

To Live Like a Clown Fish.
The Strained Relationship Between the Inside and Outside Worlds in Three
Contemporary French Novels on Transgender Characters.

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“Ma sœur ... me considérait comme une exception grammaticale s’accordant aussi bien au féminin qu’au masculin. Un genre nouveau.” (Paradisi 26)

“Je couche avec [Tony] dans les secrets. Le secret du village, celui de notre histoire, entre nous, mais aussi le secret de moi-même, que je n’ai jamais partagé, qu’avec [mon frère] Axel.” (Pagano 140)

“[Paul] voudrait partager ... la richesse de son savoir, sa voyance née aujourd’hui de la complétude heureuse, qu’il a si cher payée de sa chute dans les herbes folles, au fin fond du jardin fou.” (Châtelet 149)

Introduction

“Are you a man or a woman?” This seems a very straightforward question, in most cases even silly, since almost everyone is easily categorized as either male or female, but for the protagonists of the three novels that are at the centre of this thesis, this is not the case. To start with Camille Sacha Lou¹, the main character of Éric Paradisi’s novel *Un Baiser sous X* (2010), an honest answer would be: “I pass as a woman at the moment, but I am actually both male and female.” Camille happens to be born intersex, having both male and female physical attributes internally and externally. S/he would also like to live as doubly gendered, but does not dare to do so. Adèle, the protagonist of Emmanuelle Pagano’s novel *Les Adolescents Troglodytes* (2007), would respond to the question by saying something like: “I am a woman, but I was born in a male body, which I changed with the help of surgery.” She is a male-to-female (MTF) transsexual, although almost no one around her seems to know about her past, since she is afraid of rejection. Denise/Paul, the character around whom Noëlle Châtelet’s novel *La Tête en Bas* (2002) revolves, would probably answer the question by saying: “I am mostly male, but one assumed for a long time I was more or less a girl.” Just as Camille, Denise/Paul is intersex, but this only came out during puberty. In this novel, after many difficult and confusing years, Denise/Paul gets breast removal surgery and finally looks quite unambiguously male, which he always wanted. This enables him to come to terms with the feminine part of himself.

¹ In France, these are all names used for both women and men.

These three novels, all published within the last ten years, are thus about characters whose sexes and/or genders are unusual. With ‘sex’ I refer to the biologically based differences between men and women. (Berk 2003; Dorlin 2008; Butler “Beauvoir” 1986) ‘Gender’ is the mainly social construction based on what is perceived to be correct behaviour and a suitable physical appearance for men and women in a given society during a specific time period. (id.) Simone de Beauvoir’s famous phrase from *Le Deuxième Sexe* “On ne naît pas femme : on le devient.” is deemed to be at the basis of the distinction between sex and gender. (Beauvoir 285; Butler “Beauvoir” 1986) This distinction implies that having for instance a female body does not imply automatically that you will be a woman, i.e. have a female gender. But sex and gender cannot be completely separated. As gender theorist Judith Butler points out, the way we perceive sex is inherently coloured by our cultural understanding of its meaning. She writes:

Sex is made understandable through the signs that indicate how it should be read or understood. These bodily indicators are the cultural means by which the sexed body is read. They are themselves bodily, and they operate as signs, so there is no easy way to distinguish between what is ‘materially’ true, and what is ‘culturally’ true about a sexed body. ... the body does not become sexually readable without those [cultural] signs, and ... those signs are irreducibly cultural and material at once. (*Undoing* 87)

As you will see in this thesis, sometimes it is hard to say which term could be best used or both may even be impossible distinguish.

