

Master Thesis
Utrecht University
Literature Today
English/Comparative track
24-7-2018
16.335 words

Multiplicity and Movement: construction of
genderqueer identities in *Orlando, Middlesex*
and *Symptoms of being Human*

Name: Manon Reuling

Student ID: 5508223

Address: Fagotstraat 2

6922 KJ Duiven

First supervisor:

Barnita Bagchi

Second assessor:

Dany van Dam

Table of contents

Chapter 1 Introduction	3
Chapter 2 Woolf's <i>Orlando</i> and the Narrative of Reality	12
Chapter 3 Eugenides' <i>Middlesex</i> : the Crisis of the Self and the Social Narrative	25
Chapter 4 Garvin's <i>Symptoms of being Human</i> and (Re-)Construction of Narrative	37
Chapter 5 Conclusion	47
Works Cited	54

Chapter 1

Introduction

Man or woman? The more you think about it, the stranger it becomes: we spent most of our time subconsciously analysing any data that comes to us through our senses, making millions of connections in order to place all this data in a framework we can understand, we can work with, we can live in. We construct a reality. What is often the first piece of data we want to acquire when we meet a new person, in order to place this individual in our framework, our narrative? Whether this person is a man or a woman. At least, that is what I have often found myself doing. Looking at many different elements of clothing, behaviour, voice, appearance and assuming that there are connections between these and someone's gender. As Stoljar states, "gender is [...] one of the most fundamental categories of explanation of social, political, moral, and biological human life" (212). Gender can be used to place someone in your framework of reality, but at the same time gender is also used to create and support this very framework, to understand and give meaning to the world around us.

The dominant framework of the society I grew up in was that of the binary, which constitutes a 'male' and 'female' gender identity, often based upon one's biological 'sex'. Since Simone de Beauvoir, feminists have been arguing for the constructed nature of this binary and its associated assumptions and power structures. But how, then, do we move beyond this constructed binary, which has often been given such a "fundamental" place in our understanding and consideration of the world?

In this thesis, I will analyse Woolf's *Orlando*, Eugenides' *Middlesex* and Garvin's *Symptoms of being Human* in order to consider how these texts construct a genderqueer identity. I will analyse how these texts create gender identities which move beyond the binary,

identities that “*queer* gender constructs and activate new social relations because the reality of their gender as genderqueer is produced by the social construction of the gender binary” (Stachowiak, 534). This “queering of the binary” is how I will use the term genderqueer in my analysis. Each of these texts, then, has a protagonist who moves beyond the binary, and I will analyse how these identities are shaped and constructed by the narrative, the described individual and society, and I shall develop an analysis which in itself seeks to embody this ‘queering’; I will move beyond the concepts of natural and the social, the personal and society, in order to consider how these concepts are always intertwined in our creation of ‘gender’.

Literature, after all, can represent and position, in many different ways, genderqueerness within society. It can represent how a genderqueer identity is shaped by the imagination; indeed, we do not look to literature in order to discover the actual reality of a real individual’s life. Instead, what we find is an exploration, whether one that reinforces or subverts, of genderqueerness in relation to both the self and society. We can observe how genderqueerness is imagined, and what constructs influence this imagination. In a binary-influenced society, bodies, acts and people are read like texts through gender norms and expectations. Literature, in turn, considers society like a text, and this text is in turn placed within society. Literature is also directly an integrated part of the system of trying to understand, position and criticize the position of genders within society, through means such as fantastical turns and genre conventions which are specific to literature. By performing a genderqueer reading, then, I will not only show how genderqueerness functions in and is influenced by society, but also consider how, through the conventions of literature, literary texts can move beyond merely criticising the gender binary and then putting genderqueerness as an ideal opposite. How, instead, we can move towards a reading that offers a more productive, open and positive understanding of genders beyond the binary.

However, literature does not exist beyond the sphere of society, and though my research will focus on the texts themselves, it is necessary to consider the socio-political circumstances of these titles. *Orlando*, the first novel I will analyse, was published in 1928, was Woolf's fourth novel, and the first novel to bring Woolf commercial success (Majumdar & McLaurin, 22). Orlando wakes up after a mysteriously long sleep to find herself a woman, where she was a man before. Woolf's novel plays with conventions of gender and sexuality through fantastical means, such as Orlando's sudden gender change and the extremely long span of Orlando's life. In this way, "*Orlando* propels its readers into the realm of the imagination, a region of seeming fantasy. But *Orlando* is no aesthete's evasion of unpleasant reality" (Parkes, 436). Rather than creating a pure dream-world, *Orlando* also places itself firmly and critically within the social conventions of the time.

Woolf herself, however, "Considered Orlando to be something of a freak" (Majumdar & McLaurin, 21), putting the focus on the fantastical elements of the story, rather than to position it in relation to reality. The connection to sexual identity might also have been a reason for *Orlando*'s success. Only a year before, *The Well of Loneliness*, a novel about two female lovers, had been banned despite the protest against the ban by, among others, Woolf herself (Majumdar & McLaurin, 21). *Orlando* plays with boundaries of gender and sexuality, and this play is constructed through, and perhaps enabled by, the fantastical elements of the novel, and it is the interaction between the fantastical and perceived reality that I will consider. Perhaps intentionally, perhaps unintentionally, but through the idea of fantasy, a novel on identities beyond the heavily enforced gender binary prevalent at the time, became a widely-read and praised novel. The fantastical elements are essential to *Orlando*, and to understanding and considering the position *Orlando* holds in relation to the gender and society.

The second novel I will consider is *Middlesex* by Jeffrey Eugenides, published in 2002. The title refers both to the name of the house in which the main character, Cal/Callie, grew up, and to Cal/Callie himself, for he is intersex: he has the sexual characteristics of both 'males' and 'females'. Cal begins his story by telling us not about himself, but rather by telling the story of his grandparents and their journey from Greece to America, making it not only a story on intersexuality, but also on generations and immigration. Both of these also influence the social world Callie grows up in. The epic tone of the novel is used to delineate all the different social constructions, and perhaps biological constructions, which brought Cal/Callie into the world.

The novel itself was well received, considering that it won the Pulitzer Prize in 2003. The popularity of a novel about an intersex person caused many people, from doctors to the general reader, to become more aware about the existence, and the understanding of, intersexual people (Dreger & Hordon, 2007). A novel such as this, then, clearly shows the effect Literature can have on social dynamics, that can encourage change and awareness of the social convention. By getting to understand intersexuality and relating to an intersexual person, people can become more aware of the deficiency of supposedly fixed sex/gender categories.

Middlesex has also been critiqued, especially by a number of intersexual people. Does Eugenides, as a cis-gendered man, present views reinforcing the gender binary, compared to someone who does not identify with the binary categories?(Dreger & Hordon, 2008) However, my research does not concern itself with the position or intention of the author. Rather, this context emphasises the need to consider *Middlesex* in the light of gender binary constructions, for between the novel itself and the many responses to it, we can find the interaction between Literature, the construction of gender(queerness) and society.

The last novel I will consider is Jeff Garvin's novel *Symptoms of being Human*, which was published in 2015. The novel is a Young Adult novel, a subgenre of the novel that is categorized by its attention to the life of young adults. Its readership is, therefore, also mainly but not exclusively constituted by young adults. Young adult novels have become increasingly popular over the last few years, but are in some contexts not considered as seriously as adult novels are. However, fascinatingly, young adult novels often feature more LGBTQ characters compared to adult novels (Abathe & Kidd, 5). *Symptoms of being Human* was the first YA-novel to feature a genderfluid main character (Cart, 192). Main character Riley experiences a different gender identity at different times; at some moments female, then male, or an identity that Riley refers to as 'neutral'. Like Jeffrey Eugenides, the author of *Symptoms of being Human* is cis-gendered. Garvin does present an explicit awareness of his position towards the subject he writes about in an interview with Chapman University, saying that he: "feels awkward speaking for LGBTQ+ groups" (Chapman University, n.p.). As with *Middlesex*, I will not consider the personal position of the author, but rather consider the way in which gender(queerness) is imagined within a binary society or system

When using the term 'binary society/system' I do not in any way mean to imply that all of society is singularly defined by this binary. Many different ideas of genders can exist within the sphere of the binary society, but for each of these ideas, the gender binary forms the central framework, in that the binary is what the ideas either diverge from or reinforce. Of course, different gender frameworks might be central to different cultures, and though my analysis is open to the possibility of using different gender constructs, this thesis will focus on the binary gender framework.

Possibly the best-known work in Gender Studies and fundamental to the modern interpretation of the workings of the binary gender system is Judith Butler's *Gender Trouble*. In this work, Butler rejects the idea of gender as being predetermined and inherent. Rather,

she suggests, gender is a societal construction, a performance in which the term 'performative' suggests a dramatic and contingent construction of meaning (Butler, 190). Gender is something we 'do', rather than are, for:

Gender is also a norm that can never fully be internalized [...] If the ground of gender identity is the stylized repetition of acts through time and not a seeming seamlessly identity [...] The abiding gendered self will then be shown to be structured by repeated acts that seek to approximate the ideal of a substantial ground of identity, but which, in their occasional discontinuity, reveal the temporal and contingent groundlessness of this 'ground'. (Butler, 192)

Gender, according to Butler, is neither inherent nor fully a part of an individual's internal identity, but rather a construction that is presented as inherent and essential in society. In other words, the identity of the self is not dependent upon a specific gender. Rather, we are socialised as children to not only function in accordance with the rules of gender, but also to internalize the idea of gender so we consider this a part of our identity, and because of this we are not aware of our constant performance. This process of socialisation in accordance with gender norms can hardly, if at all, be avoided, for "people continue to be defined according to oppositional or dualistic understandings of biological sex and of gender whether they choose to or not (i.e. this is socially compulsory)" (Nicholas, 9). To function in society, we are forced to relate and base our identities upon our 'gender'. We attempt to fully identify with, through internalization, a static image of what we are socially taught is something we 'are', but, as Butler argues, this is a static, constructed ideal that can never fully encompass the complexity of the self.

