works in the tradition of trans autobiography, and the text is as such crucial to the genealogy.

⁴⁰ The full title of the 1933 edition is *Man into Woman: An Authentic Record of a Sex Change – The True Story of the Miraculous Transformation of the Danish Painter Einar Wegener (Andreas Sparre)*. When it was published in 2004, the subtitle changed to *The First Sex Change: A Portrait of Lili Elbe*, which Nicholas Chare argues insists on the centrality of Elbe's change (2016, 347). The 2004 edition is translated from German by H. J. Stenning.

⁴¹ By 1953, the title had become *Man into Woman: An Authentic Record of a Change of Sex* and it was published by Popular Library.

⁴² In *Blending Genders: Social Aspects of Cross-Dressing and Sex-Changing* (1996), Richard Ekins and Dave King argue that "medicine has become the culturally major lens through which gender blending is viewed in modern western societies" (119). While autobiographies up until the latter end

Legacies': Twentieth and Twenty-First-Century Trans* Autobiography" (2016), Sarah Ray Rondot argues that trans autobiographies early in the tradition emerged in the midst of explanations of trans being – typically from medical authority – predicated on “pathological and sensational rhetoric” (532), that necessarily informed accounts.

A key text in the trans autobiography tradition, Morris's *Conundrum* (1974) appeared during the decade following the publication of Jorgensen's *A Personal Autobiography*. It was one of a number of important texts of the 1970s, such as Canary Conn's *Canary: The Story of a Transsexual* (1974) and Nancy Hunt's *Mirror Image* (1978). When her autobiography was published, Morris was already established as a journalist, correspondent and travel writer. *Conundrum* is a notable work, and Morris's visit to Dr. Georges Burou's clinic in Casablanca for gender confirmation surgery strengthened a crucial model in the tradition: the journey, or pilgrimage, to the site of transformation. April Ashley's *Odyssey* (1982) and Renée Richards's *Second Serve* (1983/1984), which emerged during the early 1980s, record their own journeys to the same destination, confirming the model as an integral element of many trans texts.

Shifting emphasis of trans autobiographies

During the 1990s, the decade in which Thompson's *What Took You so Long?* (1995) and Griggs's *Journal* (1996/2004) and *S/He* (1998) were published, debates about the body opened up, which led to a shift towards theorising the corporeal, material body.⁴³ Also during the 1990s, and at the same time as, but diverging from, queer

of the twentieth century conform to the medical model, over time many autobiographies have moved away from an insistence on the medical facts of trans lives. In *Trans: A Memoir* (2015), for instance, Jacques positions her surgery at the beginning of the narrative, and devotes only a few pages to its portrayal, to disrupt the centrality of gender confirmation surgery to many trans accounts. While a move away from surgery as central to trans lives is evident, however, from the 1990s onwards a number of texts return to medical aspects of trans lives and changes in order to reconceptualise them.

⁴³ Central to this feminist theorising of the body is the regulation of the body in accordance with social norms and, from the 1990s onwards, this work draws on Foucault's discussion of the power relations that operate through disciplinary practices in *Discipline and Punish* (1975): see Sandra Bartky's "Foucault, Femininity, and the Modernization of Patriarchal Power" (1990), Susan Bordo's *Unbearable Weight* (1993) and Kathy Davis's *Embodied Practices* (1997). Analyses of women's bodies, "medical metaphors", reproduction and reproductive technologies – see Emily Martin's *The Woman in the Body* (1987/1989) and Margrit Shildrick's *Leaky Bodies* (1997) – reveal "cultural

studies, trans studies became a cohesive field.⁴⁴ Departing from the life-course structure, Kate Bornstein's *Gender Outlaw: On Men, Women, and the Rest of Us* (1994) illuminates the opening up of the body and trans in debates during the 1990s, and illustrates a shift away from earlier texts in the tradition. As Prosser argues, Bornstein's autobiography works against "transsexuality's telic structure" by departing from a specific "gendered outcome": the text might be considered "our first postmodern transsexual autobiography" (1999, 90). Bornstein begins *Gender Outlaw* with the assertion that her identity, as a trans lesbian, has become "manifest in [her] fashion statement", that her "fashion and identity are based on collage ... sort of a cut-and-paste thing" (3). Fragments of the text are positioned, alone, towards the margins, mirroring the analogy of collage and "cut-and-paste" that she employs in her self-portrayal. Resisting the life-course chronology, the text closes with Bornstein's play, *Hidden: A Gender*.

Other texts from the period, although traversing the boundaries of trans autobiography, similarly illuminate the shift in emphasis undergone by trans texts: these include Sandy Stone's "The 'Empire' Strikes Back" (1991/2006), a response to Janice Raymond's criticism of trans identity in *The Transsexual Empire* (1979/1980), and Leslie Feinberg's exploration of trans oppression *Transgender Liberation: A Movement Whose Time Has Come* (1992) and novel *Stone Butch Blues* (1993). Susan

assumptions" (Martin, 27) at the heart of contemporary scientific ideas about bodies. Finally, and moving away from solely feminist perspectives, theories of illness and suffering emerged during the move towards material attention to the body: see Elaine Scarry's *The Body in Pain* (1985), Arthur Frank's *The Wounded Storyteller* (1995/2013) and Jackie Stacey's *Teratologies* (1997). The analysis of pain that emerges during this period is crucial to my focus on Griggs's autobiography.

In *Gender Trouble* (1990), Butler argues that the body has "always already been interpreted by cultural meanings"; and sex is exposed as "gender all along" (11). This notion of sex is at odds with portrayals of sex and gender in the core trans autobiographies of this thesis, which instead typically explore the biological "realness" of sex. In *Bodies That Matter* (1993/2011), Butler argues that the category of sex is normative (xi); that sex is "part of a regulatory practice that produces the bodies it governs" (xi). Thus sex is a construct which becomes material over time (xii), and not a "fact" of the "body" (xii): specifically, it is a norm by which one becomes "viable" (xi). Butler is criticised by some trans theorists for asserting the malleability of gender, that it is subject to change according to an individual's "whim" (Stryker 2006, 10). Stryker argues that many trans people perceive their gender as "ontologically inescapable and inalienable", which is sometimes considered to be contrary to Butler's arguments (10). As I explore in this thesis, notions or understandings of sex and gender in the autobiographies waver, and are, at times, difficult to follow, revealing conflicts and complexities.

⁴⁴ The intersection of trans and queer theory is complex. Prosser (1998) argues that queer studies has made the trans subject "a key queer trope", and uses the trans subject to "challenge sex, gender, and sexuality binaries" and to "institutionalize homosexuality as queer" (5). I discuss Prosser's notion of the significance of trans to queer theory in Chapter One.

Stryker and Aren Z. Aizura, in the introduction to *The Transgender Studies Reader 2* (2013), identify a divergence during this period between the scholarly work that was part of the newly-formed field of trans studies and certain kinds of life narratives, particularly those that “narrated diagnostic categories from first-person perspectives” (2).⁴⁵ While the opening up of body debates and the emergence of trans studies evidently had less influence on the works of Thompson, Griggs and Boylan than it had on, for example, Bornstein’s work, rich ideas of self, gender, sex and the body nevertheless arise in these texts, prompting my focus on them; and, crucially, in this thesis I explore how these autobiographies might begin to rework conventional ideas of transness and the body.⁴⁶ I chose to return to these texts from the 1990s and early 2000s because they illuminate various ways of portraying transformation, and because broadening notions of the body and trans identities are central to this period, ideas which are the chief concern of this thesis. I sought to probe how claims of gender certainty intersect with notions of change. Furthermore, I sought to navigate the conflicts that centre on notions of surgery’s impact, and surgery as a form of destiny. Finally, the shifts of the body that arise in the autobiographies – such as the movement between fragmentation and coherence, or familiarity and unfamiliarity – indicate that complex notions of change arise in the texts.⁴⁷

⁴⁵ Stone’s “The ‘Empire’ Strikes Back” and Feinberg’s *Transgender Liberation: A Movement Whose Time Has Come* were at the forefront of newly emerging academic and political theory. While trans lives had been studied prior to the 1990s, in the period designated new discussions of trans lives and embodiment materialised (Stryker and Aizura 2013, 1) and trans studies moved away from theorising trans from purely medical, legal, and psychological perspectives (Stryker and Paisley Currah 2014, 4).

The interdisciplinary field of trans studies interrogates gender diversity, gender identity, embodiment, and diverse identities under the transgender rubric (Stryker 2006, 3). Trans studies examines development and revision in perceptions and ideas around “what gender means and does” (Stryker and Aizura 2013, 3). The field encompasses the intersection of trans and feminist theory; intimacy and sexual identities, such as Hines’s *TransForming Gender* (2007); transnormativity; trans pedagogies; trans phenomenology, such as Gayle Salamon’s *Assuming a Body* (2010); the interrogation of whiteness; the posthuman, “posttranssexual” and “postposttranssexual”: see Stryker and Aizura’s “Introduction” (2013, 3).

⁴⁶ Boylan, in the part-memoir, part-(trans) parenting guide *Stuck in the Middle With You* (2013), criticises Butler for theorising trans in dense rhetoric, which might illustrate the departure of this text and others from emerging contemporary theory, and the urge to narrate experiences rather than theorise identity.

⁴⁷ The core autobiographies pertain to UK and US contexts, and the tradition of trans autobiographies I outline also arises from this context. The history of transness I delineate thus adheres to a Western perspective.

In this thesis, I strive to maintain the awareness that trans autobiographies are situated in an interwoven genealogy, and that the adherence to particular modes of representation might inhibit ideas and thinking around trans experience. I seek to acknowledge the limitations implicit in the fact that life writing – particularly, the writing and publishing of autobiography – was and is only one medium in which trans experience could and can be discussed, but was the primary means of portraying experience and ideas with a readership until the 1990s. In *Trans: A Memoir* (2015), Jacques states that autobiography has been the particular mode of discourse in which trans people have publicly discussed their lives – and, specifically, transitions – since the appearance of Elbe’s *Man into Woman* (1933/2004). While Jacques hoped to pursue a different method to write her story, “all [she] could get publishers to consider was a personal story” (299). Her discussion emphasises both the idea that trans people seeking to discuss trans experience have typically been limited to restrictive autobiographical discourse (Stryker and Aizura, 2), and the impact of certain texts in the trans autobiography tradition on other memoirists.

Yet there is a tension between the suggestion that autobiography is necessarily a limited means of depicting trans experience and the proliferation of autobiographies that emerged during the 1990s and beyond, concurrent with the opening up of modes of trans discourse. During this period, Caroline Cossey portrayed her move into living as a woman prior to her modelling career, in *My Story* (1992). Julia Grant’s *Just Julia: The Story of an Extraordinary Woman* (1994) followed the production of the BBC television documentary series about her life, *A Change of Sex*.⁴⁹ Similarly, Jayne County depicted her emergence onto the punk scene, and subsequent shift into living as a woman, in *Man Enough to be a Woman* (1995).⁵⁰

Later, the publication of Caitlyn Jenner’s *The Secrets of My Life* (2017), following her role in the television documentary series *I Am Cait*, beginning in 2015, illustrates a dimension of celebrity culture in the consumption of trans life stories in the 2010s. Both Boylan and Bornstein appear in a number of episodes of Jenner’s

⁴⁹ The documentary series began in 1979.

⁵⁰ This is also the title of a song on County’s 1986 album *Private Oyster*.

docuseries. Additionally, Janet Mock's autobiographical works *Redefining Realness: My Path to Womanhood, Identity, Love, and so Much More* (2014) and *Surpassing Certainty: What My Twenties Taught Me* (2017) emerged in the midst of her career as a trans activist and television host. Mock's earliest autobiography is an account of her childhood and teen years, and the sequel recounts her young adulthood. In a review of *Redefining Realness*, Katherine Cross (2014) notes that, while Mock's autobiography adheres to the chronology of earlier texts, it also "transcends their tropes time and again with an unapologetically political voice that weaves the lanyards of race, class, sex work, and gender together into one story" (unpaginated).

While trans women's autobiographies substantially outnumber trans men's,⁵¹ key trans men's narratives emerged during the 2000s and 2010s.⁵² Jamison Green's *Becoming a Visible Man* (2004) combines autobiographical accounts with explorations of the trans movement, trans politics, kinship and sexuality. Moving away from the life-course structure, Green recounts his history of trans activism, crucial to the period. Certain texts in the 2010s sustain the resistance to the life course. Jacques's critique of various publishers' insistence on one type of trans story in her autobiography *Trans: A Memoir* (2015), and her structuring of the autobiography, works against the rigidity of the prescribed mode of discourse: Jacques begins with the portrayal of surgery (usually situated towards the close of the narrative), and tacks essays onto the end of chapters, disrupting typical narrative flow. Similarly, Ivan E. Coyote and Rae Spoon's *Gender Failure* (2014) departs from the standard format by interspersing fragments of text with song lyrics and images. The account narrates two lives instead of one, displacing the singular "I" at the centre of the autobiography. Finally, in the 2010s there is also a rise in the number of young adult trans memoirs, such as Arin Andrews's *Some*

⁵¹ See the Appendix.

⁵² See, for example, Matt Kailey's *Just Add Hormones: An Insider's Guide to the Transsexual Experience* (2005) and Valerio's *The Testosterone Files* (2006). Kailey's narrative is one of the very few autobiographies by a gay trans man: the diverse range of experience amongst trans people is not well-documented in the trans autobiography tradition.

In *Transition* (2011), Bono recounts navigating between fame and beginning to live as a man, despite ongoing uncertainty. Thomas Beatie's *Labor of Love: The Story of One Man's Extraordinary Pregnancy* (2008) recounts navigating notoriety; specifically, his status as the first "legal male and husband" to "give birth to a child" (309).

Assembly Required: The Not-So-Secret Life of a Transgender Teen (2014) and Jazz Jennings's *Being Jazz: My Life as a (Transgender) Teen* (2016).

Tensions between trans autobiography and theories of autobiography

The shift towards troubling the certainty of self that is central to autobiographies such as Bornstein's *Gender Outlaw* (1994) and Coyote and Spoon's *Gender Failure* (2014) reflects autobiography theory's central tenets.⁵³ Feminist scholars of autobiography, influenced by postmodern theory, argue that the subject in autobiography is a product of discourse, and that the self is a creation of the narrative in which it features: Mary Evans (1999), Linda Anderson (2001) and Sidonie Smith (2001) posit that, while one's identity or self typically seems fixed and coherent in one's autobiography, identity is possibly provisional and incoherent. However, Liz Stanley (1992) suggests it is crucial to remember that, even if the self in auto/biography is fictive or a creation of the text, it is still connected to the "material realities of everyday life" (243). These notions of self and narrative are crucial to my focus because I explore whether and how the self and/or gender might emerge as mutable in the core autobiographies: "we all change our genders".⁵⁴ I concentrate on whether and how the self and gender might emerge as irrevocable in the core autobiographies, departing from the ideas of selfhood that Bornstein, Coyote and Spoon construct, and how the autobiographers might portray a "true" self. The "trapped in the wrong body" model that is at work in many trans autobiographies is portrayed as emerging from a deep and persistent awareness of the "true" self, and I explore how the emphasis on the self typically drives the common assumption that, for trans people, the body is of lesser significance. Thompson's autobiography begins with the wrong-body claims of his early childhood, and he insists on feeling surprise and dismay, during childhood, at the claims of family and peers that he would not grow up to be a man (11). Conflict

⁵³ As I move on to discuss, I am referring here to autobiography theory of the 1990s onward.

⁵⁴ Although this is an exploration of selfhood, my exploration of change, which is perhaps at the core of the conflict between (fixed) notions of selfhood and the selfhood that emerges in autobiography theory, necessarily encompasses the body, my primary concern, because I am asking: where is change located? How do transformations of the body and of the self, in the autobiographies, interact? Additionally, as I move on to explore, under the "trapped in the wrong body" model, core ideas of gender and ideas of the body's "wrongness" are produced in tandem.

arises between these notions of self and the incoherent self posited by certain autobiography theorists.⁵⁵

Dismantling the assumed singularity of the autobiographical self, Stanley (1992) argues that “‘the autobiographical past’ is actually peopled by a succession of selves as the writer grows, develops and changes” (61).⁵⁶ How does the notion of the self as multiple interact with portrayals of the “true” self as emerging from unknown recesses, in certain trans autobiographies? In *Just Julia* (1994), Grant depicts her conceptualisation of her identity prior to transition as her woman-self, a facet of her identity whom she has named Sandy. She asks, “Why was she always there deep inside me? Why wouldn’t she go away?” and concludes, “She was getting too strong – more uncontrollable every day” (191). This portrayal of discord is an invocation of the uncertainty and doubt central to many trans autobiographies, the suggestion that the writer is struggling to identify their “real” self: Bono (2011), for example, records throughout his narrative how he agonised over whether or not to begin living as a man. However, Bono’s uncertainty is impermanent: his knowledge of himself as a man, present since his childhood, eventually overcomes his sense of doubt.⁵⁷ Similarly, Grant’s “real” self – Julia – eventually emerges despite her original reticence. In these accounts, uncertainty is finally overcome by certainty in

⁵⁵ Autobiography theory underwent key shifts during the twentieth century. While scholarship emerging during the 1950s privileged the subject and individuality, theorists during the 1970s and 1980s departed from readings of individualism and challenged notions of the self as fixed and coherent: see James Olney (1980). The notion that one’s memory operates simply as a bridge between past and present was challenged by theorists during the 1970s and 1980s, who began to conceive of memory as unreliable and an autobiographer’s access to memory as mediated: see Paul John Eakin (1985). Smith states that, during this period, theorists challenged the “I” at the centre of autobiography that had previously been perceived as representative of a universal subject (*Reading Autobiography*, 123). During the 1980s, scholarship began to address women’s autobiographies, until then largely neglected, and feminist criticism of autobiography emerged during the 1990s: see Leigh Gilmore’s *Autobiographics* (1994) and Laura Marcus’s *Auto/biographical Discourses* (1994).

⁵⁶ Similarly, Elizabeth Schewe’s “Serious Play: Drag, Transgender, and the Relationship between Performance and Identity in the Life Writing of RuPaul and Kate Bornstein” (2009) raises the notion of self – or voice – as multiple in trans autobiography: Schewe argues that Bornstein’s *Gender Outlaw* is “dialogic in the Bakhtinian sense”, and that “on nearly every page Bornstein creates a multivoiced performance through the use of different fonts and margins, the movement of text on the page imitating the actor’s movement across the stage, and the shift to bold or italics suggesting a change in voice or lighting” (681).

⁵⁷ In the afterword to *Transition* Bono discusses his previous indecision “about whether or not to transition” (239) and his ultimate realisation that following transition he feels “so good, so whole and complete” (239). He reiterates the subtitle of his autobiography, “becoming the man I was always meant to be” (240), and laments that “my life is half over and I am only now feeling like a complete human being” (240).

one's "real" self, a notion of selfhood that is in tension with autobiography theory of the 1990s onwards.

An insightful example of the progression towards the eventual emergence of certainty in self and body arises in Rees's *Dear Sir or Madam* (1996). Rees concludes his autobiography with the chapter "Wholeness": structuring his account to conclude with an exploration of the "whole" body and "whole" personhood, Rees epitomises the move towards this state of being that is typical of the tradition.⁵⁸ The aspiration towards "whole" selfhood emphasises notions of the coherent self that conflict with the central tenets of autobiography theory. However, the fact that, in the autobiographies, "wholeness" might emerge as elusive indicates resonance with autobiography theory's troubling of the certainty of the self.

Literary and political context

In his autobiography *Emergence* (1977), Mario Martino theorises the impact of the publication of Jorgensen's *A Personal Autobiography* (1967/1968): "Her book established the term [transsexual] and its meaning in the public's mind. Now, if I must label myself, I could hope for some degree of recognition" (163). Reading Jorgensen's autobiography during his own move into manhood, Martino demonstrates that his work emerges from a context in which "transsexuality" – his idea of it, and common understanding – has been framed by Jorgensen's coverage in the media, and her autobiographical account. Additionally, he illuminates a key, and compelling, facet of the trans autobiography tradition: its interwoven nature. Texts in the tradition share modes of discourse, models of experience and specific forms of symbolism, and I return to this crucial aspect of the genealogy of trans autobiographies later in this thesis.⁵⁹ The sharing of motifs and models reflects the shared focus of (some) trans autobiographies and the structuring of

⁵⁸ Certain trans autobiographies emphasise the progression towards becoming who one was always meant to be/who one always was, and I explore this notion in terms of its circular structure. Reflecting on the notion of "transition" as becoming something new, Carter (2014) argues that "transition is a misnomer because you were here, like this, all along" (236).

⁵⁹ Prosser argues that mirror scenes, operating in terms of self-reflection, "elucidate this formalization of transsexuality as a plot", and argues that Hunt's *Mirror Image*, as the title indicates, narrates the trans journey as a succession of mirror stages (1998, 101). I discuss the use of mirrors in all analytical three chapters of my thesis.

autobiographies, as I outline at the beginning of this Introduction, in accordance with the life course: recognising body “wrongness”; making change(s); attaining contentment and/or satisfaction in oneself. Rondot (2016) suggests that “patterns” in trans autobiographies throw into relief “the cultures in which authors came to consciousness”⁶⁰ rather than, as Ames (2005) suggests, the “similar experiences” (Rondot, 532) that are engendered by the mere fact of being trans. A prevalent component of trans autobiography, and one that I focus on in this thesis, is the portrayal of the body, typically at the start of the text and before any form of change has been made, as “wrong”. Similarly, in “Exceptional Locations” (1999), Prosser draws on the notion of journeying as emblematic of trans experience, which I explore in this thesis.

The autobiographies that I concentrate on in this thesis, then, emerge from an interwoven genealogy. They also arise during a cultural turn to autobiographies of “ordinary” – non-celebrity – lives, and in particular those that narrate hardships during childhood.⁶¹ Memoirs such as Frank McCourt’s account of an impoverished upbringing in Ireland, *Angela’s Ashes* (1996), are often credited with setting the trend for personal accounts of abuse or trauma, typically focusing on childhood, and are commonly referred to as “misery memoir”.⁶² Sue Vice (2014) notes that misery memoirs are consumed for their function as “inspirational life stories” and for the opportunity they provide for voyeurism (11). Alyson Miller (2012) argues that the success of the genre illustrates the widespread fascination with the recounting of trauma and abuse (90). While trans people might turn to trans autobiographies for guidance and encouragement, cis readers of trans

⁶⁰ Rondot is referring to the pathologising rhetoric from which early trans autobiographies arise.

⁶¹ In his exploration of “nobody memoir”, G. Thomas Couser (2011) states that, in fact, the “nobody memoir” is frequently about “some body”: in other words, “the nobody memoir is far more likely than the somebody memoir to be concerned with what it’s like to inhabit, or to *be*, a particular body” (148). While Couser is referring to disability memoir, the notion of memoirs of particular bodies is pertinent to trans autobiography, which emerges in this context of life narratives of the ordinary (not famous) individual.

⁶² For a discussion of misery memoir, see Susannah Radstone’s “Memory Studies: For and Against” (2008) and Sue Vice’s *Textual Deceptions* (2014). For a discussion of life writing and childhood in this context, see Kate Douglas’s *Contesting Childhood* (2010) and Vice’s *Textual Deceptions*.

autobiography might themselves be responding to a voyeuristic impulse.⁶³ Many autobiographies in the tradition take pains to carefully explain various aspects of, for example, transitioning in a medical context, which might serve both readerships. Moreover, Boylan's *I'm Looking Through You* concludes with a readers' guide, a series of questions and answers that, while ostensibly tailored to book group discussions, are also likely to anticipate the concerns or residual confusion of the reader who is unfamiliar with the subject matter.⁶⁴

Vice (2014) explores the negative criticism that McCourt's works, and others, have faced to emphasise that the authenticity of these texts is an issue that is taken seriously (13). McCourt is criticised, Vice reveals, for some of the literary conventions at work in *Angela's Ashes*, such as the resonances with James Joyce's oeuvre, and for the inaccurate portrayal of contemporary Limerick and of some of the individuals in the book, most notably McCourt's mother (15). McCourt establishes that *Angela's Ashes* involves exaggeration and "unlikely fact" (Vice, 14). Similarly, Boylan prefaces *I'm Looking Through You*, which is an account of growing up in a haunted family home, with a warning that the narrative has likewise been subject to exaggeration and invention, and she draws on McCourt's suggestion that "a memoir is meant to be an impression of a life, and not a photograph" (unpaginated), to defend her approach. I examine how this approach differentiates Boylan's texts from others in the tradition of trans autobiography. This sense of the fictional is compelling and complex: while Paul John Eakin (1985) states that the "presence of fiction in autobiography" makes readers "uneasy" (9), he also notes instances in which fiction might become a "natural function of the autobiographical process" (17). Like Eakin, Nancy K. Miller (2007) draws on Philippe Lejeune's (2005) notion of the autobiographical pact to explore the idea that, when one reads a

⁶³ Schewe (2009) argues that Bornstein's *Gender Outlaw* undermines "the voyeuristic potential of the genre", for example by naming a chapter "Transsexual Lesbian Playwright Tells All" and then refusing to "tell" the story (682–683).

⁶⁴ While many of the questions focus on the haunting analogy that underpins this work, others pertain to Boylan's trans identity. Questions include: "Growing up, what did [Boylan] see as she looked at herself?" (271) and "Consider the theme of secrets in *I'm Looking Through You* ... What about the secret of her true female identity? Why do some believe easily, while others remain unconvinced?" (2008, 272).

memoir, one expects the truth (538).⁶⁵ In this thesis, I explore the tension between expectations of truth and the haunting analogy that underpins *I'm Looking Through You*.

While Boylan begins *I'm Looking Through You* (2008) with an author's note that plays with the assumed veracity of the text, Rees begins *Dear Sir or Madam* (1996) with notes that evoke key political and medical context.⁶⁶ Rees prefaces his autobiography with a letter from Member of Parliament Alex Carlile, defending Rees's right to legal recognition as a man: "There is no doubt that Mark is a man in looks, voice and behaviour. However, the law demands that for ever he should be a woman by legal status" (xii).⁶⁷ During the 1990s, and concurrent with the coming-together of the field of trans studies, a wave of trans activism occurred in both UK and US contexts.⁶⁸ In the UK, the support organisation "Press for Change" was formed in accordance with Rees's push for official recognition of his status as a man (Stryker 2006, 5). Rees also includes a foreword from endocrinologist Professor L. J. Gooren, indicating the significance of medical notions of trans to the text, and to Rees's sense of his identity. Gooren begins by noting that "Transsexualism is an error in the sexual differentiation process" (ix), and introduces the notion of sexual differentiation of the brain, which Rees draws on in the autobiography. Rees reveals a primarily medical understanding of trans being, and insists on connections between trans and brain studies: he notes that he has "pointed out a link between brain structure and gender identity, a concept which, according to recent research,

⁶⁵ Miller (2007) specifically draws on Lejeune's explanation of the pact that it is the "engagement that an author takes to narrate his life directly ... in a spirit of truth" (qtd. in Miller, 538).

⁶⁶ Although *Dear Sir or Madam* is not one of the core autobiographies in this thesis, I draw on Rees here precisely because the autobiography illustrates an integral, specifically political, context, which has a bearing on Thompson's autobiography (although Thompson does not recount actively campaigning).

⁶⁷ The Gender Recognition Act was passed in 2004.

⁶⁸ Stryker states that, in US activism, tensions arose following the expulsion of Nancy Jean Burkholder, a trans woman, from the Michigan Womyn's Music festival in 1991 (2006, 5), igniting a new form of activism that focused on "inclusion", as David Valentine (2007) suggests (180). The tension created, centring on trans activists/protestors and particularly those at Camp Trans (on site at the Michigan Womyn's Music Festival from which Burkholder was removed), underscores the discord between trans activists and certain feminists: those for whom the concept of "womyn born womyn" is significant. However, the autobiographical works of Griggs and Boylan provide little intersection with these events.

is very probable and maybe a factor in the cause of transsexualism” (65). Despite his persistently medical theorising of trans, Rees is at times critical of medical authority for failing to assist him at an earlier point in his life. In *Sex Changes* (1997/2003), Califia draws on Rees’s embitterment to illustrate the shift from earlier texts in the tradition, such as Jorgensen’s and Morris’s, which emphasise gratitude to medical specialists (Califia, 181): in *Emergence*, for example, Martino dedicates his work to sexologist Harry Benjamin (Califia, 38).

Similarly, although Griggs’s autobiography begins with a visit to an endocrinologist, focuses on the surgical procedure she undergoes, and concludes with a follow-up medical report, her *Journal* (1996/2004) signifies departure from conventional notions of gender confirmation surgery. Halberstam’s foreword to the autobiography frames the narrative as a return to surgery; specifically, one that delves into the details of the procedure in order to expose its gruelling nature, and Griggs’s dissatisfactions. Like Rees, Griggs reveals that medical authority is responsible for huge delays in moving forward with the changes she hoped to make; Griggs’s *Journal* concludes on a despondent note, dissatisfied with the body’s capacity for change(s).

Terms

Throughout my thesis I employ the term “trans”, and refer to trans people, men, women, identities and experience, a trans individual, the tradition of trans autobiography, and the trans community.⁶⁹ From time to time, I refer to “transness”, a clunky term but one that hopefully avoids the problematics of “transgenderism”.⁷⁰ Whittle’s foreword to *The Transgender Studies Reader* (2006)

⁶⁹ The term “trans” is slippery: it can be used as shorthand to refer to trans men and trans women, and also as a broad and inclusive term.

⁷⁰ In “Regarding Trans* and Transgenderism” (2015), Julia Serano traces the history of “transgenderism”: that it has been used in a “neutral” way by trans people, and that it has been “misappropriated” by trans-exclusionary radical feminists (TERFs), who conflate or confuse the “state of being transgender” with a “potentially dangerous political ideology”. The term has been criticised for “dehumaniz[ing] transgender people and reduc[ing] who they are to ‘a condition’” (GLAAD, unpaginated). This illustrates a particular struggle in this thesis: while certain terms are designated as problematic by some, they are favoured by others. The GLAAD Media Reference Guide to transgender terms situates “transgendered” in a table under the heading “problematic”, and states “An ‘-ed’ suffix adds unnecessary length to the word and can cause tense confusion and grammatical errors”. GLAAD compares “transgendered” to “gayed” or “lesbianed” (unpaginated).

traces the history of “trans”, and he states that it did not become popularly employed until its coining by a “parliamentary discussion group in London”, striving for inclusivity in equality legislation negotiation (xi), in 1998. “Trans”, then, encompasses a range of identities and experiences: it can comprise “discomfort with role expectations, being queer, occasional or more frequent cross-dressing ... through to accessing major health interventions such as hormonal therapy and surgical reassignment procedures” (Whittle, xi). Later, “trans*” also emerged as an attempt at more radical inclusivity.⁷¹ While the history of the term is contested in online spaces,⁷² “trans*” emerged with the intention of encompassing a “wild-card’ function”: the asterisk ensured that a search engine would return results for any words beginning with “trans”, increasing the inclusivity of various identities (Julia Serano 2015, unpaginated). “Trans*” sought to move away from the assumed limitations of “trans”: in particular, that “trans” related specifically to trans men and trans women (Serano 2015, unpaginated). Serano argues that the adoption of “trans*” is accompanied by “word-elimination”, in which certain words are designated problematic in that they are not as “liberatory” or “inclusive” as others. Those who use the eliminated term can be viewed as “conservative or exclusionary” in this context (2015, unpaginated). “Trans*” has faced specific criticism: it has been condemned for trans-misogynistic implications: that it has been used to prioritise the issues of others above trans women. There is a move towards the reclamation of “trans” as the inclusive term.⁷³

“Transgender”, for which “trans” is sometimes employed as shorthand, has a long history and a variety of possibly “contested meanings” (Stryker and Paisley

However, Boylan, for one, favours “transgendered”. Clearly, this reveals the changing nature of terms and their use over time, and this is something I approach in my discussion of the term “transsexual”. In line with GLAAD’s recommendation, these terms appear in this thesis only when discussing others’ use of them.

In the 2014 *Woman’s Hour* segment “The Politics of Transgenderism”, feminist scholar and activist Sheila Jeffreys criticises trans women for their perceived adherence to stereotypical modes of femininity. During the segment, both Jeffreys and presenter Jenni Murray refer to “men who transgender as women”, and I include this example here to emphasise the harmful nature of employing incorrect phrasing.

⁷¹ See, for instance, Sam Killerman’s “What does the asterisk in ‘trans*’ stand for?” (2012).

⁷² See, for example, Trans Student Educational Resource (TSER), “Why We Used Trans* and Why We Don’t Anymore”.

⁷³ In “Why We Used Trans* and Why We Don’t Anymore”, the authors state that “[t]rans without the asterisk is already inclusive of all trans identities” (unpaginated).

Currah 2014, 1); for example, “transgender” might designate “gender crossing” or might, by contrast, “confound the gender binary” (1). The term applies to an individual who identifies differently to the gender they were assigned at birth; and it emerged in its current usage, as an umbrella term covering many gender identities, during the 1990s. Virginia Prince has often been acknowledged as having coined the term. However, her use of the term differs from how it is currently used, and Cristan Williams (2014) argues that Prince was not the first to employ a term that combined “trans” and “gender” (232). The rise in the term’s popularity during the 1990s indicates “the acceleration of a longer trend” as opposed to “the creation of a new meaning for an existing term that originally meant something else” (Williams, 233). The expansive nature of the term can, in turn, be problematic for some, in its marginalising or erasing capacity. Talia Mae Bettcher (2014) traces the introduction of “transgender” as an encompassing or inclusive term to the emergence of trans studies and trans politics in the 1990s, materialising in the midst of theory typified by that which is “beyond the binary” (384). She reflects on her own discomfort in being “problematically positioned with respect to the binary” that had been ongoing for most of her life: “what made me feel *well* was being recognized as a woman” (384). In its expansive or broad application, “transgender” might erase the specific experiences of certain identities.

Emerging from trans activist discourses in the 1990s, “cisgender” refers to an individual whose assigned gender and gender identity are congruent. The term strives to cultivate equality between trans and cis people, working with the understanding that using “man” and “woman”, or “people”, to refer to those whose assigned gender and gender identity match, but “trans man” and “trans woman”, or “trans people”, to refer to those whose assigned gender and gender identity do not match, normalises the former. The introduction of “cis man”, “cis woman” or “cis people” sought to resist this consequence (Aultman 2014, 61–62). However, for many, “cisgender” does not realise its intention, to make equal trans and cis people, in that it may designate cis as the norm regardless (62).

In their autobiographies, Thompson and Griggs favour the term “transsexual”, and Boylan uses “transsexual” and “transgender”/“transgendered”

interchangeably.⁷⁴ Over the past few decades, “transsexual” has come to be seen as an old-fashioned and outdated term, bound up with medicalisation and pathology. It has been, and sometimes still is, employed to distinguish between trans people who have changed or intend to change their bodies, typically – although not necessarily – via hormone therapy and surgical procedures (“GLAAD Media Reference Guide – Transgender”) and those who do not. Because it incorporates the word “sexual”, the term has been criticised for reinforcing the conflation of gender identity and sexual orientation in common assumptions. Rees (1996), who refers to himself as “transsexual” throughout his autobiography, nevertheless states that the term is “one [he] despise[s]” (177). He challenges the idea of “changing” sex, which he states is implicit within the term: instead, he argues, a “transsexual” individual experiences “a movement towards that which most closely approximates to our gender identity” (177). In this thesis, I use the term “transsexual” only in reference to those who claim it for their own identities. In “A Personal History of the ‘T-Word’” (2014), Serano states that she uses “transsexual” to refer to her own identity in a reclaimed fashion; that she refers to herself in the subtitle of *Whipping Girl* (2007/2016) as “transsexual” because specific identities require articulation.

Towards the beginning of this Introduction, I noted that articulations of sex and gender in the core autobiographies are a significant area of concern in my thesis. I introduced Stryker’s (2006) suggestion of the commonly held view that sex is “real” and gender its “reflection” (9), and I argued that this understanding of sex and gender arises in the core autobiographies. I have briefly referred to the tension between certain feminist theory and trans individuals, lives and experiences, and this is underpinned by biological understandings of sex. As Sally Hines (2007) notes, Janice Raymond’s *The Transsexual Empire* (1979/1980), which is critical of transness (and particularly trans women), understands sex as “chromosomally dependent and

⁷⁴ In *TransForming Gender* (2007), Hines describes the move of people towards identifying with “a divergent range of transgender identities”, and away from transsexuality (3), which had, until the 1990s, operated as the sole and dominant identity. In line with the cultural move away from the term “transsexual”, I employ the term “trans” in this thesis, to refer to individuals, autobiographies, and so on. A challenge emerges from the expansive nature of the term “trans”, however, which can be used to denote the (binary) identities of trans men and trans women, and nonbinary identities.

thus secured at birth” (18). Transition thus becomes an impossibility: as Hines states, Raymond’s “argument is absolute: transsexual women are not, nor can they ever be, ‘real’ women” (18); similar arguments arise in the works of Mary Daly (1978) and Germain Greer (1999). In Chapter One, whilst discussing the “trapped in the wrong body” model that arises in many trans autobiographies, I provide an overview of theory addressing the problematics between the biological “realness” of sex and transition.

In direct contrast to the purely biological understanding of sex is Judith Butler’s (1990) notion of sex as “gender all along” (11), referred to earlier in this Introduction. Within queer theory more widely, as Rachel Alsop, Annette Fitzsimons and Kathleen Lennon (2002) state, “the changes to embodiment which are sought by those seeking sex/bodily reassignment” emphasise “the constructedness of sexed identity which is also constitutive of apparently more stable gender identities” (205). This has proved troublesome to certain trans theorists: Prosser (1998) argues that queer studies uses the trans subject to challenge the binaries of sex (5), which neglects the lived experiences of trans people.⁷⁵ Butler’s discussion of gender has similarly caused tension. As Hines observes, Butler introduces the notion of performativity to “address the ways in which the rules of gender are compulsively and repetitively acted out to reinforce naturalness” (23). As noted, Butler’s work has been criticised by theorists for asserting the malleability of gender (Stryker 2006, 26).

I discuss the varying notions of sex and gender that arise in the core autobiographies; for example, the contrast between Thompson’s strong sense of boyhood beginning in earliest childhood and Boylan’s tentative sense of self described in both *She’s Not There* and *I’m Looking Through You*.

Overview

My thesis is arranged chronologically in terms of the publication of the texts: in Chapter One, I explore the “trapped in the wrong-body model” and the change(s) it prompts in Thompson’s *What Took You so Long?* (1995), the earliest of my core

⁷⁵ I also discuss, in Chapter One, theorists who demand attention to the material following postmodern and poststructuralist theories of the body, such as Prosser (1998).

autobiographies. The focus of Chapter Two is journeying and transformation in Griggs's *Journal of a Sex Change* (1996/2004) and *S/He* (1998). In Chapter Three, I interrogate the symbolism between ghostliness and trans experience, and the shift from diminishment to solidity, in Boylan's *She's Not There* (2003) and *I'm Looking Through You* (2008), the most recently published of my core autobiographies. Adopting a chronological structure was incidental: I chose to begin with Thompson's autobiography in order to outline the modes of representation and crucial debates that emerge; I continue onto Griggs's work to pick up significant threads, most notably the employment of specific models and motifs to evoke trans experience, and I finish with an exploration of Boylan's work because she departs most radically from the other autobiographies, and – in *I'm Looking Through You* – from the tradition. Although adopting a chronological structure was not intentional, it is, perhaps, revealing. In my chapters, I strive to resist following and repeating the chronological structure of the texts I analyse, the life course, so as to cultivate a more dynamic reading. By inadvertently following a chronological structure, and concluding with a discussion of “wholeness” as the texts themselves do, this thesis brings into sharp relief the significant influence of the autobiographies' typical format.

In the prologue to *Transition* (2011), Chaz Bono summarises his experience of his emerging trans awareness: “I was transgender, literally a man living in a woman's body” (4). Mirroring how many trans autobiographies open with wrong-body claims, this is the juncture at which I begin, and Chapter One explores the “trapped in the wrong-body model” in Thompson's autobiography. I interrogate how certain trans narratives – and representations of trans experience – rely on claims of being born in the “wrong” body to summarise or illustrate diverse and complex trans experiences, or frame trans experience specifically as dissatisfaction with, or discomfort in, the body. I examine the debates that centre on the wrong-body model – on the one hand, that the model is oversimplifying, emerges from a context of pathology and constrains the mode of discourse; on the other, that the model is, for some, accurate and useful – and I interrogate the notion that wrong-body portrayals can equally provide significant and material readings of the body. I explore how the wrong-body model might signify disembodied implications, in

which the body, as a mere outer casing for the “true” self is divested of significance, and I analyse Prosser’s approach in *Second Skins* to Thompson’s text, emphasising the material possibilities of the model.

In the chapter, I explore Thompson’s portrayal of a masculine core reaching back to early childhood, and the depiction of his body as conventionally masculine, even in childhood. I ask: in this context, how might change emerge? I examine how the narrative undermines the structure on which the subtitle of the autobiography insists, the “girl’s journey to manhood”. At the heart of the wrong-body model are rigid ideas of the “true” self, and Thompson constructs, in his autobiography, a masculine core at odds with notions of gender as mutable.

In Chapter Two, I sustain my focus on methods of invoking trans experience by exploring the journeying motif in Griggs’s *Journal of a Sex Change*. The motif of journeying as an analogy for trans experience is rife in trans narratives and trans representation in film and television. Pilgrimage to sites of transformation emerges in key autobiographies in the tradition, including Morris’s *Conundrum* and Ashley’s *Odyssey*, and I examine how Griggs’s autobiography is informed by, whilst establishing a departure from, these early trans autobiographies. In the chapter, I ask: how might Griggs rework conventional notions of change, such as the instant form of transformation facilitated by gender confirmation surgery in early accounts? I draw on the 2005 film *Transamerica*, in which the protagonist travels both across the country and towards her own gender confirmation surgery, to explore how Griggs might depart from the conventions of the journeying motif. I address the problematic aspects of studying film, when my focus is, of course, autobiography, but also what the exploration offers.

Griggs’s *Journal* is infused with notions of fate: undergoing the surgical procedure documented in the text is framed as Griggs’s ultimate destiny. Fate, then, guides the movement of the autobiography: Griggs moves on a narrative trajectory towards her surgery, fulfilling ideas of predestination. However, there is tension between surgery as a form of fate and Griggs’s sense of apprehension about the event. More widely, tension is central to her account. While she documents a shift into female embodiment following surgery, for example, she also depicts transformation into a state of being dominated by the pain of recovery, and

informed by her emphasised state of trans being. Picking up the thread from Chapter One, I explore Griggs's refiguring of being "trapped in the wrong body" as being trapped in the *trans* body, and how the expected move towards a state of contentment with oneself might be disrupted.

In Chapter Three, I focus on portrayals of diminishment in adolescence across two of Boylan's autobiographical works: *She's Not There* and *I'm Looking Through You*. Specifically, I concentrate on the symbolism between ghostliness and trans experience that Boylan constructs. My focus on the significance of settings that commences with Thompson's portrayal of the borstal and prison in Chapter One, and continues with Griggs's sense of transness in Trinidad, Colorado in Chapter Two, is sustained in Chapter Three: I examine portrayals of three settings in the two books – a stairwell and an attic in *I'm Looking Through You* and the family home known as the Coffin House in *She's Not There* – all of them, perhaps, "haunted". I ask: how might the ghostliness motif evoke Boylan's discontent with her body before her transition? As the titles indicate, Boylan's autobiographical works centre on absence and transparency, and the focus of the texts has rendered mapping the body challenging.

The settings I concentrate on evoke notions of marginality: Boylan seeks refuge in the stairwell and the attic, liminal spaces of enclosure, when she recognises her own non-conformity amongst family and peers. The diminishment that arises from the motif of ghostliness and haunting is similarly central to Boylan's portrayal of an adolescence that I term androgynous. Furthermore, Chapter Three sustains my focus on tensions that arise in Griggs's *Journal*. The motif of ghostliness in *I'm Looking Through You* emerges from the conflict between Boylan's gender identity, her sense of her girlhood, and her originally designated gender, in which she lives until adulthood. Boylan's portrayal of her struggle to come to terms with the disjuncture between her past and her present, which she explores in *I'm Looking Through You*, creates a sense of division in the autobiography. Notions of rupture are central to my exploration of contentment in the body, with which I conclude my chapters.

Chapter One: “There was something contradictory about the way I felt to the way my body was”: The “wrong” body and notions of change in Raymond Thompson’s *What Took You so Long?*

But Raymond’s sensitivity and intuitiveness reveal a softer quality. He would deny having experienced life from any feminine perspective, although I cannot help thinking that the sum total of his experiences must have given him some insight into, and from, both sides of the gender divide.

–Kitty Sewell, “Introduction”, *What Took You so Long?*

What Took You so Long? (1995) is a chronological account of Raymond Thompson’s life that begins with his childhood in a small community in South Wales. His portrayal of childhood depicts an urgent sense of the “wrongness” of his originally assigned gender. He describes a boyish appearance, confirmed by the collection of photographs in the autobiography, and his portrayal of childhood evokes a strong sense of his felt-boyhood.¹ As an adolescent and an adult, Thompson’s notion of manhood is predicated on conventional ideas of masculinity. As a child, the idea of eventual womanhood – a prospect raised by his cousin Sheila – is inconceivable to him (11). Thompson’s account of childhood centres on boyhood rather than girlhood – “I was a ... very restricted little boy” (3) – unsettling the thrust of the narrative that the subtitle conveys, the “*Girl’s Journey to Manhood*”.

Thompson’s depiction of childhood concentrates on the restricted body: to symbolise the constraints of his originally designated gender, he recounts lying rigidly in bed each night, “twisting [his] arms and legs around in awkward positions”

¹ While Mark Rees’s autobiography *Dear Sir or Madam* (1996) defines the boyishness of his own childhood specifically in terms of the “tomboy” identity (7), Thompson is disdainful of notions of himself as a “tomboy”, a term conferred on him by his parents to dismiss his boyish behaviour as a passing phase (2). Sheana Ahlqvist et al (2013) state that tomboyhood typically denotes girls in “middle childhood” who identify “somewhat with boys” and pursue “male-typical activities” (563). Thompson’s portrayal of the ill-fitting nature of the tomboy identity is presumably predicated on the sense of underlying, “true”, girlhood implicit in the term.