It is important to take into account the societal background in which these novels with characters whose sexes and/or genders are unusual are written, because, as literary and gender scholar Rosemarie Buikema points out, “cultural artefacts come about in a forcefield of global and local developments”. (4) The viewpoints on sex and gender are changing these days, not only when it comes to equality for men and women, but also on the topic of gender transgression. The latter is reflected to some extent in institutions like the law and medicine. In France for example, transsexualism is officially no longer a psychiatric disorder. (Le Monde.fr and AFP²) A transsexual person is someone who wants to live in the ‘other’ sex as s/he is born with and seeks medical intervention for that effect. His/her sex and gender thus do not concur. Estimates of the incidence of gender identity disorder—the name the current Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-IV-TR) gives to

² According to this article, “[Le] décret du ministère de la santé supprime ‘les troubles précoces de l’identité de genre’ d’un article du code de la Sécurité sociale relatif aux ‘affections psychiatriques de longue durée’.” (Le Monde.fr and AFP)

transsexualism—in Western countries go from 1 in 11.000 to 37.000 for ‘biological’ males and from 1 in 30.000 to 150.000 in ‘biological’ females. (Barlow and Durand 2002; Slob et al. 2002; Sadock and Sadock 2003) Notwithstanding the new French law, rules and regulations are still quite strict: transsexual persons in France, as well as in many other countries, are for example required to undergo sterilization in order to apply for a legal sex change, even though many do not desire to have completely unambiguously sexed bodies. (André 2011; Léotard and Kirschen 2009; Mossuz-Lavau (2009); Léotard 2009; Spade 2006) As FTM-transsexual Axel Léotard has shown in his book *Mauvais Genre*³ (2009), the road to surgical intervention is very difficult and long or otherwise extremely expensive, which leads many transsexuals to have no other professional option than to prostitute themselves as it is incredibly difficult to find employment if one’s lived sex is different from the official one. A member of an organisation helping transsexuals in need tells for example: “De nombreux membres de la communauté [transsexuelle] se prostituent pour vivre. La majeure partie de ces femmes n’ayant pas d’état civil correspondant à leur genre, l’insertion sociale est rendue impossible.” (Léotard 51)

The situation of intersex persons is quite different. An intersex person is born with both male and female bodily characteristics on the chromosomal, hormonal and/or anatomical (physical) level. Biologist Anne Fausto-Sterling tried to find out how frequent intersexuality is: “Together with a group of Brown University undergraduates, I scoured the medical literature for frequency estimates of various categories of intersexuality. ... The figure we ended up with—1.7 percent of all births ...—should be taken as an order-of-magnitude estimate”. (51) So-called true hermaphrodites, for whom it is uncertain whether they are biologically more male or female, are very rare, comprising around 0,0012% of all births according to the same figures. (Fausto-Sterling 53) One of the reasons why the frequency of intersexuality is not well documented is because when an intersex baby is born, the medical staff “declare[s] a state of medical emergency. ... Before twenty-four hours pass, the child must leave the hospitals ‘as a sex’.” (Fausto-Sterling 45) Often, the parents are not fully informed and neither is the person him/herself later on about the performed surgeries. As intersex activist Cheryl Chase writes, “Intersex status is considered to be so incompatible with emotional health that misrepresentation, concealment of facts, and outright lying (both to

³ *Mauvais Genre* is an autobiographical récit written by Léotard in a desire to explain what it is to be transsexual in contemporary France without wanting to reveal all the facts of his personal life story. (Léotard 2009; Léotard and Kirschen 2009) As he tells in an interview with Marie Kirschen, “Fiction et réalité sont mêlées, mais tout n’est pas autobiographique. Je voulais avant tout présenter la communauté trans”. Thus even though the story of Gabriel is in part fictional, the transsexual issues Léotard writes about are real ones. I will use this work accordingly in this thesis.

parents and later to the intersex child) are unabashedly advocated in professional medical literature.” (302)