There is a clear, direct connection to be found between society and gender, then. Gender is a point at which the construct of the self and the construction of social norms collide, meet, and interact. The idea of a person's gendered identity is created through this collision, this coming together of many processes from each of these sides. One of the main aspects in this consideration or collision, is that of the body. Often, it is suggested that where 'gender' is internal and therefore more prone to subjectivity and fluidity, 'sex' is static and objective (Nicholas, 8). The idea both Butler and Nicholas criticise as prevailing in society, is that there are two sets of primary and secondary sexual characteristics, each one of these related to one side of the binary, male and female. However, the idea that there only two essential sexes is problematic and limiting. It disregards the complex role the body plays in the creation of gender, for, after all, it is the body that, when we are born, is the deciding factor for which gender identity is placed upon us. There is a direct connection between the idea that there are two clearly defined sexes, and that there are two distinct genders. This act of essentialising the body is itself a social construction, Nicholas claims, drawing upon the studies of feminist biologists, who show that:

there is no empirical reality that dictates the categorisation of people according to two supposed pre-existing categories of 'sex'. This combination of characteristics understood to make up a 'thing' called sex, which consists of two discrete categories, is a humyn¹ construction imposed on to bodies. (Nicholas, 9-10)

Sexual characteristics, then, are bodily similarities essentialised as so significant that they are a defining factor for a person's identity and divide humanity into two distinct categories. That the body plays a significant role in the compulsory gendering becomes significantly clear

¹ Nicholas' spelling

when considering the situation of intersex people. Intersex people, whose sexual (primary or secondary) characteristics cannot be definitely be labelled as either ‘female’ or ‘male’, are often forced (especially as babies) to ‘become’ either ‘female’ or ‘male’; they are subjected to social pressure to change their bodies in order to fit into one of the essentialised categories. Geertje Mak traces the medical documentation of people whose bodies do not, or do not appear to, conform to either sex, and she describes these as people whose sex is doubted (6). This term foregrounds that being “of doubtful sex” is not so much an internal identity or a state, but much more of a social perspective upon the body and gender performance of the individual. It is this term I will use, then, when discussing the perception of the described society upon the individual who is seen as not conforming.

It is clear, then, that there is a direct intertwining of the social and personal when considering gender; it is from the construct of social society one understands reality, creating what I call a ‘narrative of reality’, but this narrative can be contested, explored or changed. What I intend to foreground with this term is the narratological, and therefore constructed, nature of what we perceive to be ‘natural’ or ‘real’ behaviour, or acts, especially in terms of gender. I will argue for an analysis which explores how our sense of the natural and the social are intertwined and interconnected, as “analyses of gender that continue to attach themselves to binaries [...] cannot reflect the fluidity that characterizes the embodied experience of gender” (Linstead & Pullen, 1288). I will read the texts, then, through a perspective in which I will consider gender but also its construction as a “*Simultaneous intensive multiplicity*” (Linstead & Pullen, 1289, italics in source), a multiplicity which is defined by movement, about becoming rather than being, in the sense that is “it is possible just to become, not to simply become *something*” (Linstead & Pullen, 1289). It is such a multiplicity which I will argue for in my analysis as being central to the genderqueer identity in the novels.

In the following chapters I will consider respectively *Orlando*, *Middlesex* and *Symptoms of being Human*, and analyse in accordance with the previously outlined terms and concepts how the relation between the binary society and the non-binary identity is constructed, shaped and imagined, as well as argue how we may approach texts from a perspective that goes beyond the binary.

Chapter 2

Woolf's *Orlando* and the narrative of reality

The biographical and the fantastical

Virginia Woolf's work *Orlando* tells the story of the young nobleman Orlando, who is on two occasions taken over by a seven days long slumber. After waking up from the second sleep, Orlando discovers that he has become a woman, and upon this discovery lives out the rest of her long, long days as a woman.

Woolf's story has been connected to different gender identities, such as male to female transsexuals and general genderqueerness. It is clear that this is a work that plays with, blurs and deconstructs the supposedly clearly divided and marked categories of sexual and gender identity.

To frame this deconstruction, Woolf makes use of two different genres. Firstly, she uses the fantastical. This goes beyond merely using the fantastical to excuse, as it were, Orlando's gender change. The two abnormally long slumbers and Orlando's ageing being completely unsynchronized with the passing of time around her, are elements which add to the general feel of the novel as a fantasia. *Orlando* not only blurs the rigid lines of sexual and gender identity, but also those of reality. Indeed, the rules of reality do not appear to be applicable to Orlando, who lives through multiple centuries but hardly ages. Therefore, Orlando can be considered to exist beyond the rules of gender and society itself, allowing her an outsider-view on the constructed nature of reality.

The other genre used in *Orlando* is that of the biography: the narrator of the novel is an unnamed biographer who tells Orlando's story. However, it is at the same time a meta-fictional mock-biography, playing not only with the conventions of the genre, but also with perception of reality and truth in writing. The biographer himself claims that: "the first duty of

a biographer, which is to plod, without looking right or left, in the indelible footprints of truth [...] our simple duty is to state the facts as far as they are known” (Woolf, 31). The biographer claims to consider facts and objective truth, but the narrative itself deconstructs this ideal. Multiple aspects of the narrator’s voice and interpretation affect the telling of the story, most noticeably when he uses a simile to hide Orlando’s changing of gender, as:

Now again obscurity descends, and would indeed that it were deeper! [...] Would that we might spare the reader what is to come and say to him in so many words, Orlando died and was buried. But here, alas, Truth, Candour, and Honesty, the austere Gods who keep watch and ward by the inkpot of the biographer, cry No! [...] The Truth and nothing but the Thruth! (Woolf, 65)

The biographer’s struggle becomes clear here: the change of sex is seen as something that ought to be obscured, and this hints at the preference of history-writers to obscure and obliterate anyone who does not fit within the norms of Purity, Chastity and Modesty, the three figures the biographer calls forth in an attempt to hide Orlando’s change of sex. The telling of the so-called objective truth is very much influenced by the subjective perspective of the biographer towards the states of affairs; Chastity or Modesty are norms that are closely related to in gender, sexuality, and power.

Orlando’s biography is also an ironic one, a mock-biography, showing the impossibility of writing the objective truth. This contradiction between the biographer’s intention and his actions

reveal Woolf to be a virtuoso metafictional performer – one who self-consciously lays bare the conventions of framing devices that make biographical narrative discourse

possible. Such a meta-fictional performance, of course, flaunts the constructed nature not only of fiction, but also of what readers conventionally assume to be ‘real life’ or ‘fact’. (Boehm, 197)

In order to ‘translate’ (from actions into text) the events of Orlando’s life into a biography, the biographer has to use multiple conventions of fiction writing. Woolf’s play with the conventions of the genres she uses, contribute to the general idea of construction and creation that is visible throughout the novel. Combining a genre that claims to portray the objective truth, which in itself supposes that there is a fixed reality, but in reality depends on many structures of the fictional narrative, and the genre that attempts to break away from the conventions of society and reality, Woolf creates a framework for her gender/sexual story which foregrounds the idea that reality in itself is something that is constructed through complex means, rather than objective ones. Reality, in other words, is considered as a form of narrative.

From this point, then, we can view the construction of Orlando’s gender itself as actively engaging with the conventions of society, of the supposed reality society creates, and, on the other hand, how Orlando’s identity is also influenced by these conventions, and all the complex interactions in-between these two.

Construction of gender identity

Orlando’s gender identity changes from identifying as male, to identifying as female.

However, I will argue that the identity of Orlando can be read as specifically genderqueer, rather than as transsexual in the narrow sense. There is no evidence, for example, that Orlando identified as a woman before her sex change, for “Orlando was a man till the age of thirty; when he became a woman and remained so ever since” (Woolf, 68): before the change he was

male, after the change she was female, indeed: “After being unambiguously male, Orlando becomes unambiguously female, without any of the physical features that would characterize a male-to-female transsexual” (Coffman, 13). Orlando does not fit within the general perspective of a transsexual person in the narrow sense. Orlando’s moving from one binary option to the other also does not mean that the novel confines itself to the binary. After the gender change, Orlando is female, but more importantly, her feminine gender identity takes the more prominent place: this does not mean Orlando does not identify with only the narrow space of this gender identity, for:

It was a change in Orlando herself that dictated her choice of a woman’s dress and a woman’s sex. And perhaps in this she was only expressing herself more openly than usual – openness was indeed the soul of her nature – something that happens to most people without being thus plainly expressed. (Woolf, 92)

Orlando’s identity is one of fluidity, of movement, that has been opened up, as it were, since her change of gender. On the other side, however, Orlando’s identity functions within the gender binary, rather than taking a position of in-betweenness. Orlando was a man, and is now female, and though her identity has ‘opened up’, overall she is still placed within the binary framework. So how is this seemingly oppositional identity of Orlando constructed?

First of all, we must consider the self in relation to gender identity in *Orlando*. It is striking that Orlando’s self is not predominantly defined by her gender, for “Orlando had become a woman there is no denying it. But in every other respect, Orlando remained precisely as he had been. The change of sex, though it altered their future, did nothing whatever to alter their identity” (Woolf, 67). The self, then, is not primarily dependent on gender as a fixed, supposedly stable category. Rather, Orlando is really a woman, but at the

same time, readers hear of “this mixture in her, of man and woman, one being uppermost and then the other”(Woolf, 93). Orlando’s identity is not defined by being either one gender or another in a limited, segregated sense. Instead, the two identities co-exist in her, where one is merely more visible and prominent, internally and externally, than the other. We might also see a reverse of this, with the male on top and the female below, when we consider that Orlando’s servants, upon seeing her as a woman, after having known her only as a man, state that “they were like as two peaches on a branch; which, said Mrs. Grimsditch, becoming confidential, she had always had her suspicions (...) which it was no surprise to her.” (Woolf, 83). It might be the case that, in Orlando’s days as a man, the woman also existed, but merely not as the one ‘on top’. Rather than viewing Orlando’s change of sex as a step from one gender to another, we may see this more as a movement, a re-arrangement of particles of identity.