Girlhood and womanhood are largely absent from the narrative: Thompson’s account of childhood and adolescence insist on his notions of himself as a boy, and he depicts his childhood specifically as his boyhood. He resists describing his originally designated gender as that of “girl” or “woman”, and his originally assigned forename is absent from his account, a significant point to which I return. Absenting both his designated name and any sense of girlhood/womanhood, his account is different to other trans autobiographies that refer explicitly to assigned names, and even to pronouns that have since changed. The gulf here signifies the variety of modes of portraying transition.

(3), in the hope that keeping perfectly still will make his boyhood certain. The narrative centres on modes of entrapment, symbolising the corporeality that inhibits his idea of his own manhood. The restrictive nature of the body and of the gender he has been designated, with which he does not identify, culminate in “moody” and “volatile” (3) behaviour and explosive bouts of rage. During his teenage years he commits small crimes, and in adolescence and adulthood he serves time in a borstal and in prison. Between the borstal and prison he begins the process of transition in a medical context and changes his name to “Raymond”, and in Styal Prison in Cheshire he undergoes the changes of hormone therapy. His account of surgeries spans many years, and he recounts agonised periods of waiting between procedures.

In the opening passages of the autobiography, Thompson reiterates his sense of “wrongness” in childhood: he recounts awareness, as a child, that “something” is “wrong” with him, but is unable to comprehend “the sense of ‘wrongness’” until the age of five, when he begins to grasp the origins of “the wrongness” (1). Trans autobiographies, in accordance with the life-course structure, commonly adhere to the “trapped in the wrong body” model, which commences with portrayals of the feeling of “wrongness” and culminates in feeling contentment in the changed, “correct”, body, and the movement into the gender with which one identifies.² In

² While trans autobiographies convey a breadth of varying experiences, and autobiographers write about trans identities in different ways, many accounts open with wrong-body claims. Max Wolf Valerio (2006), for example, insists on the feeling of the “wrongness” of his originally assigned gender: “The fact that my mother perceives me, naturally, as a little girl is a source of great pain for me. When I try to correct her, I feel as though I’m talking to a wall” (34). He is strikingly dissimilar to his family, which resonates with the felt-difference of his trans experience: “Growing up, my fair coloring was one of the most significant things about me. Both of my younger brothers and sister have black hair, dark eyes, and darker complexions than I. And there I was, the ‘white person’ in the family, always standing out in family pictures or gatherings” (38).

Wrong-body claims, such as those April Ashley documents in her autobiography (1982), create a core and irrevocable sense of self which is in tension with one’s corporeality: “I started out life as a boy. As I grew up I turned into a feminine-looking boy. Perhaps I should have accepted my androgynous nature ... But I couldn’t accept it because I felt myself to be essentially female. Why, I don’t know. But I did. And the feeling went as deep as feelings go” (75).

These accounts typically convey notions of entrapment in ill-fitting corporeality. In his autobiography *Transition* (2011), Chaz Bono states: “Over time, it began to dawn on me that though embodied as a female, I was not a woman at all ... I was ... literally a man living in a woman’s body” (4). Autobiographies of the 2000s and 2010s sometimes depart from the trend of opening accounts with wrong-body claims, as I explore later in this chapter. As the autobiographical accounts of Valerio and Bono suggest, however, bodily “wrongness” is a pertinent means of describing certain

accounts adhering to the model, transition facilitates resolution predicated on contentment in oneself. The model arises in trans plots to symbolise trans experience: transness becomes, specifically, discomfort in the body.

However, in this chapter, I map the debates that condemn the wrong-body model as a simplistic and inaccurate means of conveying trans experience, and one that insists on a singular trans identity.³ The portrayal of trans experience as primarily discomfort in the body arises from a context of pathology. As Jay Prosser notes in *Second Skins* (1998), trans people pursuing transition in a medical context are necessarily required to adhere to a certain narrative for recognition as authentically trans (101). Prosser defends the “trapped in the wrong body” model as it emerges in *What Took You so Long?* – and elsewhere – as a pertinent mode of representing trans experience (69). While trans people who conform to the model are accused of divesting the body of significance, in favour of the felt-authenticity of selfhood or gender, Prosser proposes a material working of the model in Thompson’s autobiography. In this chapter, I provide a reading of Prosser’s *Second Skins*, a text that is integral to my analysis because it provides insight into Thompson’s specific approach to the “trapped in the wrong body” model. In accordance with Prosser’s suggestion that Thompson’s portrayal of “wrongness” denotes the materiality of the body rather than its insignificance, I explore how *What Took You so Long?* might adhere to the conventions of the model and how it might depart from, or rework, the model. Thompson’s wrong-body claims, and the depiction of the body as boyish and manly since childhood, create tensions. If Thompson’s idea of his body largely conforms to his notion of masculinity prior to the changes of hormone therapy and surgeries, “wrongness” might denote fragments of the body, rather than its entirety. Rather than providing a critique of Prosser’s work,⁴ I establish departure from his focus on the materiality of the

trans experience. Bono emphasises his “literal” entrapment in “wrongful” morphology, conveying the idea that, as a model of experience, it is fitting.

³ In this chapter, I refer to “trans” autobiographical accounts, identities, experiences and histories, rather than “transsexual”, which is Thompson’s preferred term. See the Introduction for an overview of my choice of terms.

⁴ However, I do challenge Prosser’s notion of the morphology Thompson hides beneath layers of clothing later in this chapter.

model: I concentrate primarily on forms of change as a consequence of “wrongness” in Thompson’s text.

As I stated in the Introduction, my thesis asks, how are changes – pertaining to sex, gender and the body – represented in the core autobiographies? In this chapter, I explore how the portrayal of change in Thompson’s narrative might disrupt the notions of change that typically underpin trans autobiographies. While early trans autobiographies tend to emphasise a sense of instant change that gender confirmation surgery facilitates, “transition” in accounts such as Thompson’s typically denotes the process of change, and might encompass changing one’s name and undergoing hormone therapy. Although Thompson recounts embarking on a course of hormone therapy and undergoing surgical procedures during a period of many years, he undermines conventional portrayals of transition by emphasising his sense of his masculine core that pertains even to early childhood, and his idea of his body as always/already boyish and/or manly. My aim in this thesis is to explore how the core autobiographies open up ways of narrating trans lives and Thompson’s depiction of himself as always/already a boy even in earliest childhood indicates that he takes a novel approach to his depiction of his trans experience. The central question of this chapter is, how might change emerge? In the narrative, tension arises from changes pertaining to fragments of the body, and the depiction of “whole” transformation.

Towards the end of his autobiography, Thompson reflects on his long-held assumption that surgeries enable comfort in the “right” body (310). His discussion departs from notions of “wrongness” and suggests that resolution centres on the attainment of the “right” body. Counsellor Kitty Sewell, with whom Thompson collaborates in writing his account, notes that *What Took You so Long?* is the portrayal of a “quest for a solution” to his sense of “wrongness”, which is eventually attained following “the last of several operations” that create “a whole man” (vii). The introduction to the autobiography, then, suggests that narrative resolution rests on notions of “whole” manhood. I examine Thompson’s depiction, at the close of the narrative, of the body’s conformity to his idea of “wholeness”.

“Wrongness”

What Took You so Long? opens with wrong-body claims (1), and Thompson reports ongoing discomfort in the body prior to his final surgeries in adulthood. As an adolescent, he notes, his intimacy with girlfriends is inhibited by his “physical handicaps” (55), and the “limitations” (55) he discusses are predicated on the absence of the genitals he feels he should have. At this age, he frequently pads his trousers and he becomes upset when a friend laughs at him for doing so, in an episode that emphasises his persistent sense of anguish around the body (55). His depiction of torment suggests that possessing a penis is fundamental to his sense of himself as a boy and a man, and to the possibility of intimacy.

The “trapped in the wrong body” model that emerges in Thompson’s autobiography evokes rigid notions of gender. Thompson’s accounts of childhood and adolescence suggest striking certainty of boyhood and manhood (3). Moreover, in the afterword to the autobiography, Dr. D. H. Montgomery, a consultant psychiatrist from the Gender Identity Clinic at Charing Cross Hospital, describes Thompson as possessing an “essential masculine core” (318). In adulthood, Thompson’s notion of masculinity centres on muscular bodies, and he emphasises the tension, before his surgeries, around his urge to strengthen the body. Possessing an athletic body reduces his discomfort, he states, and enhances his confidence (166). An exercise regime is difficult to sustain, however, due to the alienation of his body: “It wasn’t even my own, and I didn’t want to be reminded of it, so why should I bother?” (166). Thompson conveys an urge to possess a man’s body that will “enable ... any male activity”, rather than his own, limited corporeality (166). His notions of his body’s limitations prior to surgeries prohibit engagement in conventionally masculine pursuits: hoping to take up boxing, for example, he is ultimately unable to “overcome the embarrassment of [his] body” (167). His insecurities suggest that his notion of his own manhood, prior to significant changes documented in the narrative, is at times incoherent – the body is “fragmented” and it “hid ... embarrassed and restricted” him (162) – but his idea of what manhood ultimately entails is rigid.

However, the rigidity of gender – which I propose is central to Thompson’s account – is challenged by texts such as Loren Cameron’s *Body Alchemy* (1996), a

collection of portraits of trans men. I draw on Cameron's work here precisely because the collection both resonates with Thompson's sense of being "trapped in the wrong body" and departs from his certainty of self. The collection encompasses self-portraiture: Cameron pumps weights, gazing directly into the camera; he carries a bouquet of flowers, dressed in formalwear, a hand thrust casually into his pocket; elsewhere, he holds a gun to his head, his eyes closed, and his face drawn in fear and torment. The images connote conventional forms of masculinity, and Melanie Taylor (2004) argues that Cameron's images reveal the "constructedness of 'natural' signs of masculinity", which the focus on the muscular form of the bodybuilding physique, for example, indicates (23-24).⁵ Elsewhere, the collection concentrates on embodiment specific to trans masculinity: Cameron twists his torso in a contortion to inject his flesh; later in the collection, he wields a scalpel, his gaze fixed on the tool. Although these props evoke transition by connoting surgery and testosterone, it is striking that the collection of images largely absents the process of change or transformation, departing from the resonances of "before" and "after" imagery.

In stark contrast to the conventional forms of masculinity central to many of the photographs in Cameron's collection, certain images draw on anxiety and doubt. In a self-portrait depicting torment, the furrowed brow, anxious gaze and the fingers that almost claw at the face trouble notions of comfort in the body. Cameron's pale figure looms from a black background, though parts of the body remain engulfed by shadow: half of his face, part of his shoulder, his chest and his arm. This obscuring of parts alludes to the incoherence of the whole. The comments that frame the portrait of Cameron, such as "This is a womyn-only space" and "You don't belong here", attest to the social conflicts and exclusions engendered by his transness. Tension arises between the assault on his gender – "Do you have what it takes to

⁵ Prosser (1998) argues that Cameron's images invoke viewers' self-reflection, and reflect viewers' gawkish fascination: we "can only look ... if we look at how we look" (230). The images play with viewers' assumptions. Notions of masculinity as constructed – the images are predicated on conventions of masculinity, and place emphasis on tools or props such as the syringe and scalpel, connoting transition – fail to negate the "gender realness" (Prosser 1998, 230) of the collection. After all, as Taylor notes in "Peter (A Young English Girl)" (2004), "[i]t is not only transsexual men who inject themselves with male hormones or seek surgery in their quest to embody an ideal of physical perfection" (24).

be a real man? ... You're not a real man: you'll never shoot sperm" – and the evident manhood the collection, elsewhere, emphasises. The interweaving of masculinity and muscularity in Cameron's fragments of autobiographical narrative suggests a sense of anxiety: Cameron's own embodiment of manhood, he states, has been "a quest for size" and – for him – those particularly iconic of masculinity are "body-builders and athletes", their bodies, to him, both "virile" and "invincible" (85). He wonders "if [he will] ever feel big enough ... if [he will] ever feel safe in [his] body" (85). This focus on the muscular body emphasises adherence to the conventions of masculinity. Cameron's anxious expression, however, and his felt-inadequacy amongst athletic bodies suggests a nuanced reading of his own masculinity, but one that might not undermine its rigidity.

While Cameron both evokes and undermines conventional notions of masculinity, Thompson portrays a sense of masculinity that Sewell's introduction to *What Took You so Long?* unsettles. In the quote included at the beginning of this chapter, Sewell proposes resonance between "sensitivity", "intuitiveness", "soft[ness]", attributes she asserts Thompson possesses, and femininity (viii). Asserting that Thompson would refuse the notion of his own "feminine perspective" (viii), Sewell hints at the rigidity of his account of his own gender. She subsequently disrupts Thompson's fixed idea of gender. In the narrative, moments of the "sensitivity" and "soft[ness]" that Sewell insists typify Thompson's character arise despite accounts of his destructive tendencies in childhood and adolescence: Thompson emphasises his concern for animal welfare, for example. By denoting these acts, amongst others, "feminine", Sewell's description cultivates tension precisely because, as she notes, Thompson refutes the possibility of his own femininity.

Rather than the balance of femininity and masculinity Sewell proposes, Thompson's notions of manhood are informed by particular forms of conventionally masculine employment, such as labouring work. Following his time in prison, Thompson commences an apprenticeship with a tile and mosaic manufacturer and is typically assigned to work on building sites. The portrayal of undertaking labour in a conventionally male environment emphasises his perception of his body as incongruous. Although it is summer, and he suffers in the heat, the urge to conceal

his chest prior to mastectomy prevents him from removing outer layers of clothing, like the other men on the building site (145). Lacking the “right” parts prevents him from urinating publicly, as the other men do, in the absence of building site toilets; and he undergoes great discomfort when facilities are unavailable (146). In these scenes, the “wrongness” of the body centres on the differences between his body and those of the other men on the building sites, and his portrayal creates a sense of the body as simultaneously too “bodily” and lacking.

The “trapped in the wrong body” model that Thompson draws on is perhaps the best known – and the most “accessible” (Lucas Cassidy Crawford 2008, 131) – paradigm that conveys trans experience. Trans narratives often characterise trans experience as dissatisfaction or discomfort with the body, in which the body might emerge as little more than a casing “trapping” the “true” self.⁶ The model dichotomises identity (gender) and body (sex): prefacing his narrative, Thompson states, “It took me more than thirty years to reach a stage when my body started to fit my identity as a man” (1), which insists on his urge to cultivate resonance between his body and gender identity.⁷ Adhering to a “master narrative” (Ulrica Engdahl 2014, 268), wrong-body claims emerge as trans rhetoric, shorthand for describing trans experience, or for referring to one’s trans identity. The wrong-body model is a means of conveying experiences that Janet Mock (2012) labels “*soundbite of struggle*” (unpaginated).

Yet many trans, queer and feminist theorists find fault with conveying or symbolising trans experience primarily via the feeling of the “wrongness” of the body (Engdahl, 267).⁸ As Prosser notes, this narrative facilitates one’s recognition as

⁶ See the Introduction to this thesis for a discussion of the tension between the persistent awareness of one’s “true” self that arises in certain trans autobiographies, and the provisional and incoherent nature of the self posited by theorists of autobiography.

⁷ Ulrica Engdahl (2014) argues that the notions of the “wrong” body rest on a binary explanation of trans experience (267). Under the model, Talia Mae Bettcher (2014) argues, trans experience is specifically predicated on the discord between the gender with which one identifies and one’s body (383).

⁸ Bettcher (2014) employs Simone de Beauvoir’s declaration that “One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman” (qtd. in “Trapped in the Wrong Theory”, 387) to argue that the notions of gender as inherent or innate that arise from the wrong-body model are problematic in feminist theory: “an appeal to an innate gender identity is hard to abide in a feminist account” (Bettcher, 387).

authentically trans, a notion that is particularly salient for those seeking assistance from medical authority (1998, 101). This requirement to adhere to the narrative of “wrongness”, despite its evident failure to convey every person’s experience of being trans, suggests constrained representations of transness.⁹ Sexology and psychiatry heavily influence the wrong-body model (Bettcher 2014, 383): explanatory notes from medical or psychiatric authority preface or conclude many trans autobiographies, signifying the bearing of these contexts on accounts of trans histories.¹⁰ For example, consultant psychiatrist Dr. D. H. Montgomery’s afterword to *What Took You so Long?* insists that “transsexualism” connotes, specifically, “believing that one has been born into the wrong sex” (316). He constructs a dichotomy between those he denotes “male exhibitionist transvestites” and those who adhere to a “true” trans identity. Those such as trans model and actress Caroline Cossey, he argues, demonstrate that the “primary”, or “core” trans person “easily and appropriately adopts the opposite gender role and blends unremarkably into society in their chosen gender” (314). Such a notion creates a troublesome sense of resolution predicated precisely on passing as the gender with which one identifies; with this in mind, why might Thompson include Montgomery’s note at the close of his autobiography? While the afterword perhaps underscores Thompson’s authentic trans identity and manhood, the account simultaneously throws into relief anxiety around the possibility of “authentic” and “inauthentic” modes of trans experience.

The depiction of trans experience as entrapment in the “wrong” body emphasises the division between (immaterial) selfhood and (material) body (Engdahl, 268), and gender and sex, as the urge Thompson portrays to align his body with his identity suggests (1).¹¹ Theorists fault the “trapped in the wrong body”

⁹ Janet Mock in “Trans in the Media: Unlearning the ‘Trapped’ Narrative and Taking Ownership of Our Bodies” (2012) insists that the “trapped in the wrong body” narrative is a “blanket statement that makes trans* people’s varying journeys and narratives palatable to the masses” (unpaginated). By making her, above all, a “prisoner of [her] body”, the model constrains modes of conveying her experiences, she suggests (unpaginated).

¹⁰ See the Introduction to this thesis, in which I note that the autobiographies of Thompson and Mark Rees (1996) are framed by – prefaced, or conclude, with – the accounts of medical authority.

¹¹ The model distinguishes between the body that is “wrong” and the “true” self, or gender identity, that the body restricts (Engdahl, 267). In the Introduction to this thesis, I discussed notions of sex and gender that arise in trans autobiographies: while sex is conventionally presumed “real” and gender its “reflection” (Susan Stryker 2006, 9), Judith Butler proposes that sex is “gender all along”

model for its implicit essentialising aspects: for example, by reifying the significance of genitals (Engdahl, 267). People “are ruled ineligible” for unsettling the “standard telos” of the “trapped in the wrong body” narrative, argues Bettcher (402).

However, many accounts that depict the “wrong” body, such as Max Wolf Valerio’s *The Testosterone Files* (2006) and Thomas Beatie’s *Labor of Love* (2008), designate those deciding against genital surgical change “eligible” rather than “ineligible”.¹²

Yet, while the fact of a penis does not necessarily define manhood in the autobiographies of Valerio and Beatie, in Thompson’s portrayal, possessing a penis is fundamental to his notion of “fully” becoming a man, as I proceed to explore.

As Mock (2012) argues, the depiction of trans experience as necessarily entrapment within “wrongful” corporeality constrains modes of representation. Typically, the “trapped in the wrong body” model limits representations of trans experience to the life-course chronology, encompassing certain significant stages. Interrogating accounts of experience provided by a trans community, Douglas Mason-Schrock (1996) defines trans identity as the feeling of “wrongness” in one’s body, ultimately overcome via surgical means: “Typically transsexuals ... believe they were born in wrong-sexed bodies and want to remedy the mistake, eventually through surgery” (176). The “wrongness” narrative imposes constraints: by assuming that “wrongness” typifies trans experience, Mason-Schrock’s work replicates the constraints of the narrative. Mason-Schrock delineates his notion of the typical structure of trans accounts, encompassing portrayals of dressing in clothing that is typical of the gender with which one identifies, denying one’s urge to transition and pursuing forms of masculinity or femininity (179–186). By implying that the outlined structure defines authentic trans identity, Mason-Schrock invokes the notion of a singular mode of trans experience and prohibits variation.¹³

(1990, 11). The idea that the sex of the body is a construction means that “even an appeal to a native sense of self as male or female is in serious trouble” (Bettcher, 388).

¹² In their autobiographies, both Valerio (2006) and Beatie (2008) chart altered morphology following hormone therapy. While the wrong-body model might not necessitate surgical changes, narrative accounts depicting the “wrongfulness” of the body are perhaps required to chart body changes intrinsic to transition.

¹³ While Mason-Schrock’s article was published in 1996, the criticism with which I began this overview of the wrong-body model debates emerges during the 2000s and 2010s. Drawing on 1990s ideas of trans identity, Mason-Schrock’s notion of transness as predicated on certain phases is in conflict with more recent, broadening notions of trans, and the suggestion that trans identity is not uniform.

The narrative of “wrongness”, moreover, creates tensions: in particular, it does not secure “claims to belong to a particular sex”, argues Bettcher (2014), and this is its ultimate failing because “this is precisely what it purports to secure” (386). Bettcher proposes that the alternative to the wrong-body model is the “transgender” model, but that the choice of only two narratives limits modes of conveying experiences (383).¹⁴ The “transgender” model, she notes, might deny the specificity of certain trans histories (384). Under the transgender rubric, many adhere to identities “beyond the binary”: how might this be negotiated, Bettcher asks, with the desire – and this includes her own – to adhere to womanhood or manhood, specifically? Pressing for understandings of gender “beyond the binary” and in a context of social constructionism might elide the realities of some trans identities and experiences (384).¹⁵ Bettcher argues that the notion that “sex and gender are constructs” can be interpreted as particularly “threatening” in a trans context, because “trans people are systematically subject to allegations of deception or pretense” (398). The “transgender approach” might undermine the reality of one’s ongoing and persistent sense of one’s authentic gender, particularly in the context of binary gender (385).¹⁶

The sense of “wrongness” Thompson portrays similarly evokes tensions. In the narrative, he conflates body “wrongness” with fragmented or incoherent manhood: “I couldn’t go on much longer unless there was some hope for me of getting out of this body, and fully becoming a man” (193). His notion of the body as a casing that he is urgent to depart is striking. A facet of the wrong-body model, excoriation is a prevalent motif in trans autobiographies, as Prosser suggests: in *Second Skins*

¹⁴ Bettcher notes that the transgender model, an alternative means of narrating trans histories, has its origins in the 1990s, the emergence of trans studies, when “transgender” was taken up as an umbrella term encompassing, for example, transsexual and cross-dresser identities, amongst others. The model adheres to notions of belonging “beyond the binary” (383–384).

¹⁵ Prosser (1998) and Viviane K. Namaste (2005) are among the theorists who “have raised serious worries about this particular vision”: this is founded on the fear that the model “doesn’t accurately capture the realities of transsexual people” (Bettcher, 385).

¹⁶ Gayle Salamon (2010) reflects on Jamison Green’s opposition to claims of gender’s constructed nature documented in Green’s essay “The Art and Nature of Gender” (2001): “thanks to the feminist critique, we can now say ‘gender is a social construction,’ as if we are above it all” (Green, qtd. in Salamon, 59). Salamon argues that Green analyses notions of social construction as unconnected to “lived gender” (59). She states that social constructionism is conceived in simple, singular terms by certain theorists, and that its true radical potential might only be unearthed when its complexities are roundly considered.

(1998), Prosser draws on Leslie Feinberg's urge to "unzip" and exit the body that constrains (68). And the depiction of the desire to shed the outer body in *What Took You so Long?* is crucial to my analysis of transformation: Thompson's portrayal of imagining his own excoriation suggests that the attainment of "full" manhood relies on entire bodily change, encompassing the discarding of his current morphology.¹⁷ Later in the narrative, he clarifies that he is plagued by a "frantic dislike of [his] body and the painful rejection of [him]self, plus [his] longing to find [his] real identity as a man" (193). This slightly convoluted description suggests that his manhood is something he has yet to attain: however, this sense of aspiring towards manhood is complicated, because Thompson reiterates his feelings of his boy- and manhood since childhood, and elsewhere stresses that he aspires to cultivate congruence between his body and his felt-manhood. Crucially, the conflict intrinsic to his sense of the body hints that the narrative departs from the conventions of the model.¹⁸

Although certain theorists, as I have outlined, criticise the "trapped in the wrong body" model, many accounts of transition in fact insist that trans experience centres precisely on the "wrongness" of the body.¹⁹ And by opening with portrayals of the conflict between "the way [he] felt" and "the way [his] body was" (1), Thompson's autobiography adheres to this tradition of trans narratives that commence with claims of "wrongness". Jan Morris's *Conundrum* (1974), perhaps the archetype of the tradition, opens with similar claims: "I was three or perhaps four years old when I realised that I had been born into the wrong body, and should really be a girl" (9).²⁰ Both Thompson's and Morris's claims of "wrongness" arise in their accounts of

¹⁷ I return to Thompson's urge to burst through his outer, "wrongful" body later in this chapter.

¹⁸ I return to Thompson's reworking of the "trapped in the wrong body" model later in this chapter.

¹⁹ Feelings of "wrongness" in the body, however, do not describe all trans experience; and I have previously stressed that the focus on the "wrongness" of the body does not typify all autobiographical accounts. Furthermore, as Cameron's collection (1996) suggests, certainty of self might not pertain to all trans experience. And while Thompson's account of boyhood hinges on certainty, at times tension arises in his portrayal of felt-boyhood. Although his account tends to evoke his boyish character and appearance, elsewhere his account rests on the analogy of a young boy residing within him: "When I was alone I would conjure up a world where I could release the boy that lived inside me" (4–5).

²⁰ Juliet Jacques, in her autobiography *Trans: A Memoir* (2015), notes that Morris's narrative "codified many of the conventions of the transsexual autobiography, not least that a description of being in the 'wrong body' features early in the narrative" (203).

childhood: almost as soon as one has an idea of oneself, these narratives suggest, one recognises the “wrongness” of one’s assigned gender, and acknowledges the discord between one’s gender identity and one’s body.²¹ This suggestion of early gender certainty is confirmed and emphasised by trans children’s certain ideas of gender and selfhood as they are depicted in the BBC documentary *Transgender Kids: Who Knows Best?* (2017). Yet children’s claims of gender identity are often criticised for their adherence to stereotypes: debates concentrate on children’s use of well-established, sometimes trite, models to convey trans experiences, such as those that evoke early feelings of gender dysphoria in line with rigid feelings of gender certainty.

The documentary *Transgender Kids* both questions and invokes established models of conveying trans experience: for example, the film opens with the hyperbolic assertion that “Parents are facing an explosion in the number of children saying they were born in the wrong body” (00:00:24–28). It is striking, however, that the first child interviewed introduces the notion of embodiment in more nuanced terms than the opening statement of the documentary permits: Warner states “I’m not comfortable in the boy body” (00:03:36–38). Notions of gender certainty are, however, rife in the film, as trans psychotherapist Hershel Russell’s account of a child’s expression of their gender identity indicates: gender certainty, for the child, is a form of knowledge “way down deep where the music plays” (00:05:57–59). Later in the documentary, politician and reverend Cheri DiNovo asserts “The child is who the child is” (00:14:34–36), stressing the certainty of childhood that resonates with Thompson’s account.²²

However, the documentary also focuses on condemnation of this common mode of expressing transness. Gina Rippon, Professor of Cognitive Neuroimaging in the

²¹ In the preface to *Emergence* (1977), Mario Martino states “Unless you have actually experienced transsexualism, you cannot conceive of the trauma of being cast in the wrong body. It is the imprisonment of body and of soul ... I have emerged from that labyrinth into sunshine” (xii). It is striking that Martino describes trans experience as an entrapment of the *body*, and his analogy resonates with Thompson’s notion of the “wrong” body, that I explore in this chapter.

²² In the film, interviews with children, politicians, doctors and trans advocates and activists are interrupted by short scenes in which children apply lipstick to dolls and don oversized high-heeled shoes. Trans teens gaze into mirrors and apply makeup. Frequent close-up shots of parts of the body, such as feet and legs jumping over a skipping rope, convey a sense of fragmentation. The documentary cultivates a dichotomy between inner notions of gender identity, and the performance of gender; femininity, in particular.

Aston Brain Centre at Aston University, argues that when trans people describe feeling like “they’ve been born in the wrong box and therefore they need to change from one to the other”, there is no recognition that “actually there’s something wrong with having boxes” (00:46:59–00:47:06). Her statements jumble the narratives, conflating bodies with categories (“boxes”). Arguing that the accounts of trans people typically reinforce binary and stereotypical notions of gender, she discounts the experience of trans people who do not adhere to a binary experience of gender. She also elides narratives such as Thompson’s, which reworks the “trapped in the wrong body” model to convey his personal trans experience.²³

Rippon’s problematic argument that this model indicates stereotypes implicit in transness resonates with the assertion, in the documentary, that many gender-variant children are ultimately able to achieve a sense of comfort in their originally assigned gender, and do not proceed to transition. The documentary explores teenager Alex’s gender-variant history, and her childhood urge for boyhood. As she entered adolescence and discovered the possibility of cultivating a different kind of girlhood than one that rests on typical femininity, her urge to live as a boy lessened. In the documentary, her story seeks to stress that boyhood and girlhood encompass nuances beyond their respective stereotypes, and to thus undermine the “necessity” of transition for all gender-variant children. However, the suggestion that children’s aspirations to transition centre on conventional notions of masculinity and femininity overlooks the claims of children themselves. In Thompson’s account of childhood, for example, his sense of his own boyhood is of greater significance than his disdain for conventionally feminine pursuits. Furthermore, the documentary fails to address striking aspects of Alex’s story. Her father recounts that her discontent with her body as a child culminated in an episode in which “she stood in front of me with her fists clenched, and then she ...

²³ The documentary faced backlash from the trans community for including interviews with psychologist and sexologist Dr. Kenneth Zucker, former head of the Gender Identity Clinic at the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health (CAMH) in Toronto, who was dismissed in 2015. Zucker disagrees with gender affirming behaviour, which encompasses allowing a child to make their own decisions with respect to gender identity, and listening to claims of the gender one feels oneself to be. In a Change.org petition asking for broadcast of the documentary to be delayed until it had been reviewed by experts, criticism of the documentary centres on Zucker’s belief that “Gender Dysphoria in children should be treated as a mental health issue”.

proceeded to punch herself in her genitals, in her vagina, and started yelling ‘I’m a boy! I’m a boy! I’m a boy!’” (00:37:48–00:38:02). The suggestion that Alex cultivated contentment in girlhood beyond modes of femininity ignores the violence she inflicted on the parts of the body that, to her perhaps, symbolised girlhood.

Alex’s story, and particularly her father’s account of the violence she inflicted against her own body, evokes her notion of the body (or parts of the body) as “wrong” or ill-fitting; defending the “trapped in the wrong body” model in *Second Skins* (1998), Prosser suggests that trans narratives so commonly deploy the narrative because “being trapped in the wrong body is simply what transsexuality feels like” (69). *Second Skins* proposes a material, substantial construction of the body in accounts of transition typified by claims of “wrongness”; and I proceed to provide an overview of *Second Skins* and particularly Prosser’s analysis of *What Took You so Long?* before moving onto my own analysis, because Prosser establishes an insightful reading of Thompson’s wrong-body motif, embedded in this focus on the material. Later, when I discuss notions of transformation in Thompson’s autobiography, I challenge Prosser’s notion of the morphology Thompson hides.

The trans autobiographies *Second Skins* (1998) encompasses concentrate themselves on how transitions and “bodily trajectories” might be portrayed (4). Trans autobiographies, argues Prosser, “have not yet been substantially read” (4): in his reading, he returns the matter of the body to accounts of “gender crossings” (4). Although the trans subject has been central to some queer theory, the “bodiliness” of transition, he asserts, has yet to be explored (6): rather, queer theory deploys transition to trouble “the fixity of gender identities” (5). The trans subject is criticised for attributing “importance” to “corporeality”, which Elijah Adiv Edelman and Lal Zimman (2014) argue is “at odds with poststructuralist readings of biological sex as a discursive phenomenon” (674). However, Prosser returns the material to the trans subject that queer theory has both “made prominent” (6) and caused to “disappear in his/her very invocation” (14). The aim of *Second Skins* is condensed into the phrase “body narrative” (12): Prosser seeks to change how the body is discussed in theory, and he employs this compound to “allow transsexuality through its narratives to bring into view the materiality of the body” (12). Specifically, he

examines the interplay of body and narrative in the construction of trans subjectivity.

Enmeshed within his focus on materiality, Prosser (1998) delineates the assumption, central to criticisms of the “trapped in the wrong body” narrative, that trans individuals experiencing discontent in the “wrongness” of physicality convey a sense of the insignificance of the body (62). Resisting the implications of this assumption, he asserts the significance of the body beyond static, meaningless flesh, to trans people who undergo transition in a medical context: “For if the body were but a costume, consider: why the life quest to alter its contours?” (67). Prosser proposes that narratives emphasising the “wrongness” of the body might convey bodies in their materiality and significance, and resist necessarily signifying the dichotomy between body and self, materiality and immateriality. His analysis centres on body image, which, he argues, “clearly already has a material force” (69) for trans people, and he employs the work of Didier Anzieu to examine the interplay between the body’s surface, “skin ego” (65) and body image. Prosser’s exploration of Anzieu’s work centres on the notion that the “surface” of the body is its most important facet: “that which matters most about the self” (65). The surface symbolises a border and might separate or cultivate “contact” between one person and another, and between “the biological, the psychic, and the social” (65); and the interior and the exterior intersect by means of the skin (65). Transition facilitated by hormones and surgeries alters the surface of the body, and Prosser’s exploration of change in this context centres on the “making” of new “parts”, and the “manipulation of the body’s surface” (66). The question “Of what does this ‘moment’ of sex change consist?” (66–67), emerging from Prosser’s discussion of altered body parts, informs my exploration of the changes of body, gender and sex that emerge in the autobiographies. Prosser employs Anzieu’s concept of skin ego to examine “sexed embodiment in transsexual accounts” (67): to navigate portrayals of “the feeling of” being trans (67).

Yet Prosser’s stance has garnered criticism. Responding to Prosser’s claim that “being trapped in the wrong body” is what trans embodiment feels like, Crawford (2008) argues that entrapment in the “wrong” body fundamentally does not describe every trans person’s experience, and that the claim ignores the notion that

“no bodily sensation carries its own self-evident meaning or orders for action prior to our reformulating these affects into narratives” (132). However, there is an interval of ten years between Prosser’s *Second Skins* (1998) and Crawford’s “Transgender without Organs?” (2008), perhaps accounting for these varying viewpoints, and particularly Crawford’s assertion that Prosser imposes a uniform trans “feeling”: I have previously drawn on Sam Dylan Finch’s assertion that transness is not necessarily bodily, and his suggestion that not every trans person will transition, to indicate broadening notions of transness in the 2010s. A similar interval lies between Prosser’s work and Gayle Salamon’s (2010), which draw on different ideas of materiality: while Salamon is “sympathetic” with Prosser’s intention to return the material to that which has been theorised as, and is commonly perceived as, immaterial, she worries that Prosser effectively asserts that “what a body is and how it is assumed are self-evident things” which, she insists, is “problematic” (13). Her stance, which she derives from the work of Maurice Merleau-Ponty, suggests that there is “no easy recourse” to the material (12). Despite these criticisms, I pursue Prosser’s notion of the material and “wrongness” because this sense of materiality reworks the typical “trapped in the wrong body” motif, and I particularly seek to investigate how Thompson might unsettle the sense of transformation embedded in the wrong-body model.

Prosser’s exploration of the materiality of the body in accounts of “wrongness” relies heavily on *What Took You so Long?* In the autobiography, Thompson conceptualises his corporeality as encompassing inner and outer bodies. Thus, while “wrongness” is pivotal to his narrative, he reworks the conventions of the model, which distinguishes between the inner “true” self, emerging as immaterial, and the body or “false outer casing” (Prosser 1998, 68). As Prosser suggests, Thompson’s account provides a “false” outer skin that encloses his “true” inner body (70), and Thompson’s conceptualisation of bodies thus materialises selfhood: the “true body within”, according to Prosser, is “sentient body image” and the “false body without” is “insentient visible body” (70). Therefore body image, in Prosser’s analysis of *What Took You so Long?*, connotes materiality – it is in relation to the body image, not the outer body, that Thompson’s “agony” is endured while he waits for a surgical procedure, Prosser suggests (70) – and the “material body is

correlatively dematerialized" (70). An insightful example of the (material) significance Thompson affords to his body image is his assertion that his "body didn't exist in the way it was born", that, for him, "it only existed in [his] inner identity as male" (75).²⁴ The significance he attributes to his body image suggests disjuncture between his idea of the body, and the fact of the body, which pertains to "wrongness".

This sense of "wrongness" culminates in periods of depression and lethargy during Thompson's ongoing wait for phalloplasty surgeries. During this period, he recounts glancing at a mirror to discover that his face has broken into blisters (202), and Prosser describes this event as an "instance of quasihysterical symptomization", the "body image" marking "its struggle on the material body" (71). In the autobiography, notes Prosser, Thompson blames the blisters on his interior state, "evidence of his 'inside' on his 'outside'" (71); and the "conflict" between "the true body within and the false body without" creates the state of semi-paralysis Thompson undergoes prior to surgeries, in which he is unable to "move or feel his body" (Prosser, 70). However, might Prosser's suggestion of Thompson's outer body as "false" and "dematerialized", and his intention, in *Second Skins*, to propose the material possibility of the body in accounts of "wrongness", perhaps conflict? While the sense of the outer body as immaterial in its insignificance defies Prosser's focus on materiality, his proposal of the bodiliness of Thompson's inner self or body image that emerges in *What Took You so Long?* attends to the materiality of the account. Similarly, Prosser's exploration of the "damaged surfaces" that are rife in *What Took You so Long?* emphasises the significance of the outer casing: before Thompson's phalloplasty procedures, as Prosser argues, images of the brokenness and damage of bodies are prevalent in the text, encompassing Thompson's father's missing fingers, lost in machinery, and

²⁴ Thompson's claims draw on the text's playfulness with notions of change. The body defies change precisely in Thompson's notion of it: the body only exists as, and does not waver from, his notion of its maleness. The suggestion that his body "didn't exist in the way it was born", however, invokes notions of change. The assertion that the body no longer adheres to that which typified it at birth is self-evident: Thompson has grown, undergone puberty and shifted from adolescence to adulthood. Thompson's suggestion that, until the changes of his final surgeries, his body exists in his own idea of it perhaps unsettles its material boundaries.

the broken skins of eggs that appear on television and that invoke Thompson's reflection on his own casing as damaged, amongst others (1998, 76).

The conflict between inner and outer arising here culminates in the sluggish and stubborn nature of Thompson's body during his wait for phalloplasty surgeries: "Most of the time I couldn't get my body to move from my chair, whilst panic was raging inside me" (249). Thompson's outer corporeality fails to feel the anguish that Prosser argues resides in the inner body. Specifically predicated on this inability to feel, tensions between body image and outer materiality culminate in episodes of "self-directed violence" (Prosser 1998, 73) in the narrative. In particular, Thompson recounts moments of anger and destruction that emerge from the feeling of the "wrongness" of the body and his original gender assignment. As a teenager, he wreaks devastation in his bedroom: "The doors on my wardrobe had been ripped off long ago, and most things had been smashed up" (39). The scenes of destruction pivot on the body: "I would butt my head hard against the walls" (39). As Prosser argues, Thompson's destructive behaviour suggests a redirected "urge to rip and tear up his own skin" (75).²⁵ And later in the narrative, Thompson renders the urge to assault his own skin explicit: when the phalloplasty surgery seems as though it might not go ahead, he confesses his urge to "slash [his] face or punch [himself] to bits" (199). Thompson's violent reaction to the fragmentation of his body – the lacking penis – stresses that he experiences an urge to further damage the body.

Contributing to this portrayal of fragmenting the body, Thompson turns "against his pretransition body precisely as if it were not his own, hitting his head against a wall, punching himself in the face, throwing himself down ravines, coating his body with mud" (Prosser 1998, 73–74). The depiction of committing violent acts against the body emphasises the sense of the body as an "inadequate container" (Prosser, 76) and Prosser suggests that Thompson's portrayal evokes the failure to "own" his

²⁵ In the autobiography, Thompson recounts the urge to tattoo his skin as an adolescent: "I amused myself by acquiring a large number of self-inflicted tattoos all over the back of my hands, down my thumbs and on the knuckles" (52). In *Second Skins*, Prosser interrogates Thompson's account of tattooing himself as a mode of self-directed violence, the site of which is Thompson's skin. The "self-inflicted" tattoos contribute to Thompson's attempt to "feel" his body ("pre-transition"), which is portrayed as being divested of materiality (74). Whilst serving time in the borstal, Thompson has his tattoos removed, perhaps undermining the sense of the felt-insignificance of the "false" outer casing.

skin (73).²⁶ Drawing on the disjuncture between inner and outer bodies, and in particular the “alienation” (Prosser, 73) from his outer corporeality, Thompson notes, “Since my body is not my own I cannot feel the warmth of it, so I am cold, very cold, on the inside” (249): and this disjuncture between the notion of the “rightful” body, and the “wrongful” physicality prior to the changes of surgeries prohibits the warmth of the body. In Thompson’s depiction of how the body feels in its dissociation, he stumbles between past and present tenses: he shifts from “my body is not my own” to “I longed for that feeling of warmth, like when your feet are freezing and you slip on a pair of really thick woollen socks” (249), for example. In the former assertion, he suggests that his notion of possessing an unfamiliar body is ongoing, which the conclusion of the narrative does not support.²⁷ The analogy of the latter statement is striking: garments of clothing – the socks – symbolise the outer body, and a pair of freezing feet evoke the inner body. Thompson yearns to be held and warmed by his own, outer corporeality, for “[his] body to wrap [him] up, keep [him] warm and protect [him]” (162); but for the body to effectively warm him, the analogy suggests, his morphology requires transformation.²⁸

The insensate notion of the outer body that Thompson cultivates is emphasised by the resonance he evokes between the body and settings such as his home. During an anguished wait for phalloplasty surgery, when he is burdened by the unthinkable possibility that the surgery might not occur (Prosser, 75), his violent urges centre on the home. His reassurance that by wreaking destruction at home he is “only hurting [him]self and damaging [his] own possessions” (248) conflates the damaged commodities and the damaged body, contributing to the ongoing sense of his fragmented corporeality. In the narrative, portrayals of home and body become entangled: undergoing self-imposed solitude and failing to take care of himself, he notes that, simultaneously, “The house became neglected, dirty and fell

²⁶ The felt-inadequacy and fragmentation of the body recall Cameron’s fear that his body might fail to keep him safe, reported in *Body Alchemy* (1996).

²⁷ In the conclusion, I explore Thompson’s departure from body “wrongness”. Towards the close of the narrative, following Thompson’s final surgeries, the autobiography absents wrong-body claims.

²⁸ While too-embodied being typifies Thompson’s body before mastectomy, might notions of the immaterial outer body – evoked by his immobility and struggle to feel warm – adhere to diminishment? How might Thompson’s narrative navigate too-embodied – prior to mastectomy – and disembodied being?

into disrepair” (248). While Thompson creates resonance between disinterest in his body and in the flat, his subsequent assertion that “The walls of protection that I had carefully built around myself, I was now breaking down” (248) connotes departure from lethargy and paralysis.

In particular, the notion of familiar rooms rendered unfamiliar that Thompson depicts invokes a sense of body-discord, which is crucial to his sense of his unfeeling outer body: “You know that all the things in the room should be recognizable, but they aren’t, and you’re looking, looking, looking for that familiar something, always trying to look beyond, but there is nothing” (249).²⁹ The experience of “nothing” that arises here pertains to the body and creates tension in the narrative: how might the significance of the body be attended to in this context of absence? Might the analogy, by signifying that inherent in the experience of discord is a form of fearful absence, divest the body of materiality? The account reiterates the search for familiarity and suggests a kind of frenzy, which Thompson’s “frantic dislike” of his body, reported elsewhere in the narrative (193), emphasises. He concludes, “There is a sense of disconnectedness and unreality, of being left out in the cold” (249). This void of nothingness and the portrayals of coldness enclose, and further restrict, the “wrongful” body.

This sense of disconnect is central to Thompson’s account of the caving in of the ceiling above him, which symbolises his trans experience. Divisions – of self and body, inner and outer, “wrong” body and “right” body, and sex and gender – are pivotal to the narrative. The crack in the ceiling of his flat replicates the disjuncture between the inner and outer bodies that Thompson portrays, and the split between the notion of the “rightful” morphology and Thompson’s “wrongful” corporeality prior to surgical changes. In the narrative, Thompson inhibits the ongoing coexistence of inner and outer, or “wrongful” and “rightful” bodies: he imagines that one is bursting through the other, a portrayal that resembles a violent

²⁹ Thompson’s account of body discord in *What Took You so Long?*, arising from the unfamiliar, echoes Avery Gordon’s definition of “haunting” in *Ghostly Matters: Haunting and the Sociological Imagination* (1997/2008), conjured when “home becomes unfamiliar” and “your bearings on the world lose direction” (xvi). In Chapter Three, I explore the symbolism between trans experience and portrayals of hauntings and ghostliness that arise in Jennifer Finney Boylan’s *I’m Looking Through You* (2008). It is striking that while Thompson’s autobiography does not hinge on a motif of haunting as Boylan’s does, body feelings nevertheless evoke the spectral.

refiguring of a birth scene: “It felt as if my ‘inner body’ was forcing itself to the ends of my limbs. It was growing ever larger inside of me, making me feel I was bursting at the seams and wanting out ... out ... *out!*” (200). Often, trans autobiographies convey transformation as a form of rebirth, evoking notions of the new, emerging body.³⁰ The fantasy of the inner body bursting through the outer body conjures the idea of entire, bodily transformation, which is perhaps in conflict with notions of change concentrated on parts of the body elsewhere in Thompson’s account; and I address this conflict in the following section.

Transformation

Although the autobiography centres on the “wrongness” of the body, Thompson depicts the body, prior to embarking on a course of testosterone and undergoing surgical changes, as already boyish and manly. He thus perhaps undermines the sense of “wrongness” he has emphasised. As a child, Thompson states, he has “a thick patch of dark hair” on his back, and his “posture” is “masculine” (15). Years later, after embarking on a course of hormone therapy, a fellow inmate of Styal Prison informs him that he resembles her husband (113). During a confrontation with his mother, who repeatedly refers to him as “she” despite his transition, Thompson removes some of his clothes to convey the fact of his gender: “I started to rip my clothes off ... I was half undressed. ‘Look at me!’ I screamed. ‘Look at me, for fuck’s sake! Just look at me. Do I look like what you are referring to me as?’”