The existence of intersex persons is largely invisible to the public eye, not only because the sexual ambiguity, ‘corrected’ or not, of intersex persons is often invisible, but also because whereas there is a great deal of media attention about transsexualism, this is not the case for intersexuality, leading to a situation in which many people do not even know that it exists, including some of the intersex persons themselves. Both the invisibility and the medical views have fortunately changed somewhat recently due to the efforts of intersex activists, like Chase, who founded the Intersex Society of North America (ISNA) in 1993, and theorists like Fausto-Sterling, whose work is also known in France. (Sadock and Sadock 2003; Barlow and Durand 2002; Kalat 2001; Dorlin 2008; Delphy 2009; Chiland 2003) Most intersex persons are satisfied with the assigned sex, although few research has been done about this until now. (Fausto-Sterling 2000) In one of them, “only fifteen percent of [the] ninety-four cases were patients discontented with their legal sex”. (Fausto-Sterling 93) Maud Marin is a famous example of someone who was not happy with the assigned sex. In her bestselling autobiography *Le Saut de l’Ange* (1987), she tells how she was assumed to be a boy, but wanted to be female and describes the long fight she had to undergo against family and numerous institutions to even get acknowledged that she is intersex, besides the difficulty of getting reassignment surgery and a legal sex change. She writes in the scene describing the happiness of the family around ‘his’ premature birth: “Je ne suis pas celui que vous vouliez [ma famille]. Je vis, mais ma vie est un danger, un combat, une lutte permanente, qui deviendra une guerre. ... Pour l’instant je suis un fils, ils le disent.” (18) The fact she describes her life as an unending combat shows how hard it is for her to be able to live in her gender of choice.

The case of Marin is similar to the one of Denise/Paul, the protagonist of Châtelet’s novel *La Tête en Bas*, as they both combine intersexuality and transsexualism, although we could not speak of transsexualism in the strict sense, because intersex ‘conditions’ exclude the possibility of the official diagnosis of Gender Identity Disorder. (Sadock and Sadock 730, 738) But they could both be called transgender in the broad definition. The definition of a transgender person is not as unequivocal as of the other two terms. Often, it is used to designate specifically people who do not live in the sex assigned at birth, but who want to live in the opposite sex without medical intervention or opt for an in-between position, between male and female. (Butler 2004; Belga and EDP 2011; Léotard 2009; Hines 2007) This is what Camille wants in Paradisi’s *Un Baiser Sous X*. At other times, it is used as a general term for

everyone who has not an either male or female gender that corresponds with their sex. (Butler 2004; Fausto-Sterling 2000; Hines 2007; Feinberg 2006⁴) In this thesis, I will use ‘transgender’ in the latter way, unless otherwise specified.

The changing views on sex and gender which have led to an increase in attention to especially transsexual issues, have also influenced contemporary French literature. I define contemporary as published from 1980 onwards, following literary scholars Dominique Viart and Bruno Vercier, according to whom since 1980 “ce n’est pas seulement une génération nouvelle qui s’avance, c’est bien une nouvelle période esthétique qui commence à se dessiner, et implique plusieurs générations d’écrivains.” (6) As literary scholars Christine Détéz and Anne Simon remark, there is a tendency from the 1990s onwards for female writers to write on tomboys, masculine girls: “le personnage de la petite fille ‘mal modelée’ semble avoir envahi les romans féminins contemporains ... depuis les années 1990”. (41) Nina Bouraoui’s *Garçon Manqué* (2000) is a good example of this. More generally, the body has become a central topic in contemporary literature. Most remarkably, there is a recent upsurge of novels by female writers appropriating the topic of the female body and its sensuality, often written in a feminist vein. As Détéz and Simon write, “Le constat a souvent été fait que la littérature française féminine contemporaine se focalise sur la description du corps dans tous ses états, repoussant à chaque rentrée littéraire les frontières du dicible.” (52) These writers frequently write explicitly about sex, like Catherine Millet in *La Vie Sexuelle de Catherine M.* (2001)⁵. Other taboos are often also transgressed, like the taboo of ugliness in Anne-Sophie Brasme’s *Le Carnaval des Monstres* (2005) or the boundary between human and animal in Marie Darrieussecq’s *Truismes* (1996), which seems to denounce the objectification of women by men. But there are also male authors who focus on the physicality of the body, like Michel Houellebecq with his equal fascination to go beyond sexuality in his recurring theme of cloning, or Éric-Emmanuel Schmitt, who explores the issue of surgical body modification in *Lorsque J’Étais une Oeuvre d’Art* (2002). But even though the material body and its modifications gets much attention, sex and gender boundaries are only rarely transgressed. As literary scholar Olivier Bessard-Banquy writes, “Les idées *queer* ... n’ont guère donné de fruits en littérature. Ces pensées sorties des *gender studies* dénoncent la fabrication du