With the passing of time, Orlando comes to identify more with the female part of her identity than the male part. The construction of this movement almost pre-figures Butler’s theory on performative gender. Although Orlando begins with an identity that is within the female sphere, but not as a closed of binary option, this is only before she gets on the boat to England:

It is a strange fact, but a true one, that up to this moment she had scarcely given her sex a thought. Perhaps the Turkish trousers which she had hitherto worn had done something to distract her thoughts; and the gipsy women, except in one or two important particulars, differ very little from the gipsy men. (Woolf, 74)

In Turkish trousers and living among the gypsies, where culture is described as more gender-neutral, at least in terms of appearance, Orlando’s femininity is almost only internal. In

Butler's terms, this means that there was no performativity related to her identity. It is only when she returns to England, on the moving boat, when she puts on a very gendered piece of clothing – her skirt, that it begins to dawn on her that she is going to a place where the performativity of binary gender is considered the norm. Orlando, up to this point, has not been socialized as a woman, so rather than having these ideas of gender internalized, she becomes highly aware of their constructedness: “she reflected: ‘for women are not (judging by my own short experience of the sex) obedient, chaste, scented, and exquisitely apparelled by nature)’” (Woolf, 77). The attributes that Orlando previously envisioned as natural, she now realises are performative: she comes to realise that gender roles are constructed by the society she lives in, and that this means “that’s the last oath I will be able to swear (...) once I set foot on English soil” (Woolf, 77). Due to the power dynamics between femininity and masculinity, Orlando will lose her ability to do a lot of things: not because she, as now a woman, is by nature incapable of this, but because society has constructed it as such and perceives it as nature. Thus, Orlando’s relative fluidity and openness of identity will have to cease once she reaches the shore. It is indeed during the night when the captain takes her to the shore of Italy that “something had happened... to give her a push towards the female sex” (Woolf, 78) where at first she was “censuring both sexes equally, as if she belonged to neither; and indeed, for the time being, she seemed to vacillate; she was man; she was woman; she knew the secrets, shared the weaknesses of each (...) and was not sure to which she belonged” (Woolf, 77-78). Orlando’s openness of identity clashes against the binary restrictions of English society: but once ashore, she internalized the female identity because she has moved away from the transitional space of the boat, towards the society in which the binary is normalized and internalized, and performativity is necessary to engage with society. Once upon shore, Orlando no longer merely views the binary rules of gender as an outsider, but rather internalizes them, and is subjected to their power.

The Gendering of Self in Society

Often the body is considered to be the main determiner of gender. Though more and more attention is given to the gender/sex distinction, as discussed before, sex still seen as a stable male/female characteristic (for example in the common naming of transgendered people as ‘females in male bodies’ and vice versa). However, the narrator does not provide a clear image of Orlando’s sex. Though Orlando is naked upon waking up and finding herself a woman, her body is not clearly named in gendered terms. The only sign of a change of supposed sexual determiners, is that Orlando gives birth; though, again, nothing is said of her pregnancy nor of the birth itself. Even the child disappears from the text once it has been born. The body of Orlando is clothed, and as mentioned before, clothes play a significant role in *Orlando*. As society does not consider it to be polite to view other people’s sexual organs which function as gender markers, clothes will often take their place, turning clothes into objects with significantly gendered meanings:

Vain trifles as they may seem, clothes have, they say, more important offices than merely to keep us warm. They change our view of the world and the world’s view of us. [...] there is much to support the view that it is clothes that wear us and not we them; we may make them take the mould of our arms or breast, but they mould our hearts, our brains, our tongues to their liking. (Woolf, 92)

In this passage we see the social power clothing has. It shows how behaviour and thought patterns are influenced because clothing, specifically pants and skirts, are gendered. When wearing a skirt, a person is perceived to be a woman and therefore this person is treated, and

also acts, as Orlando experiences, as we are learned to treat a woman, reinforcing society's construction of the binary:

Her gender change cannot be effected until clothing – that external social trapping – pressures her to conform with social expectations of gendered behaviour. These expectations work like an outside that seeps in, and clothing attracts and activates these expectations.(Burns, 351)

In other words, clothes are a way through which society's construction of gender, and the performances related to this, are enforced and reinforced.

Beyond deconstructing this power relation between identity, the body, and gender, the novel also shows how people can use this very system to create a space for their queer identities. Orlando, aware of how clothing functions in society, does have the agency to choose her own clothing, and makes active use of this (Burns, 351). Orlando never really cross-dresses, as “no one role presumes to be the true Orlando, the original ground from which she crosses over” (Cervetti, 167). Rather, Orlando is aware of how through clothes she can take on different gender identities as she pleases, resulting in an overall expression of her moving and layered gender identity of multiplicity.

In order to consider the role of clothes and cross-dressing, then, we will turn towards another character in the novel. Orlando, as a man, flees from England to escape the attentions of the Archduchess, who upon Orlando's return reveals her/himself to actually be a man. This Archduke exemplifies that the power that clothing has over identity can also be used against the very structure of gender it is used to impose. This functions like Butler's ideas on drag performers, in that

in imitating gender, drag implicitly reveals the imitative structure of gender itself – as well as its contingency.[...][Drag] does not assume that there is an original which such parodic identities imitate. Indeed, the parody is of the very notion of an original.

(Butler, 187-188)

The archduke performs a female identity by using female clothing and parodies the idea of a socially enforced binary gender identity. This is different to drag performances Butler describes, for the Archduke's audience is not aware of the discrepancy between the gender identity and the gender performance of the performer. In other words, clothes are presented as fully internalized items which merely reflect the supposedly natural structures of binary gender in humanity, the idea that if one's body is 'female' one's gender identity is female, and that one therefore acts in specific ways, as part of our nature. However, the Archduke completely deconstructs and undermines this notion as he simply 'performs' femininity by putting on female clothing and completely gets away with it. It is not some internal, natural notion which makes one be perceived as a woman, but just a series of acts, of performances.

However, the account of the Archduke is not only a parody of gender construction, but also of imposed heterosexuality, for the Archduke merely changes clothes and presents a female identity because he is in love with Orlando when Orlando is still a man. Once again, it shows naturalized heterosexuality as something that is enforced, an act; a man merely puts on clothing of a woman, and all of a sudden a homosexual romance is a completely acceptable heterosexual relationship, despite the facts that the two individuals in it still both identify as men. Heteronormativity, and the idea that there is a connection between one's gender and one's sexual attraction, is in itself deconstructed in the novel:

all Orlando's loves had been women, now, through the culpable laggardry of the human frame to adapt itself to convention, though she herself a woman, it was still a woman she loved; and if the consciousness of being of the same sex had any effect at all, it was to quicken and deepen those feelings which she had had as man. (Woolf, 79).

Heterosexuality, here, is described as nothing more than a 'convention' the mind adapts to, or in other words, a construct enforced by society that shapes the thinking of the brain into compulsory heterosexuality. It is another narrative of supposed reality. It is indeed quite striking that Woolf got away with a statement such as this, and the Archduke's attraction to Orlando as a male, in a work published so shortly after the publication of *The Well of Loneliness*. This might be due to the fact that after Orlando's sex changes heterosexuality is restored, but also that the Archduke is framed as a somewhat comedic character, getting ridiculed by Orlando. More than this, Orlando does end up in a marriage to a man, which might be enough for Woolf's readership to consider heterosexual norms restored: however, even this marriage still contains elements of the play with conventions, for they say: "You're a woman, Shel!" she cried. "You're a man, Orlando!" he cried" (Woolf, 124), once again blending the clear, distinctive lines of heterosexual relationships, and even of sexual identity itself. Orlando's sexuality moves beyond the binary: she is generally attracted to women, but Shel is a man who still, like Orlando, has an openness of femininity, and furthermore Orlando feels attracted to Sasha even before s/he knows that Sasha is a woman: "whether boy's or woman's [...] the Russian fashion served to disguise the sex [...] the person, whatever the name or sex, [...] these details were obscured by the extraordinary seductiveness which issued from the whole person" (Woolf, 17). Orlando opens up the space of both gender and sexuality alike, to allow for more space, a multiplicity, within these identities.

Beyond the binary?

Throughout the novel the sense of two oppositional forces prevails: the biography and the fantastical modes, the Truth and subjectivity, the fluidity of people and the limits of identity that are created by these people. While the people themselves are remarkably open to Orlando's change of sex, the problem when Orlando returns to England as a woman is mostly one of the law, of strict legal rules, where such an openness of identity as Orlando has cannot be accepted. This is the only instance in which Orlando falls within Mak's category of 'doubted sex', for it is only legally that her sex is doubted by society: everyone else presumes that Orlando's gender is whatever she is currently presenting herself as. This moment of doubting, during the time of her trial, is the moment the most of Orlando's play with clothing and gender occurs (Cervetti, 167). It is in the space of being of doubted sex, then, where Orlando can, more than anywhere else, express her genderqueerness. Eventually, though, Orlando is officially claimed a woman and placed in the binary after a long case to decide the matter (in which Orlando herself does not seem to take a significant part).

This is done even though, as I have argued, her identity is shown as more complex than this. It is an identity that allows for movement beyond binary categories, and explores the self that integrates and synthesizes different ideas of identity. In other words, Orlando allows for more than the conventional perspective of feminism through which it is often read: Orlando's becoming a woman, and the deconstruction of supposedly natural gendered habits do not merely show how many ideas related to the gender binary are socially constructed, but also how the binary, the idea of clearly divided genders and gender identities, is in itself constructed. It shows the different dimensions different people can have in relation to their selves and the idea of gender which surrounds them, through which some people might find

themselves to prefer to identify with the idea of a gender, to place this identity above others, or to embrace different aspects of gender, to be open to the changing dimensions of gender. However, *Orlando* also shows how socio-cultural structures can similarly impact this self: Orlando's genderqueerness is not presented as a positive utopia of identity, but rather the difficulty of her existence in society is also shown. The need to place oneself within the binary in order to function within society, and how the dimensions of identity itself are influenced by this very binary structure we cannot escape are represented. Genderqueerness in *Orlando* is not a place where people can move away from the power dynamics and expectations imposed by the binary: it is not an escape. Rather, the genderqueer reading of the novel offers an understanding of precisely how the sexual/gendered systems of society influences the perception of self, and through this awareness subvert these very notions by creating openness beyond these binary options. Therefore, even though Orlando identifies with two binary identities, she does move beyond the binary, or rather, deepens and expands, opens up, this very space of supposedly rigid identity by understanding its constructiveness, enabling her to re-shapes it to fit her own understanding of gender.