³⁰ In Chapter Two, I interrogate the significance of the rebirth motif in Claudine Griggs’s account of surgical change (1996/2004). Rebirth symbolism is prevalent in the tradition of trans autobiographies. For example, connoting his shift into living as “Mark”, Rees (1996) notes, “My ‘birth’ as Mark was due to take place at the beginning of the autumn term in October” (86). Similarly, Renée Richards’s autobiography *Second Serve* (1983/1984) hinges on notions of rebirth: the chapter “Renée Richards/Richard Reborn” is devoted to this analogy. In the chapter, she notes, “When I awoke, I would be Renée. When I chose it as a child, I had not known the meaning of the name Renée. In that moment I savoured its significance. Renée. Reborn” (280). Surgery emerges as a form of transformation in which Richards’s former identity is elided: “The penthrane was turned on, and Dick was turned off” (280).

Similarly, in the BBC documentary *Transgender Kids* (2017), co-founder of Boston Children’s Hospital’s Gender Management Service Clinic Dr. Norman Spack notes that in witnessing “these kids give birth to themselves”, a rewarding consequence of working with trans children, he “just felt like a midwife” (00:18:16–21). While transition often emerges in autobiographical accounts as a mode of birth or rebirth, Spack’s description throws into relief ideas of significant change or transformation, and simultaneously the sheer agency of the children concerned, who have the capacity to determine their own emergence.

(203–204). Exposing his chest, following mastectomy, Thompson reiterates the significance of the absence of womanhood in the narrative. How might the narrative navigate portrayals of the body as adhering to a boyish/manly morphology and claims of the body’s “wrongness”? Thompson undermines the shift into manhood precisely from the “wrongfulness” of his originally assigned gender. In the narrative, he resists documenting with any clarity a precise shift from one mode of being to another. However, while he insists on the boyish and manly qualities of the body both prior to and following the shifts of hormone therapy and surgeries, he also designates certain parts “wrongful” for interrupting notions of the man’s body.

This “wrongness” is critical to Thompson’s emphasis on his urgent need to possess a penis and to his notion of the body as “wrong” in its absence, prior to his final surgeries. While the boyish and manly qualities of the body even prior to the changes of surgery are central to the narrative, elsewhere the text suggests that the body pertains to manhood only following the attainment of the genitals he feels he should have. Before Thompson has had his final surgeries he is “alienated” from himself and his “whole body” (195), despite the hormone therapy and mastectomy he has already undergone. He recounts fearing, shortly prior to his final surgeries, that he might be unable to ever begin “a new life in the body of a complete man” (299), which the penis facilitates. As a teenager, padding out the front of his trousers makes him “feel more a boy” (55): as Prosser argues, the packing is “filling in for what [Thompson] feels should be already there” (1998, 75). This notion of packing thus invokes a more striking sense of loss, suggesting “a case of amputation” in which the body lacks that which is “rightfully” his (1998, 76).³¹

This sense of lack, during the long periods of waiting Thompson endures prior to his surgeries, culminates in bouts of depression and rage. The procedures occur in stages, encompassing four separate operations, and there is a wait of almost three years between them. Prosser argues that Thompson’s investment in “rightful” genitals commences “even while these parts are still under construction” (87). Prior

³¹ Similarly, in his autobiography, Valerio (2006) notes, “I feel the presence – spiritually and somatically – of a penis. A phantom dick. I have sex with women as though I genuinely have a penis. It seems natural” (317).

to the final of the four operations, Prosser (1998) notes, Thompson possesses an organ “attached at one end to his groin and at the other to his hip” that resembles “a suitcase handle” (87). Thompson is at risk of losing the penis, which, Prosser argues, he has already conceptualised as his “rightful” appendage: “Even at this stage of the procedure ... the surgery has already enabled Thompson to invest in this thigh material as his penis” (82). Thompson emphasises the attainment of the penis, a form of replacing that which has been lost or that which is “rightful”, as the fulfilment of destiny, on which the resolution of the narrative is based: “This was meant to be, I was a man” (300). Notions of destiny are prevalent in trans accounts and contribute to the movement towards restored “order”, a concept that Richard Grayson (2006) suggests trans autobiographies commonly reflect (29).

The “wrongness” of the body, in the autobiography, similarly centres on Thompson’s notion of the parts that “didn’t belong to boys” (1–2). Prior to transition, Prosser argues, Thompson’s genitals are “inconceivable” to him, both “untouchable” and “blank spaces in body image” (77). Thompson depicts one-sided experiences of sex in his account of incarceration in the borstal as a teenager: until he undergoes the changes of hormone therapy and surgeries, facilitating or enabling the “right” body, he inhibits intimacy involving the “wrongful” parts of the body. Genitals, in Thompson’s portrayal, symbolise entire body “wrongness” prior to changes. This idea resonates with Edelman and Zimman’s (2014) exploration of Emily Grabham’s (2007) notion of “*hyper-embodiment*” (Edelman and Zimman, 675), in which a fragment of the body signifies the whole.³² The striking sense in which the “wrong” genitals create an idea of the entire body as “wrong” suggests a playful notion of change, in which Thompson’s final surgeries might similarly establish “full” transformation.

Emphasising the conflict between parts and the whole, notions of the body and of genitals become muddled in the narrative: “While my body was the way it was, there was no way that anyone would be allowed to see or touch the parts of it that didn’t belong to me” (75). The borstal account drifts from claims of one-sided sex acts to portrayals of detachment from the body, signifying that the unthinkable

³² Assigning gender in accordance with genitals at birth reduces bodies to parts, Edelman and Zimman argue (675).

nature of the genitals, as Prosser posits, cultivates unthinkable corporeality more widely. The account stresses that Thompson renders fragments of the body distinct from the whole, cultivating dissociation between “wrongful” parts and body image, or notions of the “rightful” body: “Having a woman touch me sexually ... would have broken my detachment, which I needed to maintain in order to keep my sanity” (75). Thompson enforces and reiterates dissociation, rendering the body fragmented: “The older I got, the more I perfected my detachment from my body” (75). This sense of dissociation from the body and from the genitals suggests that the account conflates genitals and the body, both sites of “wrongness”. His daily acts – sleeping in underwear and seeking to resist catching sight of the parts of the body he designates as “wrong” – sustain the divorce between fragments of the body and the entirety of the body. While Thompson recounts dissociation from the body, divesting the outer body of materiality, the significance Thompson attributes to the genitals suggests particular, embodied concern, which is in conflict with Prosser’s notion of genitals as lacunae in Thompson’s body image.

Although “wrongness” in the narrative rests on that which the body lacks, and on the parts of the body that interrupt Thompson’s notion of manhood, the synopsis of the text included on the back cover undermines this idea of “wrongness” by defining Thompson’s sense of “wrongness” precisely as entrapment in “the body of a girl”. Like the claims of the back cover, Prosser argues that Thompson hides his “female morphology” (1998, 75) prior to his surgeries, a process that encompasses “daily layerings of binder, several T-shirts, and thick work shirt” (75). Hiding his morphology constitutes “reshaping” the body and cultivating a “second skin”, which enables “passing” but “entraps and prevents *being*” (75). However, is the “morphology” Thompson portrays, in fact, “female”? Similarly, does Thompson ever depict “the body of a girl” as the back cover of the autobiography asserts? During puberty, the changes of the body – specifically, the development of parts of the body that would “confirm” his originally assigned gender – create “frustration and anxiety” that Thompson states is “tearing” him “to bits”: puberty fragments the body, though he is “slow to develop” and “not much”

occurs “in the chest department” (54).³³ However, he states that the changes of the body fail to compromise the unwavering notion of his own boyhood: “I didn’t feel they were a reflection on my maleness” (55). By invoking his ongoing sense of boyhood, Thompson troubles the “female” resonance of the body’s development during puberty.

While Thompson refers to the “wrongness” of his pubescent body, he does not suggest that his body is “wrong” specifically because it is *womanly*: indeed, the autobiography absents the fact of female corporeality. Girlhood and womanhood are, like the female body, elided in the narrative. Prosser (1998) interrogates Thompson’s refusal, or failure perhaps, to provide the name he is designated at birth, following the inquiry of his psychiatrist: “Faced with the psychiatrist’s request, Thompson remains unable to speak his birth name, choking on its feminine sound” (109). And there is resonance, as Prosser argues, between the “unspeakability” of the assigned name and the “unthinkability” of womanhood in the narrative (110). Thompson’s account of menstruation similarly centres on absence and ellipsis: “The other aspect of puberty, the word for which I cannot bear to mention in relation to myself, also started” (54).³⁴ Dissociating from the “wrongful” body, menstruation occurs, though there is a disjuncture between the process and the body in question: in the narrative, his is not a body that menstruates. Rather than assigning the “wrongness” of the body to girlish or female qualities, he notes that “The first time I was born, it was in a body which was other than male” (1): Thompson omits the possibility of original “femaleness”; rather, the “wrongness” of the body centres on that which deviates from his notion

³³ Puberty typically emerges as a period of frustration in trans autobiographies. As Valerio (2006) states: “developing ... This word haunts me ... oh God. Something is happening to my body, it’s starting to swell here and there, a bit of hair is coming out in my pubic area, there’s an all-over feeling of climactic change gathering momentum” (54). Similarly, Rees recounts the torment he endures as his morphology shifts in line with the onset of puberty, or the approach to “womanhood” (14). This is a “new body” to him, and during the period of puberty, disjuncture between body and selfhood intensifies: “By now I regarded myself as male, cursed with a female body” (14). In the context of rebirth, hormone therapy emerges as a second, perhaps “rightful”, adolescence or puberty, as I explore later in this chapter.

³⁴ Prosser argues that Thompson’s “claiming and naming of the penis is in stark contrast to the unnamability and inconceivability of his female genital parts and functions: Thompson’s autobiography unflinchingly euphemizes vagina, menstruation, and breasts” (1998, 87–88).

of maleness. The “first” birth this refers to constructs the possibility of a “second” or “rightful” birth, which recalls the doubling of the body in Thompson’s account.

However, the “female morphology” Prosser denotes (1998, 75) perhaps pertains to Thompson’s account of binding his chest and donning various layers, prior to mastectomy, to avoid “being discovered” (146) whilst employed as an apprentice for the tile and mosaic manufacturer. Elsewhere, portrayals of the chest inhibit the possibility of “female morphology”. Shortly prior to the mastectomy procedure, for example, Thompson’s consultant surgeon conveys his reluctance to permit surgery because he is unable to perceive “any need to operate”. He invites Thompson to look at his own chest: “They are a lot bigger than yours. What are you worried about?” (176–177). The account insists on Thompson’s body as conventionally manly, or unwomanly, prior to the changes of surgery. While the chest cultivates incongruity in his employment as a labourer, Thompson hints that the felt-incongruity, and concern for the chest, centre on his idea of the body rather than how the body actually looks. The sense of “wrongness” that the chest cultivates resists denoting female embodiment but attests to Thompson’s notion of incompatibility with “full” manhood (193).

This incongruence between the former genitals and “full” manhood in *What Took You so Long?* is similarly pivotal to Rees’s *Dear Sir or Madam* (1996). In his autobiography, Rees narrates shifting from his originally designated gender during adulthood, following a childhood and an adolescence typified by the feeling of the “wrongness” of womanhood and the woman’s body. Unlike Thompson, whose portrayal hinges on boyish and manly qualities of character and morphology reaching back to his earliest memories, Rees’s account of adolescence and adulthood emphasises the ill-fitting nature of assigned womanhood. Shifting towards more masculine presentation in line with his identity, he embodies an appearance he terms “ambiguous” throughout his work.³⁵ Yet Rees strives to resist ambiguity and he recounts the urge to shift from the ambiguous mode into “definite male[ness]” (123). Passing from ambiguity to manhood conveys with clarity a shift that emerges as murky in Thompson’s account. If boyish- and manly

³⁵ I return to Rees’s portrayal of ambiguity in Chapter Three.

qualities of character and the body typify Thompson's appearance even prior to the changes of hormone therapy and surgery, then where might change(s) arise in the narrative?

In contrast to Thompson's depiction of the significance of the penis to his sense of his manhood, Rees resists the notion that a penis designates "full" manhood: "If ... my whole identity depends on the presence of a few inches of probably numb and non-functional flesh, then my problems are psychological, not physical" (1996, 149). Elsewhere, however, Rees emphasises his perception of his own genitals as "female parts" that he cannot "integrate" with his man's body (175). Thompson struggles to create congruence with aspects of his body prior to the changes of hormone therapy and surgery, but the accounts of Thompson and Rees diverge in the significance both place on these parts: Rees labels them "female" (175); Thompson, simply, "wrongful". Rees's account of undergoing a gynaecological exam following transition, for example, evokes disruption to his idea of the body by reminding him of his "remaining female anatomy", which is "abhorred" (122).

Reflecting on the parts of the body that disrupt his idea of his own maleness, Rees introduces the possibility of rethinking fragments of the body. A trans friend of his, he notes, reconceptualises parts of his body – genitals – as "male" (175) precisely for belonging to him: "He accepted his body;" Rees states, "it was not something alien and despised" (175).³⁶ This notion of rethinking or reconceptualising the parts of the body, and shifting the significance of the gender they signify, arises in the work of Edelman and Zimman (2014). In their work, they explore trans men's and trans masculine people's perceptions of "pre- or non-operative" (676) body parts (genitals) as "productive features of their maleness" (673–674), taken from an online forum. "Hegemonic readings", they state, "may render" these body parts "features of a 'female' body", but via "discursive co-constructed meaning-making" this form of "embodiment" emerges as "both malleable and implicitly dynamic" (676). However, although Rees insists on these

³⁶ In a similar portrayal of reconceptualising the body, Valerio (2006) notes "I decided that it didn't matter. I already thought of myself as possessing a cock when I had sex, and at least the rest of my body would be decisively male" (322). However, the notion of the genitals Valerio depicts conveys a sense of tension: "A man is not a penis, although a penis is an important part of a man" (322).

notions of the body as feasible, he is unable to reconceptualise his genitals as congruent with his man's body following transition. While Thompson's notion of the incongruent fragments of his body attests to "wrongful" corporeality, his account absents the female quality of the "wrongful" parts.

There is tension between this absence of girlhood and womanhood that I have proposed, and the central thrust of the narrative that the paratexts of the autobiography convey: the subtitle of the autobiography cultivates a "girl's" passage "to manhood", and the back-cover synopsis concentrates on Thompson's entrapment in "the body of a girl". The front cover of the autobiography replicates the absence of girlhood and womanhood, thus encapsulating the unsettling of change that arises in the autobiography: in the image of Thompson that is positioned centrally on the cover, his hard stare, the antithesis of the uncertainty that Cameron's (1996) anxious self-portrait conveys, challenges all but a reading of conventional masculinity.³⁷ Keeping in mind the troubling of the "girl's journey to manhood", what kinds of transformation might the autobiography observe?

Entrapment

The sense of entrapment that the "wrongness" of the body evokes is emphasised by Thompson's portrayals of incarceration in the borstal and in prison; and crucially, these settings illuminate his reworking of the "girl's journey to manhood". More widely, *What Took You so Long?* plays with modes of constraint and entrapment. Towards the end of the narrative, Thompson establishes resonance between his childhood ritual of lying rigidly on his bed, forcing his body into painful contortions, and his position on the operating table as an adult, lying rigidly still and experiencing discomfort. He recounts that his childhood urge to hold the body still

³⁷ Depicting the authors at the close of the journey the narratives portray, and replicating masculine characteristics, the front covers of *Dear Sir or Madam* and *What Took You so Long?* convey striking resonance, though notions of transition and of the significance of body parts diverge in the accounts. Both men rest their faces on their hands, and while Rees gazes off to one side, Thompson returns the viewer's gaze with a hard stare. The cover of Rees's autobiography cultivates division: an image of Rees in androgynous childhood also appears, invoking the "before" and "after" of transition. The background is white and black, and the title is blue and pink, insisting on the focus on, and the emergence of the rupture between, woman- and manhood in the narrative. Notions of split arise on the back cover of the autobiography: the first paragraph of synopsis problematically denotes Rees as both "Brenda" and "her", and the second as "him" and "Mark".

rests on his urge for transformation into “the boy I should be” (3) – from what, precisely? Rather than imagining a transformation *into* boyhood – as I have argued, Thompson’s childhood is portrayed as *already* his boyhood – notions of transformation centre on his boyhood becoming “certain” or apparent to family and peers. Ideas of “wrongness” are thus typified by the constrained body; and depicting his trans history as a series of wrong-body portrayals perhaps replicates these constraints.

This notion of the constrained body informs Thompson’s depiction of his treatment in the borstal setting, and specifically his account of being forced into his cell by the guards: “They take a run at you, holding the mattress as a shield and push you through the door and throw the mattress on top of you” (80). Thompson’s portrayal of propulsion into his cell throws the subjection of his body into relief. This depiction, in which the guard presses Thompson to the ground, the mattress between them, evokes a striking echo with Thompson’s notion of inner and outer bodies in the narrative. The account renders the disjuncture between the bodies, that the mattress symbolises, material: a form of pressure bearing down on Thompson, the mattress emerges as one of many structures of entrapment that typify his account, encompassing the cell, the borstal and the outer “wrongful” body.

A consequence of his constraints, Thompson’s urge to assault his environment, a redirected urge to assault his body (Prosser 1998, *Second Skins*, 75), arises in the remand centre. Thompson recounts boisterous rioting, in which, swinging his fists wildly, he unintentionally injures another inmate (65). During a protest, Thompson and others barricade the door of his cell against the guards and attempt to demolish the interior. In the protest, the cell symbolises his body: the prison cell traps him and connotes violence, resonating with his urge to repeatedly butt his head reported elsewhere in the narrative, for example (39). Thompson is typically apathetic as an inmate of the borstal: of his sentencing, he recounts, “I was quite immature, none of this had any impact on me” (70). He can suffer the torments of the borstal because he has suffered the torment of his bodily “wrongness”, the text suggests. While Thompson resists recounting felt-incongruity in the women’s borstal, the conflation of his body and the prison cell, and the violence he inflicts in

riots and protests – symbolic of his urge to assault the body – connote his presence in the “wrong” place as much as the “wrong” body. Thompson’s account of his time in the borstal cultivates a striking sense of incongruity in his environment.³⁸

This incongruity is similarly pivotal to the portrayal of prison, later in the narrative. Thompson, undergoing the body-changes of hormone therapy, is housed with the prison’s pregnant inmates. His presence amongst pregnant inmates strikes him as unusual: “It seemed a most incongruous place for me, of all people, to be” (113). This portrayal of prison contributes to his sense of feeling and appearing out of place that the account of the borstal begins, implicitly, to construct. The guards, Thompson notes, enforce recognition of his variance from the conventional womanhood of the pregnant inmates. In the prison environment, sporting a moustache, a closely-shaved head and a physique strengthened by exercise, his manhood is taken for granted on more than one occasion.

Upon arrival at Styal Prison, Thompson is transferred to the punishment block. Having failed to commit an offence warranting transfer to such a setting, he attributes the implication of discipline to the manliness of his appearance. In the text, Thompson’s perceived maleness in a woman’s prison is suggestive of abjection, and the consequence of his abjection is marginality.³⁹ The disciplinary

³⁸ Sarah Pemberton’s “Enforcing gender: The Constitution of Sex and Gender in Prison Regimes” (2013) examines constructions of gender in prisons in US, English and Welsh contexts. Her analysis draws on trans studies, queer theory and the work of Michel Foucault. Pemberton seeks to remedy Foucault’s inattention to “the role of prisons” and sex/sexuality in conjunction by exploring the discipline of gender practices (151). She considers the impact of the incarceration of prisoners according to binary categories.

In the UK, the 2004 Gender Recognition Act (critically, this comes into effect *after* Thompson’s time of writing) seeks to ensure that trans people can be officially recognised as the gender with which they identify. In this context, medicine and medical practitioners have authority; and, of course, many gender variant people are unable to obtain formal recognition of their gender. A crucial aspect of Pemberton’s research is the linkage of sex and disciplinary power in the prison context: “If binary sexes are a construct produced by sexuality and by binary conceptions of gender, then policies of sex segregation and the use of binary sex/gender categories in prison statistics are an exercise of power that reinforces and naturalizes binary sex/gender categories” (166). Pemberton uses Raewyn Connell’s notion of hegemonic masculinity to think through masculinity in prisons, in terms of dominant masculinity and “weakness”. Overall, there is very little written about trans men’s experiences of prison, which also is not addressed here.

³⁹ Julia Kristeva discusses abjection in *Powers of Horror* (1980/1982), exploring the reaction of horror when one is confronted by what the body is not, that which is “other” to oneself. Allison Kimmich, in “Writing the Body: From Abject to Subject” (1998), notes that abjection “grows out of physical characteristics which variously define a person as Other in relation to the normative healthy white

regimes of women's prisons enforce adherence to "white, middle-class conceptions of acceptable femininity" (166), as Sarah Pemberton argues in "Enforcing Gender" (2013). Yet Thompson is visibly at odds with this ideal, conspicuously resisting the prison's disciplinary regime. Indeed, Thompson delineates the strict parameters set by the prison and his defiance of them: when prison guards ransack his cell and remove the conventionally male underwear that he is not permitted, he arranges to be sent men's underwear that does not feature a Y-front, which he is begrudgingly allowed to keep. In the episodes of restriction during his time in prison, the power and discipline of the prison mimics the power and discipline of binary gender. Informed by the work of Judith Butler, Stephen Dillon (2011) notes that "regimes of power" that construct "intelligible and knowable bodies" also cultivate "unthinkable, abject, and unlivable bodies" (179). Abjection resonates with Thompson's account of incarceration: the sense of the "wrong" body, central to the narrative, conveys "unthinkable" and "unlivable" modes of being.⁴⁰ In prison, his reiterated insistence that fragments of the body remain untouched evoke the inconceivable nature of the body. However, this sense of the body as inconceivable and "wrongful" is in tension with his contentment in the burgeoning maleness of his body in the prison setting, a consequence of the hormone therapy he

heterosexual male subject" (223). She draws on the work of Elizabeth Grosz, Butler and Kristeva to define the abject as "something that simultaneously occupies positions both inside and outside the body" (224). Robert Phillips (2014) explores understandings of trans bodies in terms of abjection – involving "uncertainty" hinging on notions of the "ambiguous", "horrifying" and "polluting" (20) – particularly when these bodies are perceived to be in the midst of transition, and refuse "to adhere to clear definitions of sex and gender" (20). The guards' treatment of Thompson in the prison, and his removal to the punishment block on arrival, resonate with Kimmich's (1998) notion of the abject: "Designating some bodies or groups of bodies as contaminated, irrational, or disorderly allows those who count themselves among the dominant group – the subjects – to think with relief, 'That is not me'" (224). Thompson's relocation to the punishment cell is aligned with my focus on marginal spaces and trans experience in Chapter Three.

⁴⁰ In "The Only Freedom I Can See: Imprisoned Queer Writing and the Politics of the Unimaginable" (2011), Dillon, whose work pertains to a US context, records communication with two "queer" – "non-normatively gendered" (169) – prisoners, "R" and "C". He examines "white supremacy, heteropatriarchy, and neoliberal capitalism", and subjugation as a consequence of these structures. Under neoliberalism, those most vulnerable are "blamed for their vulnerability to regimes of power far beyond their control" (172). Certain subjects are "physically and discursively forced to inhabit spaces of exclusion", unlike others, whose "bodies and lives ... are permitted to flourish": the former subjects "haunt" and "constitute" the latter. In Chapter Three, I explore modes of haunting and ghostliness in Jennifer Finney Boylan's *I'm Looking Through You* (2008), and engage with Esther Wolfe's (2014) notion of haunting in the text as a form of trans oppression.

undergoes. This conflict reiterates the conflation between parts of the body designated as “wrong” and the idea of the body as “wrong” in its entirety.

The changes of hormone therapy that Thompson reports create a second puberty, symbolised by the acne that erupts on his skin; and his portrayal of suffering with acne in prison resonates with the blisters that disfigure his skin later in the narrative, suggesting that both prison and the period of time prior to his final surgeries emerge as phases of adolescence, finally overcome by his move into (his notion of “full”) manhood.⁴¹ The account of prison reifies a shift that underpins the narrative. Rather than mapping the thrust of the subtitle, from “girl[hood]” to “manhood”, the account of prison maps the shift from youth to adulthood, in which manhood is emboldened. Of the changes his body endures in prison, Thompson insists, “To me it felt like a natural progression from boyhood to manhood” (117). His account of conspicuous manhood in public, following his release from prison, marks this shift: on his journey home, he falls asleep on the train with his head hanging out into the aisle and another passenger chides her son: “watch the man’s head” (137). Despite the notions of incongruity and abjection I have explored, prison is the site in which the “natural” or “inherent” manly qualities of the body are ultimately enhanced. And this sense of development in the prison setting suggests that the thrust of the narrative is the attainment of “full” manhood precisely from (fragmented, incoherent) boyhood.⁴² Sewell’s claim that she “cannot help thinking that the sum total of [Thompson’s] experiences must have given him some insight into, and from, both sides of the gender divide” (viii–ix) thus evokes a form of transformation that the autobiography fails to chart.

Conclusion: Coming “home” to the body

What Took You so Long? pivots on notions of the “wrong” body. Prior to the changes of testosterone and surgeries, Thompson portrays the burden of the body’s “wrongfulness” that he simultaneously experiences as not belonging to him (249). He recounts his urge for excoriation – specifically, by imagining his “rightful”

⁴¹ Thompson’s account suggests that undergoing phalloplasty surgery signifies “full” manhood.

⁴² Narrative resolution in Valerio’s (2006) account similarly hinges on the attainment of maturity: “I don’t look like a teenager anymore, but clearly like an adult man. Fully grown, I’ve arrived” (325).

body bursting through his “wrongful” flesh – and endures urges to violently fragment the body.⁴³ While “wrongness” pertains to fragments of his body, he also conjures notions of “wrongness” that pertain to the body in its entirety, and the aspiration towards whole transformation. Although conveying trans experience primarily via the feeling of the “wrongness” of the body might divest the body of significance, materiality arises from Thompson’s embodied body image, as Prosser’s (1998) analysis of *What Took You so Long?* suggests. Prosser’s exploration of materiality embedded in the “trapped in the wrong body” model has been pivotal to this chapter and I return to *Second Skins* (1998) in this conclusion to investigate how transition might be portrayed (or, critically, absented) from the range of photographs Thomson includes in his autobiography. I also draw on Prosser’s analysis of the conventional chronology of trans accounts: specifically, the move towards attaining contentment in the “right” body. However, my reading deviates from Prosser’s analysis as I examine how this passage towards contentment in the “right” body might be undermined.

In this chapter, I have traced a variety of transformations in the narrative: Thompson’s shift from youth to adulthood, and from rethinking the fragmentation of the body as body coherence, for example. A series of changes arise in the borstal and prison settings, and the accounts of his emergence from incarceration in the borstal and in prison serve as allegory for breaking free of the restrictive casing, the “false” outer body. Although I argued that the shift from “girl[hood]” to manhood emerges, instead, as a shift from boyhood to manhood, the narrative still adheres to a conventional focus on transformation.

My focus on transformation in this chapter has developed my exploration of how the core autobiographies open up ways of writing about trans experience, which is my wider aim in this thesis. My argument that *What Took You so Long?* maps the shift from boyhood to manhood, rather than “girl[hood]” to “manhood”, is underpinned by the absence of girlhood and “female morphology” (Prosser, 75) in the narrative. The autobiography includes a range of photographs, depicting

⁴³ Similarly, in *Conundrum* (1974), Morris states, “I began to dream of ways in which I might throw off the hide of my body and reveal myself pristine within” (23). See Prosser’s discussion of excoriation in trans narratives in *Second Skins* (68).

Thompson's childhood, adolescence and adulthood that reiterate the unsettling of this transformation. With the absence of girlhood and womanhood from Thompson's autobiography in mind, how might transition emerge in these images?⁴⁴ In trans autobiographies, Prosser states, "past photographs are arranged with present ones to form a narrative of the changing body up to the present" (213). The photographs of Thompson are chronological, shifting from babyhood to adulthood: the caption beneath the final image is "The end of a journey" (unpaginated). Like the narrative, the collection fails to capture the shift from "girl[hood]" to manhood: rather, the collection documents Thompson's boyhood and manhood. The captions beneath the photographs emphasise his boyish attributes in childhood, such as "Having successfully insisted on short hair, aged 6" (unpaginated). Although this description perhaps recalls Thompson's originally assigned gender – he insists on short hair to enhance his boyishness, rebelling against that which he has been designated – the photograph negates all but boyhood.

While the collection of photographs replicates the smoothing over of the shift from Thompson's originally assigned gender to manhood, collections of photographs in trans narratives more widely can prove troublesome.⁴⁵ Prosser argues that "Photographs of a pretransition self threaten to incarnate a 'dead' self that one is not" (217). Portraying only boy- and manhood, to which image in Thompson's collection might the "dead" self refer? The fact of a collection, which simultaneously aspires "to represent the transsexual's transition, to expose in the photographic image the difference of transsexuality" and to "conceal this difference", to assert that "posttransition, we look just the same as you" (Prosser, 12), constructs tension. Thompson's collection negates the tension, however, by eliding transition.⁴⁶

⁴⁴ Prosser notes that portraits of memoirists that accounts encompass "embody the subject of the narrative" and "declare" that the body documented "is the real body of the autobiographer" (209).

⁴⁵ How might a photograph represent trans identity without adhering to "before" and "after" imagery? How might "transsexuality as such be represented through the medium of the photograph?" (Prosser 1998, 226).

⁴⁶ At the close of *Second Skins*, Prosser provides an image of himself: "I blow my cover, and embody my narrative with this photograph" (234). His work is derived from his own account of transition during a summer of teaching. He recalls the "gendered nonzone" of that time, in which he "felt too embodied (only body) yet also disembodied", and asks, "what on earth did I embody?" (2). His focus

Although the photographs “smooth over” transition, they construct a journey towards adult manhood, replicating the thrust of the narrative. As Sewell’s introduction to the narrative suggests, Thompson establishes an aspiration towards the eventual state of contentment and comfort in the body, in which his body reflects his gender identity: as I note in the introduction to the chapter, she designates “wholeness” as the ambition of the narrative (vii). Confirming Sewell’s assertion of the aim of Thompson’s autobiography, Prosser argues that the “drive” of typical trans autobiographies is “nostalgically toward home – identity, belonging in the body and in the world” (1998, 177). Portrayals of surgeries that arise in trans autobiographies emerge “as a return: a coming home to the self through the body” (82–83). Similarly, in his analysis of trans characters and plots in millennial television and film, Cael Keegan (2013) explores the “journey” of the “moving body” from “negative to redemptive affect”, from “psychosis to mental health”, and from “self-hatred to a celebration of liberal individuality” (unpaginated).⁴⁷ Trans plots in film and television, Keegan argues, typically encompass “achieved legitimacy, restored community, and a ‘coming home’ to the body”; narrative denouement is predicated on the journey’s end, the arrival at “readable and binary gender”. To conclude, I ask: how might Thompson’s autobiography adhere to or depart from the return “home”, or shift into “wholeness”?

Sewell’s notion of “wholeness” recalls the aspiration Rees charts in his autobiography. *Dear Sir or Madam* (1996) inscribes the movement towards recognisable manhood as a journey to becoming “whole”, a process that encompasses social and bodily shifts.⁴⁸ In Rees’s autobiography, the thrust of the

on trans autobiographies emerges from his own “preoccupation”, he notes: “Without doubt, my turning as a critic to write on transsexual narratives represents a displaced autobiographical act” (4).

⁴⁷ In Chapter Two, I examine the prevalence of the journeying motif as symbolic of trans experience in autobiographies and films, and how the journeying motif in Griggs’s *Journal of a Sex Change* (1996/2004) evokes shifts and changes relating to sex, gender and the body in the text. While the journeying motif hints at forms of change intrinsic to becoming one’s “true” self, in Chapter Two I explore how Griggs’s texts trouble this movement.

⁴⁸ I return to Rees’s *Dear Sir or Madam* to conclude the chapter precisely because his narrative makes explicit his aspiration to a state of “wholeness”, and illustrates how the move is predicated on the body, and makes the structuring effect of the move towards “wholeness” evident (by conferring the title on his final chapter). In *Dear Sir or Madam*, Rees insists that “the very root of the transsexual’s need for role re-assignment is the universal, but usually acknowledged, striving for wholeness” (179). Originally intending to devote a chapter of this thesis to Rees’s autobiography, I

narrative precisely towards “wholeness” is rendered explicit: the narrative concludes with the chapter “Wholeness”, emphasising that his aspiration, and the move of the narrative, is precisely towards this state of being. Rees introduces his shift into “wholeness” by recounting the announcement that following lengthy periods of unemployment, he has been elected borough councillor (173).⁴⁹ Rees’s notion of the body’s “wholeness”, specifically, centres on his move from a state of ambiguity – his fear of being taken as ambiguous underpins the narrative – to recognisable and “definite” maleness (123). Before living as a man, Rees agonises over his appearance and particularly the idea that he resembles “a plain tweed-clad ambiguous creature” (45). The terms Rees uses to describe his ambiguity – “creature” and “being” (123) – suggest a diminished sense of personhood. His idea of himself as a “definite male” is – perhaps temporarily – affirmed when a friend shows him photographs taken of him whilst on holiday. Rees is scornful of identities and appearances that are fluid or trouble the binary, and particularly female masculinities: he has a particular aversion to appearing “mannish” (55) or “butch” (14) before living as a man and he reveals disdain for others who he suggests adhere to these identities (49). Concluding with the exploration of “wholeness”, Rees indicates that his notion of resolution, and the morphology to which he aspires, hinge on his departure from indeterminate modes of being and appearing: “The frump was no more!” (91).

Despite charting a move towards “wholeness”, however, *Dear Sir or Madam* conveys departure from the attainment of the “rightful” body. Moments of failure Rees recounts convey despondency and tarnish his successes, on which his notion of “wholeness” is partly founded. The portrayal of his appointment as borough councillor, for example, follows accounts of struggle and disappointment, in education, in his working life and in his personal relationships.⁵⁰ Rees focuses on a

encountered notions of “wholeness”, and how it is tied into the mapping of his life and into resolution, in my initial exploration of trans autobiographies.

⁴⁹ Beyond ideas of the body and how it might be perceived, Rees’s notions of “wholeness” centre on his career, his family and the prospect of a relationship.

⁵⁰ Rees recounts failing the eleven plus exams, for example, his discharge from the Women’s Royal Navy Service, and the periods of directionless unemployment he endures. Notions of failure, central to Rees’s final chapter, also typify Rae Spoon’s experience of gender, documented in *Gender Failure* (2014). Spoon endures dysphoric feelings after coming out as “a male-identified person”, and they eventually “retire” from gender (17–18).

period of distress in the penultimate chapter “Bereavement”, which encompasses feelings of grief for his mother’s death, shame for his long-term unemployment and anguish over his sister Jane’s disapproval of his transition. The sharp transition between the “Bereavement” and “Wholeness” chapters recalls the abrupt shift from the portrayals of shame and loss to the accounts of success. “Bereavement” closes with an extract from Rees’s diary: “Spoke to no one/Saw no one/No one called/No one rang/Do I exist?” (172). The diary extract is juxtaposed with the announcement of Rees’s political appointment, the opening of the following chapter: “Do I exist?” (on which “Bereavement” ends) is followed by “I do hereby declare that the said Mark Nicholas Rees is duly elected Councillor of the said Borough” (173). While the narrative shifts sharply into “Wholeness” and insists that Rees’s successes are predicated on attaining the councillor role, the chapter additionally stresses Rees’s felt-inadequacies. Rees refers to himself as “a congenital failure”, suggesting that notions of his inadequacies pivot on the body (108).

These fears that centre on the body, and others – that his hips are womanly, for example (111) – inhibit the attainment of the “whole” body. In his portrayal, his genitals interrupt his idea of the man’s body. Rees’s failure to rethink fragments of the body as congruent with manhood and/or men’s bodies evokes incoherent notions of the body. As a consequence, his perception of the body, as his autobiography illuminates, rests on “middle-sex” being (127).⁵¹ The “female” (175) resonance of parts of the body recalls his assertion, that I delineate in the Introduction to this thesis, that “transsexual” being is a misnomer because one cannot *change* sex, as the term – for him – implies; and that transition might more precisely be defined as cultivating coherence between the body and the gender with which one identifies (177).⁵² For Rees, portrayals of the aspiration towards

⁵¹ It is striking that despite the despondent tone of the narrative and Rees’s idea of the body as, perhaps, “middle-sex” (127), he renders the aspiration to “wholeness” explicit in his autobiography.

⁵² In the BBC documentary *Transgender Kids* (2017), Dr. Norman Spack notes that he favours the phrase “affirmation surgery” rather than the phrase “sex reassignment surgery”, because “you’re not changing someone’s sex, really. You’re changing their body” (00:20:50–59). His assertion perhaps conveys trans people’s notions of gender identity as present prior to the changes of surgery; that surgery creates congruence between gender identity and morphology. However, his assertion is pertinent to notions of the capacities of change that arise in Rees’s account.

“wholeness” are complicated by his notion of the body’s capacities for change. He notes that, while he often feels content as a man, he continues to experience a “feeling of hatred for my body” (122).

How might Thompson’s autobiography, like Rees’s account, trouble the body’s shift from discomfort and inadequacy to “whole”, a “coming home” or return? While the narrative centres on portrayals of body discomfort and dissatisfaction, the depiction of “wrongfulness” as fully embodied and portrayals of “wrongfulness” that pertain to fragments of the body create tension. The text’s conflicting notions of “wrongness” as simultaneously entire and concentrated on specific sites such as the chest complicate the depiction of the shift to “wholeness” or body contentment: Thompson recounts disdain, prior to his final surgeries, for “this ugly, fragmented body of mine” (191).⁵³ Moreover, conflict arises between claims of entire “wrongness” and notions of the body as already adhering to manhood, prior to his final surgeries; and towards the close of the narrative, changed parts and the emergence of the “new” body (311) are conflated. Might “whole” transformation emerge via altered parts?⁵⁴

Perhaps tempering this notion of “entire” transformation, Thompson’s autobiography opens with the assertion that, following transition, he is “safe and sound in my male body – well, just about” (1). Towards the close of the autobiography, Thompson reflects on his previously held assumptions predicated on the felt-experience of the body, following his final surgeries: “I always thought that when this miracle took place, there would be an instant release from my humiliation and my rejection of my own body” (310). Anticipating contentment in the body following his final surgeries, his notion of the body sustains the dichotomy between selfhood and body: “I would”, he hoped, “be able to make friends with myself” (310). He confesses that “this was indeed hoping for a miracle”, and that he fails to cultivate a sense of “harmony” with his body immediately following surgery.

⁵³ This description of Thompson’s body arises from his notion of his “inability to father” children (191). This sense that infertility inhibits the “wholeness” of the body is similarly significant to Griggs’s *Journal*, as I explore in Chapter Two.

⁵⁴ In *Body Parts: Essays on Life-Writing* (2005), Hermione Lee argues that the act of compiling biography resembles constituting a whole from parts. Life writing is burdened by what is not there: by gaps and fragments (5). An echo thus emerges between the act of life writing and notions of transformation that arise in Thompson’s autobiography.

Attaining contentment in the body, he notes, requires that he “build [him]self up” (310). The tentative approach to the body suggests dawning recognition that surgery resists cultivating, with any immediacy, “transformation” and body “rightness”. However, the “rightfulness” of the body emerges as feasible: Thompson’s closing account insists, rather, on the gruelling process of its attainment.

Is the “wholeness” towards which *What Took You so Long?* strives ultimately embodied? And does the “right” body emerge at the close of the narrative? Thompson’s mastectomy procedure and his abandonment of restrictive binding clothing following his surgical procedure symbolise the shedding of his wrong-bodied burden (Prosser, 82). It is striking that in his account of the body shortly after the mastectomy operation he entangles tenses in his efforts to describe a feeling of body “rightness”: he notes that shortly after the procedure his feeling of “relief” arising from having shed the “wrongful” body parts “disappeared”. Instead, “[i]t was as if I had always looked and felt like I was now, as if I had become what I already was” (177). His account of the body evokes notions of “wholeness” in addition to the suggestion of narrative return to something that has already been. Thompson’s surgeries return the body to its “rightful” form and the phalloplasty procedure is central to the attainment of a state of “wholeness”, of complete manhood: following the final surgeries, Thompson begins to court ideas of the “new” body (311); specifically, it is the sense of the completed phalloplasty surgery that cultivates notions of transformed morphology.

Following his passage into the “new” body, Thompson reflects that the wish for “transformation” he harbours as a child – an embodied shift that would render his boyhood evident to those whose notions of him rest on his originally assigned gender – has ultimately been attained by the narrative’s close: “My childhood dream of waking up, transformed painlessly and instantly ... had been replaced by a long rocky road, but a road leading to the same conclusion” (309). Thompson’s surgical procedures shed his burden (Prosser, 82), replace that which has been figured as loss (Prosser, 76) and restore sensation and coherence to the flesh that, in its fragmentation, has been unable to warm him. In the borstal and prison settings, evoking a second adolescence, Thompson departs boyhood and moves

into manhood. Attaining contentment in the body emerges as a slow and arduous process but ultimately viable.

Chapter Two: “It’s all one river”: Transit and transformation in Claudine Griggs’s autobiographical works

Jesus made me this way for a reason, so I could suffer and be reborn as he was.

–Bree Osborne, *Transamerica*

Adult reassignment does not lift one from a sex-changed existence.

–Claudine Griggs, *S/He*

Departing from the Bildungsroman¹ structure typical of trans autobiographies, Claudine Griggs’s *Journal of a Sex Change: Passage Through Trinidad* (1996/2004) concentrates on her experience of gender confirmation surgery and her process of recovery. *Griggs’s Journal*² is an account of the period she spends in Mt. San Rafael Hospital in Trinidad, Colorado. Griggs undergoes her procedure at the age of thirty-seven, seventeen years after first living as a woman.³ Early trans autobiographies, such as Jan Morris’s *Conundrum* (1974), emphasise a form of instant change that gender confirmation surgery creates. Moreover, these early autobiographies, as well as more recent portrayals of trans experience in film and on television, often stress the significance of surgical changes and downplay the social dimension of transition. *Griggs’s Journal*, however, defies the prospect of such immediate transformation and troubles the significance that these narratives place on surgical changes. Trans representations and portrayals that focus primarily on surgery are typically faulted for their problematic employment of surgery (or surgeries) as emblematic of trans identities.⁴ By contrast, many autobiographies of the 2000s

¹ See the Introduction for an explanation of why I use this term.

² In this chapter, I refer to the autobiography as Griggs’s “*Journal*” rather than “*Journal of a Sex Change*”, for the sake of brevity.

³ Griggs was born in 1953, and the events she documents occurred between 1990 and 1992. She underwent surgery in 1990 at the age of thirty-seven, though she began living as a woman at the age of twenty. She was originally due to undergo surgery in 1977, but her surgeon lost his medical license shortly prior to the scheduled procedure.

⁴ As Sally Hines (2007) argues, the emphasis on surgeries is enmeshed in the “medical perspectives on transgender” that have “come to occupy a dominant position”, informing “how transgender is viewed and experienced within contemporary Western society” (9). A few problematic examples of plots in which entire transformation is facilitated solely by surgery include the shift of the protagonist from Myron to Myra in Gore Vidal’s *Myra Breckinridge* (1968), Evelyn’s metamorphosis into womanhood after a series of operations in Angela Carter’s *The Passion of New Eve* (1977/2007),

and 2010s deviate from the emphasis on surgical changes to convey the breadth of trans experience, and to curtail the link between trans being and surgical changes.⁵ Griggs's *Journal* returns to surgery to undermine assumptions of the brevity and ease of gender confirmation surgery and to emphasise her notion of surgery's shortcomings. Developing my focus on representations of change pertaining to sex, gender and the body in this thesis, my analysis of Griggs's *Journal* specifically centres on the portrayals of transformation following her surgical procedure. Interrogating how Griggs's autobiographical works indicate the broadening ways of writing about trans, I ask: how does Griggs rework conventional notions of change, such as the instant form of transformation gender confirmation surgery facilitates in early accounts?

In Griggs's *Journal*, she depicts her journey from her home in Los Angeles to Mt. San Rafael Hospital in Trinidad, where she undergoes her procedure. Symbolising forms of change, journeying is a common analogy for trans experience; and, more widely, is a clichéd mode of symbolising self-discovery. The genre of Griggs's work – the journal – emphasises the significance of the journeying motif: journaling and journeying are interwoven acts, as the genre of travel writing suggests. My exploration of the journeying motif in Griggs's *Journal* is a continuation of my focus on various methods of representing trans experience, which I introduced in Chapter One. As well as focusing on Griggs's portrayal of journeying in her *Journal*, I explore the motif in the 2005 film *Transamerica*. I examine this film for its parallels with Griggs's *Journal*: specifically, the focus on shifting subjectivity in accordance with changing location.⁶ As well as symbolising protagonist Bree Osborne's attainment of

and Vincente's transformation into Vera at the hands of kidnapper and plastic surgeon Robert Ledgard, in Pedro Almodovar's 2011 film *La piel que habito/The Skin I Live In*.

⁵ Autobiographies such as Jennifer Finney Boylan's *She's Not There* (2003) stress the swift and effortless nature of gender confirmation surgery, perhaps in an effort to decentralise surgical procedures, and to reduce their perceived importance to trans experience. In *Stuck in the Middle With You* (2013), the third instalment in Boylan's autobiographical oeuvre, she states that she is "weary" of "stories of transsexuals always being stories about a trip to a hospital" (109). A chapter of Julia Grant's autobiography (1994) is titled "From George to Julia Overnight", emphasising the notion of instant transformation. By contrast, Griggs's focus on surgery seeks to draw attention to that which is often elided: the gruelling aspects of the surgical procedure.

⁶ My exploration of *Transamerica* might seem incongruous in a thesis that concentrates on trans autobiographies. I examine the resonance between *Transamerica* and Griggs's *Journal*: specifically, the focus on the changing body that changing location symbolises; the emergence into new modes of being as a consequence of gender confirmation surgery; and the impact of journeying on personal

the “right” body, the trip from New York to Los Angeles that *Transamerica* concentrates on signals the strengthening of the bond between Bree and her son, Toby. This shift indicates the variety of transformations journeying evokes in narrative, on which I concentrate.⁷

In this chapter, I provide an overview of portrayals of journeying in trans films, to emphasise the prevalence and significance of the motif. A variation on my focus elsewhere in this thesis, I concentrate on a range of narratives, encompassing both early autobiographies from the tradition, such as Morris’s *Conundrum* (1974), and the genealogy of films that invoke the symbolism between travel and transness. I examine journeying as it arises in early trans accounts and film to delineate the conventions of the motif and, crucially, to explore how Griggs’s *Journal* reworks these conventions. Furthermore, although I focus primarily on Griggs’s *Journal* in this chapter, I also explore her depiction of transness in *S/He: Changing Sex and Changing Clothes* (1998), a partly-autobiographical investigation of trans experience and conceptions of sex, gender and the body. While Griggs’s *Journal* portrays her experience of gender confirmation surgery, *S/He* maps her emergence into living as a woman. Exploring *S/He*, I depart from my focus on modes of representing trans experience in favour of examining notions of gender that arise in the text: in particular, Griggs’s exploration of womanhood and her sense of her past as disrupted by transition are crucial to my focus on change.