In the end, however, Orlando no longer goes out in clothes marked as male, despite the fact that she preferred these at times even when she was a woman. Snider argues that, at the end of the novel, "Orlando, for the time being, reached that union of opposites"(268), of what Snider calls 'the single self', taking the term from Jung. However, I have argued that Orlando's identity is based upon multiplicity and movement, and therefore the single self is not an ideal to be reached for her. As she drives into the twentieth century, Orlando finds herself going over all the different selves that accumulate to shape her identity. Between these different selves, "only her name 'Orlando,' truly remains the same. Moreover this name (Orlando) is also the name of Woolf's fictional text (Orlando) [...] once the corporeal body is gone, only the textual body remains" (Burns, 359). Only the textual body, the narrative of

Orlando, remains, and as shown through the narrating biographer, the textual image of a person – the biography – cannot exist without resorting to imagery and constructions of the fictional. In fact, foregrounding fictionality through the fantastical mode is needed to narrate the biography of Orlando. It is therefore the idea of a static, ‘real’ self, of a fixed reality and a text which claims to only portray ‘objective truths’, which is contradicting the multiplicity and movement of (gender) identity and life itself. Reality in a pure, objective sense of what is natural cannot exist; rather, human existence is dependent on narrative.

However, Orlando, at the end of the novel, finds herself in “the present moment. No one need wonder that Orlando started, pressed her hand to her heart, and turned pale. For what more terrifying revelation can there be than that it is the present moment?” (Woolf, 147). Orlando’s disregarding of time is part of the fantastical, of the fluidity presented in the novel, but at the very end of the novel, Orlando loses this fluidity through time, and is placed in the present. Orlando, in other words, gets stuck in time, and therefore stuck in the time she lives in, stuck in culture and the structures of society, one in which “The sexes drew further and further apart” (Woolf, 113). Orlando has become stuck in the forced binary of gender, of expectations placed upon her, and this rigidity fixes her identity and does not allow her to embody the multiplicity of her gendered self. However, to end on a more positive note and to bring out exactly that multiplicity I have argued Woolf has interwoven with every aspect of her text, the second to last sentence of *Orlando* talks of “a single wild bird. ‘It’s the goose!’ Orlando cried. ‘The wild goose...’”(Woolf, 162). This wild goose, as Snider argues, presents Orlando’s self (267), and as long as this remains free, wild, moving and elusive, society can put the structures of a fixed identity upon Orlando, but Orlando has not fixed herself, leaving her with the possibility to get free from constructs of society.

Chapter 3

Eugenides' *Middlesex*: the Crisis of the Self and the Social narrative

The forty-one year old first person narrator of *Middlesex* tells the story not only of his female-identifying younger self, but also spends a large part of the novel on the story of his grandparents. Brother and sister, they marry each other while they flee from disasters in Greece. They live with their cousin, Lina, and have a son who marries Lina's daughter, who in turn become parents to Cal/Calliope/Callie. By narrating this story, Cal not only tells of the travels of her family, but also of the particular genetic modification marked by incest that is passed on from generation upon generation, but only becomes visible in Calliope. The result of this genetic modification is that Calliope turns out to be intersexed, being what Geertje Mak calls someone whose 'sex is doubted'. Mak uses a verb rather than a noun to indicate the multiplicity of intersexed people, and how their situation, their characteristics or identity, only gets meaning when related to its position in a social system (Mak, 7). I will use Mak's term to foreground the socio-cultural dynamics implicit in the act of 'doubting sex', as it the social function of intersexedness I concern myself with, rather than with the biological boundaries of what would define an intersex person.

Middlesex is a story written in a realistic mode, and yet it also uses a magical-realistic touch to explain Cal's ability to see into the lives of others: "I began to see, to taste, and remember everything, even stuff I hadn't eaten, seen or done. Already latent inside me, like the future 120 mph serve of a tennis prodigy, was the ability to communicate between the genders, to see not with the monovision of one sex but in the stereoscope of both" (Eugenides, 303). Like Orlando, Cal's position as 'in between the genders' allows for a broader view of the world than people who only identify with a single gender would. In both novels the genderqueer aspect is mystified, but in *Middlesex*, unlike in *Orlando*, Cal's experiences are

radically medicalized. It is the connection between these two, between the narrative of the doubting of the self and the narrative of doubting sex that society provides, that I will explore in this chapter.

The Natural and the Social

These days, the question of whether a foetus is a boy or a girl is already answered, through medical scans, before the baby even exists as an autonomous identity. Before any question of personal/gender identity comes up, there is the need to establish a gender, upon which then socio-cultural expectations are based. If a separation between sex/gender suggests that the body is neutral and only within the realm of nature or biology, these types of acts show that, once again, we place biology within the framework of our social narrative. As Stoljar points out, disconnecting sex and gender wrongly gives the idea of a divide between the natural and the social (215), whereas *Middlesex* shows the opposite.

Even before her birth, Cal's gender appears to already have been set. His parents, after having had a son, desperately want to have a daughter and use a supposedly scientific method to ensure that they will have a girl. From the very first moments of his conception Cal's mother spoke to the foetus-Cal using the words 'baby girl' (Eugenides, 239). Expectations are in this way constructed and when Cal is born, only a quick glance at her genitalia is given, rather than the inspection which would have revealed Cal's intersexedness. In this way, the assumption that the gender binary is the norm, leads to the re-imposing of the binary: because Cal is expected to fit into the binary mould of the female, aspects of her body are already assumed to also fit within this mould.

It is only after Cal's body refrains from showing the signs that are typically associated with female puberty - the growing of breasts and menstruating – that her sex begins to be doubted. Where Cal's parents at first interpret these signs as nothing more than that Cal is a

late bloomer, Callie herself begins to grow worried and even fakes her period to stop her parents from doubting her sex. What is actually happening is that “the problem came when she started to go through puberty. At puberty, the other androgen – testosterone – started to exert a strong effect” (Eugenides, 481). Cal, in other words, appeared to have female sexual characteristics until she began to develop male secondary sexual characteristics.

Bodies have, as Dr. Luce explains in the novel, completely sex-neutral parts as a foetus which then grow into what is generally interpreted as being ‘female’ or ‘male’ sexual identifiers. They come from the same root. This would suggest, as many feminist biologists do and as discussed in the introduction, that bodies simply develop in different ways, out of which two main lines of development can be outlined. However, these developments that occur in the womb are given significant socio-cultural meaning. Where Cal’s body can be seen as a body which developed differently to the mainstream bodies, without any specific social or mental impact, what actually arises upon the discovery of the workings of Cal’s body is a crisis. Callie’s need to hide the possibility of doubt of her sex shows that even the act of being doubtful in itself is considered problematic. It is a social crisis, for, as Dr. Luce says “the *problem* came when she started to go through puberty” (Eugenides, 481, emphasis added). The actual state of Callie’s body does not matter, it is the act of being seen that plays the central role here: if her body is perceived to fit within the binary, no problem arises. Only when her queerness becomes outwardly visible, when the process of doubt starts, does it become a problem.

The crisis of doubt is, as much as possible, drawn back into the binary-gender construct, or, as Dr. Luce claims: “Callie is a girl with a little too much male hormone” (Eugenides, 481). Because Callie has outwardly mostly appeared as a female, the decision is made that this must be her identity, and in this way binary gender is once again imposed upon his body. Callie is indeed raised as a girl due to her being sexed as such at birth: “I was

brought up as a girl and had no doubts about this [...] the ways at which I differed from other little girls were hard to detect” (Eugenides, 256). As Cal grows up presumptions rule over reality in a self-fulfilling cycle; because Cal is assumed to be female, and is told that he is female, he believes himself to be female. This shows the construction of gender identity Butler argues for: that gender is a construct imposed from the outside, the strong influence of which can in no way be separated from a supposed ‘internal’ gender identity. A second step in this process would be behaviour, as portrayed in a home-video given to Cal’s later doctor:

This was the thirty-five second segment that, Luce insisted, proved out his theory that gender was established early on life. This was the film Dr. Luce showed me, to tell me who I was. And who was? Look at the screen. My mother is handing me a baby doll. I take the baby and hug it to my chest. Putting a toy bottle to the baby’s lips, I offer it milk. (Eugenides, 255)

Where Dr. Luce supposes that this scene shows that Cal is female, a contemporary view much more reminiscent of Butler’s theories suggests the exact opposite: that because Cal is raised as a girl, he shows the behaviour that is constructed to be a part of this female identity. In other words, firstly Cal gets told he is a girl, and then is taught that certain behaviour he shows is related to his imposed gender. Dr. Luce’s views show another step in the self-fulfilling circle of binary gender construction, in that taught behaviour is interpreted as natural behaviour originating from a supposed gendered self. Upon seeing behaviour linked to a specific gender, once again the gender itself is imposed upon the subject, not allowing for the possibility that hugging a doll could be gender-neutral behaviour. An act which might be interpreted to show signs of things, such as compassion, but there is no specifically clear reason why the act of holding a baby doll should be linked to gender. In this way the gender binary is imposed in

every act in, once again, a self-fulfilling cycle, allowing for very little space in which the gender-neutrality can exist or be recognized.

Dr. Luce continues to ask Cal a number of questions in order to determine Cal's gender. A few of these questions conform to Dr. Luce's response to the aforementioned video, in using traditionally female interpreted behaviour as a supposedly natural determiner of gender. However, another part of his question addresses specifically heteronormative questions, showing once again the direct relationship drawn between gender identity and sexuality. Dr. Luce concludes that if Cal is attracted to men, he himself must be a girl. Sexuality is another element upon which the gender binary is imposed. This connection drawn between sexuality and gender is often determined by a heteronormative view, for "it is Cal's sexuality that has been constant and determinate of his male identity" (Lee, 43). However, I would argue that this, in the novel, is shown as a reflection of what Cal is socially taught, rather than something which is inherent to the narrative itself. For the narrative is filled with, and thereby foregrounds, biological occurrences and acts which are always intertwined with the social interpretation, the narrative, of these acts.

Intertwined narratives: the palimpsest

The novel presents a view on gender, not only from a societal perspective but also on an intellectual level, that is highly essentialistic and dualistic. Even though Callie had suspicions about her body from puberty her 'status' only becomes official when Dr. Luce diagnosed her, and from this point onward Cal becomes an object of study. One of the first things Cal tells the reader, at the start of the novel, is in which scientific publications pictures of his body can be found, as was and is the case in actual medical books in which "the genitals of the intersex person are the subject of meticulous drawings or photographs but their faces are never represented" (Graham, 11). As an object of study, Cal has no individuality or autonomy and is

merely reduced to his genitals. Instead of being allowed to explore her own identity in relation to her body, scholarly labels are placed upon her; her body is read like a singular text to which no agency is given.

In a library, Callie looks up one of the words she overheard Dr. Luce use to define her (saying it in her presence to colleagues, increasing the feeling of Callie's lack of subjectivity): hypospadias. Following this medical term to the suggested synonyms, Callie ends up at the word 'hermaphrodite', the definition of which suggests that the reader look further under the term: 'monster':

The synonym was official, authoritative; it was the verdict that culture gave to a person like her. Monster. That what was she was. [...] It explained the photographs, too. What did people do when they came upon Bigfoot or the Loch Ness Monster?

They tried to get a picture. For a second Callie saw herself that way. (Eugenides, 486)

Through the entry in the Webster, the link between scientific work and culture is emphasised: how from a medical term discussing factual circumstances of the body, a link is made to whether this is normal or not by society's term, or what this term means for the people who are defined by it and how they are positioned within society. What makes it worse for Callie, is that this is not just a swear word, but so deeply integrated into culture that it is part of an official, seemingly factual, authoritative dictionary, an institution which appears to claim what is reality and what is not. It is in this way that Cal is forced to acquire knowledge about his body, which has now become an object, and to relate this back to his own subjectivity: with the hermaphrodite, the monster, and the various connotations of tragedy Graham argues this term has (6). He is forced to view himself as monstrous.

This perspective is reinforced in the social circumstances of Cal's doubtful sex. When Dr. Luce reports to Cal's parents about his 'condition', they feel disturbed on hearing gender-neutral terms, and relieved upon hearing female-specific terms, showing once again the crisis that arises from the act of doubting sex. It is from them, rather than from Callie herself, that consent is asked about a surgery which will make Callie "look like a normal girl" (Eugenides, 482). This emphasizes the pressure from society to conform to the gender binary for "the ability to marry and pass as a normal woman in society are also important goals" (Eugenides, 493). Cal does not have to conform to a specific gender because this is his gender identity, but rather because of external reasons: that Cal, otherwise, will not fit into society, both in the broad sense and in the very narrow sense of home and family. If doubting sex is a crisis, it is not one of personal/gender identity, but rather a social crisis, an act which can be simultaneously performed by a single actor and society as a whole, which needs to be avoided as much as possible. Even when Callie still thinks of herself as a girl, she recognizes the socio-cultural need to present certain things in order to proceed to be allowed to identify this way: merely the fact that she presents herself as female and goes by a female identity, is not enough to keep this gender identity. She hides her face underneath her hair and fakes a period in order to pass as a cis-gendered woman. Dr. Luce suggested surgery, too, to increase the idea that Callie can 'pass as a woman', suggesting that the goal for people with bodies not conforming to gender binaries is to pass as much as is possible as belonging to gender binary identities: "rather than reshaping perceptions of what is normal, intersexuals are required to accommodate social norms" (Graham, 13-14). The position of being of 'doubted sex' is not considered a position in itself, but rather implies that there are elements which cause this doubt and which need to be removed as quickly as possible to resolve the doubt.

Upon hearing Dr. Luce's conclusion that she is a girl, Callie, too, at first, feels the need to conform to the standards she had been taught:

If I had a clitoris – and a specialist was telling me that I did – what could I be but a girl? [...] I was able to take on any form wanted of me. I only wanted to know the dimensions. Luce was providing them. My parents supported him. The prospect of having everything solved was wildly attractive to me, too. (Eugenides, 488)

Being raised in this society, Callie feels the need to conform to the expectations placed upon her by the norms of this society, regardless of her/his internal feelings; it only depended upon ‘what was demanded’, and her agreement indeed takes the form of “the blankness of obedience. With the unerring instinct of children, I had surmised what my parents wanted from me. They wanted me to stay the way I was” (Eugenides, 489). Being subjected to essentialistic thinking, Callie thinks that she has to be a girl; because this is what her parents, the authoritative figures, show her as normal, this is what the clitoris means, and this is what the norm is in society. However, upon looking at the bodies of a portrayed male and female “I understood both the urgency of the man and the pleasure of the woman. My mind was no longer blank. It was filling with dark knowledge (Eugenides, 489).” At this point Cal becomes aware of a more dual sense of gender identity, the ‘dark knowledge’, which contrasts to the blankness that was previously there, which is reminiscent of the act of writing. This reinforces the idea of the body as a text which is read by society, by Dr. Luce, over which Cal is now getting agency. However, ‘dark’ here can also have the negative connotation which Cal is socialized to attribute to doubtful genders.

In what is almost a paradox, Cal moves away from the imposed binary into a space which is deeply influenced by this very system itself. As Graham argues “Cal has been socialized to understand himself as monstrous, but the novel’s persistent invocation of the tropes of Greek myth suggests collusion with exactly the sense of Otherness that haunts him.”

(10). Not only the tropes of mythology indicate this collusion with the “otherness that haunts him”; I would suggest that Cal’s entire narrative of self is embedded in this duality. Indeed, Cal’s narrative is ‘haunted’ by the terms he has been socialized to connect himself with. Calling her female lover ‘the obscure object’ mirrors Callie’s own status as an object of study, “the way in which her [the object’s] own identity is obscured and objectified by Cal’s obsession” (Carroll, 198). The relationship between Cal and the object has become nothing more than that: an object which Cal studies as Dr. Luce has taught him to. Something to be studied and objectified in relation to the social norms. It is a reflection of the hidden faces of intersexed people’s photographs, with the faces hidden for privacy but also a sign of depersonalisation. Even in the numerous connections that even Cal himself draws between his male hormones and his attraction to women, we can see the influence of Dr. Luce’s relentless questions on Callie’s assumed attraction to males. After all, the novel itself counters this idea of heteronormativity by presenting characters such as Lina and the obscure object herself, who are not intersexed or transgender and are still attracted to women.

Through Dr. Luce’s texts and Cal’s autobiography, narrative “has become the site of highly charged claims for self-determination, authorship and agency. Storytelling is a significant motif in Eugenides’ acutely self-reflexive novel” (Carroll, 188). As I have argued, even Cal’s body can be seen as being read as a text. More than anything, Cal learns about himself from the dictionary and Dr. Luce’s report, and words from these texts echo throughout Cal’s own narrative because these are the terms he has been taught to think of in relation to himself. He cannot escape such terms and explications, which are always to be found under his own interpretation of self. An awareness is shown, too, through one of the first passages of the novel in which it is ironically stated that writing Homeric is genetic: that the texts of Cal’s background influence the text he is writing now. Cal’s text is a palimpsest, just as his (gendered) identity is a palimpsest, in which the ascribed narrative of gender binary

society forms the ground, the basis, on which and through which Cal has to write his identity of self. Even though the identity of self is on top, visible, it will always be influenced and limited by that which it is based upon. By writing the self-narrative in which the influence of texts and writing upon identity is a motif, the novel exposes this relationship between society and self as narratives.

Multiple Births and Multiplicity of Gender

The narrative opens with Cal proclaiming that “I was born twice: first, as a baby girl, on a remarkably smogless Detroit day in January of 1960; and then again, as a teenage boy [...] but now, at the age of forty-one, I feel another birth coming on” (Eugenides, 3 – 4). This third birth, it seems, relates to reconnecting with not only Cal’s family history, but also with Cal’s former self and exposing the palimpsest. Many critiques of the novel, such as Graham, Hargreaves and Cohen, claim that the ‘*Middlesex*’ aspect of the novel never appeared, for Cal moves from girl to boy/man without ever occupying a middle position. However, I would suggest a more productive interpretation of the genderqueer aspect of the text. For at the heart of the novel is indeed “The inconsistency between the hybridity implied by Eugenides’s title and his contrastingly boundary-conscious first line” (Graham, 1), a contradiction which is based upon the crisis of doubting sexuality, the blend of natural and social. It is this framework, of doubtful sex, which is not something in itself but a problem, that defines Cal’s perspective on self. Cal is socially forced to believe that his intersexuality is monstrous and that he has to be either a male or female. He is bound by the binary. The narrative shows how deeply ingrained these social constructions are, and the extent to which they can influence the (narrative of the) genderqueer self. For Cal lives as a man, but this does not inherently have to mean that he abides by the binary. After all, Cal’s first moment of deciding his own gender, after hearing Dr. Luce wants to assign him as female, is when he examines the status of a man

and a woman and connects with both identities. When he is on the run, what keeps him from returning is not his wanting to be a boy and his realization that unless he escaped, he would be forced to live as a girl; rather, what led him to run away was “this private ecstasy between my legs. I knew it would be taken from me” (Eugenides, 511). This does not signify only sexual pleasure: Cal’s genitals are the location of the doubt of his sex, and the very space he wants to keep, rather than conform to the norms of what a male or female ought to be. Indeed, Cal’s narrative has never been defined by the ‘born in the body’-discourse which haunts many transgender narratives (Putzi, 424): Cal’s re-births, too, have never been about being ‘reborn’ with the conventional gendered genitals. Internally, Cal views his intersexed genitals as part of his self. However, Cal has been taught to see this very space as a point of crisis, something which needs to be resolved and cannot exist on its own, and hence he remains afraid to have sexual partners and expose his identity of both man and of an individual of doubtful sex. Cal himself has renounced the ‘kinds of sexual indeterminacy which characterize the teenage Cal’s desires’ (Carroll, 200). He believes that the kind of pleasure beyond binary definitions of sex are not socially achievable.

It is only when he meets Julie, to whom he begins to open up to and who eventually accepts him, that he finds his ‘third birth’ coming on. The plot around Julie has been simultaneously connected to re-establishing heteronormativity for Cal, as well as to the idea that “Julie is the one with latent homosexual impulses, and Cal is the gender-ambiguous ‘last stop’ before Julie faces her lesbianism” (Lee, 43). I would suggest, however, that this once again limits gender identity and sexuality to a very narrow binary; the idea of heteronormativity would only work if Cal is being defined as a binary male, and the idea of Julie’s supposed lesbianism only if Cal is a woman, while neither of this is the case, and we do not have to trace their relationship back to a binary frame. Indeed, while Lee claims that the turning off of the lights when they have sex shows the need to hide ambiguous sexual

relationships from society (42), I would argue that it is, instead, for an opposite purpose when we relate this to the theme of visibility of the body and agency throughout the novel. Cal's body and his relation to the object have been connected to the bright light of medical definition and objectification, both to the people around Cal and to the reader. But the sex between Julie and Cal, the sexual ambiguous sexual acts which Cal desires which do not include heteronormative penetration, is the only sexual encounter hidden from the reader. In this moment Cal is not seen and therefore allowed to escape to ever-judging view of binary society which has defined so much of Cal's relation to his body. In the dark, Cal is allowed full control and agency over himself. This, then, is the third birth Cal feels: and as his first two births were connected to gender, we can assume that the third birth is, too. This third birth might entail finally accepting the doubtful sex, while living is a male, in what is perhaps not a "middle" option, as suggested by the title of the novel, but rather, as Cal calls it himself in the beginning of the text, 'a stereoscope', a double, intertwined image. Cal begins to perceive his gender not as a singularly outlined identity but rather as a layered multiplicity.