Griggs’s Journal, as the title indicates, follows the format of daily diary entries written during her stay in Mt. San Rafael Hospital. However, in the afterword to her *Journal*, Griggs notes that she in fact began to write her autobiography shortly after

development and kinship bonds. However, I explore this film – and refer to others – purely in terms of trans representation and the journeying motif, and as a consequence, my approach to these films is perhaps narrow.

⁷ *Transamerica* is a portrayal of protagonist Bree Osborne’s pursuit of gender confirmation surgery, which is hampered when she discovers that a teenage son she had not previously known about requires collecting from jail. Whilst preparing to undergo surgery, Bree is informed by her therapist that, before the surgical procedure can go ahead, she needs to collect Toby from jail and make amends with him. Bree impersonates a member of the “Church of the Potential Father” and escorts Toby back to California with her. Toby discovers that Bree is trans when he sees her urinating by the side of the road, and that she is his parent when he tries to become intimate with her, causing a rift between them. Although Bree eventually undergoes her surgical procedure, she is devastated by the altercation with Toby. At the close of the film, Toby arrives at Bree’s home, hoping to repair the bond between them.

returning home, following her period of recovery in hospital.⁸ The conflict between the “in the moment” sense of Griggs’s daily diary entries and the fact of her delay between undergoing surgery and writing her account is striking. While the events of the narrative are autobiographical – they are taken from Griggs’s experience of gender confirmation surgery and recovery – the structure of the narrative in accordance with the invented diary implies many of the conventions of crafting a novel. Adhering to the journal format, Griggs’s autobiography echoes many of the conventions of the published or literary diary. In particular, the conflict between writing for oneself and writing for a readership that typifies this genre resonates with Griggs’s narrative: in the afterword, her assertion that she had not intended to publish her work suggests tension between public and private discourse. Judy Simons (1990) delineates the “indecent” and “prurient” nature of reading another person’s diary, implicit in the genre of the published journal (2); and this sense of prying voyeurism might also pertain to a cis readership attending to the salacious events of certain trans narratives.⁹

By combining the format of a diary with the portrayal of a journey, Griggs’s *Journal* resembles a travelogue. Informed by the genre of travel literature, her narrative deviates from the conventional focus of trans autobiographies. In the preface to her *Journal*, she states that her account departs from the typical emphasis of trans accounts, on “early childhood, depression, suicide attempts, psychiatric counseling, hormone therapy” (ix). Because her *Journal* moves away from this focus, she asserts, it “is not a story of transsexualism per se” (ix) but rather the account of pilgrimage in pursuit of surgical change, following a seventeen-year period of waiting. By delineating some of the conventions of the genre, Griggs emphasises the rigid structure to which trans autobiographies frequently conform.

In her *Journal*, Griggs’s journey symbolises the passage into female embodiment. The site of this shift into the femaleness of the body, and of various other forms of

⁸ In the afterword to *Griggs’s Journal*, she notes that she had not intended to publish the work she produced after returning from Trinidad, Colorado, a manuscript originally titled “Notes on a Trip to Trinidad” (211).

⁹ In the Introduction, I referred to this sense of voyeurism in the context of Christine Jorgensen’s return to the US following her gender confirmation surgery in Denmark.

transformation in the narrative, is Mt. San Rafael Hospital in Trinidad, Colorado. The setting evokes paradox, however: in Griggs's portrayal, the surgical procedure facilitates transformation into female embodiment; simultaneously, the hospital setting facilitates a shift into a deepened awareness of transness. Prior to travelling to Trinidad, she discloses her trans identity to very few individuals (38). Epitomising precisely the idea of herself she seeks to repress, the hospital symbolises incarceration. Griggs's portrayal of entrapment in Mt. San Rafael Hospital, like Raymond Thompson's account of incarceration in the borstal and prison settings in *What Took You so Long?* (1995), recalls the "trapped in the wrong body" model common to trans autobiographies.

As this portrayal of entrapment suggests, Griggs depicts conflicted notions of gender confirmation surgery. Prior to living as a woman, she confesses, she had assumed gender confirmation surgery to be the most significant aspect of her passage into womanhood (1998, 6). Specifically, in her early twenties, she had assumed that "a vagina would automatically bestow femininity" (6). In both *Journal* (1996/2004) and *S/He* (1998), Griggs emphasises resistance to the assumption that transition is solely predicated on surgery: "I became a woman not because I changed my driver's license, took estrogens, applied makeup, grew long hair, or had genital surgery" she suggests, "but because on 1 July 1974, a man opened the door for me as I entered my 8.00am class" (1998, 17). Furthermore, she states, her womanhood is confirmed by "everyone who ... says 'she' or 'her' when they speak of [her]" (1998, 17). Griggs's depiction of transition in her autobiographical accounts emphasises that the recognition of her womanhood is of more significance than her surgical procedure. Simultaneously, she conveys a deep and persistent urge for surgical change, as I explore. The tension that arises is encapsulated in her notion of the seventeen-year gap between first living as a woman and, later, undergoing surgery: while the long duration perhaps signifies that the surgical procedure is relatively insignificant to Griggs –like Mark Rees's *Dear Sir or Madam* (1996), *Griggs's Journal* suggests that the legitimacy of one's gender does not depend solely on surgical changes – the duration might also signify tormented and lengthy delay prior to the procedure that completes her progression into womanhood, resonant of Thompson's autobiography.

Yet Griggs's account of gender confirmation surgery reinforces her notion of its gruelling nature and inadequacies. In the foreword to the autobiography, Halberstam notes that Griggs's *Journal* "is not a 'feel good account' of journeying from male to female" (vii) and that Griggs "refuses to sugar coat the 'passage'" the narrative documents (viii).¹⁰ Deviating from convention, Griggs's *Journal* concentrates on the overwhelming sense of pain that is a consequence of surgery. Griggs's account is structured in accordance with the daily rituals of Griggs's hospital stay. Often, trans autobiographies diminish or absent the pain of surgical procedures, which is crucial to my exploration in this chapter. Griggs notes that recording her daily routine stems, in part, from her compulsion to remember the intricacies of her pain. Her portrayal of pain emphasises its inarticulate nature and the propensity to forget common to the experience of misery and discomfort. I examine the tension cultivated by Griggs's focus on pain, engaging with the inexpressible nature of pain that Elaine Scarry (1985) analyses, and consider how the depiction of pain evokes transformation, thus reworking the conventions of transformation in trans accounts. My exploration of Griggs's account of agony, towards the end of the chapter, departs from my focus on the journeying motif. However, my analysis of pain in the autobiography sustains my focus on forms of transformation in Griggs's narratives.

Halberstam's foreword to the autobiography notes that the narrative "refuses to offer a whole and happy woman at the end of the story" (vii). This departure from contentment that Halberstam proposes disrupts the return "home" to the body, typical of trans autobiographies. Nevertheless, Griggs (1996/2004) notes that her urge for surgery is based on the hope that her procedure will "make [her] a whole person" and achieve coherence between her body and her identity (203). Returning to my focus on "coming home" to the body, that I introduced in Chapter One, I explore how Griggs's *Journal* might unsettle the transformation into the "wholeness" of the body towards which she aspires.

¹⁰ In the foreword to Griggs's *Journal*, Halberstam argues that gender confirmation surgery "needs to be recognized as a painful and difficult process rather than the quick fix that it appears to be in idealized accounts" (vii).

Journeying

In the preface to her *Journal* (1996/2004), Griggs invokes the analogy between travel and gender confirmation surgery: one's journey, she notes, "begins at the moment one decides to contact a surgeon" and concludes "after returning home from the hospital" (ix). Griggs's account concentrates on her pilgrimage to Mt. San Rafael Hospital in Trinidad and the "journey" of undergoing gender confirmation surgery. Griggs employs the motif of journeying precisely to convey the changes of gender confirmation surgery. As Cael Keegan (2013) notes, the journeying motif in trans narratives resonates with forms of shifting, and might evoke "newly gendered personhood", a changed body, the discovery of one's "true" identity, personal growth, self-acceptance and new affinities between family members (unpaginated).¹¹ Adhering to Keegan's notion of the changes journeying creates, Griggs depicts a variety of transformations – beyond, and arising from, the shift into female embodiment – that her journey to Trinidad evokes.

The portrayal of Griggs's journey from her home in Los Angeles to Mt. San Rafael Hospital in Trinidad, Colorado recalls portrayals of pilgrimage in pursuit of surgeries in autobiographies such as April Ashley's *Odyssey* (1982) and Renée Richards's *Second Serve* (1983/1984). Ashley and Richards both recount travelling to Dr. Georges Burou's renowned gender clinic in Casablanca, Morocco. In "Exceptional Locations: Transsexual Travelogues" (1999), Jay Prosser argues that Casablanca becomes an "exceptional site of transformation" (100) in narratives such as Ashley's and Richards's, and he notes the prevalence of autobiographies that chart the journey to Casablanca for gender confirmation surgery (98). However, the symbolism between journeying and transition is not limited to gender confirmation surgery. In *Dear Sir or Madam* (1996), Rees emphasises the significance of travelling to a Friary shortly after making the decision to begin living as a man: "The train journey to the Friary was uneventful, which was for me an event. No one seemed to

¹¹ In "Moving Bodies: Sympathetic Migrations in Transgender Narrativity" (2013), Keegan explores portrayals of "transness" in millennial film and television in the US. Keegan focuses specifically on portrayals that create "sympathetic identification" to "produce the 'moving body' of ... an emerging transnormative subject position" (unpaginated). Being "moved" has multiple meanings: it resonates with an audience who feels "moved" by a particular portrayal – and perhaps "moved" to consider events from a trans perspective – and the movement from one state of being to another, undertaken by the trans protagonist (unpaginated).

take any notice of the small young man travelling alone. It was the most important journey of my life” (95). As well as invoking Rees’s public emergence into manhood, the train journey evokes his felt-shift from conspicuous to inconspicuous: prior to transition, Rees fears that the ill-fitting nature of the womanhood he had been assigned at birth renders him ambiguous and frumpy (64). The shift into unremarkable manhood that Rees charts signifies the variety of transformations that journeying elicits.

While Rees’s account of travel reveals that the symbolic nature of the journey is not necessarily founded on surgical changes, the texts and events that established the motif centre on this form of transformation. The earliest account in the trans autobiography tradition, Lili Elbe’s *Man into Woman* (1933/2004) charts her journey from Copenhagen to Germany for the early, experimental surgery she undergoes. As Prosser argues, the deeply entrenched journeying model emerges in trans portrayals following Christine Jorgensen’s well-documented and widely-publicised return to the US from Denmark following her own gender confirmation surgery: thus, as a “cultural phenomenon”, trans experience “begins with a trip abroad and a return home” (1999, 98). More recently, portrayals of trans lives that hinge on the motif of journeying are criticised for erasing the variety and complexity of trans experiences. By concentrating on accessible and “sensationalistic” trans plots, Julia Serano (2007/2016) argues, the media erases the “vast diversity of perspectives and experiences” of trans women, on whom Serano’s work *Whipping Girl* focuses.¹² By insisting on singularity rather than diversity, the “intricate and difficult relationships” many trans people have with “genders and physical bodies” are “dumbed down” in the media (2). Bearing in mind Serano’s criticism of “palatable” (2) trans plots, how might one interpret Griggs’s emphasis on the symbolism between trans and journeying in accordance with the oversimplification of the motif?

¹² Serano’s *Whipping Girl* explores myths central to the discourse on trans womanhood and femininity, and concentrates on transmisogyny and the intersection of various forms of oppression trans people encounter. In Griggs’s *Journal*, as I seek to demonstrate, complex notions of the body arise even amidst the journeying motif.

Griggs's *Journal* recalls the archetypal portrayal of transit and transformation established by Morris in her autobiography *Conundrum* (1974).¹³ The narrative is a chronological account of Morris's life that encompasses transition and records significant events from her career in journalism and correspondence, such as the British Mount Everest Expedition in 1953.¹⁴ Morris's travel-writing oeuvre evokes the analogy between journeying and transition that is central to *Conundrum*. Richard Phillips (2001) explores the transgression of binaries that literature of travel might effect, and the significance of "in-between" and "ambivalent" spaces that arise within Morris's travel-writing and autobiographical oeuvre (7).¹⁵ Phillips refers to Morris as both "James" and "Jan", frequently – and problematically – shifting between "he" and "she" to cultivate a sense of shift between former and current selves. Morris, argues Phillips, changes as she moves through "a changing world" (14). Phillips charts Morris's shift, prior to transition, from binary gender towards liminality and ambiguity, and argues that Morris's notions of gender shift towards fluidity.¹⁶ Travel, Phillips argues, offers Morris the freedom to become playful with gender (16–17).

Morris's shifting notion of herself during the process of changes contributes to the portrayal of her ambiguity that Phillips delineates: she notes, "Some people assumed me to be a homosexual, some thought me a kind of hybrid, some supposed me to be a woman already ... I had reached a half-way mark" (103).¹⁷ The

¹³ *Conundrum* is one of the best-known autobiographies in the trans tradition. In *She's Not There* (2003), for example, Boylan suggests that, of all the autobiographies produced by other trans people, "none reached quite so large an audience as Morris's" (244).

¹⁴ In *Conundrum* (1974), Morris narrates her school years at Lancing College, serving with the 9th Queen's Royal Lancers shortly after the end of the Second World War, and her career as a journalist, when she joined the British Mount Everest Expedition as a correspondent. Morris married, had children, and began living as a woman in her thirties. She underwent gender confirmation surgery in Casablanca in 1972.

¹⁵ Phillips charts Morris's "gentle and gradual descent" from imperialist thinking to convey forms of transformation that her journeying evokes (11). He interprets Morris's transition as a form of decolonisation of the body (14), and her focus on the self and space, he insists, is a motif that also emerges in postcolonial literature.

¹⁶ While *Conundrum* adheres to binary thinking in many instances – Morris's perception of men and women as irrevocably dissimilar, for instance: "there seems to me no aspect of existence, no moment of the day, no contact, no arrangement, no response, which is not different for men and for women" (138) – it simultaneously disrupts its own adherence to rigid binary thinking, Phillips argues, by illustrating "the superficial nature" of Morris's "masculinity", before she lived as a woman (15).

¹⁷ I return to notions of androgyny in Morris's autobiography in Chapter Three. Morris's notion of reaching "half-way" and embodying ambiguity in the midst of transition resonates with Boylan's account of suspension between genders during the process of transition.

middle section of *Conundrum*, Phillips argues, evokes “marginality and movement” (16): Morris, shifting into ambiguity, travels “obsessively” (1974, 91) during this period, moving “not to places but from them, between them” (Phillips, 16). Cultivating an “in-between gendered subjectivity” (Phillips, 16–17) whilst travelling, Morris emphasises a sense of shift predicated on journeying to settings typified by “otherness” (Phillips, 16), culminating in the “exotic” setting of her gender confirmation surgery in Casablanca.¹⁸ While ambiguity and “liminal spaces” (15) resonate in Morris’s work, Phillips suggests that even following her move into womanhood, her identity adheres to notions of “in-between”, and he insists that her gender is specifically “(transgendered womanhood)” (17).¹⁹

However, the ongoing nature of Morris’s ambiguity is not something that *Conundrum* supports by its denouement. Morris’s androgyny – “I was a chimera, half male, half female, an object of wonder even to myself” (103) – arises in the midst of various changes, and it is “precarious” (104) and abandoned when she feels the urge to move forward in the process of change (109). Her account of shifting from her androgynous mode of being resonates with Rees’s aspiration to escape ambiguity, which I discussed in Chapter One. While Phillips argues that Morris shifts from “binarized to in-between identity” (17), I propose instead that Morris’s account of transition refuses to depart from the binary of gender: “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” (99). Rather than a deviation from the binary, Morris’s account of androgyny emerges as a phase of her transition.

This shift from the ambiguity of the body to unambiguous womanhood, which I, in contrast to Phillips, argue is central to Morris’s depiction of her changes, resonates with Griggs’s departure from “sexual limbo” (1996/2004, 12) and eventual embodiment of femaleness (151), following her surgical procedure. The attainment of female embodiment evokes notions of contentment in the body.

¹⁸ Later in this chapter, I delineate Prosser’s exploration of the Casablanca setting in early works such as those of Morris, Ashley and Richards.

¹⁹ Phillips argues that Morris’s trans identity alone expresses ambivalence and “in-between perspectives” (18); in Phillips’s account, Morris’s womanhood is qualified rather than legitimate (18). Later in this chapter, I explore Griggs’s notion of her own qualified female embodiment.

However, Griggs's notion of gender confirmation surgery is conflicted: learning that her surgical procedure is finally feasible, Griggs notes, "My proclaimed stance, 'I have learned to live without surgery,' has changed to 'I must have it to survive'" (2).²⁰ In *S/He* (1998), Griggs notes that while she had originally considered gender confirmation surgery to be "a minor addendum in the sex-change process" (26), and that she has "endured reasonably well" and "maintained a tenuous sanity" (1996/2004, 1) prior to undergoing surgical changes, as soon as she becomes aware that the procedure is viable the notion of surgery becomes significant. Her reluctance for gender confirmation surgery prior to writing her *Journal*, she notes, had merely been a consequence of encountering "less than knowledgeable, sometimes less than competent and less than ethical" (1) medical professionals, shortly after first living as a woman. On the morning of her surgery, she confesses that it is a day she has "dreamed of for 17 years" (49).

However, the disruptions that occur during the journey to Mt. San Rafael Hospital, threatening to prevent Griggs's shift into female embodiment, emphasise her uncertainties about the procedure. Before Griggs and her partner Elizabeth reach Trinidad, they are confronted by a violent storm "of frightening severity" (27). Although Elizabeth tells her not to worry, Griggs fears that, "since [they] are only twenty miles from Trinidad", fate is "trying to discourage [her]" (27). Griggs's portrayal of the storm as occurring towards the border between one state and another and threatening to prevent her passage from one state of being to another evokes a sense of transition as predicated on the "crossing" of a "border".²¹ The account of the storm encapsulates Griggs's urge to undergo gender confirmation surgery, and her simultaneous reticence. In particular, Griggs's account of passing into Holbrook, Arizona, suggests tension between her desire, and her reluctance, to undergo her surgical procedure. Although she recounts feeling inclined to return home, Holbrook emerges as "the point of no return" (26) on the journey. Beyond

²⁰ Later in this chapter, I explore a similar tension between Griggs's conflicted notions of surgery and notions of fate.

²¹ The storm that threatens to disrupt Griggs's attainment of gender confirmation surgery resonates with the sense of conflict in *Transamerica* (2005), based on Bree's urge for her surgical procedure, and the arrival of Toby, initially a mere obstacle on Bree's path to surgical changes.

Holbrook, the possibility of turning back is inhibited, emphasising changing notions of the journey as it occurs.

Yet the portrayal of the journey to Trinidad is infused with notions of predestination, her “feet ... set unalterably on the path” leading to her “current existence” (27). As Griggs enters Mt. San Rafael Hospital for the first time, she conceptualises the coming meeting with her surgeon, Dr. Stanley Biber, as an “appointment made long ago, when I was one or two years old, or six months, or maybe at birth, perhaps in the womb” (43).²² Tension arises between Griggs’s account of reflecting, on the morning of the procedure, “This is it! ... the day I’ve suffered for and struggled for, the day (I am convinced) that was fated for me” (49), and her portrayals of hesitation and reluctance prior to gender confirmation surgery. While Griggs wonders “how life would have been different if [she] had turned aside on July 21, 1991, to reconsider or reject” the surgical procedure (27), notions of fate in the narrative suggest that straying from the “path” to Trinidad is inhibited. The notion of destiny conflicts with the sense of indecision surrounding gender confirmation surgery that Griggs emphasises. The preface to Griggs’s *Journal*, in particular, encapsulates her conflicted notion of surgery. Noting the transformation that surgical change facilitates, she suggests that, “Trinidad delivers one onto a different path, and it delivers the realization that the previous path is closed forever” (ix). Her assertion emphasises that she is constrained to follow one route: to undergo surgery in Trinidad. However, she stresses residual doubt, which encompasses “regret that one did not travel to Trinidad much sooner” and, paradoxically, “sorrow that one traveled to Trinidad at all” and “fear that one might

²² The idea of finally becoming who one was meant to be, or becoming able to express who one always has been, with which Griggs’s attainment of gender confirmation surgery resonates, is prolific in autobiography. For example, the subtitle to Chaz Bono’s autobiography *Transition is Becoming Who I Was Always Meant to Be* (2011). A useful example of this notion of becoming who one always has been is Thompson’s assertion that, following his mastectomy, he feels as though his body has always conformed to his post-surgery body image, and as though surgery has facilitated a transformation into a form of embodiment he already possessed (177), that I explored in Chapter One. The portrayal of transformation into a former state evokes a circular, rather than linear, trajectory, resonating with ideas of becoming who he already *was*. Drawing on a similar idea, Nancy Hunt concludes her autobiography *Mirror Image* (1978) by stating, “I look at myself in the mirror, and I am happy. I now see in that reflection a mirror image of the person that I have always been” (263). For a discussion of how “self-discovery” and “self-invention” intersect in autobiography, see Paul John Eakin’s *Fictions in Autobiography* (1985), and particularly the chapter “Fiction in Autobiography: Ask Mary McCarthy No Questions”.

have failed yet to undertake this journey” (ix). Griggs’s portrayal of “sorrow” as a consequence of gender confirmation surgery undermines notions of contentment in the body, with which trans autobiographies typically close.

While Griggs emphasises conflicted notions of her surgical procedure with which her journey culminates, *Transamerica* (2005) protagonist Bree Osborne shifts, at the close of her journey, into contentment in a “new life” that gender confirmation surgery facilitates. *Transamerica* is situated in a genealogy of films invoking symbolism between geographical and gender “crossings”. *Boys Don’t Cry* (1999), for example, a portrayal of the life and murder of Brandon Teena, begins with Brandon’s relocation to Nebraska in an effort to escape physical assault, having been outed as trans in his previous community. Furthermore, the protagonist of *Todo sobre mi madre/All About My Mother* (1999), Manuela, embarks on a mission to locate the other parent of her deceased son, Esteban, a trans woman named Lola. Similarly, *Breakfast on Pluto* (2005) centres on protagonist Kitten’s travel as she searches for the mother who had abandoned her as a baby. In *Tomboy* (2011), Mikäel begins living as a boy only after the family moves to a new area of Paris. Finally, Lili Elbe, in the 2015 film *The Danish Girl*, travels from Copenhagen to Germany to undergo an experimental form of confirmation surgery, in its earliest stages. While these are a few examples among many, the genealogy from which *Transamerica* emerges reveals the pervasive nature of the motif and suggests that the motif typically operates as shorthand for transition and/or gender variance.²³

In *Transamerica*, the forms of transformation that Bree’s journey evokes signify that the film is implicated in this oversimplification of experience. Primarily, Bree’s

²³ For a genealogy of trans representation in film that centres on its problematics, focusing on portrayals of gender nonconforming individuals that range from “homicidal maniacs” (207) to “comic relief” (208), see Gordene O. Mackenzie’s “50 Billion Galaxies of Gender: Transgendering the Millenium” (1999). Further genealogies of trans representation in film appear in Melissa Rigney’s “Brandon Goes to Hollywood: *Boys Don’t Cry* and the Transgender Body in Film” (2003) and Andre Cavalcante’s “Centering Transgender Identity via the Textual Periphery: *TransAmerica* and the ‘Double Work’ of Paratexts” (2013).

Central to discussions of trans film, Helen Hok-Sze Leung (2014) notes that the question of “what counts as a trans film?” has “provoked heated discussion”. Might “trans film” describe “one that features self-identified trans characters or characters that viewers would recognize as trans? One made by trans filmmakers or starring trans actors, regardless of content? Does it have to be made for trans viewers, have a trans aesthetic, or just be open to trans interpretations?” (86).

journey symbolises her shift from discontent in the body prior to surgery to a sense of comfort in the body following her procedure. The resolution of the film rests on Bree's movement into "full" or "whole" womanhood, facilitated by gender confirmation surgery. The resolution of the film is also predicated on her departure from "inauthentic" modes of femininity. The opening scenes of the film specifically emphasise this "inauthenticity", central to Bree's femininity. Serano (2007/2016) compares the portrayal of Bree's feminine morning rituals – applying makeup, painting her nails, brushing her hair – to "scenes of women putting on eye makeup, lipstick, and shoes" that open a 2003 episode of *The Oprah Winfrey Show* on trans identities (43). Bree lists the cosmetic procedures she has undergone to her therapist shortly after the portrayal of her conventionally feminine morning rituals, and by laying emphasis on her cosmetic changes, evokes the "artificial" and "imitative" (Serano 2007/2016, 42) nature of her womanhood. Serano delineates the common assumption that femininity is "inherently 'contrived,' 'frivolous,' and 'manipulative'" and stresses that it is this sense of femininity as inauthentic "that allows masculinity to always come off as 'natural,' 'practical,' and 'sincere' by comparison" (43). Similarly, popular assumptions pivot on the idea that "all trans women are on a quest" to become "pretty, pink, and passive as possible" (Serano 2007/2016, 35). The depiction of Bree's morning rituals, in particular, suggest that femininity is something she might put on and take off.

The shift from "inauthenticity" to the "authenticity" attained by the end of Bree's journey is signalled by a lessening of her feminine frilliness. During the journey back to Los Angeles, Bree's appearance transforms from immaculate, and typified by the lavender and pink hues iconic to her character, to dishevelled and unkempt. In the opening scenes, Bree dresses in a pink suit, applies makeup, paints her nails and brushes her hair. Later in the film, having lost their money and the car in which they have been travelling, Bree and her son Toby become visibly bedraggled. Following the portrayal of Bree's bedraggled state, the film charts a shift of the protagonist into a less formal appearance: at a restaurant, freshening up in the bathroom, Bree wipes away her smudged lipstick, ties her hair back with her scarf and wraps her pink cardigan around her waist. When she emerges from the bathroom she appears less formally feminine, and her informality, which her

relaxed appearance and the suggestion of intimacy with another patron of the restaurant evoke, conveys the sense that she is moving towards the state of contentment on which the film concludes. This lessening of formality resonates with a shift from “inauthentic” femininity: in the hospital, walking to her room on arrival, Bree is attired in conventionally feminine clothing – a skirt and a jacket – but has exchanged her iconic pink and lavender for blue and cream. While she is depicted in the final scene wearing a pink shirt and flowery trousers – Bree has a core of femininity that remains unchanged, the film suggests – after her surgery, as she laments the loss of Toby, her undoing is emphasised by the absence of her usual formal dress and demeanour. The “authenticity” of the moment is evoked by the temporary abandonment of femininity.

Bree’s “inauthenticity” in the film, evoked by the emphasis on her femininity, is similarly established by her trans identity, kept secret from Toby; her reluctance to divulge to Toby that she is his parent; and her alleged affiliation with the “Church of the Potential Father”.²⁴ For much of the film, the portrayal of Bree hinges on deception. Serano (2007/2016) argues that representations of trans women in film tend to conform to either “deceptive transsexual” or “pathetic transsexual” archetypes (36). A “deceiver” typically creates “unexpected plot twists” (36), while a “pathetic transsexual” character emerges as a risible aspect of the plot, unable to pass but often insisting “she is a woman trapped inside a man’s body” (38). Bree, who is portrayed as “‘doing female’ rather badly” (Serano, 42), adheres to Serano’s delineation of trans archetypes in film,²⁵ and the lessening of Bree’s “inauthentic”

²⁴ During their first encounter, Toby asks if Bree is a member of the church of “Jesus the Reformer”. Bree, at first taken aback and perhaps inclined to be honest, replies “No ... I’m...” but then changes tack: “... from the Church of the Potential Father” (00:10:55–00:11:10). Later in the film, Toby buys Bree a cap with the words “I’m proud to be a Christian” emblazoned on the front. A reminder of Toby, she clutches the cap to her body after she has undergone her surgical procedure, visibly devastated by the damaged relationship with her son. Telling her therapist “I fucked up”, she shows her the cap (01:28:40), signifying that the cap epitomises her sense of deception, and the guilt she feels for her dishonesty with Toby, which are crucial to her eventual movement into a mode of “authenticity”.

²⁵ A defining aspect of the “pathetic transsexual” character, states Serano, is the “lack of male genitalia (or their desire to part with them)” (40). *Transamerica* centres on Bree’s urge for gender confirmation surgery. However, Bree does not conform to the expression of “outward masculinity” that Serano insists typifies the “pathetic transsexual” role: for much of the film Toby is unaware of Bree’s trans identity, and the revelation, during the journey, signals one of the film’s primary shifts. Toby is also unaware that Bree is his parent, and his attempt to make amorous advances on Bree before she reveals the secret of their kinship to him resonates with Serano’s description of the

femininity contributes to her progression into “honesty” and “authenticity”: when Bree confronts her parents, who have failed to support her transition, and becomes honest with Toby, her decision to open up facilitates the resolution of the film (Keegan, unpaginated).

However, the shift into honesty and “authenticity” at the heart of *Transamerica* is a problematic one, particularly because Bree only emerges into “authenticity” *after* she undergoes gender confirmation surgery.²⁶ Bree’s progression into “authenticity” facilitates the shift of the audience into acceptance of the protagonist. Keegan (2013) stresses that Bree’s assertion that “Jesus made [her] this way for a reason, so [she] could suffer and be reborn as he was” (00:50:26–32) has specific resonance with the viewership: “we too suffer discomfort and are ‘reborn’ as educated, liberal subjects who have been instructed in the acceptance of transgender identity” (unpaginated). Central to the trans acceptance the film strives towards is the strengthening of the bond between Bree and Toby: in the film, Bree transforms from childlessness – and, finding Toby, a dispassionate attitude towards her own child – to motherhood, and contentment in the role of mother.²⁷

This emergence into motherhood is depicted as Bree’s most significant transformation.²⁸ As Keegan argues, for Bree to attain sympathy from the audience, her “child must be more important than [her] transition” (unpaginated). Towards the end of the film, and following her surgical procedure, Bree collapses weeping in the arms of her therapist, devastated that her relationship with her son has

“deceiver”, who is typically “found out” by another character “in an embarrassing, often violent way” (40).

²⁶ Keegan argues that *Transamerica* equates “being trans” to “desiring surgery” and seeks to demonstrate that “trans people cannot be happy without modifying their bodies” which, he insists, minimises “the complexities of transgender experience and identification” (unpaginated).

²⁷ Bree initially wants little to do with Toby, who is a reminder of her life before she lived as a woman, and, according to her therapist, “a part of [her] body that cannot be discarded” (00:07:56–57).

²⁸ Although *Transamerica* concentrates on Bree’s changes, Toby also undergoes significant developments during the journey from New York to Los Angeles. At the start of the film, Bree discovers that Toby undertakes sex work, and Toby travels to Los Angeles with Bree with the intention of finding work in pornographic films. Towards the close of the film, Toby undergoes a shift in his notion of pornography, and gives up his role in film – the audience assumes – so that he might find Bree. Toby’s decision to stop acting in pornographic films is essential to the strengthening of his relationship with Bree.

undergone seemingly irreparable damage:²⁹ “It hurts”, she cries, and her therapist replies “that’s what hearts do” (01:28:58–01:29:05). Keegan’s assertion that the attainment of audience acceptance depends on Bree’s privileging of her relationship with Toby above her pursuit of surgical change is reflected by the film’s focus on Bree’s progression into motherhood rather than the joy of attaining the procedure towards which she has aspired.³⁰ Yet the resolution of *Transamerica* is facilitated by both the repaired bond between Bree and Toby, and Bree’s passage into contentment in the “right” body, enabled by gender confirmation surgery. Keegan argues that, towards the close of the film, the plot “problematically posits surgery as the solution to the bad feelings of being transgender”, which overlooks “the stark political and economic inequalities that continue to structure transgender oppression” (unpaginated).³¹ In a problematic sense, gender confirmation surgery facilitates the reconciliation between Bree and Toby, and Bree’s contentment in womanhood, on which the film closes.³²

Both *Transamerica* and Griggs’s *Journal* depict a sense of contentment derived from the passage into female embodiment. However, the portrayal of Bree’s contentment in the body at the end of *Transamerica* deviates from Griggs’s

²⁹ The portrayal of anguish following gender confirmation surgery is entirely pertinent and valid. In the six-month follow-up report that Griggs sends to her surgeon, she reveals that she has “undergone one of [her] worst depressions in many years” (202). She is informed by her endocrinologist that this is not unusual. As I stated in Chapter One, Rees and Thompson record feeling conflicted after transition and surgery. However, in *Transamerica*, the portrayal of Bree’s weeping shortly after surgery perhaps relates to Toby’s loss rather than Bree’s response to the procedure or a reflection on her own trans experience.

³⁰ Katherine Cross (2014) criticises *Transamerica* for enhancing “narrative tension with mawkish tropes about transition”, and contrasts it with Imogen Binnie’s novel *Nevada*, which also narrates a road trip, and has been criticised itself, Cross notes, for its failure to teach readers much about trans lives. Cross asserts that the “new wave of trans women’s lit”, of which *Nevada* forms a part, “is not meant to be didactic for the cisgender reader” (unpaginated).

³¹ Although Bree’s gender confirmation surgery facilitates “full” or “whole” womanhood, in the film, Bree’s womanhood is nevertheless portrayed as legitimate before she undergoes her surgical procedure. When Bree and Toby visit the home of Bree’s parents, she is required to endure her mother’s transphobic and transmisogynistic attitude. When Bree’s mother claims, “You don’t have cycles”, Bree retorts, “Hormones are hormones. Yours and mine just happen to come in little purple pills” (01:18:05–12). However, the notion of womanhood as legitimate prior to gender confirmation surgery is undermined by the portrayal of the party hosted by Bree’s friend Mary Ellen. Bree refers to Mary Ellen’s guests as “ersatz women” (00:43:57), suggesting that Bree’s idea of legitimate womanhood centres on one’s ability to pass as the gender with which one identifies.

³² While the shift into “whole” or “full” woman- and motherhood signals resolution, *Transamerica* demonstrates awareness of its own adherence to trope and cliché. After surgery, Bree’s therapist asks her, “how are you feeling?” and warns, “don’t say, ‘like a new woman’” (01:27:40–44).

depiction of discontent, specifically due to her discomfort in the body following surgery. While *Transamerica* concludes on a note of harmony between Bree and Toby, and with an expression of reconciliation between Bree and her transformed body, *Griggs's Journal* offers no such resolution, and her account ends on a despondent note. Departing from trans accounts that conclude with a positive insight into the "new life" various changes enable, Griggs recounts uncertainty and anguish in the six-month follow-up report she sends to her doctor; and she describes a period of depression following her return home (202).³³ Her sense of discontent stems from notions of the body's changes following gender confirmation surgery, and by cultivating conflict between her hesitancy around the journey and the surgical procedure, and the notion of gender confirmation surgery as a form of fate, Griggs deviates from the conventions of the journeying motif. Her portrayal of dissatisfaction and "sorrow" at the close of the narrative evokes a sense of departure from films such as *Transamerica* and early autobiographical accounts; and thus, the forms of transformation that arise in *Griggs's Journal* suggest a reworking of the journeying motif.

Transformation

In *Griggs's Journal* (1996/2004), the passage into female embodiment, enabled by surgery, creates a form of contentment in the body. Shortly before leaving the hospital, Griggs undergoes a pelvic exam, and reflects on the changes of her body. Prior to surgery, she notes, she "was expecting to look and feel better" but had not realised that she "would literally be female" and that she "would have a functional vagina" which would "seem natural" (151). Yet Griggs recounts that as she undergoes the exam, during which the doctor "shoves his finger inside [her] body" (151), she finally appreciates that she is "female at last, wonderfully, completely, visibly" (151). In particular, she emphasises the disjuncture between her expectations of surgery and the transformation that surgery effects: she notes that she "expected to be a transsexual who appeared a woman, who had breasts and a

³³ In *Griggs's Journal*, she attributes her depression to the deeply entrenched feelings of "trans" that surgery has enabled: "One thing that surgery does is solidify the realization that there is essentially no cure for transsexualism" (202).

vagina, who convincingly played the role, but who was somehow essentially male” (151). The notion of maleness that emerges here is almost jarring: throughout the narrative, Griggs is explicit about her ideas of her own womanhood many years prior to her surgery.³⁴ After the procedure she undergoes, Griggs receives an affidavit confirming her passage into femaleness: she notes that she is pleased “that a doctor finally states that I am specifically *female*”, because “I have been a girl or woman all my life” (76). She journeys to Trinidad, she states, because “I believed I needed the surgery to make me a whole person, to unite my body and mind” (203). And following surgery, she states that she feels “more like myself ... than before. I feel female” (203); furthermore, she notes, “I like my genitalia for the first time in my life ... I love the visual image of my new body” (197). Her notion of transformation thus centres on her shift into female embodiment and the shift of the body from “sexually ambiguous” (2) to accurately reflective of her “inner being” (203).³⁵

Implicit within her aspiration towards female embodiment is her account of experiencing the “overwhelming desire, compulsion, aching” to become “female” and – in particular – “normal” (Griggs 1996/2004, 1). Her reported aspiration to a “normal” body that she hopes gender confirmation surgery will provide is strikingly resonant of the portrayals of surgery as entirely transformative in early trans autobiographies. In *Second Serve* (1983/1984), for example, Richards recounts the dawning realisation, after waking from surgery, that she “was now a woman” (281).³⁶ Similarly, in *A Personal Autobiography* (1967/1968), Jorgensen records

³⁴ Following surgery, though, Griggs states that she has been “irretrievably cured of maleness” (151). Griggs’s depiction of shedding “maleness” resonates with Thompson’s portrayal of disburdening, shedding the “wrongful” parts of the body, following surgery.

³⁵ In *S/He*, Griggs states that she undergoes surgical change because her “internal gender” and “external body” are in conflict (4). In the follow-up report that Griggs sends to her surgeon, she states that her “body reflects [her] inner being better now than it ever has” (*Journal*, 203). Moreover, Griggs recounts her dawning recognition, following surgery, that “a radically modified body transforms life experience” (1998, 5). Early autobiographies in the tradition, such as Jorgensen’s *A Personal Autobiography*, emphasise the transformative possibilities of gender confirmation surgery. Describing her preparation for her trip to Denmark, Jorgensen states “It was a one-way ticket to a new life” (86).

³⁶ Richards recounts that, noticing the changes of her body as a result of hormone therapy, she “began to consider seriously how [she] would arrange for the surgery necessary to complete the process” (208–209). Mackenzie (1999) argues that “formulaic” autobiographies from the period between the 1960s and the 1980s, to which I refer here, are “often framed in medico-clinical explanations and frozen identities”. Mackenzie suggests that towards the 2000s, “trans writing

asking her doctor if surgery might “change [her] into the whole person [she] had envisioned” (93).³⁷ Both accounts emphasise that passage into “whole” womanhood is based precisely on gender confirmation surgery. Yet, this sense that one’s transition relies on gender confirmation surgeries is complicated in later texts, such as Rees’s *Dear Sir or Madam* (1996). As I explored in Chapter One, Rees’s autobiography evokes his aspiration towards “whole” being. While his notion of legitimate manhood is not predicated on the attainment of phalloplasty surgery, his portrayal of the body towards the close of the narrative emphasises the incongruity of the genitals that have not undergone change; and the notion of “wholeness”, in Rees’s narrative, is based on “full” change, which he reports failing to undergo.³⁸ Similarly, although I have identified resonance between Griggs’s aspiration towards “normal”, “female” embodiment and early trans autobiographies that stress the significance of gender confirmation surgery, her *Journal* echoes the sense of failing to embody “wholeness”, which Rees reports in *Dear Sir or Madam*: following her procedures, she notes, she is “not completely happy” (203), and she endures anguish in particular at the notion of infertility (192). Thus, her account reveals conflicted notions of surgical changes, as evoked by the tentative approach to the surgical procedure previously discussed.

This conflicted sense of her body’s changes is enmeshed within her troubled notion of her own femaleness. In Griggs’s *Journal*, she notes that the surgical changes she undergoes fail to facilitate the transformation to which she aspires: “the dream is to be *naturally* female; the reality, unfortunately, is surgery” (4). Surgery, in Griggs’s account, facilitates “a great improvement” (197), but she

morphed into hyperspace employing numerous dimensions including politics, autobiography, theory, art, literature, and so on into a single work, challenging reductionistic and mechanistic ideas about gender” (199). For a discussion of how autobiography might constrain trans representation, see the Introduction to this thesis.

³⁷ Similarly, in *Transamerica*, Bree’s therapist’s insistence that Bree meet and strive to bond with Toby before going ahead with the scheduled surgical procedure emphasises the aspiration towards the state of “wholeness” to which trans plots typically adhere. The therapist states, “I don’t want you to go through this metamorphosis only to find out you’re still incomplete” (00:08:00–04). Her assertion suggests that surgery and kinship bonds “complete” Bree’s process of change.

³⁸ Moreover, Thompson’s account of transition, in *What Took You so Long?*, pivots on notions of “full” change that surgery facilitates. Seeking medical assistance at the age of sixteen, he insists that he is urgent for his doctor to do “everything ... possible” for him and “as soon as possible” (100). Both Rees and Thompson provide conflicted accounts of the “new” body and entire change, which I explored in Chapter One.

reveals a sense of disjuncture between the femaleness surgery facilitates and cisgender femaleness. When Griggs wakes up from her surgery, she hallucinates that she is in labour – in the midst of childbirth – because she is both in a great deal of pain and disoriented. Her realisation that she is not having a baby, and that she is, in fact, waking from gender confirmation surgery, reinforces the distinction between her own womanhood and other forms of womanhood, which pregnancy and childbirth epitomise. The portrayal of her hallucination aligns “normal” womanhood with childbirth and joy – “I am ecstatically happy, completely happy. I think, ‘I’m normal; I’m normal; I’m not a freak; I’m normal; I’m normal; I’m normal. It’s all been a bad dream. I’m normal; I’m normal; I’m normal’” – and her own womanhood with mourning: “I want to cry. I understand, once more, that I am transsexual. Labor was just a beautiful dream; the pain is surgical. I am a freak after all” (53).³⁹ While the narrative charts the move into a new mode of being designated as a “great improvement” (197) and the capacity to feel more herself, Griggs’s dissatisfaction with her own femaleness signifies that transformation in the account might fail to cultivate contentment in the body.

Emphasising this sense of dissatisfaction, Griggs states that while her intention to undergo surgery is informed by her desire to become “not transsexual”, surgery cannot effect this transformation: “That did not happen” (1998, 25). In her *Journal*, she designates the new mode of being she shifts into as a “sex-changed existence” (27). Before travelling to Trinidad, she notes, she resides in a “pre-surgery world of simulated normalcy” (109) to which, following surgery, she is barred from returning. Partly, the state of “sex-changed” being into which Griggs shifts is a consequence of residing in Mt. San Rafael Hospital. Griggs worries that by revealing to her colleagues – who are unaware that she is preparing to undergo gender confirmation surgery – that she is travelling to Trinidad for a surgical procedure, they will recognise her as trans: “Perhaps Mary Louise and Stephanie and others have guessed the truth, since, as I have discovered, Trinidad is somewhat famous (or infamous) for the procedure” (82). Prior to surgery, she is “just one-of-the-girls Claudine” (18); but afterwards, she assumes, she will become “Claudine the

³⁹ In *What Took You so Long?* (1995), Thompson’s exploration of his own inability to father children similarly centres on the fragmented body (198).

transsexual, an object of pity ... an object of questionable sexuality” (18). While her fear centres on her colleagues becoming aware of her trans identity, her journey to Trinidad evokes a shift into more entrenched trans being, in the narrative.

In particular, Griggs reiterates Trinidad’s status as the “the sex-change capital of the world” (82). The hospital setting stresses Griggs’s notion of her own transness: she is surrounded by fellow trans patients and receives medical care that specifically centres on her impending gender confirmation surgery. Having chosen to pursue the surgical procedure, she is required to “confront” her trans identity amongst strangers (38) and in Trinidad, “everyone I meet reminds me that I am what I hate” (39). Before the trip to Trinidad, she is not under the same pressure to confront her trans identity, nor indeed with such frequency: she “disclosed” her trans identity “to almost no one” and she “existed at work, at home, at school, in the shopping mall, grocery store ... every place but the bedroom and the doctor’s office ... year after year, with no one apparently knowing that I am not just a girl down the street” (38). The journey to Trinidad thus marks her shift from repressing to confronting her sense of her own transness.

Griggs’s insistence on the notoriety of Trinidad resonates with the infamy of Dr. Burou’s Gender Clinic in Casablanca, portrayals of which arise in trans autobiographies published between the 1960s and the 1980s. In the autobiographies that record the trip to Casablanca, argues Prosser (1999), the location is “a site of romantic transformation, product of the autobiographer’s conceptions of otherness and the East” (99). In Richards’s *Second Serve* (1983/1984), argues Prosser, Casablanca emerges “as an enchanted place of transfiguration” (1999, 99). Morris’s (1974) account of travelling to Casablanca insists on the setting as beyond the boundary of law (Prosser 1999, 99).⁴⁰ The portrayal of Casablanca in these narratives cultivates symbolism between “sex reassignment” and the “turning point” of the narrative: the setting evokes a

⁴⁰ Morris travels to Casablanca because she has no desire to divorce her wife Elizabeth Tuckniss before undergoing gender confirmation surgery, one of the conditions of the procedure in the UK at the time of her transition (the early 1970s). Phillips (2001) describes Morris’s portrayal of Casablanca in *Conundrum* as one of the “liminal” (15) spaces he seeks to explore as potentially “transgressive” (15). Morris’s depiction of Casablanca, for Phillips, is “deeply eroticized” and “a space in which sexualities are said to be more fluid, sexual desires less restricted, and moralities less rigid, than in England” (16).