Chapter 4

Garvin's *Symptoms of being Human* and (Re-) Construction of Narrative

Young Adult Literature & Realism

While neither *Orlando* nor *Middlesex* explicitly uses terms indicating a genderqueer identity (the word intersex has connections to the body, rather than just to gender identity) *Symptoms of being Human*, a Young Adult novel published in 2015, features an explicit genderqueer character. Narrator Riley identifies as genderfluid, a term I will return to, but struggles with expressing this as they² fear that they will not be accepted by society and that this will ruin their father's political career. At their new school, Riley begins to make friends who also struggle with gender and sexual normativity, and Riley's therapist, the only person to which they is open about their identity, suggests they write an anonymous blog about their experiences. Both through the blog and their new friends, Riley gets in touch with queer organisations. Then, Riley's identity as the writer of the blogs is discovered, and they is outed as genderqueer.

Living in the age of the Internet, sixteen year old protagonist Riley, unlike Callie, does not have to resort to a dictionary to learn about themselves. Where the dictionary presents a more formal concept of authority, the Internet is a space where everyone can post (almost) anything, and even though the power structures of society are still influential, that space can also, as I shall discuss, offer new possibilities. *Symptoms* considers the position of a genderfluid teenager in current society, and is framed as a realistic YA-novel. YA-novels are often viewed as being lighter than adult fiction (Falconer, 8) or "simplified [...] overly didactic" (Proukou, 62). It is realistic, then, but at the same time its form and content are a

² In order to refer to Riley, I will use, as is generally done, they in a singular form as a gender-neutral pronoun

supposedly simplified version of real Literature and real life, respectively. In case of *Symptoms*, too, Banks points out that readers are often quick to say the happy ‘out’ existence of Riley and other queer characters is unrealistic (34). The idea of queer characters being happy and open with and about their identities is perceived as not fitting within our general narrative of reality. This idea is reminiscent of the tendency in YA fiction up to 1955 in which “LGBT characters [...] often dead or killed off during the narrative [...] the message is hard to miss: LGBT characters are most useful if they’re dead or gone” (Banks, 35). Even though Banks reports that today, we see less and less of this, in the perception of happy endings as unrealistic, and also in the still prominent ‘bury your queer’-trope we can still see its trace. Given this pattern of expectations, then, there is something radical about giving the genderqueer character a happy ending, presenting it as fitting within the narrative of reality.

Symptoms, then, presents at first a binary society, a narrative of reality which will indeed be the dominant narrative in general current-day America, but from this re-constructs a new narrative of reality in which multiplicity of gender becomes central. Proukou claims that “YA Literature is a genre of the possibilities of returning to begin again” (63); *Symptoms*, as a realistic YA-novel, foregrounds this sense of re-constructing a new (social) reality, to feature not only a character but a narrative itself which considers the social reality they are becoming embedded in, and challenge it when coming of age.

The Narrative of Self

Riley self-identifies as genderfluid. But how is this identity constructed by Riley and the narrative, and what role do the social and the natural play?

First of all, even though Riley defines themselves as genderfluid, no general description of this identity is given, nor of genderqueerness itself. The only thing we read is specifically how Riley perceives themselves, and this view is explicitly limited to only Riley’s experience.

Riley's perception of their own genderfluidity does not limit or influence other people's concept of self and their own genderfluidity/queerness. In doing this, the narrative moves away from the imposing boundaries of the binary, without simultaneously ascribing a totalizing new narrow category of identity. Indeed, the medium of the Internet Riley uses embodies this very notion: their blog is a personal space, allowing them to post their own narrative, while at the same being a social space. It is a space in which others can read their narrative of self but not edit or censor this narrative, but rather leave comments to react and share their own experiences. Riley defines their own gender actively in the narrative, through their blog, as follows:

some days I wake up feeling more 'boy' and some days I wake up feeling more 'girl'. And some days I wake up feeling somewhere in between. It's like I have a compass in my chest, but instead of north and south, the needle moves between masculine and feminine. I know it's not like that for all genderfluid people – but that's the best way I can describe how it is for me. (Garvin, 29)

The phrase “describe how it is for me”, too, indicates not a definition or a direct representation of identity in words, but rather an attempt to bring into words something complex. It allows for more openness, not only towards the rest of the world, but also internally: how Riley describes it, does not define them: a description is open to change when the understanding of one's internal identity also changes.

What genderfluidity for Riley roughly means, then, is moving between feeling feminine, masculine and what Riley calls 'neutral'. Indeed, Riley's identity is still based largely upon the binary system, but this binary is not seen as essential, for there are also genderqueer people who identify differently: the compulsory element of the binary is

removed. It is optional, and even then, Riley does not always identify with either male or female. The majority of their identity is, however, centred around these two options, as Riley themselves remarks when meeting another genderqueer person:

I realize that, while I think of myself as drifting between the two poles of male and female, that's my individual perception – and, in some ways, it's too binary for a person like Morgan, who seems to hover somewhere in the middle, or maybe doesn't envision gender as a spectrum at all. It's weird to think I'm the one clinging to old ideas. (Garvin, 194)

Again, the phrases “I think of myself” and “individual perception” not only put an emphasis on the individual aspect, rather than presenting a generalizing view; the use of such phrases also shows gender identity as something that is created. Not in the sense that genderqueerness is merely a construct – but rather that all gender identities are representations of internal, complex systems and elements which we add up to ‘gender’. These representations are, as all representations, flawed and not a direct copy. There is a gap between word and emotion, based upon socio-cultural and historical factors: “Feminine is that word that comes to mind, but it's too simple a word for what I feel. There aren't words for what I feel, because all the words were made up by people who never felt like this” (Garvin, 179). Even the words ‘femininity’ and ‘masculinity’, then, are perceived not as direct binary representations of our internal selves: in other words, we are not essentially female, male, or both. Rather, these words correlate to specific feelings, socio-cultural acts and many other complex systems we have attached to these words throughout time. To use Judith Butler's terms: we have come to understand gender as if there is a direct correlation between the performative and the internal, and as a result the performative also defines and narrows down

what the internal is. However, according to *Symptoms*, the performative is actually always merely an expression of the internal and subjective, based upon socio-historical-cultural practices. Narrowing the internal identity of what we call ‘feminine’ down to only a particular cultural expression of femininity, is restrictive to the internal identity.

Alongside the openness of gender identity, in *Symptoms* we can also read a sense of movement of identity, which is highlighted by Riley’s genderfluidity. Often, gender is perceived as a set identity which can be outlined and defined. Instead, a person’s personal sense of what ‘feminine’ means can move and change. Indeed, the sense of gender *Symptoms* presents is one of multiplicity, in which one becomes, rather than *is*, which has “a consistency all of its own; it does not reduce to, or lead back to, ‘appearing’, ‘being’, ‘equalling’ or ‘producing’ (Deleuze qtd. In Linstead & Pullen, 1289). This becoming, the multiplicity it contains, is a complex system which does not need to be reduced to a static thing. Instead, the becoming itself is at the centre, and around this we shape our gender identities in which categories and words denoting masculine and feminine can hold different combinations and interactions, moving and becoming consistently. Riley is not ‘*Middlesex*’ or inserted into any other kind of solid, set identity: instead, the fluidity of their identity lets us see that there is no need for us to position ourselves towards gender in a definitive way: that we can experience, express and identify with genders, too, when these genders do not have bordered definitions.

A Clash of Narratives

So what happens when Riley’s narrative of self meets the dominant narrative of reality? Riley, for the larger part of the novel, is not out to anyone except their psychologist: in order to avoid ‘outing’ themselves, Riley “can’t always represent myself how I want to. If I show up feminine on day one, people will assume I’m always a girl. Then, if I show up the next day

dressed like a guy, they'll react: taunts, ridicules, even violence.” (Garvin, 30). As a result, Riley only wears black, loose, ‘neutral’ clothing. Neutrality, however, also leads people to doubt their sex. As shown through the quote above, Riley actively seeks out the position of uncertain gender in her clothing choices. The reaction from those around Riley to this is negative: from the first moment at their new school, Riley gets the question “Is that a girl, or a guy? [...] That has to be a...” “Yeah, but look at what it’s wearing” (Garvin, 5). This is followed by multiple moments of aggression, and ends in a harassment scene in which a group of classmates attempt to discover ‘what is really in their underwear’.

Being called ‘it’ does not only reflect the question of pronoun use on someone of doubtful sex: it also presents the idea that when you do not have an identifiable gender, you are not a person, but an object, a space of social crisis. The person termed *it* is de-humanized in a world of normative genders. This de-humanization also ties in with the aggressiveness and assault depicted in the novel: being of doubtful sex is, once again, a social crisis. Not for the individual, but for the depicted society; in this case, conservative America. The numerous times Riley gets asked if they are ‘a boy or a girl’ shows that being of doubtful sex is something which needs to be culturally resolved. When this does not happen, aggressions begin to occur: the novel depicts the image of a binary system in which the existence of a person of doubtful sex who actively refuses to conform or resolve this status, becomes a threat. The need to see the person’s genitalia shows how the binary society attempts to resolve this crisis: the attempt to see Riley’s genitalia happened to them twice since they began dressing neutrally, once in their former school. The body has become a social object and a situation of crisis and, as such, Riley’s right to their own body has been socially revoked. Society fixates upon the body as the place to restore this crisis of society and self,; the body. In this, then, there is not only a blended or palimpsest-type relation between the narrative of

self and the narrative of general reality, as in *Middlesex*. Instead, it is also an active clash, a meeting point between two different processes of identity.

The clash between the personal narrative of multiplicity and dominant binary narrative is not defined by aggression or crisis. Rather, this ‘clash’ is an active interaction between these two concepts. Riley finds themselves guessing another person’s gender on many occasions: “This is the second time in as many weeks that I’ve misjudged someone else’s gender identity. I feel a pang of shame; like everybody else, my instinct is to put people in a category” (Garvin, 154), “all at once, I realise what it must be like for someone else to see me for the first time. When I saw Morgan, my first instinct was to wonder: Boy or girl?” (Garvin, 193). The doubting of sex is not always directly enforced, but is also deeply internalized, even by those, like Riley, who are themselves genderqueer. It is the dominant narrative, the one from which the others come, once again the bottom text of the palimpsest. It shows how deeply the binary is ingrained in society’s thinking pattern, but by challenging the dominant narrative you have internalized with a new narrative, a clash which allows the individual to challenge and reconsider their narrative of reality.

This clash, or challenging, also appears on a third, almost meta-fictional level. The reader does not know what gender Riley was assigned at birth. The first sentence of the novel is of Riley’s first blogpost, of which the first sentence reads: “The first thing you’re going to want to know about me is: Am I a boy, or am I a girl?” (Garvin, 1). This immediately foregrounds the need for categorization along binary categories, not only by the society around Riley, but also by the reader: after all, the perceived audience of Garvin’s novel is, at least in part, the same as the one depicted: current day America. It implies that the constructions of the described society in the novel are also the constructions which influence the readers. Like the people around Riley, the reader, too, has been socialized with the need to resolve the crisis of Riley’s body, and to define a ‘real’ gender for Riley, even if this is only

subconscious. Not ascribing a biological gender to Riley, then, allows readers to challenge their own thinking, which is influenced by a society with a binary dominant narrative, and truly attempt to create a concept of genderfluidity beyond the binary.

Shaping Identities Beyond the Binary

Riley resists being placed within a gender binary category, but does not feel like they have the option to express this identity in society. In other words, Riley does not know how to position their identity in relation to mainstream society and the binary which, in the novel, holds power and cannot accept the genderqueer identity.

However, there is a second space in society aside from Riley's school and home: the internet. It is through the internet that Riley first comes across the terms transgender, genderqueer and eventually genderfluidity: "Reading those words was a revelation. It was like someone tore a layer of gauze off the mirror, and I could see myself clearly for the first time. There was a name for what I was. It was a thing. Genderfluid" (Garvin, 40). For Riley, finding a term which fits them is a comforting thing, for this allowed them to understand why they did not fit in with the binary norms. It is not a restriction; Riley experiences 'genderfluidity' as a touch-point, a basis that allows for a broad understanding, and further individual construction. Through the internet and through their friend, and later girlfriend, Bec, Riley also gets in touch with a queer organisation, aimed at supporting other queer people and raising awareness. Besides being a space in which Riley can formulate their own narrative of self, as I have argued, the Internet is also presented as a social space of interaction. The Internet enables contact with communities in current society which work towards a broader, non-binary understanding of gender. In this way, the novel constructs a space and a sense of gender identity-creation which is personal without being completely restricted from the social; rather, the social and the personal actively work together in order to

exchange and interact, in which the individual's agency to shape their own experiences and identity is central.

This interaction between social, constructed ideas of reality and the personal brings with it awareness of the binary narrative of gender, without being confined to this. For example, Riley's identity is not defined by what they wear, but as gender is a social construction, their appearance does shape our idea of gender and therefore what makes Riley feel like they reflect a feminine identity back to society. Wearing a dress or putting on lipgloss are not essential female acts, and this is also shown by the end of the novel when Riley buys their first outfit which feels completely like them, which includes a skirt, but the outfit is not defined as either female, male or neutral. Rather, that outfit encompasses the entirety of Riley's genderfluid identity. It is, then, a realization of the performativity of these acts, and making a conscious rather than subconscious decision to present certain acts at certain times: taking agency over the acts, rather than being forced to perform them by convention.

Seeing acts of gender performance as nothing more than what they are, namely, constructed acts, allows Riley to play with these conventions and their sense of gender identity. Where Nicholson foregrounds the idea of genderneutral identities taking the place of the binary, *Symptoms* views feminine and masculine identities as not needing to be removed from society. Indeed, Riley and many other transgender characters in the novel actively seek out appearing as a certain identity, and speak about experiencing discomfort when not being able to represent themselves as their preferred gender. Riley's identity is not only dependent on fluidity, but also implies that when they experience a female gender identity, this experience is perceived as valid. Once again, multiplicity and movability, becoming, is central to Riley's experience of genderqueerness, in which neither of these terms implies a static state, but rather the constant ability to shape and re-shape as central, rather than the specific shapes given to gender identity. It is being able to create a personal narrative of 'femininity'

‘masculinity’ and ‘neutrality’ to create identities which go beyond these very terms. Indeed, Riley’s genderqueer identity is one in which the binary and its related narrative of reality, of what gender entails, is surpassed and deconstructed. The individual, rather, creates their own narrative of multiplicity of gender, consistently creating and considering what (their) gender means for them and how they perform this gender. Knowing the constructedness of this narrative and of this performance, there is an awareness that this is indeed a *individual* narrative, rather than a static one which defines gender for others, or even constantly for the Self.

Chapter 5

Conclusion

When considering gender, often a distinction is made between the ‘natural’ and the ‘social’, between what is inherent, shaped by biology or outside the direct control of humanity, and something human-made, or artificial. The natural here is considered to be ‘truth’, objective and therefore legitimate, whereas the social is its opposite: it is no wonder these terms are considered to be ‘binary’ terms. There is something paradoxical, then, about making an argument of moving beyond the gender binary along the framework of another set of binary terms. Of course, there are aspects which are ‘natural’ to our world and our existence: but, as many scholars such as Donna Haraway pointed out, from the moment we come in contact with these, in order to think or speak or even give meaning to what we perceive, we conceptualize them using many social factors. As Stoljar points out, gender is a very important factor that is placed upon many things, including biology, in order to explain our ‘reality’ of human existence (212). In the act of perceiving reality, we already have implicit a construction of what ‘reality’ or ‘natural’ is. It is this act of constructing reality which I have concerned myself with; Literary texts, after all, cannot exist without replicating a form of reality. Fictional texts are constructions of society, of humanity and reality. Whether these constructions of reality are then reinforced, subverted or criticized, the framework of what reality is perceived to be remains central, the ground from which the text operates. It is this process which I have made central to my analysis: looking at gender as one of categories that is both shaped by and applied to the construction of reality in Literary texts. For this reason, I have also considered the role genre plays in the texts, for genre is, among many things, a mode through which the story, the construction, is given shape.

Woolf used the fantastical mode to frame the story of *Orlando*, explicitly moving away from realism, which offers a supposedly common-sense but actually equally constructed version of reality. *Middlesex* has a narrator who is able to see not (nearly) all of reality, but rather their family's perceptions of reality, society and themselves. *Symptoms of being Human* does operate through a 'realistic' mode, that is, attempting to re-construct reality in the text as we perceive reality. But *Symptoms* is also a Young Adult novel, which in itself a genre that, as I have argued, influences the construction of humanity and reality in the text as it is often perceived as 'idealistic' and is often perceived to contain an implicit component of didacticism. All of these texts, then, deploy different genre-specific means in which not only the construction of text is foregrounded, but also the creation of reality itself. In these texts we can read, as I have argued, a movement away from the singularity of truth or social reality and naturality, or normality. Although less explicitly foregrounded in *Symptoms*, it is exactly in this subtlety that we may locate what all these three texts have in common through their different modes: in each, in a sense society and reality are reconstructed. Each text explicitly or implicitly, reflects back upon that very construction of experienced reality itself. Where *Orlando* and *Middlesex* do this in content, *Symptoms* does this in form; the text itself is a mingling of a constructed 'realistic' reality and the 'idealistic' notions which move away from the general narrative considering (gender)queer people. Indeed, all these texts foreground the notions of writing, writing the self versus writing the other, as a means to create not only a textual narrative, but also a narrative through which the characters engage with, give meaning to and function in society. The reality of society, then, is not an objective truth, but a narrative in which the 'natural' and the 'social' are deeply intertwined rather than binary.

Though set in different time periods and different locations, *Orlando*, *Middlesex* and *Symptoms* each reconstruct a similar socio-cultural gender construct; that of the

heteronormative, cis-gendered-centered, singular gender binary. This binary forms the central narrative from which all other narratives, be affirmative, subverting or any possible combination of the two, derive. In my analysis, I have applied Judith Butler's theory of performativity to the texts, arguing that based upon the general binary narrative of social reality, people 'perform' their gender in order to interact with society. From Orlando's return to England, to the anxiety Cal's parents experience when hearing their child being referred to with genderneutral pronouns, to the struggle Riley experiences daily from having to present a coherent, singular gender identity: each of these novels show the need to perform a gender in order to be able to function in and interact with society. Especially clothing plays an important role: clothing is presented as highly gendered in each of the novels, and perceived as a key part of the performance of gender. The performance is not only for the performer, to present a certain gender, but also for the viewers. Gender is an important category of understanding, meaning that we tend to apply gender as a means to be able to place a person within our narrative of reality. In *Symptoms* especially society is depicted as forcing individuals to perform a consistent, singular gender. In interaction with society, it is how one presents themselves, their performance, which defines how other people read those individuals. In other words, certain acts, most particularly wearing specific items of clothing, are placed by the viewer within their social framework of reality. Cal, too, experiences the need as an adult to present a coherent, singular gender by wearing man's clothing and not revealing the intersexed body underneath. It is a reminder that Butler's performance is a social performance. As Geertje Mak argued in her work, gender has been given a fundamental social purpose in the structure of society, and the individual of 'doubted sex' distorts this system. As Cal gets told by his doctor, and Riley experiences by the abuse from their classmates, being of doubtful sex is a social crisis which 'needs' to be resolved. In Riley's case, this is expressed by the need to resolve matters to the supposedly 'objective' and 'natural' case of the body; to

see the genitalia and decide their gender from this. For Cal, it is the lack of conformity in his genitalia which poses the crisis, like Riley's 'neutral' clothing. Cal's parents and doctor attempt to resolve this crisis by nevertheless ascribing a binary gender to Cal, by reading their genitalia within the narrative of singular gender identities. They do not want to change Cal's genitalia in order to fit them within the construct of the binary; they claim his genitalia already belongs within this binary, but simply does not show it yet and therefore need to be fixed. These show, then, the compulsory and self-fulfilling aspect of gender in society.