“transsexual boundary or border”, and is “orientalized and exoticized”, which mirrors the “feminization” of the autobiographer (“Exceptional Locations”, 100).⁴¹ Similarly, in Griggs’s portrayal, Trinidad emerges as a “boundary” across which she must pass to escape the trans significance of her environment (136). While Griggs’s account of Trinidad is influenced by the resonance between passing through Casablanca and passing into womanhood that early portrayals create, she complicates the significance of her location.

Specifically, Mt. San Rafael Hospital in Griggs’s portrayal connotes entrapment in trans being. When Griggs imagines leaving Trinidad, she reflects that her anticipated journey “feels like an attempt to escape from transsexualism” (136). Following her period of recovery, she insists on a sense of “wrongness” in the trans body, in which trans being – rather than the archetypal “wrong” body – becomes a means of incarceration: “In some ways I feel trapped in a female body in the same sense I once felt trapped in a male body ... Something like being a woman, a person, trapped in a transsexual body” (210). And her account of transness creates a sense of discomfort comparable to the “wrongness” of the body before her surgical procedure.⁴² The hospital setting, whilst facilitating Griggs’s transformation into female embodiment, simultaneously evokes her transformation into an entrenched form of transness: she shifts from a mode of being prior to surgery typified by comfort in womanhood to a mode of being following her surgical procedure typified by discomfort in transness. In particular, the portrayal of hallucinated childbirth on waking from surgery and her subsequent anguish emphasise Griggs’s discontent in trans embodiment.

Although Griggs notes that surgery has shed “maleness” (151), she emphasises that she has not “been ‘cured’ of transsexualism” (151). As a patient of Mt. San Rafael Hospital, Griggs conveys her urge to shed the connotations of the setting after her stay. Deborah, a fellow patient who has undergone the same procedure as Griggs, asks Griggs for her address and phone number to remain in contact

⁴¹ Much as travelling to Trinidad evokes trans being by making the location central to the notion of change, in these autobiographies “the specification of being ‘in Casablanca’ ... authenticates the transformation from male to female” (1999, 100).

⁴² Griggs insists that, despite surgery, her mode of being remains typified by transness, which is “a pain no surgeon can ever remove” (197).

following their departure from the hospital. Yet Griggs is reluctant to comply, and states that on leaving the hospital she hopes to “leave it completely” (129). During her time in the hospital, she finds it difficult to “be transsexual again” and describes her renewed sense of her own transness as “a terrible regression of sorts” (129). She concludes that she will avoid “contact with anyone associated with Trinidad” once she has left (129). Her emerging discomfort in her trans identity, argues Prosser, insists on a move backwards rather than a move forwards (1999, 105). The sense of “regression” Griggs portrays emphasises a reworking of notions of transformation as progression, elsewhere in trans accounts.

Similarly, while Griggs’s trip to Trinidad evokes transformation – into female embodiment and also into an entrenched form of transness – Griggs concentrates on the failure of gender confirmation surgery to facilitate a “journey back” to Griggs’s “place of a past that should have been” (Prosser 1999, 106). Griggs states that she cannot undergo “the childhood of a little girl, the adolescence of a young woman, the family experience of a young bride, wife, mother” (202).⁴³ While a girl’s childhood is, in her *Journal*, unattainable, she emphasises her own urge for girlhood that began at a young age. Although she emphasises her urge to shed transness, Prosser suggests that she “implicitly admits in writing her account” that transness “is the only ‘home’ she has” (107). By evoking a sense of “home” in transness, and an urge to shed the trans state of being, Griggs evokes tensions central to the depiction of transformation in her narrative.

Noting, with regret, the absence of her own girl’s childhood, Griggs emphasises the disjuncture between her sense of herself following surgery and her sense of her past. By underscoring the divide between former and current selves, Griggs’s *Journal* deviates from conventional portrayals of transformation in trans autobiographies. In *Second Skins* (1998), Prosser notes that by setting down one’s history in narrative, a trans autobiographer creates a coherent subject and sutures the “split” created by transition (102).⁴⁴ The autobiographical act, a “look back at

⁴³ Griggs asserts that she “will never be” the “person I envision I would have been if I had been born female” (202).

⁴⁴ “I was a woman, I write as a man. How to join this split? How to create a coherent subject? Precisely through narrative” (Prosser 1998 102). A pertinent example of this aspiration towards coherence is Jorgensen’s assertion that although her “outward appearance” has “changed”, she

the self”, enables the autobiographer’s trans identity “to appear to have been there all along” (103). Griggs draws on this notion of continuity in *S/He* (1998): she recounts attending a conference at which a member of the audience asks Professor Jacob Hale, “How long have you been living full-time?” (8).⁴⁵ Hale’s response, “I’ve been living full-time since the day I was born on July 30, 1958”, fails to “separate pre-transition from post-transition being”, Griggs suggests (8): rather, in Hale’s account, his history emerges as “all one river” (8).⁴⁶ Departing from Hale’s stance, Griggs conceptualises her “social history” as divided “by the change of life from man to woman” (1996/2004, 202), and refuses, in her autobiographical works, to suture the rupture between present and former selves.

Pain

In Griggs’s *Journal* (1996/2004), she emphasises notions of rupture by concentrating on the pain of gender confirmation surgery and recovery. Following her surgical procedure, the body undergoes a passage into a state of agony. The portrayal of hallucinating her own labour on waking from surgery emphasises the focus on pain that is central to her *Journal*: “Pain; more pain; I am having a baby, ripping me apart. I am amazed at how much labor hurts” (53). The short, staccato nature of the depiction of her hallucination, cleaved apart by commas and semicolons, underscores the agony of the moment and Griggs’s inability to

states, she is “basically one and the same person [she] was in the earlier part of [her] life” (298). Similarly, Thompson’s elision of girlhood in *What Took You so Long?* smooths over the change from former to present being, as I argued in Chapter One.

⁴⁵ In other words, how long has Hale been living in the gender with which he identifies?

⁴⁶ In *Transamerica*, explaining to her therapist that she has received a phone call from Toby (while he is an inmate in the New York prison system and before they meet for the first time) Bree states “he claimed to be Stanley’s son”. Her therapist reprimands her, “no third person”, and Bree reluctantly amends her statement to “my son” (00:07:05–00:07:07). Forbidden from conceptualising “Stanley” as a separate person, Bree is unable to conceptualise herself as having been “Bree” since childhood. The therapist’s demand that Bree incorporate “Stanley” into her history suggests that by theorising Stanley as independent of her, Bree ignores or erases her “true” past. As this scene illuminates, *Transamerica* emphasises the influence that Bree’s therapist has over Bree. The therapist refuses to allow Bree’s planned procedure to go ahead until Bree has pursued contact with her son. Equally, by correcting Bree’s statements – “no third person” and, later, “Stanley’s life is your life” (00:07:43) – she demonstrates that she is in charge of guiding Bree’s self-conception. Bree is devastated by the delay to her surgery, which she conceptualises as providing a “new life”. The film is not particularly critical of the system that will not allow Bree to continue with surgery when she feels she is ready; and in fact, the most significant shifts arise as a consequence of her wait (the bond with Toby; Bree’s move into motherhood).

articulate her agony with anything other than brevity. Pain in Griggs's account is active, and "intense" (67): on waking the night after surgery, she fears that moving even slightly will make her scream; the second night after surgery, she fears her stitches will "tear", and experiences "glow-red pain", and "burning" in her throat (67). When she leaves her bed for the first time after surgery, pain erupts "full force" between her legs (124). For days, she is required to "lean to one side" and is unable to sit without a pillow beneath her (124). The focus on discomfort in Griggs's account undermines, for example, Jorgensen's claims of "instant womanhood" facilitated by surgery. The intense pain of surgery and recovery evokes a physical divide between former and present selves, and evokes a sense of transformation: central to the attainment of the "new body" is the pain that accompanies the process of changes; in Griggs's account, pain is central to the new mode of being.

The portrayal of pain centres on visceral detail: she describes a "heavy wire, perhaps a sixteenth of an inch in diameter" in her abdomen, which is attached to "what looks like a metal button, perhaps half an inch in diameter" that "prevents the end of the wire from slipping into [her] abdomen" (68). Later, the wire is removed, and Griggs's description of the action is largely monosyllabic: it causes "sharp pain" and she "gasp[s] a quick breath"; the nurse "bears down, and the wire snaps". To complete the operation, the nurse "clamps onto the end of the wire and yanks" (101). The short clauses and the onomatopoeic effect of "clamps," "snaps" and "yanks" provide a glimpse into the agony she endures after her procedure. Griggs recounts taking great care to avoid further antagonising the body that is already undergoing agony: "I try desperately not to twitch my abdominal muscles or legs" (57). Her portrayal of keeping the body rigid insists on pain as fully embodied and ongoing.

This sense of continual pain is reinforced by the journal structure of the narrative: Griggs's *Journal* is structured according to her daily routine during her residence in hospital, and the repetitive nature of the account, the attendance to menial tasks and events – primarily sleeping, eating, washing, and taking medication – coupled with her focus on pain, insist on a depiction of gender confirmation surgery as elongated and unpleasant. In places, the relentless detail appears in list form and evades full sentences: "About 8:00 P.M. Medications –

antibiotic, iron supplement, laxative, Metamucil-and-juice, milk of magnesia, and mineral oil" (84). By listing her duties, she evokes a sense of the arduous nature of her period of recovery. For the first few days after the procedure, she sleeps fitfully and wakes continually and in torment: "I'm nauseated and vomit fiercely. I don't mind the nausea in itself; the convulsive agony is so overwhelming that nausea compares as minor discomfort" (53). In the foreword to *Griggs's Journal*, Halberstam states that the narrative "tells readers what other authors tend to gloss over", which encompasses "the very physical details of the surgery itself" (viii). Confirming Halberstam's assertion, Griggs states that she refuses to romanticise her time at Mt. San Rafael Hospital: "I wanted", she states, "a detailed chronicle that years hence would recall the sex-change experience without the distorted fondness I sometimes project into distant memories" (211–212). And the detail of the account attends to the precise focus on the pain of the body, following the surgical procedure.⁴⁷

Griggs's focus on the pain of surgery and recovery deviates from portrayals elsewhere in the trans autobiography tradition, which tend to smooth over the lengthiness and painful nature of the period of recovery surgery necessitates. In these trans accounts that depict surgery and overlook recovery, the elision of the pain is disembodiment. A valuable example of this absence of pain arises in *Conundrum* (1974): Morris's portrayal of waking from surgery in Casablanca privileges the joy of her transformation – "I had a new body" (131) – above recognition of her pain: as she admits, the fact of being "alive, well, and sex-changed in Casablanca" overrides "the nightmare sensation" of waking from surgery (130–131). To underscore the insignificance of the impact of surgery and its pain on her recovering body, Morris notes that shortly after waking from her procedure, she is able to continue working on the crossword puzzle that she had started the previous night (131). Griggs's hallucination, on waking from surgery, that she is undergoing labour, evokes the elision of pain to which Morris's portrayal

⁴⁷ In Griggs's account, pain is ongoing, beyond her period of recovery in hospital. For nine months after her surgery, she is required to dilate – an intensely painful procedure – daily, "trying to stretch out what is patently a small vagina, beginning at about 2 ½ inches in depth and gradually increasing to 4 ½ inches" (34). By dwelling on minute, numeric detail – the inches, the daily dilations – Griggs exposes the intricacies of the agony she endures.

of gender confirmation surgery adheres. In accounts of birth and labour, the significance of childbirth often undermines accounts of pain (Della Pollock 1999, 9).⁴⁸ Griggs's account of pain renders bodily that which, elsewhere, emerges in diminished fashion.

Yet, my claim that many trans autobiographies erase the pain of surgeries overlooks certain narratives that recount pain as a defining consequence of surgery. For example, both Thompson's *What Took You so Long?* (1995) and Ivan E. Coyote and Rae Spoon's *Gender Failure* (2014) attend to the discomfort that arises following mastectomy procedures. Similarly, in *Second Serve* (1983/1984), Richards describes "an overwhelming awareness of pain" after her surgical procedure, in which she experiences "shooting pains of searing intensity" and pain that emerges as a "crushingly intense flood" (281). However, following her portrayal of the agony of surgery, Richards undermines her own account by stating that her discomfort cannot be compared to the pain of the patients she meets during her medical residency, who, unlike her, are "life's real sufferers" (282).

In contrast to Richards's diminishment of the pain of recovery, Griggs's account pivots on her compulsion to attend to the pain of the body. Scarry (1985) notes that, in pain, "the claims of the body utterly nullify the claims of the world" (33).⁴⁹ After surgery, pain disorients Griggs, and impairs her conception of the passing of time: "Almost as I press the call button, I am vomiting and keep vomiting for hour-long seconds and seconds, each convulsion ripping pain through my abdomen" (66). She particularly attends to the pain of the body during the nights following her

⁴⁸ Pollock argues that the pain of childbirth is also undermined in "discussions of pain", in which pain is framed "in terms of illness and injury" (118). However, pain is also central to accounts of childbirth: conventional understandings of birth align labour with pain. Pollock seeks to avoid focusing solely on pain in childbirth, and the alignment of childbirth with "pain as horror or disease" (119). However, narratives of childbirth cannot avoid pain: "Pain will inevitably catch up with the birthing body" (119). In this bind, pain, and common understandings of pain, require rethinking, Pollock suggests: "we have to ... break not the conventional identification of birth with pain but the identification of birth with conventional notions of pain" (119). While it might seem incongruous to employ theories of childbirth in this chapter, Griggs herself recounts her hallucination of childbirth on waking from surgery (and recounts her anguish at the notion of infertility), and narratives of childbirth are valuable in a discussion of conventional understandings and representations of pain.

⁴⁹ In *The Body in Pain* (1985), an exploration of the inarticulacy of bodily pain, the consequences of pain's inexpressibility, and the nature of "expressibility" (3), Scarry notes that "intense pain ... destroys a person's self and world" which is "experienced spatially as either the contraction of the universe down to the immediate vicinity of the body or as the body swelling to fill the entire universe" (35).

surgical procedure, when her daily routines – distracting her from her pain during the day – are abandoned for the pursuit of sleep, which is invariably broken: “the darkness ... delivers me unmercifully to my physical self” (85). Just as she is incarcerated by the hospital in its othering transness, she is trapped by the body’s pain. Lying in the bed, which she is unable to leave for many days because she is attached by a catheter, causes pain to her back and neck, and even her ears and the top of her head, from the constant pressure of the pillow: “I shift positions in search of relief but find none, and the burning agony of lying on either side is too much to bear” (86). This portrayal of entrapment in the pain of the body reworks the “trapped in the wrong body” model, which typically emphasises feelings of entrapment prior to surgery, and the disburdening of the body as a consequence of the surgical procedure.

As the overwhelming nature of Griggs’s account of pain signifies, the experience of agony signals transformation. Pain cultivates a divide between body and self. Following surgery, Griggs states, her body has undergone “a traumatic experience” and “has been benevolently assaulted and will require some time to put itself back together” (57–58). The passivity of the depiction of the body suggests that the body might coordinate its own recovery. And the pain of her surgical procedure is fully embodied: for example, she states that, while brushing her teeth, her “gums are sore, presumably from gritting [her] teeth” (69). Scarry argues that when one is in pain, one “experiences” the body “as the agent of ... agony” (47). Griggs’s account of the reassembly of the body suggests disjuncture between her selfhood and her corporeality: she states that she feels “almost apologetic for demanding” that her body endure the procedure and she vows “to be a better friend” (58). Following her surgical procedure and her period of recovery, she reveals, she and her body become “closer” (58). In Griggs’s account, overcoming pain signals transformation based on creating congruence between body and self.

However, pain muddles the established distinction between self and body. Scarry argues that, in pain, “the boundary between inside and outside” is dissolved (53). While she insists on the body’s culpability as “agent” of pain (47), she argues that, in pain – even when the pain one endures originates in the body, without external cause – “a vivid sense of external agency” typically emerges, which is

evident from the vocabulary often employed to describe the experience of pain: “knifelike pains, stabbing, boring, searing pains” (53). Because one feels one’s body hurting one, and simultaneously locates the cause of pain as external to one, “one feels acted upon, annihilated, by inside and outside alike” (53).⁵⁰ While pain is a “limited internal fact”, the experience “eventually occupies the entire body and spills out into the realm beyond the body” and “takes over all that is inside and outside” (55).⁵¹ This notion of the progression of pain is crucial to Griggs’s portrayal of her own discomfort, in which the shift of pain from the abdomen to the entirety of the body, that the “overwhelming” nature of her “convulsive agony” (53) denotes, suggests incoherent notions of the body in pain and undermines the typical progression of trans autobiographies, from disjuncture to coherence.

Yet, while Griggs’s pain facilitates passage into disoriented being, she emphasises that fellow patient Deborah, recovering in the room next door, easily overcomes the pain of surgery: “Deborah insists, ‘Hey, I’m really healthy. Things like this don’t bother me as much as other people ... I’m going to ask Dr. Biber about checking out of the hospital early’” (115). Griggs’s dismay that Deborah seemingly experiences a gentler post-surgery phase than her own is a consequence of her failure to imagine Deborah’s pain. Yet Griggs *portrays* Deborah’s discomfort, even as she depicts Deborah’s relaxed attitude towards her own period of recovery: when Deborah visits Griggs in her room, she winces as she sits on the donut-shaped pillow given to the patients after their surgeries (128). Griggs’s portrayal of Deborah’s pain resonates with the depiction of Bree’s pain after surgery in *Transamerica*. Bree walks over to a chest of drawers in her hospital room, clinging to a drip, and winces before sitting down. As she does so, she says to her therapist, “I feel like a medieval heretic impaled on a very large and very thick stake with splinters” (01:27:47–01:28:02). Her words are interspersed with pauses, indicating

⁵⁰ Conflict perhaps arises between Scarry’s notion of the “external agency” of pain, delineated here, and her argument that the body itself typically feels responsible for the pain one endures: “when a knife or a nail or pin enters the body, one feels not the knife, nail or pin but one’s own body ... hurting one” (Scarry, 53).

⁵¹ The consequence of the experience of pain is the “dissolution of the boundary between inside and outside”, in which emerges “an almost obscene conflation of private and public” (Scarry, 53): pain, felt only by oneself, is isolating (private) but exposing (public). Griggs draws attention to the erasure of her dignity after surgery: “Someone, I think Elizabeth, wipes my mouth and face with a damp cloth; I must be a mess” (53).

her discomfort. Much as Bree's anguish for Toby overshadows the portrayal of pain, Deborah's discomfort is eclipsed by her apparent wellness: she is urgent to venture from the hospital into Trinidad, and seeks discharge from the hospital earlier than her doctors recommend. Griggs's *Journal* shifts from attending to her own pain to diminishing the significance of Deborah's.

By diminishing the weight of Deborah's pain, Griggs indicates her failure to fully conceive of it, even as she endures her own. Griggs's emphasis on Deborah's ease of recovery and simultaneous portrayal of the pain that continues to afflict Deborah evokes the complexity implicit in conveying another person's experience of pain. Griggs cannot conceptualise Deborah's pain despite her own post-surgery period of recovery because the two experiences vary: one's own pain, argues Scarry, and someone else's pain relate to "two wholly distinct orders of events" (4). One might conceive of one's own pain "effortlessly" – indeed, it is typically impossible to disregard – but it is equally "effortless" not to grasp another's physical pain, even to "remain in doubt about" or refuse "its existence" (4).⁵² By emphasising the lessening of Deborah's pain whilst hinting at its ongoing nature, Griggs indicates her failure to convey the pain of another and the complexity implicit in conveying her own experience of pain.

Griggs's account of discomfort is hampered by the inability of language to capture physical pain. If one undergoes "intense pain", the ability to discuss one's experience might be compromised: "as the content of one's world disintegrates, so the content of one's language disintegrates" (Scarry, 35). In pain, a merely "fragmentary means of verbalization is available" (Scarry, 13): Griggs's articulation of pain ranges from "discomfort" (53) to "anguish" (67) – and beyond – and she varies her portrayal of pain by employing a succession of adjectives: she undergoes "excruciating" pain (56) and "ripping pain" (66) and "intense pain" (67). At times, during the narrative, she relies on articulating her body's responses to convey her experience of pain: she is "flinching from pain" (75), pain "slices through" (53) her

⁵² Another person's account of pain, Scarry argues, can have "the remote character of some deep subterranean fact," and can seem to emerge from "an invisible geography" that seems unreal "because it has not yet manifested itself on the visible surface of the earth" (3). Furthermore, if one is finally able to comprehend another's pain, the idea one has of that experience "will only be a shadowy fraction of the actual 'it'" (4), because the experience is elusive.

body and her “teeth are clenched in resistance to pain” (57).⁵³ Griggs’s capacity to depict her experience of pain is further impaired because her project relies on recall. In the introduction, I noted that Griggs’s *Journal* is comprised of diary entries recorded following her time in hospital. The periods of intense pain and disorientation she records are mapped out in accordance with memories. Yet, while pain is recalled from memory, the ongoing nature of the discomfort of Griggs’s recovery might suggest that she endured pain whilst writing the narrative.⁵⁴ Griggs’s remove from the exact moment of pain, however, complicates its portrayal.⁵⁵ In her *Journal*, she undergoes a shift into inarticulacy.

The typically inarticulate nature of pain complicates the elision of pain in certain trans accounts and portrayals. While Griggs, unlike early writers in the tradition such as Jorgensen and Morris, strives to attend to her experience of pain, she is caught in the bind of inarticulacy; perhaps the accounts that smooth over the pain of surgery and recovery are informed by this bind. Arthur Frank (1995/2013) notes that individuals typically require other narratives of suffering to structure their own accounts (xi). While Griggs’s *Journal* is perhaps informed by other accounts of suffering, it is significant that she cannot draw on specifically trans narratives to structure her account of gender confirmation surgery and suffering.

Despite constraints, Griggs recounts the compulsion to convey her pain, as her depiction of wanting to record in detail her experiences in hospital without romanticising her period of recovery suggests (211–212). Griggs’s emphasis on her urge to recount her experience suggests that while pain impairs communication, recounting the experience is rendered imperative: “suffering needs stories” (Frank,

⁵³ Just as Griggs’s experience of pain cannot be grasped by a readership in anything like its actual form, perhaps the elision of physical pain in other accounts relates to its singular, personal impact. The pain of Bree’s surgery and recovery in *Transamerica*, for example, is perhaps portrayed as less significant than the damaged bond between Toby and Bree because Bree’s painful recovery cannot be grasped by the film’s audience, beyond the discomfort signified by the slow steps she takes across the hospital room, and her grimace as she sits down on the bed.

⁵⁴ In the six-month follow-up report Griggs sends to her doctor, she states that she continues to experience “pain/discomfort” (196).

⁵⁵ Certain physical expressions of her pain communicate its presence and its impact: her portrayal of vomiting, for example, a physical expression of intangible pain, and her description of the visible impact of surgery on her body: “I push down the bed covers to expose my lower abdomen and legs, and am still somewhat shocked by the bruising, swelling, and discoloration” (68). The image of damage to Griggs’s body makes evident, or visible, aspects of the painful impact of surgery on her body.

xi).⁵⁶ Those who endure suffering, Frank argues, “need to become storytellers in order to recover the voices that illness and its treatment often take away” (xx). Griggs’s compulsion to write also perhaps arises from her need to record the changed and changing body following surgery. During recovery from surgery, Griggs’s body is rendered unfamiliar: her abdomen is swollen, bruised and discoloured (68) and her mouth aches from clenching her teeth (69). She moves slowly: on leaving her hospital bed for the first time in days, she notes, “My body weighs four hundred pounds. My thighs quiver ... I am weak and dizzy” (124). In the narrative, following surgery, the body shifts into unfamiliarity.

This passage into unfamiliarity defies the conventional transformation from the “wrongness” of the body to contentment in “rightful” morphology, as a reflection of one’s authentic identity. The conventional shift into “rightful” corporeality evokes notions of familiarity: recognising the body as one’s own.⁵⁷ Frank argues that, in narratives of suffering, the body “is often alienated, literally ‘made strange’” (2). During her period of recovery, Griggs catches sight of herself in the mirror: “I behold a person ... exactly where I should be, but the poor thing doesn’t look well ... Her complexion is pallid, eyes dull, cheeks hollow” (61). Catching sight of the unfamiliar being, she notes, “My immediate impulse is to lower the bed so that I cannot see into the glass” (61). As Prosser notes, mirror scenes arise frequently in trans autobiographies and symbolise the “splitting of the transsexual subject” (1998, 100). The mirror captures the rupture of transition, a division Griggs seeks to emphasise, her deviation from the portrayal of her history as “all one river” (1998, 8).⁵⁸

However, in Griggs’s *Journal*, the transformation into the unfamiliar body is impermanent: overcome by frustration, discomfort and helplessness shortly after

⁵⁶ *The Wounded Storyteller* (1995/2013) concentrates on three narratives that “storytellers and listeners use to structure and interpret stories, respectively: restitution, chaos, and quest. Each is also a way of experiencing illness” (xiv). While my analysis is not centred on illness, I focus on suffering implicit in the process of recovery in Griggs’s account.

⁵⁷ As I noted in Chapter One, Prosser (1998) conceptualises the familiarity of the body in Thompson’s *What Took You so Long?* in terms of replacing that which is “rightfully” his/has been lost (phalloplasty).

⁵⁸ Griggs’s inability to recognise herself in the mirror resonates with Boylan’s portrayal of wavering between familiarity and unfamiliarity in a mirror scene in *I’m Looking Through You*, which I move on to explore in Chapter Three.

surgery, Griggs reassures herself, “It’s only a matter of time until my body is my own again” (81). Frank notes that accounts of suffering are driven by the need to “make [the body] familiar” (2); and Griggs’s portrayal of her experience of surgery is in part an effort to recover the body that has become unfamiliar, a consequence of the pain of surgery and the process of recovery. Griggs’s determination to make her body her own, once she has overcome her pain – she reiterates, for example, her intention to take up running again after her period of recovery (190, 201) – evokes the passage towards familiarity, the movement of the body, temporarily made “strange” by surgery, into a familiar mode of being. Transformations in the narrative simultaneously pivot on restoring previous capacities of the body and cultivating a sense of the body as “new” in its femaleness.

While much of this chapter concentrates on *Journal*’s departure from the conventions of the tradition, the structure of Griggs’s account in fact reveals conformity to other trans autobiographies: the chapters move from “Decision” to “Aftermath”, constructing an established, linear structure of change.⁵⁹ Mario Martino’s autobiography *Emergence* (1977), arranged into chapters that reveal each phase of the journey, such as “The Early Years”, “Puberty”, “Neo-Gender”, and “Legally, I am a Male!”, demonstrates the typical structure to which Griggs’s account adheres. Following conventional chronology, Griggs’s *Journal* conforms to the “voyage into the self” (Prosser 1998, 116), typical of the tradition, even while notions of transformation and the focus on pain perhaps undermine common conventions.

Conclusion: Arrival

While the emphasis of Griggs’s *Journal* (1996/2004) is on the process of gender confirmation surgery and the period of recovery, the narrative charts various forms of transformation. Griggs asserts that she seeks gender confirmation surgery to facilitate coherence between mind and body, and to cultivate a passage into

⁵⁹ When I argue that the structure of Griggs’s *Journal* reveals conformity to other trans autobiographies, I am referring specifically to the chronology of the chapters; as I have noted, the convention of diary entries Griggs employs does mark the text as different from others in the tradition.

becoming “whole” (203). Additionally, the back cover of Griggs’s *Journal* notes that the autobiography maps a “compelling journey from male to female”.⁶⁰ Surgery sheds the “male[ness]” that has previously “trapped” Griggs (210). Furthermore, Griggs’s body departs from the state of “sexually ambiguous” (2) being that she asserts typifies her morphology before her surgery: she describes satisfaction that the body, following surgery, is both female (151) and congruent with her womanhood (203). Choosing to pursue gender confirmation surgery, Griggs shifts from sustaining the privacy of her trans identity to informing close friends and colleagues. While Griggs insists that the social dimension of transition is of more significance than surgical changes, she depicts a deep and persistent urge for the surgical procedure on which her very survival depends (2). Returning to my exploration of “wholeness” in Chapter One, I ask: might the surgical procedure on which Griggs’s *Journal* concentrates facilitate the return “home” to the body?

As I will explore, Griggs’s notion of “wholeness” is complex, and similar to Rees’s ambivalent sense of his own “wholeness” in *Dear Sir or Madam* (1996). In the Introduction, I stated that my argument in this thesis is that the core autobiographies unsettle significant changes underpinning them. In Chapter One, I developed this argument by suggesting that Thompson disrupts the “girl’s journey to manhood” the subtitle of his autobiography proposes by depicting a boy’s journey, instead. Griggs’s *Journal* proposes and disrupts key conventions in the trans autobiography tradition, as I have charted in this chapter. As Griggs states in the preface to her *Journal*, her “journey to Trinidad” is ongoing because “an altered body inevitably brings with it an altered life experience” (ix). Lacking a designated point of conclusion, Griggs’s portrayal of the journey signifies departure from the conventions of the journeying model. And while surgery facilitates transformation into female embodiment, Griggs delineates her conflicted notion of the procedure, encompassing both “sorrow” and “regret” (ix). Her idea of the femaleness that surgery enables also creates tension: she distinguishes between her own female body, facilitated by surgery, and “natural” femaleness (4). Conflict arises between the portrayal of gender confirmation surgery as a form of destiny and Griggs’s

⁶⁰ The 2004 edition.

depiction of her reluctance to undergo the procedure. Finally, in *Griggs's Journal*, she constructs a problematic gulf between trans and cis being.⁶¹ When she reveals that gender confirmation surgery has surpassed her expectations by creating a female body, her account slips between real and felt: the body is “literally” female (151), and the vagina “seem[s] natural” (151). While surgery facilitates passage into femaleness, it simultaneously cultivates transformation into a “sex-changed existence” (27). Critically, the narrative departs from notions of surgery as essentially a “cure” for wrong-bodied being, as it emerges in, for example, Morris’s *Conundrum* (1974). Griggs’s notion of her own trans being, which becomes more pronounced after she undergoes gender confirmation surgery, evokes a sense of lacking personhood: “I myself have never been able to accept being transsexual – an object of pity, an object of horror” (18).

At times, it can be troubling to read Griggs’s notions of transness. In *S/He* (1998), for example, Griggs conveys a problematic notion of transition, suggesting that one’s womanhood is predicated specifically on one’s recognition as a woman: “Society must see a woman; otherwise, sex-change surgery or not, one cannot be a woman” (17). It is particularly striking that Griggs emphasises the significance of passing as a condition of one’s “rightful” womanhood. Dean Spade (2003) argues that Griggs’s notion of “a successful transition” is based on “full participation in the normative, sexist, narrowly defined performance of ‘woman’” (27). While Griggs’s ideas of womanhood at times emerge as limited – she is relieved, for example, that because she is “not a man” she is not required to “pretend to care” about “intensely important world issues” (105) – both *Journal* and *S/He* illustrate wide possibilities of womanhood. The digression that political matters are of little concern to her as a woman is light-hearted, and she jokes, “perhaps the surgery has affected my brain” (1996/2004, 105). Moreover, her aspiration towards “normal” embodiment that she hopes gender confirmation surgery can facilitate is subverted by her depiction of the failings of surgery. Griggs’s notions of the shortcomings of

⁶¹ As I explored in Chapter One, Rees emphasises the disjuncture between trans and cis being. In *Dear Sir or Madam* (1996), Rees employs the term “normal” to describe that which he has been barred from: he states that his experiences do not include “normal heterosexual relations”, that he is unable to imagine “how it feels to be a normal woman”, and that he missed out on a “normal adolescence” (176), for example.

surgery are in tension with her assertion that surgery facilitates her female embodiment, contributing to the conflicted sense of gender confirmation surgery at the heart of the narrative.

Enmeshed within Griggs's conflicted sense of gender confirmation surgery is the shift into a deeply entrenched sense of transness, emerging as "regression" (129), that she undergoes during her residence in Mt. San Rafael Hospital. In the autobiography, Griggs reworks the "trapped in the wrong body" model as entrapment in the trans body (210).⁶² While Prosser suggests that Griggs's *Journal* constructs transness precisely as there all along, the points of "*departure and arrival*" (1999, 105), transness inhibits "whole" being for Griggs, as Halberstam's insistence that Griggs's *Journal* resists depicting contentment in womanhood emphasises (vii). Griggs's regret that the trip to Trinidad fails to construct the journey back to her "rightful" girlhood, as Prosser explores, evokes her dissatisfaction with the transformation(s) of gender confirmation surgery. In Griggs's account, "wholeness" is tempered by limited notions of transformation: her dissatisfaction with the female body, and sense of anguish at infertility.⁶³ In the afterword to her *Journal*, she emphasises her ongoing aspiration to cis being: "if I could choose a non-transsexual life, I would. I want to be born, have a happy childhood, grow into a young woman, go to high school proms, be a cheerleader and not a wrestler" (213). Much of her desire for cisness hinges on her despondency that her family fails to recognise her womanhood: she seeks "a family with siblings and parents and cousins and aunts and uncles who know me (not 'him')" (213). The failure of surgery to shed transness is central to Griggs's narrative.

⁶² In the afterword to Griggs's *Journal*, she cultivates another form of change: "There are now days, whole days, in which I do not think about being transsexual" (213). However, her emphasis on "whole days" might suggest that entrenched trans being is ongoing.

⁶³ Griggs recounts feeling misery, following gender confirmation surgery, as a consequence of dreaming about pregnancy: "I find myself at various stages of the nine-month term, sometimes having distorted arguments with the doctors as I explain that it's impossible for me to be pregnant, because I'm transsexual ... each time, the dream must end, and I awake in tears at the realization, 'It was only a dream.' Infertility is reality" (192). The portrayal recalls Griggs's hallucination, on waking from surgery, of undergoing childbirth. Both accounts evoke despondency at the dawning realisation that childbirth is imagined.

By conveying doubts centring on the surgical procedure, Griggs reworks the notion of the path to contentment in the “right” body. Her *Journal* charts a passage into the pain of surgery, and the account of agony signals forms of transformation: agony evokes the incoherence of the body; and Griggs shifts into the inarticulacy of pain and the unfamiliarity of the “new” morphology. Notions of incoherence and unfamiliarity undermine the return “home” to the body. However, while I suggest that Griggs’s portrayal unsettles the attainment of “wholeness” and the return “home”, elements of the text counter this position. Firstly, Griggs hints at the eventual passage into the familiarity of the body, facilitated by a return to her exercise regime, which adheres to the typical thrust of the narrative towards the eventual state of contentment and comfort in the body. Secondly, her portrayal of waking from surgery and hallucinating undergoing labour and giving birth adheres to the prevalent symbolism of rebirth in autobiographical trans narratives. In this light, Griggs’s childbirth scene conforms to notions of entire transformation: a portrayal of rebirth in which Griggs is figured as agentic, birthing her transformation.⁶⁴ I conclude this chapter with these examples to emphasise that, in Griggs’s account, coming to a conclusion on the sense of the “return home” in the narrative is complicated by a sense of “arrival” that is undermined precisely by discontent.

⁶⁴ The portrayal of birth/rebirth in Griggs’s *Journal* resonates with the excerpt from Maggie Nelson’s *The Argonauts* (2015), with which my thesis commences. Nelson compares the transformations of pregnancy to the changes implicit in the transition of her partner, Harry Dodge. Both might signify jarring comparisons.

Chapter Three: “To her I was just a shadow”: Depictions of conflict and disembodiment in Jennifer Finney Boylan’s autobiographical writing

She seemed surprised to see me, and raised one hand to her mouth, as if I were the ghost, as if I were the one floating, translucently, in the mirror.

–Jennifer Finney Boylan, *I’m Looking Through You*

Haunted! ever since I was a child!

–Virginia Woolf, *Orlando*

The earliest of three autobiographical works, Jennifer Finney Boylan’s *She’s Not There: A Life in Two Genders* (2003) begins with portrayals of a childhood in which solitariness and the slowly dawning recognition of gender “wrongness” are central¹ and closes on a note of contentment, following transition, in adult womanhood.² Its sequel, *I’m Looking Through You: Growing Up Haunted* (2008), plays with the notions of change that underpin the narrative. As the titles of both autobiographies indicate, the works centre on absence and transparency. Without documenting precisely her shift into womanhood – she states, “This is not a book about being transgendered, per se” (24) – *I’m Looking Through You* concentrates on Boylan’s adolescence and particularly her experience of living in the allegedly haunted family home known as the Coffin House. While *She’s Not There* is organised in accordance with the life course and charts Boylan’s movement into womanhood – a portrayal that comprises hormone therapy, gender confirmation surgery and the disclosure of her womanhood to her colleagues – *I’m Looking Through You* deviates from the life-course structure and absents the details of her transition. The gulf between the

¹ Drawing on early notions of gender “wrongness”, in *She’s Not There* Boylan recounts her bafflement, as a young child watching her mother iron her father’s clothes, at her mother’s claim that “Someday you’ll wear shirts like this” (19). The scene recalls Jan Morris’s portrayal of dawning awareness, as a child, of the “wrongness” of the body, whilst sitting beneath a piano at which her mother is playing, that I discuss in the Conclusion.

² Author, musician, and professor of English at a liberal arts college in Maine, Boylan has published three autobiographical works. Born in 1958, she began living as a woman in 2000. I do not explore Boylan’s most recent autobiographical work, *Stuck in the Middle With You: A Memoir of Parenting in Three Genders* (2013), in any detail in this chapter because it focuses primarily on the experience of parenting, and on trans parent identities, rather than changes pertaining to sex, gender and the body that are the focus of my thesis.

modes of depicting transness in the two texts prompted me to analyse them together in this chapter.

By reading two of Boylan's autobiographies together, I am able to further extend my key aim of exploring how the core texts open up ways of writing about trans experience. *I'm Looking Through You* adopts a ghostliness analogy to convey Boylan's experience of her trans adolescence, a thoroughly original approach within the trans autobiography tradition.³ In *I'm Looking Through You*, Boylan's family and her peers fail to recognise the girlhood with which she identifies, which creates a sense of ghostliness and a feeling of being haunted.⁴ The analogy between trans experience and ghostliness that underpins the narrative ranges from glib – "I do not believe in ghosts, although I have seen them with my own eyes ... A lot of people feel the same way about transsexuals" (107) – to meaningfully evocative of burden and oppression, as I will explore. In this chapter, I examine the echo between trans experience and ghostliness on which the narrative hinges. Boylan's portrayal of adolescence evokes conflict and diminishment arising from her urge for girlhood and womanhood; moreover, the portrayal of ghostliness emphasises the tensions underpinning her adolescence, and her sense of her own disembodiment. I ask: how might the ghostliness motif evoke Boylan's discontent with her body before her transition?

Boylan hints that portrayals of hauntings and ghostliness in *I'm Looking Through You* are symbolic rather than literal: in the author's note that prefaces her account, she warns that while she has "taken care to ensure accuracy whenever possible", the narrative "contains occasional elements of invention"; she has altered the timeline and "invented" dialogue (unpaginated). Boylan's note throws into relief the expectation that autobiographies are necessarily based on recounted events: in

³ While *She's Not There* is a more conventional account of Boylan's trans experience, and follows the typical life-course structure, elements of the autobiography similarly hint at the broadening of ways of writing about trans experience as I explore in this chapter.

⁴ In this chapter, I use the terms "haunting", "ghostly" and "spectral", amongst others, to refer to that which is uncanny in the text, but also to various modes of being that Boylan and others embody. The terms "spectre" and "spectrality" have a specific resonance, however: Maria del Pilar Blanco and Esther Peeren (2013) point out that cultural criticism during the 1990s adopted these terms over "ghostly" and "haunting" not only because they "have a more serious, scholarly ring to them" but because they "evoke an etymological link to visibility and vision" (2). In this chapter, I unpack precisely this connotation – the seen and the unseen – and the tension it constructs.

“The Entangled Self” (2007), Nancy K. Miller suggests that “When you go to the bookstore and pick out a book that says ‘memoir’ on it, you expect to be reading the truth” (538).⁵ Boylan’s depiction of spectrality, then, suggests that she pushes the boundaries of the genre. Throughout *I’m Looking Through You*, Boylan emphasises that her autobiography undermines the expectations of the genre: “Had any of it been real, when you came right down to it?” (140). The author’s note draws on Frank McCourt’s blend of fact and fiction in the memoir *Angela’s Ashes* (1996), hinting at the presence of invention in her own work.⁶ Employing many of the conventions of fiction, *I’m Looking Through You* signifies a departure from the trans autobiography tradition.⁷

I focus on three spaces in the two narratives – all of them “haunted” – to explore states of diminishment and conflict prior to Boylan’s transition. Specifically, I draw on the sense of marginality pivotal to Boylan’s portrayal of her “haunted” adolescence and examine the fragility and vulnerability of adolescence and adulthood prior to transition. Unlike the previous two chapters, and informed by the emphasis of *I’m Looking Through You*, I focus primarily on the period of adolescence – although I do refer to early adulthood – and the sense of diminishment that emerges during this phase. The conflict between Boylan’s originally assigned gender and the girlhood/womanhood with which she identifies underpins both of her autobiographies and culminates in the motif of ghostliness, central to *I’m Looking Through You*. In particular, my analysis of Boylan’s attic setting centres on the conflicts she depicts. I note resonance between the haunted attic of Boylan’s autobiography and the third-storey attic of *Jane Eyre* (1847/2006).⁸

⁵ Throughout this chapter, I refer to Boylan’s autobiographical works as “autobiographies” rather than “memoirs”. I discuss this distinction in the Conclusion.

⁶ In the Introduction, I explored the assumption that autobiographies are necessarily derived from fact, and the tensions that arise from texts such as McCourt’s, which comprise some of the conventions of fiction.

⁷ In the Conclusion to my thesis, I explore how *I’m Looking Through You*, by unsettling adherence to conventions of autobiography theory, departs from the other core autobiographies in this thesis.

⁸ Boylan is an author and scholar in English: whilst writing *She’s Not There* and *I’m Looking Through You*, she was professor of English at Colby College, Maine. Because her work is literary in nature, reading *I’m Looking Through You* with Gilbert and Gubar’s “A Dialogue of Self and Soul: Plain Jane’s Progress” (1979/2000) in mind has been fitting. However, certain complexities arise from employing the work of Gilbert and Gubar in this chapter. Melanie Taylor (2000) notes the problematic nature of Gilbert and Gubar’s conflation of “transsexualism” and “transvestism”: “Gilbert and Gubar’s citing of these distinct cultural identities as a ‘trope’ (not even two separate tropes) reflects a common

My exploration of Boylan's account of feeling "bifurcated" is informed by Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar's (1979/2000) assertion that various tensions epitomise the character of Jane. In the final section of this chapter, I depart from my focus on ghostliness and examine tensions arising from Boylan's portrayal of her own androgyny.

There is tension between my focus on portrayals of change in this thesis – specifically, as they pertain to the body – and my focus on the analogy of ghostliness on which *I'm Looking Through You* is predicated. Ghostliness and the notions of marginality and diminishment that are central to both autobiographical works I concentrate on render mapping the body in the narrative challenging. To seek out the body, I explore the shift from portrayals of diminishment and marginality to the depiction of solidity, a consequence of Boylan's departure from ghostliness. By doing so, I slightly rework my focus, established in the previous chapters, on the aspiration towards the embodiment of "wholeness". Both the shift from the insubstantial to the substantial body and the eventual embodiment of "wholeness" might emerge as forms of "coming home" to the body. I examine, in particular, Boylan's shift from ghostliness and haunted being to coherent adult womanhood.

Stairwell

In *I'm Looking Through You* (2008), Boylan depicts the gender nonconformity of her adolescence. At a party she attends, she seeks refuge in a stairwell after publicly enduring taunts from her peers. The stairwell, a narrow and cramped environment in which the "staircase hugged the walls" (62), is situated beyond the main throng of the gathering, and the marginality of the setting emphasises Boylan's eviction from the social group. During her teens, Boylan dresses privately in her mother's and sister's clothing, wearing her hair long to facilitate a smooth movement into girlhood, and conforming to an appearance that I term androgynous:⁹ the stairwell, a space in which she hides from her tormentors, evokes the oppression that she

critical practice of employing transgender identities for their figurative, rather than literal, potential" (14).

⁹ I discuss androgyny in Boylan's work later in this chapter.

endures for her nonconformity. More widely in Boylan's autobiographical works, marginal settings provide a means of hiding from family and peers, and – in her concealment – echo the private nature of her urge to live as a girl and a woman.

On the stairs, Boylan meets a school peer, Faith Bartelsby. In the darkness, she and Faith are unable to see one another and the scene begins in a state of disembodiment. Despite this depiction of obscurity, Faith introduces herself in familiar terms: “‘It’s only me,’ a girl’s voice said” (62). Her words have a (spectral) resonance later in the narrative, as I will explore. Faith, to gain a sense of Boylan, reaches out to touch her, undermining the emphasis on disembodiment in the scene: “Her hand dropped down to my bow tie. ‘Oh,’ she said. ‘You’re a boy’” (63). She confesses that she had, at first, taken Boylan’s girlhood for granted, because her “voice is so—” (63). Faith’s failure to determine Boylan’s gender and Boylan’s diminishment in the stairwell evoke a sense of androgyny as insubstantial, which also arises in Boylan’s depiction of her androgynous adolescence in *She’s Not There*.¹⁰ Boylan reciprocates Faith’s touch: “I reached out and felt her face. My hands touched her long, silky hair” (63). The depiction of the tactile act throws into relief the tangibility of both Boylan and Faith. At the same time, the darkness of the setting obscures them; and by drawing on the boundary between seen and unseen, tangible and intangible, the scene evokes a spectral resonance.¹¹

This spectrality is central to the narrative: *I’m Looking Through You* opens with the portrayal of the ghost of a girl drowned in a river, who haunts a hotel in the vicinity of her place of death. Enmeshed in Boylan’s focus on spectrality, dead girlhood is a similarly prevalent metaphor in the narrative.¹² For example, following their encounter in the stairwell, Boylan reads Faith’s obituary in the newspaper. Crucially, Boylan cultivates an echo between her own diminishment and the motif

¹⁰ I return to this notion later in this chapter.

¹¹ Similar to my argument that wavering between tangibility and intangibility evokes the spectral, Esther Wolfe (2014) suggests that the notion of embodiment itself carries spectral resonance: “To embody means both to provide with a physical form and also to symbolize ... to embody reflects the paradoxical state of transsexual identification as both an actualized, cohesive state brought into physical form and a state of dissociation and fragmentation” (45).