This is not to imply that all of society is completely defined by a heteronormative binary way of thinking. In *Orlando*, in fact, Orlando's genderqueerness is not posed as a social problem; the people around Orlando express no discomfort when Orlando returns presenting herself as a woman, nor is her biological status ever really questioned. It is only politically, regarding a woman's ability to inherit and hold property, that her genderqueerness poses a problem. Even Orlando's cross-dressing admirer depicts the idea that the heteronormative gender binary is nothing but a play: that, when a homosexual relationship is presented as a heterosexual one, there is no social crisis. The gender binary, then, is nothing but a socio-political narrative to structure society, a play that needs to be kept up in order to keep societal structures functioning. It is underneath this play, this farce, then, that people such as Orlando, Cal, Riley and the other queer people they meet can exist. In fact, in all texts the main character finds a group of people who either themselves do not fit within the binary system, or people who do not but are still very open to non-binary gender identities. These queer spaces definitely exist; what I argue for is not that the binary structure is hegemonically experienced and upheld by all those who live within its reach, but rather that it is this structure of the binary which forms the central narrative of society and reality; it is not an individual structure but rather a social structure, a combined reality from which we derive our personal

sense of experience and reality. Any group which subverts this structure, such as the queer group Riley becomes a part of, is still based upon this structure.

It is from the normative narrative of reality, then, that the identities presented in the novel are constructed. Orlando, Cal and Riley each consider their own gender identity in relation to the social constructs of society around them, as I have shown. In a way, the construction of identity is depicted as a palimpsest, in that the narrative of society and reality forms the building blocks from which personal identity is created. In *Middlesex* Cal uses the terminology used to define him to tell his own story: it is from the general societal narrative that the narrative of self comes, even if this narrative of self subverts the general narrative.

Even Orlando finds herself struggling against the influences of time, of society and reality, as I have shown. In this, it also becomes apparent that we cannot ask whether gender is a purely societal construct or if we do have an internal gender: we cannot think of ourselves without the construct of reality, which includes gender, and vice versa. The internal and the external are always connected, rather than in a binary relationship. Indeed, each of the genderqueer main characters combines the narratives of ‘female’ gender and ‘male’ gender to create their very own narrative of gender; in *Middlesex* Cal cannot fully encompass his genderqueer identity until he has written his own narrative, and Riley, too, experiences the need to write their own narrative, one which depicts the reality of their own lived experiences, rather than claiming to be a narrative of everyone’s reality. Orlando, Cal and Riley can each be read as identities that surpass the binary limits; that encompass all of what Gender is perceived to be and from this they create a plurality of gender identity. In other words, they resist the idea of a singular, restricted and defined gender, but rather shape their identity by blending the ‘male’, the ‘female’ and everything else in one identity that embraces this plurality, which, as Linstead and Pullen argue, is a state in itself, rather than becoming something. In this, movement is possible, because the openness of this identity allows for the

interconnectedness, and the constant interaction, between different aspects of gender, society and the self, to be shaped by the individual.

In short, it is a way of approaching gender that moves beyond the limits of the binary and finds stability in its openness and movement, as it is more than anything expressing a self-awareness about the creation of narratives. In which the narrative of self does not define the general narrative and vice versa. It is this sense of movement, of considering the binary without merely deconstructing it, which I have sought to articulate in my genderqueer reading. Asking the question of how genderqueerness is constructed in *Orlando, Middlesex* and *Symptoms of being Human*, I have argued that these genderqueer identities are intertwined with the narrative of gender of the society they live in, having to define themselves against this narrative. As the characters construct their own identities they defy the binary limits implied and instead move beyond this, combining and intertwining all aspects of gender, which were otherwise confined by the binary, into their own genderqueer identity.

Questions that arise from this research, then, are for example how genderqueerness is expressed in other genre-works, such as high fantasy, in order to further analyze the relation between the construct of gender reality and genre writing. But we can also ask the question of how the genderqueer reading can be used to consider non-genderqueer identifying characters and their connection to their gender as moving beyond the binary. The genderqueer reading is not exclusive to genderqueer characters; for the binary construct confines and limits everyone's sense of gender. Another question is of how the genderqueer identity, as constructed in the novels, can be reflected back to society. Indeed, none of the characters seek out an identity completely aside of the idea of gender, a fully 'neutral' identity. So how do we approach neutrality? Should we steer away, when considering identities beyond the binary, from any type of gendered action or performance? But does this not reinforce the very binary

we would be trying to get away from? And how would this relate to many scholars' objections that neutrality is hardly ever reached?

Indeed, none of the characters claims to ever be fully 'neutral' or genderless: instead, they embrace every aspect and use these as building blocks for what they feel express their gender, combining 'male' performance with 'female', until a state is reached in which these cannot be separated anymore, cannot be limited to narrow, exclusive binary genders. This is a state in which we can create gender identities from any and every aspect of the gender spectrum that we chose to, and find neutrality in this very pluralness and movement of gender.

Works Cited

- Abate, Michelle Ann, and Kenneth B. Kidd, eds. *Over the Rainbow: Queer Children's and Young Adult Literature*. Michigan: University of Michigan Press, 2011. Print.
- Banks, William P. "Literacy, sexuality, and the value (s) of queer young adult Literatures." *English Journal* (2009): 33-36. Web. *JSTOR*. 10-7-2018.
- Banner, Olivia. "'Sing now, O Muse, of the recessive mutation': Interrogating the Genetic Discourse of Sex Variation with Jeffrey Eugenides' *Middlesex*." *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 35.4 (2010): 843-867. Web. *JSTOR*. 6-7-2018.
- Boehm, Beth A. "Fact, Fiction, and Metafiction: Blurred Gen (d) res in 'Orlando' and 'A Room of One's Own'." *The Journal of Narrative Technique* 22.3 (1992): 191-204. Web. *JSTOR*. 10-7-2018.
- Burns, Christy L. "Re-dressing feminist identities: tensions between essential and constructed Selves in Virginia Woolf's Orlando." *Twentieth century Literature* 40.3 (1994): 342-364. Web. *JSTOR*. 10-7-2018.
- Butler, Judith. *Gender Trouble*. New York: Routledge, 2007. Print.
- Carroll, Rachel. "Retrospective Sex: Rewriting Intersexuality in Jeffrey Eugenides's *Middlesex*." *Journal of American Studies* 44.1 (2010): 187-201. Web. *JSTOR*. 16-2-2018.
- Cart, Michael. *Young adult Literature: From romance to realism*. American Library Association, 2017. Print.
- "For Jeff Garvin '98, Story of Gender-fluid Teen Simply Had to Be Written." News and Stories at Chapman. Chapman University, 8 July 2016. Web. 23 Mar. 2018.
- Cervetti, Nancy. "In the Breeches, Petticoats, and Pleasures of 'Orlando'." *Journal of Modern Literature* 20.2 (1996): 165-175. Web. *JSTOR*. 10-7-2018.
- Coffman, Chris. "Woolf's *Orlando* and the resonances of trans studies." *Genders* 51 (2010): 1-15. Web. *Academic OneFile*. 10-7-2018.
- Dreger, Alice D., and April M. Herndon. "Progress and politics in the intersex rights movement: Feminist theory in action." *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* 15.2 (2009): 199-224. Web. *Duke University Press*. 23-3-2018.
- Eugenides, Jeffrey. *Middlesex*. New York: Picadore, 2003. Print.
- Garvin, Jeff. *Symptoms of being Human*. New York: Balzer Bray, 2016. Print.
- Graham, Sarah. "'See synonyms at MONSTER': En-Freaking Transgender in Jeffrey

- Eugenides's *Middlesex*." *ARIEL: A Review of International English Literature* 40.4 (2010). Web. *Academic Onefile*. 10-7-2018.
- Lee, Merton. "Why Jeffrey Eugenides' *Middlesex* Is So Inoffensive." *Critique: Studies in Contemporary Fiction* 51.1 (2010): 32-46. Web. *Taylor & Francis*. 8-7-2018.
- Linstead, Stephen, and Alison Pullen. "Gender as multiplicity: Desire, displacement, difference and dispersion." *Human Relations* 59.9 (2006): 1287-1310. Web. *Sage Journals*. 10-7-2018.
- Majumdar, Robin, and Allen McLaurin, eds. *Virginia Woolf*. New York: Routledge, 2003. Print.
- Mak, Geertje. *Doubting sex: Inscriptions, bodies and selves in nineteenth-century hermaphrodite case histories*. Oxford University Press, 2012. Print
- Nichols, Lucy. *Queer Post Gender Ethics: The Shapes of Selves to Come*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014. Print.
- Parkes, Adam. "Lesbianism, History, and Censorship: *The Well of Loneliness* and the Suppressed Randiness of Virginia Woolf's *Orlando*." *Twentieth Century Literature* 40.4 (1994): 434-460. Web. *Duke University Press*. 23-3-2018.
- Proukou, Katherine. "Young Adult Literature." *ALAN Review*. 32.3 (2005): 62-68. Web. *ProQuest*. 1-7-2018.
- Putzi, Jennifer. "'None of this' trapped-in-a-man's-body'bullshit': Transgender Girls and Wrong-Body Discourse in Young Adult Fiction." *Tulsa Studies in Women's Literature* 36.2 (2017): 423-448. Web. *Project Muse*. 10-7-2018.
- Snider, Clifton. "'A single self': a Jungian interpretation of Virginia Woolf's" *Orlando*." *Modern Fiction Studies* 25.2 (1979): 263-268. Web. *JSTOR*. 10-7-2018.
- Stachowiak, Dana M. "Queering it up, strutting our threads, and baring our souls: genderqueer individuals negotiating social and felt sense of gender." *Journal of Gender Studies* 26.5 (2017): 532-543. Web. *Taylor & Francis*. 9-7-2018.
- Stoljar, Natalie. "The Metaphysics of Gender." *A companion to Applied Philosophy*. Ed. Lippert-Rasmussen, Brownlee and Coady. Oxford: Wiley Blackwell, 2017. 211-223. Print.
- Woolf, Virginia. *Orlando*. London: Wordsworth, 2003. Print.