¹² In the narrative, death and haunting pertain to the prevailing sense of loss: Boylan’s father, who dies when she is a young adult, and her sister, who refuses to reunite with Boylan following her transition, are not part of her life as a woman. Speaking of the drowned girl, Boylan notes that she too has lost a father and a sister (13), a notion to which I return towards the end of this chapter.

of dead girlhood: recounting the death of a girl following collision with a train, also during her adolescence, she notes, “She looked a lot like I would have, I thought, if I’d been (1) a girl and (2) dead” (44). However, while Boylan conveys the idea of her resemblance to the dead girl, she simultaneously renders herself distinct by insisting that she is not a girl¹³ and that she is not dead. The juxtaposition perhaps embodies Boylan by reinforcing her vitality, while the text equates dead girlhood with ghostliness. Elsewhere, Boylan’s portrayal of feeling both haunted and ghostly throws her diminishment into relief; her portrayal of wavering between embodiment and disembodiment indicates that the tensions of ghostliness are central to the narrative.

In particular, the narrative hinges on the conflict between seen and unseen, and present and absent. The ghosts that haunt the Coffin House are “translucent” (47), somewhat visible, half-present entities. The spirits or spectral beings that Boylan cannot see register a felt-presence: “something passed through me. I’d been speared by an icicle, stabbed by something I could not see” (31). In the narrative, portrayals of the “wrongness” of Boylan’s originally assigned gender typically centre on the absent body. As an adult, confessing that she has not been honest about her urge to live as a woman with her partner Grace, she invites readers to speculate on their own honesty in the given predicament: “Would you have looked Grace in the eyes and told her that until the day you met her you suspected you did not exist, that you had spent your whole life up to that point like some kind of sentient mist?” (208). Invoking the disjuncture between personhood (sentience) and corporeality (haze; obscurity), the conflation of bodies and vapour she depicts operates as a variation on the wrong-body model to which trans autobiographies typically adhere: for example, Raymond Thompson’s (1995) portrayal of insensate outer flesh.¹⁴ However, Boylan’s notion of the body as mist-like resonates with the title of

¹³ Unlike Thompson, who, I have argued, absents his original gender assignment by emphasising his boyhood in his text, Boylan states explicitly that she thinks of herself as having been a “boy” in childhood. Prefacing her accounts with, for example, “Back when I was a boy” (2003, 7), she fragments the story she is telling. By making explicit her former identity – “Jimmy” is the protagonist, the subject, of *I’m Looking Through You* – she deviates from the prevailing narrative, to which many trans autobiographies adhere, in which the autobiographer signifies the continuity of their gender identity, reaching back to childhood.

¹⁴ I discussed established wrong-body debates in Chapter One.

her autobiography: the mist-like body might be seen, and simultaneously seen through.¹⁵

In the stairwell, this sense of almost-presence is emblematic: Boylan and Faith are aware of one another in a limited fashion and both deal in partial truths. During their discussion, Boylan realises that Faith, a terminally ill friend of her sister, is familiar to her; and that she has, in fact, donated blood cells to Faith to aid her recovery. Faith's act of concealing her illness echoes Boylan's urge to keep her gender identity private; later, Boylan conflates Faith's illness with her own gender struggle: when Faith asks if Boylan is also ill, Boylan is ambivalent (64) and does not elaborate. Faith only divulges her illness after some time and Boylan resists revealing her own private burden to Faith, her urge to live as a girl and a woman.

Boylan's concealed urge for girlhood and womanhood and the tension that the gender identity she keeps private evokes underpin both *She's Not There* (2003) and *I'm Looking Through You* (2008). Throwing into relief her urge to conceal her trans identity, the discussion in the stairwell with Faith recalls Boylan's date with Casey, recounted in *She's Not There*: when Casey asks "did you know I was transsexual too?", Boylan reflects, "The silence that transgendered people cloak themselves with had hidden us then, even from each other" (2003, 66). Similarly, Boylan's account of meeting Samantha D'Angelo, the first trans woman she encounters, hinges on that which is left unsaid: "Listen. Do you know about me? I've..." (2003, 64). The ellipsis resonates with Faith's confusion after interpreting Boylan as "a boy", because Boylan's "voice is so—" (2008, 63). The absences Boylan invokes echo the "absent-presence" (Wolfe, 45) of the ghostliness motif underpinning *I'm Looking Through You*. And her sense of diminishment has a similarly spectral resonance: Boylan, amongst other trans autobiographers, portrays trans experience "using a language of fragmentation, displacement, and dissociation" that Wolfe posits as spectral (45). It is striking that the titles of the autobiographies, "*She's Not There*" and "*I'm Looking Through You*", emphasise the failure of Boylan's family and peers to perceive or recognise her: the phrases emphasise the notions of absence and obscurity central to Boylan's experience of gender nonconformity.

¹⁵ This sense of almost-presence underpins Boylan's other work, as its title emphasises: Wolfe (2014) argues, "the phrase 'she's not there' dictates and narrates an experience of absent-presence" (45).

This concealment of the urge for girlhood and womanhood is enmeshed in the alleged absence of transness and transition from *I'm Looking Through You*: Boylan stresses that “being transgendered” is not the focus of her work (24). The “ghosting” of her trans identity in her autobiography resonates with Terry Castle’s (1993) analysis of the disappearing (or “ghosting”) of the lesbian in film, literature and culture more widely. Castle notes that “virtually every distinguished woman suspected of homosexuality has had her biography sanitized” (5). Her project is to re-embody the lesbian figure: “to bring the lesbian back into focus, as it were, in all her worldliness, comedy, and humanity” (2). Rendering the “ghostliness” of her project explicit, she portrays her intention as an urge to “call up”, to conjure or recover “that which has been denied” (8): the presence of lesbianism is “something very palpable”, emphasised by the capacity of the lesbian to “haunt” (7).¹⁶ Crucially, she discusses her focus on the disappearing of the lesbian in spectral rhetoric: “Lesbianism had always been a ‘phantom’ in my scholarly work” (4). It is precisely the marginality of the lesbian figure, cast as ghostly, that is pertinent here, and echoes the undercurrent of tensions between absence and presence in Boylan’s work: “The lesbian is never with us ... but always somewhere else: in the shadows, in the margins ... out of sight, out of mind” (2). This sense of conflict is central to Boylan’s depiction of feeling simultaneously haunted by spectral beings, and embodying ghostliness herself. She states that, as a young person, she feels that her survival depends on becoming “something like a ghost [her]self”, that she needs to “keep the nature of [her] true self hidden” (25). By positioning her survival as implicit in her self-imposed obscurity, Boylan recalls the motif of dead girlhood

¹⁶ Castle’s suggestion that Radclyffe Hall’s *The Well of Loneliness* (1928) has influenced, or “haunts”, almost all lesbian fiction since its publication (52) resonates with the intertextual nature of texts in the trans autobiography tradition: specifically, the notion that Boylan’s works are haunted by their predecessors. Castle notes, “such rampant intertextuality can bring with it an unsettling sense of déjà vu – if not a feeling of outright ‘possession’ by the ghosts of the lesbian literary past” (64).

Might texts such as Raymond Thompson’s *What Took You so Long?* (1995), a life narrative written in conjunction with his counsellor, encompass a spectral resonance? How might the notion of the ghost-written text evoke the ghostly? In a similar sense, the events portrayed in Boylan’s *I'm Looking Through You* are not contained to the autobiography but emerge in other accounts. For example, in the *New York Times* article “Growing up in Coffin House” (2007), she introduces motifs of the autobiography, published the following year. Certain passages closely echo the autobiography, such as the unironic statement of a paranormal investigator that “this is my dead season” (unpaginated).

underpinning the narrative. And in particular, the act of concealing her gender identity, her sense of her own girlhood, renders the teenage Boylan marginal, emphasised by her presence in constricted settings, such as the stairwell and the attic of the Coffin House.¹⁷

Central to the spectral overtones of the autobiography, Boylan's depiction of embodying ghostliness to ensure the concealment of her "true" self connotes her troubled past. Erica L. Johnson (2004) notes that ghosts, when they emerge, "signify a traumatic history": spectrality insists that haunted individuals "do not otherwise have access" to traumatic events (110). In particular, ghostliness in Boylan's account symbolises her struggle to recount trans experience and the trauma of feeling gender "wrongness" during childhood and adolescence: the stairwell setting signifies Boylan's expulsion from the social group, and coupled with the verbal abuse of her peers, illuminates the torment of her adolescence. In the allusion to traumatic experience, *I'm Looking Through You* resonates with Claudine Griggs's compulsion to narrate the trauma of surgery and recovery in *Journal of a Sex Change* (1996/2004). As I stated in Chapter Two, Griggs draws on the split of her history, emphasising departure from the convention of portraying one's past as "all one river" (1998, 8); similarly, in Boylan's autobiographical works, the traumatic nature of living as her originally designated gender, with which she does not identify, contributes to the split of her own past.¹⁸

The rupture that Boylan depicts between the gender with which she identifies and the "wrongfulness" of her originally designated gender echoes the notion of

¹⁷ While I have drawn on Castle's work to explore the intersections between ghostliness and marginalised identities – and, in particular, Boylan's marginality in *I'm Looking Through You – The Apparitional Lesbian* is also pertinent to Boylan's disclosure of her sexual orientation following transition, and the shifting nature of her marriage. Common assumptions of trans identities pivot on heterosexuality. The nature of Boylan's marriage to Grace therefore further marginalises her, as Caitlyn Jenner's comment, in a 2015 episode of the docuseries *I am Cait* makes evident: "You would feel so much more feminine if you were with a guy" ("The Roadtrip: Part 1"). In a later episode, "The Dating Game", Boylan relates (to Jenner): "When I went through what you're going through right now, I wasn't sure that I was going to remain attracted to women ... but at a certain point I realised the needle of my compass kept pointing back, not only to women, but also to my wife".

In her own work, and prior to her appearance on *I am Cait*, Boylan depicts the changing nature of her sexuality: "I had always imagined that post-transition my sexuality would remain constant, that I would remain fascinated by women no matter what form my own body took. Yet somehow, without any conscious thought, the object of my desire was gently shifting" (2003, 241).

¹⁸ Later in this chapter, I explore the rupture Boylan emphasises between her past and present "selves", created by transition.

spectrality – centring on gender, race and sexuality – that Maria del Pilar Blanco and Esther Peeren (2013) interrogate.¹⁹ Blanco and Peeren argue that, within spectrality, “boundaries between normative and non-normative subject positions ... are not necessarily immediately perceptible”, creating “pervasive anxiety that things may not be as they seem” (310). Boylan’s account of adolescent intimacy focuses on the disjuncture that Blanco and Peeren propose. She recounts, for example, speaking with her girlfriend Sarah on the phone whilst dressed in “a halter top” with “grapefruit in it” (101). The scene plays on the fact that Sarah is oblivious to Boylan’s attire: when Sarah tells Boylan that her voice sounds strange, Boylan briefly worries that, although they are unable to see each other, Sarah is somehow aware that she is padding her top with fruit to cultivate a conventionally womanly figure (102).

Boylan’s depiction of haunting her own corporeality contributes to this sense of “bifurcated” being (2008, 102) that is central to her adolescence. Following the assertion that her survival, as an adolescent, depends on her own embodiment of ghostliness, Boylan proclaims, “And so I haunted that young body of mine just as the spirits haunted the Coffin House, as a hopeful, wraithlike presence otherwise invisible to the naked eye” (25). Her account reveals notions of ill-fitting embodiment: she draws on the discord between her body and her selfhood, and a sense of not belonging to or fitting in her own body, as a method of representing her experience of nonconformity. Notions of splitting and disjuncture are rife in Boylan’s portrayal of adolescence: in her account of narrowly avoiding exposure by her sister whilst dressed in typically feminine attire, she describes the girlhood she cultivates privately as “*being someone else while [her sister] wasn’t looking*” (54). This allusion to transformation emphasises notions of selfhood as multiple. And later in the narrative, when her brief, adolescent relationship is on the brink of ending, she refuses to contradict the insinuation that she has been guilty of unfaithfulness. Instead, she assigns culpability to one facet of her split self: faced

¹⁹ *The Spectralities Reader*, an anthology of works of spectral theory, approaches the move (at the end of the twentieth century) from reading ghosts and haunting as “possible actual entities, plot devices, and clichés of common parlance” to utilising them as “conceptual metaphors” that have become intrinsic to “global (popular) culture and academia alike”. Following this change, the ghost functions as an “analytical tool” (Blanco and Peeren, 1).

with Sarah's demand to know whether the person who had come between them was a peer, Boylan reflects that, "She *did* know me, if it came to that, assuming that the girl I was actually seeing behind her back was my own bifurcated self" (102). It is striking that the notion of selfhood as split or multiple that emerges in Boylan's portrayal of adolescence is in tension with the notion of singular, coherent selfhood elsewhere in the tradition of trans autobiographies.²⁰

This allusion to successive selves is enmeshed in Boylan's depiction of self-haunting: further to her assertion that her adolescence is predicated on a mode of corporeal self-haunting, towards the close of the narrative Boylan portrays an instance of haunting by her child-self, Jimmy, rendered ghostly in his return.²¹ Key to the representation of ghosts in fiction, Blanco and Peeren argue, is the question of "*who* haunts and *who* is being targeted?" (309). The narrative closes with Boylan's visit to the Kennebec River, the site of the drowned girl's demise. The ghosts of significant and intimate figures in Boylan's life haunt the liminal setting, emerging as she hovers on a bridge over the river, straddling two settings: the present, and beyond. The final ghost to appear is "Jimmy", to whom she expresses regret for preventing this self from continuing into adulthood. Crucially, Jimmy forgives her: "Why would I be mad at you? ... I think this is great" (265). As one of many invocations of self-haunting in the narrative, and specifically an invocation of self-haunting that arises towards the close, or resolution, of the narrative, the emergence of Boylan's former/child self as a ghostly entity seeks to undo the dichotomy that creates ghostliness. The portrayal of the departure of this facet of

²⁰ I explore the tension between notions of singular and multiple selfhoods later in this chapter.

²¹ The protagonist of *I'm Looking Through You* is "Jimmy", Boylan's child/adolescent self. Of the three autobiographers, Boylan is the only writer to chart her shift from former to current identity, from "Jimmy" to "Jenny", in her portrayal. In Chapter One, I argued that Thompson depicts his boy- and manhood as there all along; that the narrative shifts from boyhood to manhood, rather than girlhood to manhood, as the subtitle implies. *What Took You so Long?* even resists divulging the name Thompson was given at birth, and Jay Prosser, in *Second Skins* (1998), discusses the significance of the scene in which a medical practitioner requests Thompson's name, who refuses to provide it (109). Recounting the period of time seventeen years after she had first lived as a woman, Griggs's *Journal* is narrated only from the subject position of Claudine.

It is only because Boylan uses the names "Jimmy" and "James" to refer to her past that I, at times, refer to these names – and, typically, only to illustrate the movement into womanhood that the narrative charts, and Boylan's struggle to conceptualise her past and her present. Although Boylan refers to her "boyhood", I continue to employ "she" and "her" pronouns, even in discussions of childhood and adolescence.

the self – Jimmy turns away from her, rendered ethereal – suggests that she no longer embodies the dichotomy between her gender identity – girlhood – and the “falseness” of boyhood, the site of Blanco and Peeren’s posited anxiety that things are not as they seem. While the depiction of the ghost’s passage elsewhere suggests that Boylan departs from her own sense of ghostliness, concurrent with and symbolising her movement into contentment in adult womanhood, notions of self-haunting emerge elsewhere in the narrative.

The concluding portrayal of ghostly entities crossing the threshold into the “beyond” evokes liminality.²² In her depiction, Boylan unsettles that which is irrevocably “there”, and that which is perhaps “not there”, and this wavering between absence and presence echoes the sense of one another Boylan and Faith cultivate in the stairwell. The troubling of absence and presence is similarly pivotal to Shannon Egan’s (2008) analysis of painter and printmaker Alison Rector’s work; therefore, I explore Egan’s analysis here to deepen my reflection on these notions in Boylan’s work: specifically, to consider how the interwoven nature of absence and presence are integral to the three locations I analyse in this chapter.

Rector’s works centre on absence – specifically, the uninhabited interior – and Egan explores the complexity of emptiness, or the vacillation between absence and presence that items in the paintings imply: chairs and personal effects, for example. As Egan argues, bodily presence in Rector’s works is evoked, paradoxically, by its absence: “The rooms are strangely both vacant and occupied; the perspective encompasses the floor and ceiling, as well as a glimpse outdoors and another viewpoint inside” (416). Egan employs Maurice Merleau-Ponty’s concept of the “lived perspective” to unpack embodiment in the empty spaces in Rector’s works, arguing that “the ‘lived perspective’ in art contributes to the idea that the painting is not merely constructed around one’s eye, but rather according to how one’s

²² The transgression of thresholds and boundaries is a motif of gothic literature. Furthermore, liminality might resonate with trans significance: Sonny Nordmarken’s (2014) portrayal of shift and change in an autoethnographic essay, for example, encompasses “different kinds of genderednesses and betweennesses”; Nordmarken is “liminal” and moves “between bodies and between locations” and resides “in many bodies at once” (39). Gothic literature and trans autobiographies are further alike in their intertextual nature: as Angela Wright notes, “Gothic fiction champions digression into other stories” (2007, 119).

body engages with and is made aware of occupying space” (414). Egan’s interpretation of embodiment in Rector’s work draws precisely on the movement required of the viewer to engage with the full artwork: “The visual vectors in the space – inward, upward, outward – contribute to a kind of dynamism, that is, the feeling of being whole and bodily in the space” (414). In Rector’s *Below the Staircase*, for example, the doorways, closed and open, and the stairs themselves, convey an impression of the house that is not static, but typified by movement; and this notion of movement in an empty space creates a sense of ghostliness.

Rector’s works resonate with the depiction of liminality central to Boylan’s stairwell setting. The doorways and passages that Rector’s works commonly portray evoke the transgression of thresholds. In its title, Rector’s painting *Below the Staircase* insists on the significance of an area which the work does not portray. Instead, the staircase itself is the focal point of the piece. Rector frequently works with the disjuncture between that which is depicted in her work and that which is beyond the margins; that which can be seen, and that which cannot.²³ The hallway, the open doorways and the stairs of *Below the Staircase* evoke movement, inviting a dynamic viewing of the painting.²⁴ On the ground floor, the row of open doors implies depth and the suggestion of a presence further inside, hidden from sight, a resonance with the space beneath the stairs. This impression is emphasised by the lone closed door on the landing. The stretch of hallway to one side of the closed door glows a warm yellow, suggestive of a window through which light emerges. While the painting is rendered in muted colours, the burst of yellow brightens the landing and draws the eye. The glossy texture of the wooden flooring is reflective, and the light is cast from the open doors on the ground floor. While the painting depicts a claustrophobic interior – the dark wooden ceiling is low and constricts the space – the feeling is relieved by these bursts of light.

²³ The Centre for Maine Contemporary Art website introduces Rector’s work by stating that “Alison Rector’s poetic and quietly ordered paintings – interior and still-life – hint at vital disorder outside their windows and beneath their serene surfaces” (unpaginated).

²⁴ *Below the Staircase* portrays a similar scene to Rector’s *Approaching a Shadowy Stair*, a work that emphasises movement, positioning the viewer in a dynamic role – on the approach – and sustaining the notions of hiddenness and secrecy that appear in *Below the Staircase*. “Shadowy” recalls the obscurity central to Boylan’s stairwell setting.

The emphasis on traversing boundaries and the allusion to hidden or marginal spaces (“below” the stair, “shadowy” areas) invite a spectral reading. Similarly, Boylan’s depiction of the stairwell setting evokes spectrality by throwing into relief the transgression of thresholds. Faith asks Boylan, for example, how long it will take to hit the ground after jumping from the outside railing. Both Faith and Boylan refer to the act of jumping as going off the “edge”: Faith refers to the “edge of the railing” (62) and Boylan to the “edge of the stairs” (64). The threshold recalls Faith’s liminal position between life and death, and Boylan’s suspension between the “wrongness” of her originally assigned gender and her inner girlhood and womanhood. In the stairwell, the wavering between “there” and “not there” evokes the changes on which I focus in this thesis, pertaining to sex, gender and the body. Echoing Sonny Nordmarken (2014), whose autoethnography notes, “I live in the in-betweenness of genders and in the borderlands of oppressions” (38), Boylan’s passage into the stairwell resonates with the symbolism between shifting location and forms of change that underpins Claudine Griggs’s *Journal of a Sex Change* (1996/2004). The movement into the stairwell recalls Boylan’s fluid shifting into and from girlhood that she recounts in *She’s Not There*; similarly, Boylan’s portrayal of frequent journeying to visit her dying father, also in *She’s Not There*, symbolises the “back and forth from male to female” (70) in adulthood.

While Boylan’s presence in the stairwell hinges on diminishment, her portrayal partly evokes the materiality of the body as Boylan and Faith each become aware of the physical presence of the other. Reaching out to gain a sense of one another, the depiction of touch emphasises transformation from disembodied voices to corporeal beings.²⁵ Noting that she “smelled like white flowers” (63), Boylan emphasises Faith’s physicality. Exploring the interaction of spaces and the senses, Paul Rodaway (1994) insists on the complexity of smell: it encompasses “both immediate encounter with the environment” and, perhaps simultaneously, “a kind of virtual encounter with places in the imagination when odour memories are excited by current place experiences” (67). By drawing on Faith’s scent, Boylan

²⁵ Boylan’s account of donating blood cells to Faith embodies them both.

reminds us that the scene in the stairwell is a recalled event. While smell might “evoke rich memories”, however, it “can also evoke tantalisingly incomplete memories” (Rodaway, 73). The senses of touch and smell that arise in the scene emphasise the problematic nature of recall, and of the genre of memoir, founded on the project of remembering.²⁶ Crucially, Boylan’s insistence on the troublesome nature of memory contributes to her unsettling of the genre of autobiography that I described in the introduction: “I wondered, sometimes, whether my memories of my own life could be trusted” (2008, 140). By evoking the resonance between smell and the limits of memory, Boylan emphasises the troubling of the senses central to her account of the stairwell encounter. And in the wider narrative, the depiction of failing senses evokes spectrality: Boylan and others perceive and simultaneously fail to perceive the spectral entities the autobiography documents.²⁷ Boylan’s portrayal of an “undulating blue mist” that emerges from “the haunted room” contributes to the echo between the troubling of the senses and ghostliness (2008, 32): the mist hovers between tangible and intangible, visible and transparent; the spectral entity resonates with her sense of her own corporeality as mist-like (208).

While Boylan’s depiction of her adolescent self is informed by this notion of intangibility, the suggestion of Faith’s floral scent and the “silky” texture of her hair constructs a more corporeal impression. However, Boylan’s depiction of reading Faith’s obituary shortly after the stairwell scene ultimately disembodies her. When Boylan meets, during adulthood, the spectral being whose presence in the Coffin House has haunted her childhood, the spirit announces, “*Don’t be afraid, Jenny ... It’s only me*” (250): the spectral figure’s reassurance recalls Faith’s introduction in the stairwell.²⁸ And by referring back, and rendering Faith spectral, the text

²⁶ In the Introduction to my thesis, I noted that autobiography theorists of the 1970s and 1980s challenged assumptions of the reliability of memory when narrating one’s life. In *Reading Autobiography* (2001/2010), Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson argue that the crafting of autobiography relies on “reinterpretation of the past in the present”, a process that is active rather than passive: it does not merely involve “retrieval from a memory bank” (22). Instead, “the remembering subject actively creates the meaning of the past in the act of remembering” (22). When we narrate experiences, “we inevitably organize or form fragments of memory into complex constructions that become the stories of our lives” (22). Ultimately, life writing is “an interpretation of the past that can never be fully recovered” (22).

²⁷ Rodaway argues that the varied meanings of the term “perception” signify its complexity (10–11), which Boylan’s narrative perhaps draws on.

²⁸ Although there is an echo of Faith in this scene, this is not Faith’s ghost, as I move on to explore.

reinforces the idea of the body's eventual absence. While the stairwell scene evokes the possibility of tangibility, primarily by invoking Faith's touch, the scene ultimately diminishes Boylan's materiality and personhood: "To her I was just a shadow" (64). In the stairwell setting, Boylan's trans identity remains private: her concealment insists on adherence to the diminishment described by the titles of both autobiographies, the suggestion that she cannot be seen; the possibility of her absence.

Attic

Boylan sustains her focus on absence and presence, and material and immaterial being, in her portrayal of her sister's wedding party, which occurs later in her narrative.²⁹ During the event, Boylan dons her sister's discarded wedding gown and whilst wearing the dress is drawn to the attic by the sound of footsteps that she imagines to be ghostly. To escape the attention of her father, who is looking for her, she crouches behind an old trunk. The wedding dress, although theatrical in its excess, connotes bridal ghostliness and thus contributes to a sense of diminishment. Occupying the "[h]aunted" space (176) in the ghostly garb, and lingering amongst the discarded "junk", an old "wardrobe and the old pipe rack" (176), the portrayal emphasises her simultaneously haunted and ghostly nature.³⁰

While Boylan's solitariness in the wedding dress, amongst the neglected furniture, might recall the seclusion of Miss Havisham in *Great Expectations* (1861/1966),³¹ her refuge and subsequent concealment in the attic echo the incarceration of Bertha Mason Rochester in *Jane Eyre* (1847/2006). In particular, Boylan's portrayal of spectrality and space resonates with the exploration of the

²⁹ In this section I continue to discuss *I'm Looking Through You* (2008). In the following section, "Coffin House", my focus moves on to *She's Not There*.

³⁰ How might tensions that emerge in the attic setting engender ghostliness? In her exploration of haunting in Virginia Woolf's *Orlando*, Johnson (2004) draws on tensions "in the person of Orlando, who is at various times in her extraordinary biography dead and living, straight and queer, a historical and 'contemporary' figure—and of course male and female" (113). Boylan conveys tensions between the girlhood and womanhood with which she identifies, and her original gender assignment. Johnson cultivates a spectral reading of *Orlando* in accordance with Gordon's definition of the ghostly, hinging on "exclusions and invisibilities" (qtd. In Johnson, 113).

³¹ The parallel with Miss Havisham invites a spectral reading. Notions of decay are rife in Dickens's novel: the wedding dress resembles "grave clothes", for example, and the veil "a shroud" (55). Miss Havisham herself is diminished in her resemblance to a corpse (53, 55).

settings of *Jane Eyre* in the work of Gilbert and Gubar (1979/2000).³² The central motif of *Jane Eyre*, Gilbert and Gubar argue, is “enclosure and escape” (339): they interrogate Gateshead (specifically, the red-room), Lowood school, Thornfield (the “third storey” and the attic, which emerges as a double of the red-room), Marsh End and Ferndean precisely in terms of enclosure. The red-room, a supposedly haunted space that terrifies young Jane when she is locked inside, is paradigmatic: it symbolises “her vision of the society in which she is trapped” (340).³³ Jane “has no clear place”, which renders “the angles of the furniture” of her allotted setting, sharp, “enlarges the shadows” and “strengthens the locks on the door” (340). The red-room signifies Jane’s expulsion from the Reed family; similarly, the attic Boylan “haunts” emphasises her sense of isolation from her family: and her concealment in the attic, while she hides from her father, recalls the concealment of her urge for girlhood and womanhood. Although Boylan asserts her departure from typical trans plots in *I’m Looking Through You*, her entrapment in the attic, resonating precisely with her (trans) burden, recalls notions of being trapped in the “wrong” body. Thus, while Boylan asserts that the narrative resists documenting transness “per se”, the attic setting precisely emphasises the significance of her trans experience.³⁴

In particular, Boylan’s attic setting recalls the third-storey attic of *Jane Eyre* because both settings depict tensions that centre on identity. Bertha, whose marriage to Rochester creates conflict in the novel, embodies and conveys Jane’s desires and rage: Bertha’s presence becomes “associated with an experience (or

³² It is significant that while *I’m Looking Through You* recalls *Jane Eyre*, the autobiography resists conforming to the Bildungsroman structure that is both typical of the trans autobiography tradition and core to *Jane Eyre*. Gilbert and Gubar note that Charlotte Brontë’s novel employs “the mythic quest-plot – but not the devout substance – of Bunyan’s male *Pilgrim’s Progress*” (336). In the Conclusion to my thesis, I explore the departure of *I’m Looking Through You* from many of the conventions of trans autobiography, to which the Bildungsroman model is significant.

³³ Haunting is another narrative component both texts have in common. Gilbert and Gubar draw on the manifestation of the ghostly in the red-room, arguing that the red-room “haunts” the novel.

³⁴ Literature of the nineteenth century, most notably *Jane Eyre*, *Great Expectations* and the work of Edgar Allan Poe, “haunt” Boylan’s text. In *The Apparitional Lesbian*, Castle (1993) argues that Henry James’s *The Bostonians* (1886/1986) is haunted by Emile Zola’s *Nana* (1880/1992): “this, I am suggesting, is James’s method throughout *The Bostonians*: to insinuate *through* Zola, as it were, a host of provocative effects” (Castle, 170). Invoking Zola’s work, James evokes lesbian experience – “a ghost” in his novel – whilst remaining inexplicit: “though we can’t see what exactly is ‘going on’ between Olive and Verena, ‘it,’ nonetheless, seems to stare us brazenly in the face” (Castle, 170). Trans identity, in *I’m Looking Through You*, is similarly obscured but present, the “ghost” of the narrative.

repression) of anger on Jane's part" (360). Gilbert and Gubar argue that Jane's encounter with Bertha, "Jane's truest and darkest double" (360), is the novel's "central confrontation" in which Jane encounters "her own imprisoned 'hunger, rebellion, and rage'" (339). Bertha is resident in the attic assumed to be empty, and Boylan hides behind the trunk and cannot be seen by her father who searches for her; and these depictions of concealment echo the wavering between absence and presence that Egan (2008) argues typifies Rector's paintings. When Bertha dashes back and forth in the attic, argue Gilbert and Gubar, she recalls Jane's pacing of the third storey as Thornfield governess. The attic at Thornfield symbolises Jane's conflicted identity: it is "a complex focal point where Jane's own rationality ... and her irrationality ... intersect" (348). Moreover, the red-room "haunts" the third-storey attic, amongst various other settings in the novel. Emphasising the resonance between the red-room and the third-storey attic, Bertha's frenzied rushing recalls "that 'bad animal' who was ten-year-old Jane, imprisoned in the red-room" (361). Like the attic at Thornfield, the Coffin House attic is emblematic: the echo between Bertha's and Boylan's attic settings suggests that conflict is similarly pivotal to Boylan's portrayal of her adolescence. In the Coffin House attic, the tension between her urge to shift into girlhood and womanhood, and the "wrongness" of the gender she has been assigned, is encapsulated by the wedding dress: the excess of the dress signals the accentuation of her fear of being caught in conventionally feminine clothing. Drawing on her nonconformity, the scene conveys the idea of disjuncture that typifies Boylan's adolescence.

This sense of conflict is pivotal to Boylan's attic setting. While the spectral connotations of the attic chapter and Boylan's attempt at concealment suggest diminishment of the body, the wedding dress itself emphasises notions of excess and too-embodied being. Crouching behind the trunk – and becoming marginal – Boylan wonders whether her father can see "edging from behind it, the telltale train of the dress" (176),³⁵ simultaneously conveying a sense of the body's presence and its expanse (in the dress). The veil, specifically, embodies spectrality: at first an

³⁵ Boylan's description of the dress alludes to Poe's "The Tell-Tale Heart" (1843/2004), further literary influence on the attic setting. Moreover, the attic scene echoes the fear of discovery at the heart of Poe's story.

unknown entity, it falls across Boylan's face "like gauze, or the webs of spiders", causing her to shudder (177). At Thornfield, Bertha rends in two the veil that Jane "secretly wants to tear" (Gilbert and Gubar, 359). Just as the veil in *Jane Eyre* invokes the doubling of Bertha and Jane, and the tension between Jane's behaviour and her urges, Boylan's veil emphasises disjuncture and conflict. It is at once spectral – it engulfs Boylan, seemingly of its own accord – and ordinary: it is discovered, finally, to be "only the veil" (177). Boylan's recognition that the veil is ordinary rather than extraordinary signifies her dawning realisation that nothing of a spiritual or spectral nature is occurring in the attic. Conflict centres on the suggestion that the Coffin House is haunted and the revelation that it is not: much as the third-storey attic of Thornfield is "haunted" by Bertha Mason Rochester rather than a ghostly entity, it is Boylan, rather than a spectral being, who "haunts" the attic of the Coffin House.

As Boylan emerges from behind the old army trunk, she loses her footing and falls through the attic trapdoor: "Briefly, I flew through the air, a streak of white, an inverted angel in a downward flight" (178). Whilst theatrical, and perhaps ethereal, her descent connotes the transgression of a threshold; and her abrupt shift from one setting to another symbolises the sense of transformation pivotal to Boylan's history. However, the portrayal of her descent undermines the motif of spectrality: while traversing thresholds evokes the gothic, her ethereal flight is, rather, an awkward, adolescent tumbling. Boylan further disrupts the motif of spectrality towards the close of the narrative. Catching a glimpse of the ghostly figure who has haunted both the Coffin House and her own childhood, she describes an "older woman with long blond hair" (47), who resembles her as an adult woman.³⁶ Towards the end of the narrative, the entity greets Boylan in familiar terms that recall Faith's introduction in the stairwell (250). Boylan arrives at the dawning comprehension that the ghostly being of her encounter and the spirit who has haunted her childhood is, in fact, merely herself as an adult woman, reflected in the mirror.

³⁶ The 2008 edition of *I'm Looking Through You* features a photograph of Boylan on the back cover, fitting the description of the ghost in the narrative.

By revealing the spectral being haunting Boylan to be only herself in the mirror, the narrative subverts the mirror imagery that Jay Prosser suggests is prevalent in trans autobiographies (1998, 100). In the motif, the mirror evokes the splitting of the subject of autobiography.³⁷ Symbolic of the rupture of pre-transition and post-transition existence, Boylan's portrayal draws on the split between ghostly being and womanhood. As the quote at the start of this chapter reveals, adolescent Boylan, caught off-guard by the supposed presence of the ghost, glimpses her own astonished expression in the mirror and briefly assumes that the ghost, like her, is wearing an expression of shock. The confusion renders Boylan simultaneously ghostly – she becomes the figure “floating, translucently, in the mirror”, left “powerless” (47) by the ghostly figure's translucence – and reifies her personhood: later, the narrative reveals that the ghost was imagined all along.³⁸ Boylan's childhood and adolescence are haunted by the prospect of eventual womanhood, and of significant change from the “wrongness” of gender, rather than a ghostly being. While Boylan asserts that her narrative depicts ghostliness and resists focusing on transness, the allusion to eventual womanhood central to the mirror scene departs from ghostliness and recalls trans experience.

Towards the end of the narrative, following the shift from adolescence to adulthood, Boylan emphasises this sense of division. She asserts that she is haunted by the rupture between her womanhood and the adolescence and young adulthood typified by the “wrongness” of her originally assigned gender. Her embodiment of both womanhood and ghostliness symbolises the tension between her “male history” and her “female present” (258). In an exchange with Grace, she reveals that she conceives of herself as embodying two identities rather than one: “*I'm Jennifer Boylan. And I'm the Former James Boylan*” (259).³⁹ Boylan's

³⁷ In the previous chapters of this thesis, I discussed the significance of mirror scenes in the autobiographies of Thompson and Griggs.

³⁸ Boylan's embodiment of both diminished ghostly being and the solidity of adult womanhood recalls Castle's (1993) notion of the lesbian as disembodied yet posing the threat of return: “within the very imagery of negativity lies the possibility of recovery – a way of conjuring up, or bringing back into view” (8). In *The Apparitional Lesbian*, Castle seeks to “recarnalize” the lesbian, who has been absented: to undo the assumption of asexuality. The lesbian at once signifies disembodiment and evokes “a notion of reembodiment: of uncanny return to the flesh” (Castle, 63), recalling the tensions that typify trans experience in adolescence for Boylan.

³⁹ Throughout the narratives, Boylan emphasises uncertainty of self. Although she is critical of feminine speech that “makes every statement sound like a question” (2003, 6), for example, for

indeterminate hovering between identities invites a gothic reading, her displacement into a liminal space; and Grace suggests that a person might become “haunted” by the struggle to comprehend the past. The symbolism between the ghostliness analogy and trauma, in the narrative, similarly connotes rupture: “When a person is overwhelmed by trauma, the coherence of the life narrative is shattered ... a void enters the structure of the narrative” (Hein Viljoen and Chris N. van der Merwe 2007, 1). Grace notes that one might overcome the divide by narrating one’s history. In Chapter Two, I discussed Prosser’s suggestion that the “narrative continuity” of autobiography sutures the rupture caused by change (1998, 102).

But while trans autobiographies typically strive to overcome the split of transition and thus evoke the continuity of selfhood, narratives such as Renée Richards’s *Second Serve* (1983/1984) and Julia Grant’s *Just Julia* (1994) convey a dawning comprehension of trans identity as the embodiment of competing selfhoods.⁴⁰ Richards names her “female personality” prior to her transition “Renée”, and notes that her urge to name her “feminine side” is derived from the disjuncture between “Renée” and “the image I showed to the world” (30). She draws on psychiatric discourse to convey her early trans experience: for example, that her “split was similar to the rare cases of multiple personalities that have become familiar” (30). Similarly, in *Just Julia* (1994), Grant depicts the elision of her former identity – “George Roberts” – so that her womanhood might emerge: “George Roberts was dead, and I never wanted him to exist again – ever” (97). She enacts the destruction of “George” by destroying her own conventionally male clothing: “I spotted my evening suit hanging on the back of the door, and I flew at it and started to rip it to pieces” (97). Tearing apart her former garb, her passion conveys a return to an almost primal state: “I was going wild” (97). Might the portrayal of trans experience prior to transition that evokes competing selfhoods

which she chides her students – “Say your name, Carolyn. Don’t ask it” (17) – doubtfulness typifies her notion of herself: “I’m Jenny Boylan?” (2013, 4).

⁴⁰ In addition, Deirdre McCloskey’s autobiography *Crossing: A Memoir* (1999) portrays a succession of identities. The narrative shifts from Donald to Jane, to Dee, to Deirdre; and each section of the text is named after the persona portrayed. At times, McCloskey employs a combination of names, such as “Donald/Jane” (28), which evokes the competing nature of the identities on which the narrative concentrates. Furthermore, tension hinges on her use of the male pronoun whilst referring to herself, for example, as Jane and Dee (30).

indicate the influence of Lili Elbe's *Man into Woman* (1933/2004) on these narratives? Elbe introduces her trans identity by asserting that "Lili is no longer content to share her existence with me. She wants to have an existence of her own ... she rebels more vigorously every day" (20). The conflict that the two personas cultivate prompts Elbe's transition. They cannot coexist, and Lili is the stronger of the two: "Whereas he felt tired and seemed to welcome death, Lili was joyous and in the freshness of youth" (24). Ultimately, Elbe's former self withdraws so that Lili might emerge: "His ultimate hope was to die in order that Lili might awaken to a new life" (24). Richards's account of competing personas plays with Elbe's notion of Lili's dominance: "Dick would recede, and Renée would come forward" (31). While these narratives evoke the disjuncture of discarding one's "wrongful" self, the portrayal of felt-gender, present since early childhood, provides a sense of continuity; specifically, that while one may have changed one's mode of living and morphology, one's identity remains unchanging.

Although Boylan emphasises early notions of gender "wrongness" in both *She's Not There* and *I'm Looking Through You*, she resists persistent claims of "rightful" girlhood and womanhood, suggesting departure from the tradition and heightening tensions with conventional modes of conveying trans experience. Virginia Woolf's *Orlando* (1928/1998), a work I explore later in the chapter for its resonance with the tensions of androgyny, centres on "shifting" subjectivity: Orlando "lives through centuries, undergoes a sex change halfway through the narrative, and loves both men and women" and "is a transgressive figure who recognizes no borders or rules of time, gender or sexuality and fails to conform to any pre-established pattern" (Stef Craps 2006, 178). The "shifting" nature of Orlando's subjectivity ensures the failure of the biographer to locate – or cultivate – coherent continuity of character.⁴¹ In *I'm Looking Through You*, Boylan's suspension between "Jennifer"

⁴¹ Noting the tensions in the character of Orlando, Johnson, in "Giving Up the Ghost" (2004), suggests that "one of Woolf's central concerns is clearly that of building continuity into Orlando's character that cuts across the boundaries of the gendered body" (113). The novel aspires to continuity, in part, via "Orlando's elemental relationship to national space"; Orlando "remains both constant and English" (113). Chris Coffman (2010) argues that *Orlando* resists recounting "desire for transition" as the "antecedent of a process of change"; rather, "the novel sets multiple explanations of Orlando's transformation in motion", and in doing so, "*Orlando* refuses to require narrative coherence or the positing of an essential gender identity to make sense of its protagonist's subjectivity" (8).

and “the Former James” similarly challenges notions of continuity that are central to trans autobiographies. In the previous chapter, I argued that opposing the idea of her trans life as singular and continuous (unbroken), Griggs (1998) theorises her history as cleaved into parts. Boylan’s confession of the suffering created by the rupture and the presence of ghostliness and haunting in the narrative adhere to Griggs’s emphasis on division: both writers depart from the effort to cultivate narratives that neatly encapsulate changes – pertaining to sex, gender and the body – and their effects.

The tensions of the attic scene – between the gender with which Boylan identifies and the “wrongness” of her originally assigned gender; between ghostliness and personhood; and between diminishment and (too-) embodied being – culminate in her portrayal of her embodiment of two, perhaps clashing, identities. The conflict between former and current selves inhibits the possibility that portraying her history might suture the rupture of transition; and while Boylan’s confession to Grace that she embodies division hints at a move towards overcoming the disjuncture, her residual doubting of her own coherence prohibits the notion of continuity.

Coffin House

An image of the Coffin House prefaces *I’m Looking Through You*, and its presence at the beginning of the narrative emphasises the significance of the setting.⁴² The

The shifting subjectivity of the protagonist, and the challenge to identify continuity of personhood, resonates with the precarity of the genre of the text. In *Auto/biographical Discourses* (1994), Laura Marcus notes the disjuncture between the text’s description of itself as a biography and its classification as fiction. Woolf feared that describing her novel as a biography, an act of “fun” and “transgression”, would culminate in negative reception by the reading public, and the struggle of booksellers to categorise the text (Marcus, 116–117). *Orlando*’s transgression of genre recalls the fictional conventions of Boylan’s *I’m Looking Through You*, a work in which assumptions of a truthful account are central.

⁴² In a blog post, “The Fall of the House of Boylan” (2011), Boylan notes that the Coffin House haunts her work: “My agent Kris Dahl says that the Devon house has appeared in virtually every single thing I’ve ever written”. The setting arises “in various guises in the stories in *Remind Me to Murder You Later*; it’s the model for the abandoned high school in *The Planets*. It’s the castle in the Falcon Quinn series, and of course it stars as itself in my memoir” (unpaginated). The title of the blog post evokes Poe’s short story “The Fall of the House of Usher” (1839/2004), inviting a spectral reading. Furthermore, the Coffin House setting has a bearing on her own character: “The places we live in make us who we are. I grew up in this rambling, elegant, slightly eccentric house, a place full of books and creaking stairs, empty rooms that no one knew what to do with; a living room with a warm fireplace” (2011, unpaginated).

name of Boylan's childhood home introduces the motif of ghostliness that underpins the narrative. The Coffin House, however, evokes more than ghostliness and haunting. As I shift my focus from *I'm Looking Through You* (2008) to *She's Not There* (2003), I depart from concentrating primarily on ghostliness.⁴³ However, I sustain my focus on the depiction of marginality, diminishment and – in particular – tensions central to Boylan's account of adolescence in both texts. As an adolescent, whilst living in the Coffin House, Boylan dresses privately in her sister's and mother's clothes. The sense of conflict between the girlhood with which she identifies and the "wrongfulness" of her originally assigned gender is central to her portrayal of privately dressing in conventionally feminine attire. This tension is pivotal to the Coffin House setting and resonance arises between Boylan's concealed urge for girlhood and her depiction of the house as suggestive of solitariness and hiddenness: "On the third floor, next to my room, there was one room that was kept locked" (2003, 29). Similarly, *Jane Eyre's* Thornfield, argue Gilbert and Gubar, is more "metaphorically radiant" than "most gothic mansions" (347); Thornfield is, rather, "the house of Jane's life, its floors and walls the architecture of her experience" (347). Drawing from Gilbert and Gubar's notion of *Jane Eyre's* Thornfield as significant beyond its gothic connotations, I ask: how might Boylan's portrayal of the Coffin House – specifically, in *She's Not There* – embody significant tensions of Boylan's trans adolescence?⁴⁴

The tensions central to Boylan's depiction of her adolescence in *She's Not There* centre on her portrayal of androgyny. The notion of the "androgynous" is conventionally assumed to describe embodiment of the masculine and the feminine. Boylan's portrayal of adolescence emphasises her girlish appearance, suggesting that her "shoulder-length blond hair" (32) facilitates an easy movement

⁴³ The setting of the Coffin House arises in both *She's Not There* and *I'm Looking Through You*. While the haunting motif – particularly in the Coffin House setting – is more prominent in *I'm Looking Through You*, in the chapter "After the Bath" (*She's Not There*), Boylan implies that the Coffin House was ghostly: "At night I'd lie in bed, waiting to hear footsteps on the other side of the wall, a door opening softly" (29). As Wolfe (2014) suggests, in its title, *She's Not There* indicates absence and the spectral (45).

⁴⁴ In Chapter Two, I explored how Mt. San Rafael Hospital in Trinidad, Colorado, embodies specifically trans significance, in Griggs's *Journal*.

into girlhood: “Hey, you’re cute ... You look like my sister” (37).⁴⁵ Donning her mother’s and sister’s clothing when she is at home by herself in the Coffin House accentuates her girlish appearance. Her seamless shift into girlhood renders her appearance unexceptional: “I put on a peasant skirt and a paisley top. The sad thing was how normal I looked in this” (32). Here, the narrative proposes a fluid movement between genders, rather than a distinct transformation from one mode of being to another. Boylan emphasises that “boyhood”, however, is ill-fitting: “As a boy I looked thin and startled. As a girl I just looked like a hippie” (32). She stresses that she performs “boyhood” at this age by persistently “imitating the person I would be if I’d actually wound up well-adjusted” (32). While she begrudges “boyhood”, the narrative conveys a sense of her adolescent girlhood as unremarkable. The fluidity of shifting into and from girlhood signals a variation on the conventions of early notions of the “wrong” body and eventual transformation.

Although I insist on the significance of Boylan’s androgyny, however, this is not a term that she employs to describe her own adolescence. Noting its absence in Boylan’s account, I am wary of using the term in my analysis,⁴⁶ and particularly so because the concept of androgyny embodies varied significance, suggesting tensions within the term itself. As Tracy Hargreaves (2005) notes, during the twentieth century, “different discourses – literary, sexological, psychoanalytic, sociological, feminist” have drawn on androgyny (3). Heralding wide-ranging possibilities, and notably the notion of unity, androgyny is central to second-wave

⁴⁵ In my discussion of the Coffin House setting, I draw on Boylan’s portrayal of fluid movement into and from girlhood. Early drafts of this chapter referred to “gender fluidity”, although I began to resist this compound after noting that Boylan’s identity, even in adolescence, perhaps does not resonate with the gender fluid identity. For some, gender fluidity encompasses refusal to conform to fixed gender roles (Julia Serano 2007/2016, 346). These notions of gender fluidity are perhaps at odds with Boylan’s portrayal of gender during adolescence. Choosing instead to concentrate on androgyny, I reflected on whether gender fluidity and androgyny might encompass similar significance. Androgyny, I supposed, is typically employed to describe appearances, while gender fluidity pertains more precisely to identity. The tensions that androgyny and fluidity evoke are, perhaps, pertinent to the chapter. Although I avoid discussing notions of “gender fluidity”, I continue to theorise Boylan’s account in terms of fluidity and shifting.

⁴⁶ Exploring androgyny provokes complexities. However, I employ and explore androgyny because the account of adolescence *seems* to resonate with the androgynous. The term encompasses a variety of meanings, which engenders tension. Tracy Hargreaves (2005) notes that androgyny has been criticised “as a too generalised identity that effaces the sexual politics of specific embodied female-masculine identities” (3).

feminism.⁴⁷ Yet the meaning of the term fluctuates depending on the discourse in which it arises: “Even a brief glance at books and articles written between the 1960s and 1990s tells us that androgyny was a protean concept whose function shifted according to the discourse that constructed it” (Hargreaves, 97). During the second wave of feminism, for example, the term connoted both bisexuality and asexuality, and described individuals who embrace, and those who reject, both masculine and feminine qualities (Hargreaves, 97). I am hesitant to adopt the term precisely because its scope is broad: androgyny is often criticised for its capacity to “obliterate sexual difference” and for supporting “the gendered categories” it seeks “to dismantle” (Hargreaves, 11). Boylan’s portrayal of adolescence, however, evokes tentativeness, and thus the instability of the concept of “androgyny” is perhaps fitting in the context of her sense of uncertainty. Indeed, discussions of androgyny frequently pivot on its transient nature; Boylan stresses mutable notions of the body during adolescence.

While depictions of androgyny might convey tensions around the embodiment of the masculine and the feminine, Jan Morris’s *Conundrum* (1974) casts androgyny prior to transition as “a suspension between, rather than a union of, male and female identities” (Hargreaves, 11). In Chapter Two, I argued that androgyny in Morris’s account is transient and that by the end of the autobiography androgyny has given way to unambiguous womanhood. Hargreaves suggests that, for Morris, androgyny is “a private identity” (11). However, while Boylan’s urge for girlhood and womanhood remains private during her adolescence, her androgyny is, rather,

⁴⁷ Carolyn Heilbrun’s *Toward a Recognition of Androgyny* (1964/1993), which examines androgyny in myth, in the novel, and within the Bloomsbury group, is central to discussions of androgyny during the second wave of feminism. However, Heilbrun does not sustain a link between feminism and androgyny. In *Androgyny in Modern Literature*, Hargreaves states that Heilbrun’s position is odd, considering the time of the publication of her work. Following the reception of *Toward a Recognition of Androgyny*, Heilbrun claimed she had been misunderstood by readers who had interpreted her focus on androgyny and feminism as interrelated, and that the text analysed androgyny primarily as central to “creation myths” (Hargreaves, 98–99).

Heilbrun’s work is consistently informed by the assumption that androgyny is a liberating ideal: the crux of Heilbrun’s argument is the desire to move away from “sexual polarization and the prison of gender” towards “a world in which individual roles and the modes of personal behaviour can be freely chosen” and that her ideal “is best described by the term ‘androgyny’” (ix–x). And yet she acknowledges that it is impossible to discuss androgyny without referring constantly back to masculinity and femininity. Androgyny in her work relates to a kind of “wholeness”. This is in stark contrast to Rees’s pursuit of “wholeness” in *Dear Sir or Madam* (1996), in which he depicts aversion to the appearance of ambiguous gender.

embodied and therefore evident. Later in the narrative, and during adulthood, a form of androgyny emerges as central to her straddling of genders after beginning hormone therapy. Just as Boylan's shift into girlhood is seamless, the narrative permits the possibility of a fluid movement into and from womanhood: "I had been given a rare and precious gift, to see into the worlds of both men and women for a time and to be able to travel almost effortlessly between them" (153). She employs her son's term "boygirl" (152) to describe her (temporary) embodiment of the attributes of manhood and womanhood.⁴⁸ This period of adulthood pivots on fragmentation, as Boylan's shifts "back and forth" (70) suggest: she notes that, whilst at graduate school, she is "living as a woman about half the time" (70). The shifts into and from womanhood fragment her notion of herself. Following her decision to transition, the narrative depicts the process of changing appearance, early in the process, as a movement in three phases: "Hey, that guy looks a little weird ... Hey, that person looks *really* weird ... Whoa, that chick is ugly!" (152).⁴⁹ At the centre of these shifts – "that person" – is the "suspension between" genders evident in Morris's autobiography. Crucially, the phases Boylan draws on signify eventual departure from genderless being.

Portrayals of androgyny that arise in accounts such as Boylan's and Morris's are typically confined to a specific phase of one's life, or phase of one's transition. In *She's Not There*, androgyny chiefly informs adolescence, established as a phase of shifting subjectivity even beyond gender, and the suspension between the subjectivities of "Jennifer" and "the Former James". This notion of androgyny as

⁴⁸ Like "boygirl", the name that Boylan's sons use to refer to her, "Maddy", combines two roles: "Mommy" and "Daddy" (2003, 159).

⁴⁹ Boylan's summary of the early period of her transition – "Hey, that person looks really weird" – is predicated on external perspective, indicating the significance of the social dimension of change(s) in the narrative. Boylan devotes a chapter of *She's Not There* to the letter she sends to colleagues, disclosing her transition, and the responses she receives to the announcement. The chapter is underpinned by her urge to convince her colleague and friend Richard Russo to recognise her womanhood as authentic. In coming to terms with his friend's transition, Russo states that he struggles with Boylan's assertion that "Jenny is not a choice – that she just naturally *is*", which he does not find "convincing" (182). He asserts that Boylan's claim to be "Jenny" (rather than "Jim", as Russo had originally known her) strikes "too many ... wrong notes" (182). While *She's Not There* focuses on the "wholeness" of being recognised as a woman by others, her surgical procedure, while documented, is of lesser significance in the narrative. By singing to herself, in the operating room, "Everything's Coming Up Roses" and "I'm Gonna Wash That Man Right Out of My Hair" (231), she reduces the seriousness of her impending surgery; by doing so, the significance of the procedure is diminished.

impermanent and abandoned following transition is different to portrayals of androgyny in works such as Woolf's *Orlando*. Lisa Rado notes that "'androgyny' has become virtually synonymous with 'Virginia Woolf'" (1997, 147).⁵⁰ Protagonist Orlando embodies conventionally male and female traits, recalling notions of androgyny central to ancient myth.⁵¹ Androgyny in the novel centres on "a dynamic and fluctuating quality of identity that liberates the self from any supposed determinism of the body" (Craps, 184). I have argued that Boylan departs from convention by resisting persistent claims to "rightful" girlhood and womanhood: however, her eventual move into womanhood and the summary of her movement in three phases resist the mutable quality of identity that emerges in Woolf's *Orlando*.⁵²

The vagueness of "androgyny" echoes the imprecise nature of "ambiguity" that is central to Mark Rees's autobiography *Dear Sir or Madam*. As I discussed in Chapter One, Rees portrays disdain for ambiguity, his own and that of others: specifically, he resents his ambiguous look before transition, and fears lingering or persistent ambiguity following transition. While "ambiguity", like "androgyny", embodies varied resonances, in Rees's narrative it typically describes an old-fashioned and unfeminine appearance, a "frump" (64). In *Dear Sir or Madam*, Rees emphasises his urge to shift from ambiguity to evident manhood. Boylan charts a similar departure from androgyny: whilst the ability to move seamlessly between boyish and girlish looks is central to Boylan's portrayal of adolescence, and the suspension between the attributes of her originally assigned gender and those of

⁵⁰ Rado notes that Heilbrun "pronounced Virginia Woolf the prophet of sexual liberation", but that Nancy Topping Bazin and Elaine Showalter took a more critical stance on Woolf's notion of androgyny (148). Craps notes that Showalter "accuses Woolf ... of betraying feminism" by pursuing androgyny and moving "away from the field of political contestation" (183).

⁵¹ Notions of androgyny that had been central to discussions of myth and literature previously were revised in the late 1960s and 1970s. Aristophanes's myth in Plato's *Symposium* had been the iconic or archetypal account of androgyny: it "has been influential in representations of androgynous unity and sexuality throughout the twentieth century" (Hargreaves, 4).

⁵² In *Second Skins*, Prosser dismisses the relevance of *Orlando* to a study of trans autobiographies, because the realities of transition are absent in the text (168). Coffman argues that "Prosser's strong preference for realism over other forms of fiction" – which his neglect of *Orlando* demonstrates – "limits the scope of transgender studies to only those texts that present a teleological narrative that tracks the protagonist's identification of and process of acting upon a long-held, internal sense of gender identity". However, "not all forms of transsexual subjectivity follow Prosser's model" (5). While debates on Woolf and androgyny might be considered "*passee*" (Rado, 148), I draw on *Orlando* here precisely to evoke the troublesome nature of the concept of androgyny.

womanhood typifies the early period of hormone therapy, these states of being are displaced by her ultimate move into adult womanhood. While Boylan's depiction of the departure from androgyny, and specifically from the mode of "boygirl" being, signifies the resolution of *She's Not There*, the haunting motif of *I'm Looking Through You* perhaps inhibits neat conclusion.⁵³

While my analysis of the Coffin House setting has centred on the tensions pivotal to Boylan's adolescence, the sense of diminishment – in particular, arising from her depiction of androgyny – is similarly central to the setting. Hargreaves notes that, conventionally, the androgyne is "disembodied" and "leaves everything to the imagination" (6).⁵⁴ Mapping the body proves challenging in this context. However, the Coffin House setting evokes shifts between diminishment – arising from both androgyny and ghostliness – and solid presence. Recounting an evening with school peer Onion, Boylan juxtaposes her own androgynous body with Onion's "womanly" form. In the narrative, Boylan concentrates on Onion's body rather than her own: beyond the depiction of her thinness and her bohemian appearance, she absents her own body from the account. By contrast, having undressed shortly after arriving at the Coffin House, Onion's nakedness is central to her portrayal: "Her breasts lay there before me, veined and amazing. The nipples were a soft pink. Her hair fell over one shoulder" (39–40). The account emphasises a sense of awe at the spectacle of the body, and Boylan's reverence towards Onion and towards the fact of nakedness in front of her. The draping of Onion's hair evokes a portrait-like quality, a motif to which the narrative later returns: "She looked perfect, like a painting by Degas" (44). Boylan recounts her urge to resemble Onion, and her reiterated desire that "Onion were a mirror instead of a human" (40) reinforces the centrality of Onion's body to the chapter, and her objectification.⁵⁵ Boylan's idea of

⁵³ I explore how portrayals of haunting and ghostliness might inhibit resolution in the conclusion to this chapter.

⁵⁴ Here, Hargreaves is discussing Jeffrey Eugenides's *Middlesex* (2002).

⁵⁵ Boylan's desire to see Onion's body reflected back to her as her own emerges precisely from her own body: "she looked immortal ... The vision of her filled me with a profound, aching sorrow" (44). Onion shifts from bodily to the insubstantial nature of a reflection. The narrative insists on Boylan's capacity to embody dejection. The two of them waver between solid and insubstantial, recalling the wavering between absence and presence that typified the portrayal of Faith and Boylan in the stairwell.

Onion centres on the body: “I didn’t know a lot about Onion. She was very blond, and she was missing one finger, the pinkie on her left hand. And she did boys” (33). Despite Boylan’s longing to become like Onion, the text emphasises that Onion’s chief purpose is to stifle Boylan’s urge for girlhood and womanhood by providing sexual intimacy.

Ultimately, however, Onion’s drunkenness prohibits sex. Boylan’s portrayal of Onion emphasises the sense of Onion’s body as deficient. For example, in Boylan’s depiction of Onion, her missing finger is her defining attribute: when she arrives at the Coffin House, she is described as “a girl with nine fingers” (36). Strengthening this notion of bodily deficiency, the account reveals that Onion’s naked body is a site of violence: “On her right shoulder was a blue-and-green bruise the size of a man’s fist” (39). The allusion to abuse, the sex act that is prohibited by vomiting and the insinuation that visiting a peer for sex is fairly common practice for her – “You’re my last stop” (38) – emphasise stark contrast between Onion and Boylan, who is sober to Onion’s drunkenness, unmarked by violence and “thin” to Onion’s fleshy physicality. Boylan juxtaposes her own androgynous body with Onion’s more typically womanly body, with “lovely round buttocks” and “smooth shoulders” (39). Boylan’s flat chest, furthermore, accentuates Onion’s breasts: “I felt her fingers trace my ribs” (39). The fact of Onion’s nakedness, when Boylan discovers her in the bath, is striking in contrast to Boylan’s fully-dressed presence. Again, Onion’s breasts are the focus of the passage: “One hand was raised in the air. I could just see the vague shadow of her pink nipple at the upper perimeter of the towel” (44). Onion’s attempt to cover her body emphasises her recent nakedness and throws into relief the illicit nipple that she has allowed to escape the confines of the towel. Later that evening, after Onion has left the Coffin House, Boylan notices that she has left behind her diaphragm. Thus, the closing passages of the account emphasise that Boylan’s representations of Onion centre on sex and the body.

While Onion’s fleshy womanliness is central to the scene, Boylan’s comparative diminishment – she is “thin” (32) and the few details describing her own body are obscured by her focus on Onion – suggests dissatisfaction with the body. Her account thus adheres to conventional wrong-body notions. While the portrayal of Boylan’s adolescence in *She’s Not There* conveys her fluid movement into girlhood,

facilitated by the androgyny of the body – or, her contentment with the femininity of her body – she simultaneously resents, and feels “ever-present exasperation” (31) for, her body.⁵⁶ Boylan insists on the ill-fitting nature of both the Coffin House and certain feminine clothing: noting that the family had “been living in the Coffin House only for a couple of years now, and it still didn’t quite feel like home” (28), Boylan recalls the body that does not fit certain conventionally feminine attire. Her reflection that “It would have been a great relief to have been a person in life whose body fitted into [Onion’s clothes]” (41) evokes her urge for Onion’s conventional womanliness; and she recounts wrestling with her urge to don Onion’s discarded clothes: “There was no reason I shouldn’t put on her stuff ... But I didn’t do it” (41). While her reticence might stem from politeness, it also suggests that conventionally feminine clothes shape her notion of the “womanly” bodies required to fit them, to which her own morphology does not, yet, adhere: “I closed my eyes, thinking. If you have breasts, I thought, they go right in here. If you’re a girl, you wear one of these and you probably don’t even think about it, it’s just what you do” (41). When Boylan contemplates Onion’s bra – “I sat on the bed and picked up the bra. I held it in my lap for a moment. It was warm” (41) – the bra resonates with the body that has previously filled its contours; the “right” body, to which Boylan aspires.

Boylan’s notion of Onion’s clothing and the depictions of conventionally feminine attire elsewhere in the narrative insist on her own diminishment. Whilst at graduate school, she begins appearing as a woman in public, moments that she describes as “frightening” experiences: “The first time I ever went outside wearing a skirt and knit top, I thought I was going to perish from fear” (70). The sense of disintegration intrinsic to her use of “perish” contributes to her depiction of fragility. In particular, her account centres on the notion that conventionally feminine clothing exposes the body: “The world felt raw and intimidating; the cold wind howled on my bare legs” (70). Her portrayal renders the woman’s body

⁵⁶ The narrative reiterates the fact of Boylan’s easy journey into girlhood, in which clothing accentuates her femininity: “Onion was wearing blue jeans and a tight black top. It was definitely something I’d have looked good in” (36). Boylan’s body is not a site of dissatisfaction in this context, which perhaps absents the body.

vulnerable, in contrast to the “shield” of maleness (140), and emphasises that she is more in tune to how her body feels as a woman. The sensitivity of the body evoked by Boylan’s depiction of exposure in conventionally feminine clothes echoes notions of vulnerability elsewhere in trans accounts: Morris’s portrayal of hormone therapy in *Conundrum* (1974), for example, draws on excoriation symbolic of departing “maleness” (101) – “a stripping away of the rough hide in which the male person is clad” (100–101) – leaving behind a female core. Like Boylan, Morris denotes that which is removed as a “shield” of maleness. The “shield” or outer layer refers not to “body hair, nor even the leatheriness of the skin, nor all the hard protrusion of muscle” but to “something less tangible too ... a kind of unseen layer of accumulated resilience” that “deadens the sensations of the body” (101). Like Boylan, Morris is present in her woman’s body in a way that her notion of the body prior to transition inhibits. Without the “armour” of her previous morphology, she feels simultaneously “physically freer and more vulnerable” (101).

The depiction of feeling covered or exposed by certain kinds of clothing that arises in *She’s Not There* resonates with Sara L. Crawley’s exploration of clothing and identity in the autoethnographic essay “The Clothes Make the Trans: Region and Geography in the Experiences of the Body” (2008). Crawley examines the impact of the warm climate of South Florida on butch identity: “Most days I am reminded of the female body I have. I cannot hide it. It’s too hot!” (367). Crawley struggles to claim a trans identity, and the complexity is emphasised by the inability to cover up the body that, Crawley suggests, conforms to femaleness. Because clothing is “essential” to performing gender and to “the possibility of being taken seriously in one’s chosen gender by others” (372), Crawley notes that the clothing that the warm climate necessitates prevents solidarity with others from the LGBT community, or adherence to the archetypal image of the butch identity: “My body was exposed by necessity. That is why I never identified with the prototypical urban dyke or trans men of New York and San Francisco so everpresent in glossy LGBT magazines” (370). Drawing on a recent drop in temperature, Crawley introduces a shift in the experience of the body: “I’m feeling covered in clothes and very butch” (366). In cooler weather, Crawley’s experience of the body changes: Crawley feels “stronger, less curvy, more masculine” (370). The cool climate Boylan portrays

evokes the notion of rawness when she is dressed in women's clothing. In Boylan's autobiography, women's clothing emphasises notions of the diminished body, in contrast to the strength and solidity facilitated by conventionally masculine clothing in Crawley's account.

Yet the sense of feeling physically present in the body during the emboldening of manhood, specifically, arises in accounts such as Max Wolf Valerio's (2006) portrayal of transition. Valerio documents "an awakening recognition" in which "pores have become larger, opened up ... skin must be getting rougher" (12). As a consequence of his changes, he gains knowledge of how "biological masculinity" feels: "It's another world, a shift of consciousness" (13). Moreover, while narratives such as Morris's and Boylan's insist on the "shield" of manhood and the fragility of womanhood, Loren Cameron's *Body Alchemy* (1996) disrupts this dichotomy. Confessing his own urge for size and strength, Cameron concludes, "Sometimes I wonder if I'll ever feel big enough. I wonder if I'll ever feel safe in this body" (177). Cameron's depiction resonates with Thompson's aspiration towards a coherent body capable of warming him, recounted in his autobiography.

It is important to note that Boylan's depiction of vulnerability and fright emerges from her experience of venturing into public whilst wearing women's clothes, prior to transition. Following transition, she overcomes her sense of diminishment in women's clothing. By referring to the change in her measurements towards the denouement of the narrative – "When I began hormones, my measurements were 35-30-36. A year later, they were 37-30-38" (2003, 138) – Boylan emphasises her shift into womanly morphology. Her passage into "rightful" embodiment, the urge for which underpins her encounter with Onion, signifies a form of narrative resolution in *She's Not There*.

Conclusion: Solidity

The three settings I have focused on in this chapter – the stairwell, the attic, and the Coffin House – evoke conflict and diminishment, central to Boylan's depiction of transness and nonconformity in adolescence. Boylan hides in the marginal settings of the stairwell and the attic, symbolising the failure of her family and peers to bear witness to the girlhood with which she identifies. The depiction of her embodied

ghostliness emphasises her diminishment. It is striking that the motif of ghostliness in *I'm Looking Through You* evokes damaged familial bonds. Boylan compares the fate of the drowned girl, the first ghost of the narrative, to her own family dynamic: "Just like that girl ... I'd lost my father and my sister, too" (13). By asserting that until the day she met her wife she had doubted her own existence, and depicting her own presence as mist-like, Boylan creates a sense of dissatisfaction in the body prior to transition. In *She's Not There*, portrayals of androgyny and the juxtaposition between Onion's fleshy physicality and Boylan's thinness evoke the complexities of this specifically trans diminishment of the body. Boylan's depiction of diminishment resonates with portrayals in other trans autobiographies: early notions of diminishment in many trans autobiographies – in childhood, adolescence and young adulthood – establish the move towards solidity and substance that transition creates. A striking example occurs in Morris's *Conundrum* (1974), which begins in a mode of diminishment: in her depiction of childhood, she recounts her hope that she would eventually become "as solid as other people appeared to be", a desire that is countered by her fear that perhaps she "was meant always to be a creature of wisp or spindrift, loitering in this inconsequential way"; that she is doomed to remain an "intangible" being (13).

In this chapter, I argued that Boylan's portrayal of adolescence centres on a variety of tensions: in particular, conflict arises between her gender identity that she keeps private and her sense of "wrongness" in her originally assigned gender. In the Coffin House, Boylan's contentment in her fluid shift to girlhood and her "exasperation" with the "wrongful" body conflict. The stairwell and attic settings evoke spectrality centring on the tension between the seen and the unseen, and the present and the absent. The depiction of rupture between Boylan's gender identity, her inner girlhood, and her "wrongful" assigned gender, and between her present and former selves, create ghostliness. And portrayals of self-haunting, such as the appearance and subsequent dissolution of her child-self, "Jimmy", towards the close of the narrative, emphasise notions of splitting and disjuncture that are central to her account of adolescence. In the attic setting, the resemblance Boylan bears to *Jane Eyre's* Bertha Mason Rochester denotes Boylan's own sense of conflict. In this scene, the suggestion of the extraordinary – that Boylan is a spectral

being – and the revelation that the recounted events are, rather, ordinary – that Boylan “haunts” the attic, rather than a ghostly entity – creates conflict. Boylan’s recognition of the ghost in the mirror as herself as an adult woman replicates the tension of the attic setting.

In the previous chapters, I explored the autobiographers’ aspirations towards the eventual state of contentment and comfort in the body, in which the body reflects gender identity. To conclude this chapter, I ask instead: how might contentment in the body emerge in Boylan’s autobiographical works? In *I’m Looking Through You*, she seeks to overcome the insubstantial nature of the body and the tensions that typify her adolescence: she eventually departs from her child/adolescent self “Jimmy”, and the spectral dissolution of “Jimmy” signifies her own passage into solidity. The move into a form of solid corporeality is a key change in the text: as Wolfe argues, autobiographies encompass “a literal act of ‘remembering’ the dissociated, displaced self” (49). This pertains to *I’m Looking Through You* most pertinently, Wolfe suggests, when Boylan declares, at the end of her narrative, “Against all odds, I had become solid” (249). Including this assertion in the title of my thesis, I seek to stress its significance to my reading of change in the autobiographies. While Boylan conveys mutability and fluidity during adolescence, the narrative discards these indeterminate states – and androgyny itself – in her final move to womanhood. In this chapter, I have argued that by ultimately departing from fluidity and androgyny, Boylan’s autobiographical works diverge from the ongoing nature of androgyny in Woolf’s *Orlando*. Rado argues that *Orlando* sustains the tensions that inform the protagonist, and she seeks to trouble literary criticism that perceives the end of *Orlando* as “an empowering release of imaginative jouissance, a celebration of androgynous fusion” (158) by insisting on the “cultural expectations and demands” that restrict Orlando (159). Rado suggests that the tensions of the novel’s ending centre on the criticism Orlando receives for her work “The Oak Tree”, on childbirth that emerges as “a kind of homage or sacrifice to the demands of the Age”, on self-fragmentation of the division of mind and body, and on Orlando’s nightmares (159–161). Rado explores the novel’s “myth of wholeness” (161), and Orlando’s aspiration to “a solid, stable, singular identity”

which is “elusive” (161); by the end of the narrative, Orlando is “alienated from her own body and all external reality” (162).

While *I’m Looking Through You* and *Orlando* differ in their approach to the ongoing nature of androgyny, and the tensions androgyny engenders, Boylan adheres to this sense that the “stable” and “singular” identity is “elusive”. Boylan’s struggle to conceptualise her past and her present selves, and her emphasis on notions of rupture, unsettle her return “home” to the body. Her confession that she struggles to comprehend the division between her past and present selves follows her claim that “Against all odds, [she] had become solid”; by drawing on her sense of feeling split *after* her allusion to solidity, *I’m Looking Through You* invokes the possibility of the ongoing state of haunted being: specifically, that Boylan is “haunted” by the dichotomy of her history. Furthermore, Boylan’s recognition of herself as the ghost in the mirror insists on simultaneous solidity and transparency – personhood and ghostliness – which disrupts the move into solidity precisely from the insubstantial body that *I’m Looking Through You* seeks to depict. In Chapter One, I argued that Thompson unsettles the central transformation his autobiography depicts by emphasising his boyhood even in earliest childhood. In Chapter Two, my argument that Griggs emphasises the difference between cis and trans femaleness, and depicts her own journey into “sex-changed existence” (1996/2004, 27), developed my exploration of the unsettling of significant changes underpinning the core autobiographies. Like *What Took You so Long?*, *I’m Looking Through You* similarly disrupts its central change, the transformation from ghostly to solid. In *I’m Looking Through You*, the ongoing nature of haunting and ghostliness in the narrative prohibits the return “home” to the body by suggesting the diminishment of the body. *She’s Not There* draws on various transient shifts into and from girlhood and womanhood, in which the body changes – becomes vulnerable, for example – indicating broadening modes of representation pertaining to narrating trans lives. The autobiographies deviate from the neatly encapsulated portrayal of transition that emerges elsewhere in the trans autobiography tradition, and that I move on to discuss in the Conclusion.

Conclusion: Exploring resolution

I remember times when I lived in a crucible of troubled phantoms, and faltered in the long, painful struggle for identity. But for me there was always a glimmering promise that lay ahead; with the help of God, a promise that has been fulfilled. I found the oldest gift of heaven – to be myself.

–Christine Jorgensen, *A Personal Autobiography*

Providing an overview of the Bildungsroman model to which trans autobiographies frequently conform, Jonathan Ames (2005) describes the final of three narrative “acts” as, typically, the “aftermath” of transition (xii). Ames notes that, while autobiographers might not document “great happiness” or the attainment of (re)solution to “all their problems” following transition, narrative endings tend to portray an eventual arrival at “a place of self-acceptance and peace” (xii). As I have explored in this thesis, the aspiration towards contentment with oneself and in one’s body typically underpins trans autobiographies. In early accounts of transition, gender confirmation surgery frequently enables instant transformation and signals contentment in the body and narrative resolution, as I addressed in Chapter Two.¹ Some recently published works, however, such as Juliet Jacques’s autobiography *Trans: A Memoir* (2015), portray reconciliation between contentment in the body and a degree of dissatisfaction: Jacques’s portrayal suggests that she is fairly happy in her body, most of the time.² In this Conclusion, I explore how Ames’s notion of trans narrative endings typified by contentment in oneself might resonate with the autobiographical works of Raymond Thompson

¹ In Chapter Two, I noted that certain early trans autobiographies, such as Jan Morris’s *Conundrum* (1974), are criticised for portraying gender confirmation as an easy and instant form of change and for suggesting that transness might be “fixed”, usually by surgery. Outlining the different resonances of the terms “transition” and “the operation” (culminating in “sex change”), Julian Carter (2014) argues that “‘the operation’ often serves as an imagined conclusion” (236). Taking up this idea of conclusion, and specifically one that is founded on contentment following transformation, Sarah Ray Rondot (2016) argues that trans writers of the twentieth century often “cast transsexuality as a problem in need of an external fix” (532). Thus, the writers frame gender confirmation surgeries as “the sign of a successful trans* story” (532). In my Conclusion, I concentrate on forms of resolution, and how the core autobiographies might depart from the conventions established by early texts.

² Jacques, whilst asserting that she has overcome gender dysphoria – “with its all-consuming sense that my body and the way I was expected to behave because of it were fundamentally wrong” (310) – summarises her feelings towards her body at the close of her narrative as, “Some days I feel good about where I am physically, others less so” (310). Her allusion to departing gender dysphoria is a form of resolution in itself.

(1995), Claudine Griggs (1996/2004, 1998) and Jennifer Finney Boylan (2003, 2008). As my thesis has focused on depictions of change – pertaining to gender, sex and the body – in trans autobiographies, this Conclusion examines resolution that might hinge on recounted changes.

The aspiration to “wholeness”, which I originally identified in Mark Rees’s autobiography *Dear Sir or Madam* (1996) and introduced in Chapter One, has been a key concern in this thesis.³ In *Second Skins* (1998), Jay Prosser explores forms of resolution in trans life writing as “arrival” facilitated by “reassignment” (101). Prosser’s suggestion that surgical procedures signify or construct “return” and “coming home” to the body (82–83), coupled with Rees’s aspiration to a state of “wholeness”, informed my exploration of contentment in the body with which I concluded each of my chapters. In the conclusion of Chapter One, I drew on Rees’s *Dear Sir or Madam* (1996) to explore the tension between Rees’s aspiration to “whole” being and his portrayal of failing to embody “wholeness”; and I discussed how Thompson engages with this notion of “wholeness”. In Chapters Two and Three, I argued that the Griggs’s and Boylan’s narratives disrupt the typical thrust of trans autobiographies, in which the autobiographical subject “arrives” in the “rightful” body. Griggs, for example, documents discontent in the body following gender confirmation surgery, working against convention. Exploring, in this Conclusion, forms of resolution, I return to the arguments I have constructed in my chapters, centring on “wholeness” and coming “home” to the body, and I ask: how might Thompson, Griggs and Boylan “resolve” their narratives?

Resolution in trans autobiographies might evoke such notions of return. Jan Morris (1974), for example, is playful with the sense of return that *Conundrum* cultivates. The concluding passages of the autobiography recall both Morris’s childhood and the opening of the narrative: “If I consider my story in detachment ... I see myself not as man or woman, self or other, fragment or whole, but only as that wondering child with a cat beneath the Blüthner” (159–160). As I noted in

³ I bring in Rees here to draw on the sense of “wholeness” that has been crucial to my exploration of the autobiographies. Elsewhere in this Conclusion, I draw on *Dear Sir or Madam* because the notions of resolution that arise in this text are central to my discussion: as I move on to explore, Rees’s work proposes and complicates a sense of resolution, and it is precisely this conflict that is key to my reading of resolution in the core autobiographies.

Chapter One, *Conundrum* begins with Morris's dawning realisation, as a young child sitting under the piano on which her mother is playing, of wrong-bodied being (9). The cramped space beneath the piano her mother is sitting at, "enclosing me as in a cave" (9) in turn, operates as a return to Morris's own beginning. By establishing a journey back to her origins whilst insisting on her girl's identity (9), the opening introduces the move into womanhood that is the focus of the autobiography. The return to childhood that Morris cultivates in the concluding passages of her autobiography establishes a sense of continuity between Morris as the child beneath the piano, Morris as adult woman and Morris as autobiographer. Even though she states that she is moving away from the focus on states of "fragment[ed]" and "whole" being, the passage, in its return, insists on her coherent and legitimate (or "whole") girlhood and womanhood, in contrast to her original gender assignment.

But before embarking on an exploration of forms of resolution in the core autobiographies, I discuss the process of developing my thesis, which encompasses an overview of my reasons for focusing on notions of change and how my work contributes to its field. I delve into the ideas of change and the body that I have articulated in my chapters, and illustrate how my work brings the core autobiographies usefully together. I explore how the autobiographers might differ from one another by adhering to or departing from conventional notions of resolution in their works. My exploration of tensions in the thesis fits neatly within my focus on resolution: I work towards resolution in my own work despite delineating the tensions that arise in it, which might replicate forms of resolution in the autobiographies.

Development of the thesis

My thesis has concentrated on notions of change – pertaining to sex, gender and the body – in Thompson's, Griggs's and Boylan's autobiographical works. In its focus on change, the thesis has examined conventional notions of transformation in trans autobiographies. For example, I explored the Bildungsroman chronology typical of trans autobiographies, prevalent models and motifs that evoke trans experience, and the significance of gender confirmation surgeries to notions of "full" change.

My central argument has been that the autobiographies I concentrate on unsettle conventional notions of change: specifically, ideas of change that arise in early trans autobiographies and in trans plots in film and television.⁴ Thus, I explored how the texts might adhere to or deviate from conventions established by early texts in the tradition.

In early drafts of my thesis, I attempted to organise my work in accordance with the life-course structure typically followed by trans autobiographies: I intended to centre my chapters on childhood and adolescence, and adulthood both prior to and following the changes brought about by hormone therapy and gender confirmation surgeries, rather than devoting the chapters of the thesis to Thompson, Griggs and Boylan in turn. My decision to alter this structure arose from the recognition that my early drafts, in observing the life-course chronology, smoothed over much of what was interesting and rich in the autobiographies. The chapter I drafted on childhood and adolescence was heavily influenced by Aaron Devor's "Witnessing and Mirroring" (2004), which explores chronological stages of transition. Certain issues arose from the influence of this work on my thesis: by adhering to the model, my chapter overlooked the breadth of trans experience.⁵ I drew on phases of childhood and adolescence in the core autobiographies and teased out how they demonstrated conformity to the model, rather than exploring how the autobiographers write about the body and changes. Structuring my thesis in accordance with the life-course structure conveyed the assumption that various phases are necessarily intrinsic to trans lives, around which autobiographies are necessarily organised. I chose to focus on Griggs's *Journal of a Sex Change* in Chapter Two precisely because this narrative defies the life-course structure, undermining the requirement to conform to this chronology. It has been helpful to draw on a text such as Griggs's that deviates from the conventional structure in order to illustrate the breadth of representation in trans accounts.

⁴ For example, the idea that gender confirmation surgery facilitates instant and entire change, which arises in the autobiographies of Christine Jorgensen (1967/1968) and Jan Morris (1974). I discussed Sandy Stone's criticism of this notion in the Introduction, and Griggs's unsettling of gender confirmation surgery as instant transformation in Chapter Two.

⁵ However, Devor notes that "it is important to bear in mind that [the model] cannot possibly apply to all individuals in the same way. Each person is unique. Each person experiences their world in their own idiosyncratic ways" (42). I found that working with the model constrained my work.

Having chosen, instead, to devote a chapter to each writer, I focused first on Rees's *Dear Sir or Madam* (1996). Shifting from the life-course structure, which had felt restrictive, I was able to plunge into the autobiography and unearth the notions of "wholeness", ambiguity, gender and transness that have been central to my thesis. I was struck, in particular, by Rees's interpretation of the term "transsexuality" as implicitly evoking the "change" of sex, which, he notes, is unattainable (177). In the Introduction, I stated that my thesis would consider articulations of gender and sex throughout the texts, and possible conflicts. Rees's notion of sex as immutable is in tension with Griggs's depiction of her passage into female embodiment. While complex notions of trans experience emerge in Rees's autobiography, I chose to work these ideas into my main chapters, rather than devoting a chapter of the thesis to *Dear Sir or Madam*.⁶ As my focus – on changes pertaining to sex, gender and the body – developed, my thinking departed from *Dear Sir or Madam*, and settled instead on the autobiographical works of Thompson, Griggs and Boylan. Choosing not to devote a chapter of this thesis to Rees's autobiography, I moved away from an exploration of tomboyism and embodiment that I had originally intended to pursue.⁷ Nevertheless, the aspiration to "wholeness" that arises in Rees's autobiography has been crucial to the conclusions I have drawn in each chapter. This exploration of how Rees's autobiography charts a move into "wholeness" and, later, defies this move, and in particular drawing from Rees's portrayal to investigate whether the core autobiographies might adhere to or resist notions of embodied "wholeness", has been an original mode of thinking about contentment in the body in these trans accounts.

My work contributes to the field of autobiography theory; more specifically, it contributes to the subfield of trans autobiography theory.⁸ In the Introduction to this thesis, I explored tensions between rigid or certain ideas of self that commonly

⁶ In the Introduction, I outline my reasons for choosing not to devote a chapter of my thesis to Rees's autobiography.

⁷ I also avoided delving into instances of sexism in the text, and in particular the disdain for butch womanhood that arises in Rees's text. In pointing out this striking aspect of his autobiography, I am not seeking to criticise the text, but to indicate my own reticence in approaching such complex standpoints.

⁸ I provided an overview of this field in the Introduction.

arise in trans autobiographies and notions of the self as provisional that are posited by autobiography theorists. While trans theory and theories of the body underpin my work to a greater extent than autobiography theory,⁹ the tenets of autobiography theory develop my exploration of the core autobiographies. In Chapter Three, for example, I explored the depiction of competing selfhoods in the wake of dawning realisation of trans being in Lili Elbe's *Man into Woman* (1933/2004), Renée Richards's *Second Serve* (1983/1984) and Julia Grant's *Just Julia* (1994): these portrayals resonate with the succession of selves proposed by autobiography theorists (Stanley, 14). I also examined the tension between the assumption that autobiography is predicated on recounted events and the presence of ghostliness in Boylan's *I'm Looking Through You*. Finally, in Chapter Two, I analysed the problematics of memory in Griggs's account of the pain of surgery and recovery. It is important to note that my chief focus on the body and trans theory provides scope for further research concentrating on tensions and harmony between notions of self in autobiography theory and notions of self in trans autobiographies.

My focus on changes was prompted by contradictions in the texts: varying ideas of change arise from the tradition of trans autobiographies, as I discussed in the Introduction. Rees, as I have indicated, asserts his perception of the limitations of change in the context of the body's sex. By contrast, in Griggs's *Journal*, surgery divests the body of "maleness" (151) and facilitates the shift into female embodiment. However, Griggs's account of femaleness is tentative, evoking tensions arising from forms of change in the autobiography. In early drafts of Chapter One, the sense of change in Thompson's autobiography emerged as challenging. While I had framed the chapter around changes alongside my exploration of the "trapped in the wrong body" model, I struggled to locate a

⁹ I chose to focus on the body rather than the genre of autobiography because, in the core autobiographies, I discovered stimulating material to engage with that centred on the body; and I found theory that traversed the boundaries between autobiography theory and the body, such as Prosser's *Second Skins* (1998), illuminating. As I noted in the Introduction, I found Griggs's (unique) focus on her pain and suffering following gender confirmation surgery an engaging and intriguing aspect of the text. I was drawn to Thompson's depiction of his body as boyish (or, perhaps more pertinently, a boy's) even in his earliest memories. Finally, I was intrigued – though initially challenged – by Boylan's depiction of the body's diminishment in both of her autobiographies.

conventional sense of change in Thompson's autobiography. I assumed, then, that the narrative absented change, and I attempted to impose this reading on the autobiography. However, this interpretation of the text was ill-fitting. As I argued in Chapter One, the autobiography centres on forms of change, despite the absence of a "girlhood" from which Thompson shifts.

In the Introduction, I provided an overview of my argument in this thesis: that the core autobiographies unsettle the notions of change that underpin them. I argued that Thompson depicts the transformation from boyhood to manhood, rather than the shift of the subtitle, the change from "girl[hood]" to "manhood". Similarly, I suggested that Griggs portrays regression into an emphasised state of transness, concurrent with her passage into female embodiment. Finally, I noted that, in *I'm Looking Through You*, Boylan's shift into womanhood is eclipsed by her focus on her transformation from "ghostly" to solid. The central argument of my thesis – that Thompson, Griggs and Boylan undermine conventional notions of change – developed after encountering the disjuncture between the stated central thrust of Thompson's autobiography – the "Girl's Journey to Manhood" – and the absence of girlhood, and therefore the unsettling of the development proposed by the subtitle, in the text. Revealing that the narrative resists documenting the "girl[hood]" to which the subtitle refers, I explored how the autobiographical works of Griggs and Boylan, in turn, are playful with and unsettle key changes. In each chapter, I concentrated on compelling motifs that arise in the autobiographies, and that provide ways of depicting change: Thompson's "trapped in the wrong body" model, Griggs's journeying motif, and Boylan's analogy between ghostliness and trans experience. After drafting the chapters, I realised that my focus was shared between notions of change and modes of representing trans experience. In the Introduction, I established my focus on how changes might emerge: the changes I have focused on are interwoven with the "trapped in the wrong body" model, and the journeying and spectrality motifs, arising in the core autobiographies.

Overview

In Chapter One, I explored notions of "wrongness", which are central to Thompson's *What Took You so Long?* They are predicated on his originally assigned

gender, and his body prior to the changes brought about by hormone therapy and surgeries. The narrative adheres to the “trapped in the wrong body” model, as the opening of the account conveys. In Thompson’s portrayal, the “wrongness” of the body centres on a sense of being too-embodied – he binds his chest and dons multiple layers of clothing to disguise his frame – and a sense of lack. A penis is fundamental to Thompson’s sense of his manhood (Prosser 1998, 75), and the body is “wrong” in its absence. Padding his trousers as a young person foreshadows the construction of the penis in adulthood, conveying the sense that phalloplasty is Thompson’s destiny.

I examined how, in Thompson’s portrayal, the body is limited in its “wrongness”: Thompson is weighed down by a stubborn and sluggish physicality, and the “wrongness” of parts of the body inhibits sex acts. Entrapment is a key motif in the autobiography. To evoke the “trapped in the wrong body” model, Thompson recounts holding his body rigid in childhood to make his boyhood certain. The borstal and prison settings, which convey further enclosure, such as his cell and the punishment block, evoke his sense of entrapment. The “wrongness” of parts of the body, such as the chest, creates a sense of incongruity. And just as certain parts of the body are ill-fitting in Thompson’s account, his portrayal of working as an apprentice to a tile and mosaic manufacturer on building sites, and of incarceration in the borstal and in prison, similarly adhere to incongruity: in these settings, he is surrounded by others from whom he is different. Thompson’s response to feelings of physical “wrongness” is to further fragment the body: he conveys an urge to assault the flesh, and strives to redirect this “urge” towards his environment (Prosser 1998, 75).

Chapter One focused on how Thompson reworks the “trapped in the wrong body” model. “Wrongness”, in Thompson’s account, evokes two bodies: inner and outer. While Thompson’s body image is rendered material, the materiality of his outer body is diminished (Prosser 1998, 70). Prior to surgeries, Thompson experiences the (outer) body as unfamiliar, and his sense of the body is typified by coldness. To experience contentment and warmth, Thompson insists, his entire body requires transformation. I investigated tension, in Thompson’s account, between notions of “wrongness” based on parts of the body, and the “wrongness”

of the body in its entirety, and the conflict between changed body parts and full bodily transformation. I argued that Thompson's account of one body bursting through the other, adhering to Prosser's notion of excoriation (1998, 68), emerges as a violent refiguring of the birth scene, and evokes notions of complete transformation.

The sense of "wrongness" and embodiment in *What Took You so Long?*, I argued, creates tension. Thompson depicts a deep and persistent sense of himself as a boy even in early childhood, and he stresses a boyish look from a young age, and an adolescence and adulthood typified by the manliness of the body. "Wrongness", then, is based on parts of the body rather than the whole: specifically, the parts that are incongruent with his notion of manhood. Central to the argument I constructed is that, in the narrative, a "female" morphology never arises. I explored the tension between the body that largely, even prior to the changes of hormone therapy and surgeries, adheres to Thompson's notion of manhood, and the notions of change upon which the narrative hinges. The central question of this chapter was, how might change emerge? The phalloplasty surgeries Thompson undergoes are portrayed as transforming the entire body, engendering a narrative shift from "wrong" to "right".

Central to the absence of female morphology that I discussed, I argued that there is tension between the "girl[hood]" of Thompson's subtitle – and the back cover of the autobiography – and the emphasis of the narrative. In the foreword, Kitty Sewell notes that Thompson's transition provides him with a comprehensive understanding of both manhood and womanhood. While the paratexts emphasise a sense of shift from girlhood, the autobiography undermines this shift; and identifying that the paratexts are in tension with the thrust of the narrative is an aspect of the autobiography that had yet to be explored. The central form of change I identify in Thompson's work is also an original interpretation: in the prison setting, Thompson shifts into incongruity, concurrent with his development into a more conventionally masculine appearance. Thompson's incarceration in prison, during which he undergoes the changes of hormone therapy, emerges as a form of puberty, which his breakouts of acne emphasise. The period of delay prior to phalloplasty surgery recalls the puberty that emerges in prison: the blisters on

Thompson's face recall his earlier bout of acne. The suggestion of periods of puberty evokes an ultimate move into manhood precisely from boyhood, rather than the "girl[hood]" proposed by the subtitle.

While Chapter One explored forms of change in the borstal and in prison, in Chapter Two I aspired to continuity between my chapters by focusing on the significance of Trinidad, Colorado, and specifically Mt. San Rafael Hospital, and Griggs's sense of her own transness in this setting. My chapter concentrated on her portrayal of the pilgrimage to Trinidad for the gender confirmation surgery she undergoes in *Journal of a Sex Change*. I introduced the significance of the journeying model to trans autobiographies and trans plots in film and television, and I identified resonance between the "trapped in the wrong body" model and the journeying motif: specifically, that both are well-known modes of symbolising experiences of transition. To create a sense of how Griggs departs from the conventions of the journeying motif, I explored notions of travel and transness in the 2005 film *Transamerica*. In the film, protagonist Bree Osborne achieves contentment in womanhood and motherhood following her surgical procedure, and resolution is facilitated by these shifts. I examined, specifically, how Griggs's *Journal* deviates from the sense of neat resolution the film cultivates.

In the chapter, I suggested that early trans autobiographies, such as the works of Morris (1974), April Ashley (1982), and Richards (1983/1984), emphasise a sense of instant transformation created by gender confirmation surgery, and often elide the pain of surgery and recovery. I asked: how might Griggs rework conventional notions of change, such as the instant form of transformation that gender confirmation surgery facilitates in these early autobiographies? Griggs defies the prospect of instant transformation in her account. Instead, she portrays her surgical procedure and the process of recovery as elongated and gruelling. Early autobiographies and trans plots in film and television stress the importance of surgical, rather than social, changes. Autobiographies of the 2000s, such as Boylan's autobiographical works, depart from the focus on surgery to downplay the idea that transition is precisely predicated on surgical changes. Griggs's *Journal* (1996/2004) is a return to gender confirmation surgery, but departs from notions

that surgery is the most significant facet of transition. Griggs notes that, because her *Journal* diverges from the life-course structure of trans autobiographies, it is an account of a “trip” rather than a conventional story of trans experience (ix); and I argued that there is tension between her claim and the journeying model that is central to the autobiography, a common mode of conveying trans lives.¹⁰ The tension that arises, I suggested, emphasises that Griggs is working against the constraints of the genre.

While Griggs’s *Journal* contributes to the analogy between journeying and gender confirmation surgery, her depiction of “sorrow” (ix) as a consequence of surgery emphasises departure from early texts. Griggs depicts ambivalence about gender confirmation surgery in her account: she conveys both her urge and her reluctance for surgery. While she stresses that transition hinges on social change rather than surgical change, she states that her survival depends on attaining her surgical procedure (2). There is tension, in Griggs’s account, between her notion of surgery as a form of fate, and residual reluctance to undergo the procedure. In *S/He*, she notes that she had expected the impact of surgical changes to be limited to the body, but that her procedure transforms her “life experience” (5).

In my chapter, I focused on the shift from “sexual limbo” (12) and a “sexually ambiguous” body (2) into female embodiment that Griggs depicts. In Griggs’s portrayal, surgery facilitates reflection between her body and her womanhood. In her *Journal*, however, she reworks the transformation by cultivating disjuncture between the femaleness she embodies and cis femaleness. Her portrayal of hallucinating labour and childbirth after waking from gender confirmation surgery stresses the disjuncture between her own female body and female bodies that are typified by childbirth. Concurrent with her move into female embodiment, Griggs shifts into a “sex-changed existence” (27). Griggs stresses the reputation of Trinidad, Colorado, for “sex-change” procedures (82): in Mt. San Rafael Hospital, she undergoes treatment by medical staff precisely in terms of her impending surgical procedure. In the setting, her sense of her trans identity transforms from a facet of herself that she tends to repress, to keenly felt. She shifts into an

¹⁰ The tension that I draw on here also arises in Boylan’s *I’m Looking Through You*, as I explore later in this Conclusion.

entrenched state of trans being following her surgical procedure and reworks the “trapped in the wrong body” model to convey a feeling of being trapped in the *trans* body following her surgery. This shift into an entrenched sense of trans being emerges as “regression” (129), a move backwards rather than forwards, as Prosser notes (1999, 105).

I suggested that there is a resonance between motifs of entrapment in Thompson’s and Griggs’s autobiographies. My argument that, as a consequence of the surgical procedure, Griggs shifts into a body in pain, and into the inarticulacy of pain, draws on an aspect of trans life writing that tends to be overlooked. Griggs’s account of incarceration by the pain of the body is another variation on the “trapped in the wrong body” model: she evokes entrapment after surgery, though surgery conventionally disburdens the body. The smoothing over of surgery in early trans autobiographies perhaps attends to the inarticulate nature of pain. Griggs struggles to convey her own sense of pain, although she emphasises her urge to capture the experience of it: the journal format of the autobiography brings into sharp relief her precise focus on pain, stressing the elongated and gruelling nature of the surgical procedure and process of recovery. In addition to her desire to depart from the conventional portrayal of surgery in trans accounts, her stated compulsion to narrate the process, and particularly the pain that accompanies her period of recovery, reveals its traumatic effect, and that portraying her experience operates as a mode of recovery itself. The “overwhelming” nature of Griggs’s pain suggests a shift into the incoherence of the body.

While early trans autobiographies document the transformation that gender confirmation surgeries facilitate, *Griggs’s Journal* resists the idea of “full” change, crucial to the sense of conflict that I explored in the chapter. She notes the tension between her hope that surgery would shed her feeling of transness, and her sense of entrenched trans being after her procedure. Moreover, she stresses the failure of her surgical procedure to construct a path back to her “rightful” girl’s childhood. By stressing the absence of her girl’s childhood, she evokes the divide that she has cultivated between present and former modes of living. Rather than narrating her life as continuous and unbroken, she stresses the divide between past and present, departing from the compulsion to suture the split of transition via the

autobiographical project (Prosser 1998, 102). In the foreword to *Griggs's Journal*, Halberstam asserts that the autobiography fails to convey a sense of “wholeness” at its close (vii), and I suggested that the sense of rupture in the account contributes to this.

While I argued that Griggs disrupts “wholeness” and the return “home” to the body, certain moments in the narrative perhaps undermine my argument. For example, in my chapter, I concentrated on the unfamiliarity of the body in *Griggs's Journal*, an aspect of the text that had yet to be explored. However, Griggs reassures herself that she will ultimately attain familiarity with the body following a return to her exercise regime. Her compulsion to portray her pain might also emerge as an attempt to render the body familiar. Overcoming pain signals a shift into coherence between the body and the self, a portrayal that might correspond to contentment in the body. Moreover, the portrayal of hallucinating childbirth and labour after waking from her surgical procedure evokes notions of rebirth and transformation akin to the portrayal of gender confirmation surgery in *Transamerica*. I concluded the chapter by arguing that these conflicts render the process of exploring “wholeness” or contentment in the body complex.

In Chapter Three, I focused on forms of diminishment which are central to Boylan’s portrayal of an androgynous adolescence in *She’s Not There* and to the analogy underpinning *I’m Looking Through You*. The failure of Boylan’s family to see or bear witness to her girlhood and womanhood evokes ghostliness and a sense of being haunted in *I’m Looking Through You*. Boylan asserts that her departure from the conventional emphasis of trans autobiographies means that *I’m Looking Through You* might not be considered a typical account of trans experience, bearing a striking resemblance to Griggs’s claim that her own account resists the definition of a trans plot. Although Boylan stresses that the narrative is not, in a conventional sense, a “trans plot”, the echo between ghostliness and trans being suggests otherwise. In my chapter, I asked: how might the ghostliness motif evoke Boylan’s discontent with her body before her transition? I specifically investigated how portrayals of the shifts between ghostliness, disembodiment and solidity might resonate with the changes pertaining to sex, gender and the body. In *I’m Looking*

Through You, I argued, there is tension between the assumption that autobiographies are based on recounted events and the presence of ghostliness and hauntings in the autobiography. In my chapter, I focused on three spaces across the two narratives, all of them “haunted”: the stairwell, the attic and the Coffin House. For the final section of the chapter, I concentrated on the Coffin House setting, exploring its significance beyond the ghostliness analogy, and focusing instead on androgyny and the body. I noted that there was, perhaps, tension between my focus on change – pertaining to the body – and the ghostliness analogy in *I’m Looking Through You*: ghostliness, diminishment and marginality render mapping the body challenging. In the chapter, I employed the work of Esther Wolfe, with a precise focus on ghostliness in *I’m Looking Through You*. However, my focus on diminishment implicit in ghostliness in the text, and central to *She’s Not There*, departs from other work on Boylan’s autobiographies.¹¹

My focus on *I’m Looking Through You* pivoted on a variety of tensions. In a broad sense, conflict arises between the girlhood and womanhood with which Boylan identifies, and her originally assigned gender, in which she lives until adulthood. Androgyny, central to Boylan’s account of adolescence, evokes tensions: while the term might denote the embodiment of both the masculine and the feminine, in Boylan’s account it emerges as fluidity into and from girlhood. “Androgyny” embodies varied significance, and I use the term while keeping in mind its instability, because Boylan’s portrayal of androgyny is tentative. Androgyny is typically a transient identity, and Boylan’s account adheres to this: she shifts from an androgynous mode of being into adult womanhood. Finally, tension arises in the Coffin House setting between Boylan’s account of contentment in the adolescent body that moves fluidly into girlhood, and her “exasperation” with the body.

I argued that the phrasing of the titles “she’s not there” and “I’m looking through you” convey the rupture between living as “Jimmy” and her desire for girlhood and womanhood, in adolescence and young adulthood. A consequence of this disjuncture is disembodiment: I noted that a sense of diminishment arises in her comparison of her body to “mist” (208). The body in its mist-like invocation is

¹¹ For example, Rondot’s “‘Bear Witness’ and ‘Build Legacies’: Twentieth- and Twentieth-First-Century Trans* Autobiography” (2016).

“wrong”, a variation on the “trapped in the wrong body” model. Moreover, the account of the body as mist-like in its “wrongness” is a variation on Thompson’s portrayal of “wrongness” as insensate outer flesh that Prosser emphasises (*Second Skins*, 73). Further variation on the “trapped in the wrong body” model arises in the attic setting: Boylan’s concealment behind the trunk in the attic recalls her concealed urge for girlhood. Throughout *I’m Looking Through You*, Boylan invokes various modes of self-haunting: concealment of her “true” selfhood rests on “haunting” her own body (25). Jimmy’s (re)appearance towards the close of the narrative, whilst a parade of ghostly beings crosses the river, is a further significant instance in which Boylan’s former self haunts her adult life.

My focus on the tensions in *I’m Looking Through You* emerged from my exploration of the attic setting. I argued that Boylan’s concealment in the attic evokes the portrayal of Bertha Mason Rochester, incarcerated in her own attic setting in *Jane Eyre* (1847/2006). Cultivating an analogy between Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar’s (1979/2000) exploration of *Jane Eyre* and Boylan’s attic setting, in order to tease out tensions around the significance of forms of enclosure and tension, is unique. The allusion to Bertha, in the narrative, evokes conflict: Bertha embodies and conveys Jane’s desires and rage. The portrayals of Bertha and Boylan adhere to the wavering between absence and presence: both reside or seek refuge in attics presumed to be empty. The tensions of the attic scene in *I’m Looking Through You*, I argued, are encapsulated by the depiction of the veil. Boylan’s veil recalls the *Jane Eyre* veil, which connotes the analogy between Jane and Bertha: Bertha rips the veil in half in response to Jane’s urge. The veil, in Boylan’s account, is at once ghostly and not ghostly. The depiction of the attic hinges on this tension: it is a haunted space, and simultaneously, it is only Boylan who occupies this setting.

This tension between settings which are haunted and those which are not culminates in Boylan’s notion of her own ghostliness. In adulthood, Boylan recognises the ghost that haunted the Coffin House during her childhood as simply herself in the mirror. This revelation defies the sense of haunting the narrative has cultivated, and simultaneously renders Boylan ghostly. The account resonates with the tension between familiarity and unfamiliarity that I concentrated on in Chapter

Two. Furthermore, Boylan's portrayal of being haunted by the rupture between her womanhood – her present – and the adolescence and young adulthood typified by the “wrongness” of her original gender assignment draws on a sense of conflict. She is, she states, simultaneously “*Jennifer Boylan*” and “*the Former James Boylan*” (259). In her account, she is at once woman and ghost, evoking the in-between nature of gender and liminal space.

Central to the three settings I explored are notions of diminishment and marginality. In the stairwell, marginality is a consequence of trans experience: Boylan seeks refuge in the narrow space, on the fringes of a social gathering after she has been cast out from the group. In this setting, Boylan and Faith hover between seen and unseen, tangible and intangible, evoking spectrality. More widely in the narrative, Boylan and others perceive and fail to perceive ghostly entities. Androgyny in the Coffin House setting evokes diminishment. Boylan contrasts the “thinness” of her body to Onion's fleshy physicality. The body in conventional women's clothing, in *She's Not There*, similarly adheres to diminishment and vulnerability. While the settings I concentrated on evoke disembodiment, materiality also arises. In the stairwell, Boylan and Faith reach out to gain a sense of one another. In the attic, although the wedding dress insists on diminishment, it also evokes excess. The three settings emerge as liminal, and evoke the “in-betweenness” of gender that Sonny Nordmarken (2014) discusses (38). *I'm Looking Through You* centres on the liminal space between life and death: the stairwell, for example, evokes the passage into Faith's death, and the Kennebec river, the site of Jimmy's (re)appearance, evokes the passage into the “beyond” of significant figures in Boylan's life. In *She's Not There*, Boylan's account of the space between genders during her transition – she terms the middle phase of change(s) “boygirl” (152) – resonates with the sense of liminality in *I'm Looking Through You*.

While I explored the body's shift into “wholeness” in Chapters One and Two, in my final chapter I mapped the shift from diminishment to solidity. My focus contributed to the notions of “coming home” to the body, and contentment, that informed the conclusions I drew in Chapters One and Two. Boylan portrays the shift from adolescent androgyny into adult womanhood. The move into solidity evoked in *I'm Looking Through You* encompasses the shift from ghostliness and haunted

being to coherent personhood: specifically, adult womanhood. The departure from diminishment resonates with notions of transformation in early narratives such as Morris's *Conundrum*. The portrayal of ghostly Jimmy's dissolution suggests departure from haunted and ghostly modes of being. However, I argued that the tension Boylan stresses between her former and current selves prohibits suturing the split of transition. As a consequence of the rupture she documents, Boylan doubts her own coherence, and I suggested that the autobiography hints at the ongoing nature of haunted being.

Models and motifs

Coming to the realisation that the focus of my chapters was shared between forms of change and modes of denoting trans experience – the “trapped in the wrong body” model, the journeying motif and the analogy between ghostliness and trans being – I turned to exploring how the autobiographies rework these models.

Although it is a firmly entrenched model in the trans autobiography tradition, and typically assumed to be central to trans experience, Thompson, Griggs and Boylan both convey and undermine the sense of being “trapped in the wrong body”.

Rather than depicting a sense of his manhood that is at odds with “wrongful” flesh alone, Thompson portrays an inner, “rightful” body, his body image rendered material and an outer, “wrongful” morphology he yearns to discard (Prosser 1998, 70). Similarly, Griggs refigures a sense of her “wrongful” corporeality as, specifically, entrapment in the trans body (210), and cultivates a sense of entrapment in the pain of the body.¹² Finally, Boylan's portrayal of entrapment pivots on restricted spaces, such as the stairwell and the attic, and entrapment in the insubstantial and immaterial nature of her depicted ghostliness.

In Chapter Two, I argued that Griggs's *Journal* undermines the journeying motif as it arises in early texts such as Morris's *Conundrum* (1974) and films such as *Transamerica* (2005), particularly the instant shift into the “rightful” body that

¹² There is a similarity between Griggs's notion of entrapment in the trans body and Ivan E. Coyote and Rae Spoon's unsettling of the wrong-body narrative in *Gender Failure* (2014): Spoon notes, “When I decided to retire from the gender binary, the narrative that I had about being a man stuck in a woman's body didn't make sense anymore, unless I was a gender-neutral person who'd been stuck in a man's body stuck in a woman's body all along” (241).

gender confirmation surgery, often the journey's ending, facilitates. Griggs troubles notions of instant shift by depicting reluctance to undergo her surgical procedure, a sense of "sorrow" that she eventually undergoes it (ix), and by stressing its lengthy and arduous nature. Boylan's account of spectrality is unique, but reworks conventional modes of evoking trans experience, including those underpinning *She's Not There*. In this thesis, I seek to cultivate an original argument, that the works of Thompson, Griggs and Boylan evoke resonance by reworking typical modes of representation.

This undermining of conventional motifs and models has continued to arise in recent trans autobiographies, and in works such as Maggie Nelson's *The Argonauts* (2015) that fall outside my definition of trans autobiography,¹³ in accordance with broadening ideas of transness culturally. In her narrative, Nelson observes a balanced account of the models I have discussed: she notes that "the quickly developing mainstream narrative" that "trans" suggests, for example "(‘born in the wrong body,’ necessitating an orthopaedic pilgrimage between two fixed destinations)", might be "useless for some" and also "partially, or even profoundly, useful for others" (65). Nelson's discussion emphasises the variety of trans identities and varied meanings of change(s): "for some, 'transitioning' may mean leaving one gender entirely behind, while for others – like Harry, who is happy to identify as a butch on T – it doesn't" (65). She is critical of representations of trans lives that neatly encapsulate experience: "I'm not on my way anywhere, Harry sometimes tells inquirers. How to explain, in a culture frantic for resolution, that sometimes the shit stays messy?" (65). Although the core autobiographies (particularly Thompson's and Griggs's) emerged long before Nelson's work, there is a resonance between these texts and Nelson's because the core autobiographies unsettle key motifs, portraying "messy" and varied forms of trans experience.

Recognising that the autobiographers rework how trans experience is commonly represented, I explored conventional motifs that had been undermined elsewhere

¹³ I argued in the Introduction that *The Argonauts*, whilst autobiographical, is not a trans autobiography as I am defining the genre because the book is not a first-hand account of the writer's trans life: rather, Nelson writes about her parenthood, marriage, family, and her life with her trans partner Harry Dodge. As I noted, in places it might be regarded as trans biography. I draw on *The Argonauts* here because it illustrates the opening-up of ideas of trans in the 2010s in memoir.

in the autobiographies. *What Took You so Long?*, *Journal of a Sex Change* and *I'm Looking Through You* each depict mirror scenes, a form of symbolism that Prosser argues is central to the tradition of trans autobiographies, in which the mirror captures the split of transition (1998, 100). As I stated in Chapter One, Thompson recounts waking to discover that his face is covered in blisters, and Prosser argues that the event emerges as a physical manifestation of the agony of the feeling of “wrongful” embodiment (1998, 71). The mirror scenes in Griggs’s and Boylan’s accounts undermine the conventional portrayal of the unfamiliar body prior to hormone therapy and surgeries, and the familiar body following these changes. Griggs, gazing into the mirror after her surgical procedure, recounts her failure to recognise herself. Central to the conclusions I draw in Chapter Three, Boylan mistakes her reflection in the mirror for the ghost who has haunted her childhood in the Coffin House. While the mirror scene in *I'm Looking Through You* might evoke Boylan’s eventual recognition of herself as an adult woman, the suggestion of ongoing haunting that I explored inhibits resolution predicated on the shift away from haunted and ghostly states of being.

Notions of rebirth, typical of trans life narratives, also arise in the core autobiographies. Thompson, for example, imagines his inner “right” body emerging from his outer “wrong” body, a fantasy that I argued emerges as a violent analogy for the birth scene. Griggs’s recounted hallucination of labour and childbirth evokes notions of (re)birth, in which Griggs herself gives birth to her “new” body. However, Griggs’s entrenched sense of transness undermines notions of “full” change that rebirth symbolises. Boylan’s focus on death and her recounted sense that conforming to ghostliness might ensure her own survival evoke notions of rebirth similar to those that appear in Thompson’s and Griggs’s accounts.

Similarly, a sense of continuity (of subjectivity) resonates in the autobiographies. My argument that Thompson portrays development from boyhood to manhood rather than transformation from girlhood to manhood (as the subtitle states) suggests that he smooths over the sense of change and elides the central rupture. In *I'm Looking Through You*, Boylan depicts a struggle arising from her sense of rupture between former and current modes of being, and she evokes her failure to cultivate continuity. Throwing doubts pertaining to coherence into relief following

her assertion that she has “become solid”, she indicates tensions based on suturing rupture and seamless change. Griggs renders her aspiration to leave the rupture open overt: she resists conventional modes of imposing continuity and coherence on a history typified by significant change.¹⁴ By reworking various motifs and undermining established notions such as the transformation into the “right” body that gender confirmation surgery facilitates, the core autobiographies broaden modes of representation. The accounts insist on various resonances of trans experience, rather than one “journey”.

Tensions

During the process of writing and developing my thesis, certain issues arose. It is, perhaps, pertinent to provide an overview of various tensions in this chapter, in which I explore resolution in the autobiographies, and the conflicts that might undermine neat conclusions. Firstly, the period I concentrate on in this thesis, the 1990s and 2000s, widened as I developed my thesis. The earliest autobiography I concentrate on – Thompson’s *What Took You so Long?* – is from 1995. The most recently published of the autobiographies – Boylan’s *I’m Looking Through You* – is from 2008. My original rationale was to work with texts from the mid-1990s to the early- to mid-2000s, a span of eight years.¹⁵ The context of the autobiographies has a significant bearing on my work. In the Introduction, I noted the turn to autobiographies of “ordinary”, or non-celebrity, lives, and in particular lives of hardship such as Frank McCourt’s *Angela’s Ashes* (1996), during the 1990s. Furthermore, I explored the paratexts of the core autobiographies – the prefaces and concluding notes from medical professionals, in particular – in order to analyse ideas of trans pertinent to the period, from the mid-1990s to the mid-to-late 2000s.

I had intended to concentrate primarily on Boylan’s *She’s Not There* (2003) in Chapter Three, rather than splitting my focus between this text and *I’m Looking Through You* (2008). As I began working with the material, however, I discovered

¹⁴ The portrayals of rebirth and rupture suggest that Thompson’s depiction varies from Griggs’s and Boylan’s accounts, and I return to this point later in this chapter.

¹⁵ See the Introduction for my rationale outlining my reasons for choosing the autobiographies I concentrate on in this thesis.

that *I'm Looking Through You* was rich with ideas of transness and how trans lives might be portrayed. This text tied in pertinently to my focus on models, or ways of representing trans experience, such as the “trapped in the wrong body” model in *What Took You so Long?* and the journeying motif in *Journal of a Sex Change*. Although I devoted the final section of the chapter to diminishment in *She's Not There*, my focus is primarily on the ghostliness motif in *I'm Looking Through You*.

As I discussed in the Introduction, the emphasis of trans texts published during the 2000s and 2010s varies from the emphasis of early trans autobiographies. The tone and mode of representation in *What Took You so Long?* varies vastly from *I'm Looking Through You*: Boylan's ghostliness analogy, for example, suggests that it is a playful account. While the differences between the narratives reflects their emergence from different periods of the tradition, I avoid delving into this in detail in this thesis.¹⁶ The gulf between Boylan's *I'm Looking Through You* (2008) and certain recently published texts, such as Ivan E. Coyote and Rae Spoon's *Gender Failure* (2014) and Jacques's *Trans: A Memoir* (2015), is also remarkable.¹⁷ More widely, my focus on texts of the 1990s has required delving into portrayals of trans experience that are perhaps constrained by the context of pathology.¹⁸ I have attempted to dismantle the assumption that Thompson's *What Took You so Long?* and Griggs's *Journal* in particular hinge on surgical changes by emphasising the broadening modes of representing trans experience that the accounts emphasise. Another project might consider notions of change and depictions of trans experience in more recent works, such as those of the 2010s.

Secondly, while my work on representations of trans embodiment and transition contributes to the subfield of trans autobiography theory, as I have stated, it provides scope to explore notions of selfhood in line with autobiography theory. A challenge for the thesis, and one that is central to reading autobiographies, has been distinguishing between the autobiographer and the subject of the

¹⁶ While it is beyond the scope of this thesis, another project might trace broadening notions of trans specifically in the 2000s and 2010s, and shifting depictions of trans and transition in life writing.

¹⁷ In these texts, the authors are explicit about the constraints of the genre, and oppression.

¹⁸ In the Introduction, I note Rees's emphasis on brain studies as a means of explaining trans identities.

autobiography.¹⁹ In this thesis, I have typically analysed the texts as though they are novels, although the distinctions between fiction and life writing are stark.²⁰ While I explore the tension between the presence of ghostliness in Boylan's *I'm Looking Through You*, and the assumption that the account is derived from recounted events, I have avoided exploring in any detail the presence of the conventions of fiction in the autobiographical accounts.²¹ Whilst informed by Sidonie Smith's and Julia Watson's suggestion that life narratives are records of "interpretation", as opposed to accurate retellings of remembered events and experiences (2001/2010, 22), I have resisted delving too deeply into the constructed nature of the autobiographers' portrayals. Autobiography theory of the 1980s and 1990s identifies common differences between men's and women's life writing.²² However, trans autobiographies trouble the dichotomy cultivated by these theorists.²³ As I noted earlier in this Conclusion, in another project, with a different scope, I would seek to address the gaps that arise here.²⁴

¹⁹ As Stanley (1992) notes, drawing on the work of Roland Barthes (1975), "the self who writes' no more has direct and unproblematic access to 'the self who was', than does the reader" (61). Earlier in this chapter, I noted the representation of dawning trans identity in early trans accounts, such as Grant's *Just Julia* (1994), as competing selves, which might have proved a rich area of analysis.

²⁰ I wanted to specifically explore, in a literary sense, how the autobiographies portray notions of transness, transition, body, selfhood and gender, and crucially to avoid "psychoanalysing" the writers – which is particularly problematic in the context of trans history.

²¹ In the Boylan chapter, I avoided exploring the ghostliness motif in literature, a well-established trope. My focus, instead, was on the symbolic nature of ghostliness, rupture and trans experience.

²² Mary G. Mason (1979) argues that the "patterns established by the two prototypical male autobiographers, Augustine and Rousseau" are not typically taken up in autobiographies written by women (210). The "egoistic secular archetype that Rousseau handed down to his Romantic brethren in his *Confessions*", for example, "finds no echo in women's writing about their lives" (Mason, 210). Instead, "the self-discovery of female identity seems to acknowledge the real presence and recognition of another consciousness, and the disclosure of female self is linked to the identification of some 'other'" (Mason, 210).

²³ Rondot (2016) asks useful questions on this subject, such as, "So what do we make of autobiographies written by authors who do not identify as male or female, or who transition from one subject position to another throughout their lifetimes?" And, "How might trans life writers construct a different relationship between gender and autobiography so as to challenge ideal and universal understandings of the autobiographical "I" as inherently masculine?" (528).

²⁴ Furthermore, in this thesis, I avoid delving into the differences between "autobiography" and "memoir". Smith and Watson (2001/2010) note certain variations: "Historically, a mode of life narrative that situated the subject in a social environment, as either observer or participant, the memoir directs attention more toward the lives and actions of others than to the narrator" (274). In addition, "the term [memoir] refers generally to life writing that takes a segment of a life, not its entirety, and focusing on interconnected experiences" (274). This might have been pertinent to teasing apart differences between Thompson's *What Took You so Long?*, for example, or any text that follows the Bildungsroman chronology, and Griggs's *Journal*, or any text that resists the

Endings

Having discussed the development of the thesis, and articulated the notions of change and models of experience that underpin my arguments, I turn now to exploring forms of resolution in the core autobiographies. In early trans autobiographies, resolution typically rests on the aftermath of surgery. Trans autobiographies more widely often cultivate a sense of resolution predicated on the move into the “right” body, living as the gender with which one identifies. However, forms of resolution are perhaps viable in the core autobiographies, despite dissatisfactions with the body following transition, which I interrogate here. The notion of resolution in trans accounts is complex. How might trans autobiographies neatly encapsulate and construct a conclusion to the process of the documented changes? How might transition itself signal resolution; where is its end point?²⁵ That one is eventually “on the other side” following transition, as Julian Carter (2014) suggests (236), perhaps signals a form of conclusion or resolution in narrative accounts. While transition cultivates a negotiation of ongoing changes and an assumption of eventual arrival, Carter notes that, at a certain point, “changes become less pronounced, less socially and affectively intense” (236). How might the core autobiographies negotiate the complexities of resolution as it pertains to their own lives?

Thompson’s *What Took You so Long?* maps the shift from feelings of “wrongness” in the body to contentment in the body, as I explored in Chapter One. While Thompson records dawning recognition that surgery fails to facilitate, with *immediacy*, transformation into the “right” body, his surgical procedures shed the burden of the body’s “wrongness” (Prosser 1998, 82), replace the parts that Thompson depicts as absent (Prosser 1998, 76), and return sensation to his flesh. In the autobiography, resolution is predicated on the move from boyhood to manhood, and a repaired bond: the reunion with his partner, Loretta, following a

structure, and focuses instead on a particular passage of time (for example, Griggs’s account of gender confirmation surgery and recovery).

²⁵ Noting that transition is “thousands of little gestures of protest and presence”, unlike assumptions of “the operation”, which emerges as conclusion by itself, Carter (2014) asks, “how do you know when you have arrived?” (236).

separation of many years. Thus, the narrative is concluded when Thompson enters the “right” romantic relationship – with Loretta – in the “right” body.

The resonance between Thompson’s recounted childhood hope that holding his body rigid each night will have a transformative consequence, and his immobility on the operating table in adulthood, adheres to the notion of return that Morris cultivates in *Conundrum* (1974). In Chapter One, I explored Thompson’s assertion that mastectomy engenders transformation into that which he “already was” (177). Moreover, the accounts of keeping the body rigid emphasise Prosser’s notion of autobiographical suturing of the rupture of transition, facilitating continuity of subject between childhood and adulthood (1998, 102). By portraying his childhood as always/already his boyhood, Thompson’s narrative departs from the split or rupture of the move from “girlhood” in favour of the boy’s journey to manhood. As I argue in Chapter One, the sense of harmony with the body emerges as feasible, though not immediate, and the account closes on notes of “self-acceptance” and “peace” conventional to trans narrative resolution (Ames 2005, xii).

Similarly, in Griggs’s *Journal* (1996/2004), the portrayal of her embodiment of femaleness and the resonance between her body and her gender, following surgeries, signifies conventional modes of resolution. Griggs shifts from having “invariably hated” her body (133) to acknowledging that her body is “beautiful”, despite the “bruises, blood, swelling” caused by surgery (133). However, elsewhere Griggs evokes departure from the conventions of resolution. While Thompson establishes comfort in the body that mastectomy and phalloplasty enable, Griggs reworks the assumption that surgeries necessarily facilitate contentment with the body, as I explored in Chapter Two. Crucially, the close of the narrative departs from the “self-acceptance” and “peace” that Ames figures as central to the third act of trans autobiography, and that typify Thompson’s ending: rather, surgery cultivates a “sex-changed existence” (27) and an entrenched mode of transness. Griggs cultivates a gulf between her sense of her own female body and cis femaleness. Similarly, her portrayal of the unfamiliar body during her period of recovery from surgery subverts the possibility of “coming home” to the body. Moreover, her account of gazing into a mirror shortly after her procedure and being unable to recognise her reflection additionally subverts the mirror symbolism that

Prosser posits as central to portrayals of transition (100). By rendering Griggs unrecognisable, the portrayals of the pain of recovery, the marks of the surgical procedure and confinement to the hospital bed additionally engender narrative deviation from the movement towards restored “order” (Richard Grayson 2006, 29).

Discontent with the body, however, might not inhibit forms of resolution in Griggs’s account. While “arrival” at the “right” body is tempered by pain and her notion of its unfamiliarity, Griggs hints that returning to her exercise regime with the persistency she cultivated before her surgical procedure, seeking to “resume and then exceed” her previous capability (201), might facilitate “arrival” at the familiar body.²⁶ Pursuing her previous regime restores the body to its previous strength; seeking to build up the strength of the body reveals the notion of further shifts. “Arrival” at the body, in the text, is supplanted by ideas of ongoing changes. However, the suggestion that she might ultimately attain a form of contentment and familiarity in the body resonates with Thompson’s notion of eventually attaining harmony in the body. Griggs’s notion of harmony, though, is tempered by the sense of transness that surgery is unable to resolve.

The strengthening of kinship bonds that facilitate resolution in *What Took You so Long?* resonates with forms of conclusion in Boylan’s autobiographical works. In *Stuck in the Middle with You* (2013), Boylan’s most recently-published work and an autobiographical guide to trans parenting, Boylan charts her shift from “Maddy”, a contraction of “Mom” and “Daddy”, to “Mom” (264).²⁷ The transformation sheds ambiguity: not only does “Maddy” invoke two differently gendered parenting roles, it is, unlike “Mom”, an unfamiliar appellation. The change of title charts a movement towards certainty, as well as the shift into the role of the mother.

²⁶ In “Serious Play” (2009), Elizabeth Schewe explores how, in their autobiographies, Kate Bornstein and RuPaul present themselves – “their current identities” – as “works-in-progress”, to be further explored “through ongoing performances” (681). While the use of photographs in Bornstein’s work follow the life course, the text opposes this chronology, “following a dialogic, rather than a narrative, model” (682).

²⁷ In Chapter Three, I discussed my reasons for leaving this autobiographical work out of my discussion. I draw on the text here for its adherence to resolution facilitated by (changing?) forms of kinship.

Boylan's womanhood, however, does not hinge on the move into the "Mom" role.²⁸ As I discussed in Chapter Two, the denouement of the 2005 film *Transamerica* rests on the repaired bond between protagonist Bree Osborne and her son, Toby, and the surgical procedure that she is eventually able to undergo. Bree's womanhood, argues Cael Keegan (2013), thus depends on both the female body and motherhood (unpaginated).²⁹ In *She's Not There*, resolution is facilitated by the shift from a period of distance and anguish between Boylan and her wife Grace to reconciliation, and the decision to remain married.

The account of transition, in *She's Not There* (2003), emerges as a process of becoming more closely acquainted with herself: "As it turns out, we're all still learning to be men, or women, all still learning to be ourselves" (197). Boylan emphasises adherence to the "trapped in the wrong body" model: "the awareness that I was in the wrong body, living the wrong life, was never out of my conscious mind" (19). And her account of emerging from the "wrongness" of the body resonates with the analogy between incarceration in jail and entrapment in the body in Thompson's account: "I feel great these days, like somebody who just got out of prison after 40 years for something she didn't do, like I got pardoned by the governor" (179–180). However, *She's Not There* resists focusing on the changes of the body. As I stated in Chapter Three, surgery is elided in the narrative, and the autobiography concentrates on the social dimension of transition. Resolution and harmony in womanhood arise from the responses Boylan receives to the announcement of her transition, from colleagues and students alike, and the repaired bonds with, primarily, her children, her wife Grace, and her friend and colleague Richard Russo.

By departing, in the sequel *I'm Looking Through You* (2008), from the conventions of the tradition she establishes in *She's Not There*, Boylan hints at

²⁸ In the television drama *Transparent*, for which Boylan is a consultant (Kristin Fritz, unpaginated), protagonist Maura Pfefferman is known as "Moppa" to her children, a similar contraction to Boylan's (a mix of "momma" and "poppa"). In the 2016 episode "To Sardines and Back", tension arises from Maura's desire to be called "Grandma" and "Mom" by her family. In this context, moving into the role of the mother, or seeking to, engenders conflict, rather than catharsis or denouement, and the departure from an unfamiliar subject position, as in Boylan's text.

²⁹ Boylan, however, departs from the notion of resolution founded on womanhood that motherhood designates.

broadening modes of conveying trans experiences. In *I'm Looking Through You*, Boylan's assertion that "Against all odds, [she] had become solid" (249) insists that the resolution of *I'm Looking Through You* rests on the shift from diminished and marginal (ghostly) being to the solidity of adult womanhood. However, the implications of ongoing haunting, which I explored in Chapter Three, interrupt neat resolution. Her sense of anguish when her sister refuses to tolerate her transition also inhibits resolution. It is striking that, while *She's Not There* cultivates a sense of resolution based on strengthened kinship bonds with Russo, Grace and her children, *I'm Looking Through You* returns to Boylan's adolescence and young adulthood to emphasise the suffering engendered by the death of her father, prior to her transition, and the loss of her sister after her transition. Comparing herself to the dead girl precisely because she has "lost" her father and sister (13), she hints at failing to attain a sense of "peace" (Ames 2005, xii).

Although I continue to waver between the sense that the autobiographies – the work of Griggs and Boylan in particular – might, and simultaneously might not, suggest resolution, I seek to conclude on this note to emphasise the complexity of resolution. By charting a move towards "whole" being and subsequently delineating ongoing dissatisfactions, Griggs departs from conventional or typical modes of resolution that emerge in trans autobiographies. By closing with accounts of dissatisfaction, in which transness itself is framed as inhibiting the possibility of "coming home" to the body, Griggs's *Journal* demonstrates that it deviates from the obligation to depict the eventual "self-acceptance" that Ames (2005) proposes.³⁰ Similarly, in *I'm Looking Through You*, Boylan declares her own solidity – "I had become solid" – and subsequently illustrates her own ghostly, and haunted, states of being. In doing so, she resists conventional closure, deviating from the obligation to attain "peace" (Ames 2005, xii). The reworked sense of resolution contributes to

³⁰ In their autobiographies, both Griggs and Rees describe aspiring to a "normal" and "natural" being that resonates with cisgender being. In their accounts, transness tempers resolution predicated on "coming home" to the body. Rondot notes Professor L. J. Gooren's idea of transness as "sex error of the body", included in *Dear Sir or Madam* (qtd in Rondot, 532). As I explore in Chapter Two, Griggs portrays transness as entrenched, and stresses that she cannot escape trans being.

In *I'm Looking Through You*, Boylan deviates from Rees's and Griggs's notions of transness: as Rondot (2016) notes, Boylan "figures her trans* identity as only one of the theories—one of the 'stories'—that elucidates her life" (536), marking a shift from earlier texts that sought to explain trans and to convey "a universal trans* experience" (536).

the broadening modes of representing experiences of transition on which my thesis has focused: Thompson's development from boyhood to manhood; Griggs's shift into entrenched transness concurrent with her shift into femaleness; and Boylan's wavering between ghostliness and personhood.

Appendix: List of trans autobiographies

I have compiled this list of works, grouped into decades of publication and arranged by year, in order to clarify what I mean by the “tradition” of trans autobiographies that I refer to in this thesis. As I have explored, a trans autobiography typically depicts the process of beginning to live as the gender with which one identifies. In this thesis, I refer to “trans autobiographies” to specifically denote texts by writers who have undergone body changes as part of their process of transition, even if these body shifts are not documented. Though I seek to provide an overview of significant works – typically from UK and US contexts – certain titles will be absent from the list. In the texts I include, authors narrate their own experience of being trans; and thus works such as Boyd’s *My Husband Betty* (2003) and *She’s Not The Man I Married* (2007) that focus on the trans experience of Boyd’s spouse are not included. Similarly, autobiographies that document gender variance but not a process of transition, such as Scholinski’s *The Last Time I Wore a Dress* (1997), are not included because they do not correspond to the emphasis of these specific texts.³¹

1930s-1950s

Hoyer, Niels, editor. *Man into Woman: The First Sex Change: A Portrait of Lili Elbe*.

1933. Blue Boat Books, 2004.

Cowell, Roberta. *Roberta Cowell's Story*. William Heinemann, 1954.

Star, Hedy Jo. *“I Changed My Sex!” The Autobiography of Stripper Hedy Jo Star,*

Formerly Carl Hammonds. 1955. Novel Books, 1963.

1960s

Sinclair, Abby. *I Was Male*. Novel Books, 1965.

Jorgensen, Christine. *A Personal Autobiography*. 1968. Bantam Books, 1967.

³¹ Most of the autobiographies in this list do not appear in the bibliography, to prevent duplication. The trans autobiographies that do appear in the bibliography are included because they have been discussed in the main body of the thesis.

1970s

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- Raskin, Lyn. *Diary of a Transsexual*. Olympia Press, 1971.
- Dianna, and Felicity Cochrane. *Once I Was a Man. Behold: I am a Woman*. Pyramid Books, 1972.
- Morgan, Patricia. *The Man-Maid Doll*. Lyle Stuart, 1973.
- Conn, Canary. *Canary: The Story of a Transsexual*. Nash Pub., 1974.
- Fry, Jane, and Robert Bogdan. *Being Different: The Autobiography of Jane Fry*. Wiley, 1974.
- Morris, Jan. *Conundrum*. Faber and Faber, 1974.
- Martino, Mario, and Harriett. *Emergence: A Transsexual Autobiography*. Crown Publishers, 1977.
- Hunt, Nancy. *Mirror Image: The Odyssey of a Male-to-Female Transsexual*. Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1978.

1980s

- Ashley, April, and Duncan Fallowell. *April Ashley's Odyssey*. Jonathan Cape, 1982.
- Richards, Renée. *Second Serve*. 1983. Stein and Day, 1984.
- Davis, Sharon. *Finer Specimen of Womanhood: A Transsexual Speaks Out*. Vantage Press, 1986.

1990s

- Lloyd, Stephanie Ann. *Stephanie: A Girl in a Million*. Ebury Press, 1991.
- Castle, Stephanie. *Feelings: A Transsexual's Explanation of a Baffling Condition*. Perceptions Press, 1992.
- Cossey, Caroline. *My Story*. Faber and Faber, 1992.
- Cummings, Katherine. *Katherine's Diary: The Story of a Transsexual*. William Heinemann, 1992.
- Hollis, Christina M. *Beyond Belief: The Discovery of my Existence*. Genesis Publications, 1993.

- Munroe, Carlyne Jayne. *A Tale of Two Sexes: The Story of a Transformation*. Bonden Publications, 1993.
- Bornstein, Kate. *Gender Outlaw: On Men, Women, and the Rest of Us*. Routledge, 1994.
- Grant, Julia. *Just Julia: The Story of an Extraordinary Woman*. Boxtree, 1994.
- County, Jayne. *Man Enough to Be a Woman*. Serpent's Tail, 1995.
- Thompson, Raymond, and Kitty Sewell. *What Took You so Long? A Girl's Journey to Manhood*. Penguin, 1995.
- Griggs, Claudine. *Journal of a Sex Change: Passage through Trinidad*. 1996. Berg, 2004.
- Nettick, Geri, and Beth Elliott. *Mirrors: Portrait of a Lesbian Transsexual*. Rhinoceros Publications, 1996.
- Rees, Mark. *Dear Sir or Madam: The Autobiography of a Female-to-Male Transsexual*. Cassell, 1996.
- Hoyman, Rhonda D. *Rhonda: The Woman in Me. A Journey through Gender Transition*. Pearce Publishers, 1999.
- McCloskey, Deirdre. *Crossing: A Memoir*. University of Chicago Press, 1999.

2000s

- Brevard, Aleshia. *Woman I Was Not Born to Be: A Transsexual Journey*. Temple University Press, 2001.
- Boylan, Jennifer Finney. *She's Not There: A Life in Two Genders*. Broadway Books, 2003.
- Carlotta, and Prue MacSween. *Carlotta: I'm Not That Kind of Girl*. Pan Macmillan, 2003.
- Rose, Donna. *Wrapped in Blue: A Journey of Discovery*. Living Legacy Press, 2003.
- Green, Jamison. *Becoming a Visible Man*. Vanderbilt University Press, 2004.
- Kailey, Matt. *Just Add Hormones: An Insider's Guide to the Transsexual Experience*. Beacon, 2005.
- Paris, Rico Adrian. *Transman – Bitesize: The Story of a Woman Who Became a Man*. AuthorHouse, 2005.

- Khosla, Dhillon. *Both Sides Now: One Man's Journey Through Womanhood*. Jeremy P. Tarcher, 2006.
- Moore, Annah. *Right Side Out: In-Tune Within, to Be in Harmony with the World*. iUniverse, 2006.
- Valerio, Max Wolf. *The Testosterone Files: My Hormonal and Social Transformation from Female to Male*. Seal Press, 2006.
- Link, Aaron Raz, and Hilda Raz. *What Becomes You*. University of Nebraska Press, 2007. Print.
- Mateo, Vanessa. *Naughty and Nice: The Colorful Life of Transsexual Vanessa*. iUniverse, 2007.
- Reyes, Raquel. *Goddess: Memoir of a Transsexual*. BookSurge, 2007.
- Rose, Lannie. *Lannie!: My Journey from Man to Woman*. SterlingHouse Books, 2007.
- Beatie, Thomas. *Labor of Love: The Story of One Man's Extraordinary Pregnancy*. Avalon, 2008.
- Boylan, Jennifer Finney. *I'm Looking through You: Growing up Haunted*. Broadway Books, 2008.

2010s

- McDonald, S. *Confessions of an Empty Purse*. Frontenac House, 2010.
- Anders, Pamela Rose. *Gypsy Moon*. Real Publishing, 2011.
- Beatty, Christine. *Not Your Average American Girl*. Glamazon Press, 2011.
- Bono, Chaz, and Billie Fitzpatrick. *Transition: Becoming Who I Was Always Meant to Be*. Plume, 2011.
- Cook, Daphiny. *Bourbon Street Stripper to New Orleans Lady!: The Life of My Dreams; The Dreams of a Life*. PublishAmerica, 2011.
- Newman, Toni. *I Rise: The Transformation of Toni Newman*. CreateSpace, 2011.
- Birch, Jessica Angelina. *Confessions of a Transsexual Physician*. CreateSpace, 2012.
- Bornstein, Kate. *A Queer and Pleasant Danger*. Beacon Press, 2012.
- Maroon, Everett. *Bumbling into Body Hair: A Transsexual's Memoir*. Liberty, 2012.
- Boylan, Jennifer Finney. *Stuck in the Middle with You: A Memoir of Parenting in Three Genders*. Crown Publishers, 2013.
- Henderson, Kenna. *Kenna: A Transgender Life*. Clay Reston Books, 2013.

Andrews, Arin. *Some Assembly Required: The Not-So-Secret Life of a Transgender Teen*. Simon and Schuster, 2014.

Coyote, Ivan E., and Rae Spoon. *Gender Failure*. Arsenal Pulp Press, 2014.

Hill, Katie Rain. *Rethinking Normal: A Memoir in Transition*. Simon and Schuster, 2014.

Kelly, Teri Louise. *Bent*. Open Books, 2014.

McBee, Thomas Page. *Man Alive: A True Story of Violence, Forgiveness and Becoming a Man*. City Lights Publisher, 2014.

Mock, Janet. *Redefining Realness: My Path to Womanhood, Identity, Love and so Much More*. Atria, 2014.

Smith, Phoebe. *From Sharecropper's Son to Who's Who in American Women*. Phoebe Smith, 2014.

Dolan, Zoe. *There Is Room for You: Tales from a Transgender Defender's Heart*. AM Publishing, 2015.

Jacques, Juliet. *Trans: A Memoir*. Verso, 2015.

Maloney, Kellie. *Frankly Kellie: Becoming a Woman in a Man's World*. Blink Publishing, 2015.

Edwards, Chris. *Balls: It Takes Some to Get Some*. Greenleaf Book Group Press, 2016.

Jennings, Jazz. *Being Jazz: My Life as a (Transgender) Teen*. Penguin Random House, 2016.

Bertie, Alex. *Trans Mission: My Quest to a Beard*. Hachette Children's Group, 2017.

Mock, Janet. *Surpassing Certainty: What My Twenties Taught Me*. Atria, 2017.

Jenner, Caitlyn, and Buzz Bissinger. *The Secrets of My Life*. Trapeze, 2017.

Kergil, Skylar. *Before I Had the Words: On Being a Transgender Young Adult*. Skyhorse Publishing, 2017.

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