⁴ Leslie Feinberg is an important American figure to mention in the context of transgenderism. According to Susan Stryker and Stephen Whittle, Feinberg “must be considered a founding figure of contemporary transgender studies”. (Feinberg 205) This is due to ‘hir’ (one of the non-gender-specific pronouns Feinberg helped popularize, together with for example ‘s/he’, which I use in this thesis) activism, theoretical writings, as well as hir novel *Stone Butch Blues* on the life of a butch lesbian and hir transgender transformations. (Feinberg 2006)

⁵ For an analysis of female writers writing on sex, see Bessard-Banquy 2010: 51-87.

masculin-féminin et réfutent qu'à un sexe donné puisse correspondre une sexualité préétablie." (157)

Nevertheless, there are a few contemporary novels on gender transgression which I would like to point to because they provide an interesting context to the to-be-analyzed novels and to some of them I will refer shortly in this thesis when relevant. However, a thorough analysis of these novels lies outside the scope of this work. The first novel that is relevant to mention is Éric Fottorino's *Caresse de Rouge* (2004) about a single father who cross-dresses in order to also play the mother role in response to his son's demands. Another example is *Sphinx* (1986), a sensuous novel of OuLiPo-member Anne Garréta which implicitly questions gender boundaries as it is a love story between two persons whose gender(s) are not specified. Furthermore, Belgian writer and psychoanalyst Jacqueline Harpman's *Orlanda* (1996) questions the naturalness of gender roles. This is a novel on the character Aline, whose masculine side ('Orlanda') leaves her in order to place him/herself in a living male body, since this side is repressed by Aline due to a rigidly sexist maternal education which learned her not to act on any impulses which could be perceived as unfeminine. The most famous contemporary novels written in French about transgender issues are Tahar Ben Jelloun's *L'Enfant de Sable* (1985) and *La Nuit Sacrée* (1987). These two novels of this Moroccan writer are both about a girl who was raised as a boy in a Maghrebian country, since her father wanted to have finally a son, since he did not want to be mocked anymore. There exist also two novels on transsexualism by MTF-transsexual Juliette Jourdan. Besides the writers of the three chosen novels, on which I will focus next, she is the only writer from France who has written on transgenderism since 1980. Her autobiographical novels *Le Choix de Juliette* (2009) and *Accord Parental Souhaitable (Contenu Explicite)* (2010) are about the everyday life of a MTF transsexual student. Although the first novel was published by *La Dilettante*, the second one is downloadable online as Jourdan has yet to find a publisher for it. (Canaux and Jourdan) This may very well be difficult because transsexualism is a controversial issue and since the writer is herself transsexual, it cannot be dismissed as only fictional.

The three novels that are the focal point of this thesis are all written by regularly gendered and sexed French authors who tend to write on themes revolving around the body. Scriptwriter and novelist Paradisi (1963) has written *Un Baiser Sous X* as his third novel. Pagano (1969) has studied art and cinema and has written five novels, a short story, a novella and a récit. With *Les Adolescents Troglodytes*, she won in 2009 the European Union Prize for Literature. Writer, sociologist and actress Châtelet (1944) has been writing essays, novels and novellas since over thirty-five years. *La Tête en Bas* is inspired by the life story of someone

she met. (Châtelet 7) The reason why I have chosen these three novels is first because I find the topic they write about fascinating. I am interested in sex and gender issues, especially in the gap between the minimal physical differences between men and women and the great societal consequences of 'being' male or female and the stress put on this division in current Western society. The experiences of transgender persons lay bare the artificial and constraining nature of this binary gender division and could point to new ways of perceiving gender, which makes a focus on them particularly exciting. Moreover, Paradisi, Pagano and Châtelet allow their readers to imagine what it would be like to be transgendered, like the protagonists of their novels, and make felt through the means of their beautiful prose not only the difficulties these characters encounter, but also show inspiring subversions of sex/gender norms. *Un Baiser Sous X*, *Les Adolescents Troglodytes* and *La Tête en Bas* are a reasonably homogenous choice of works, since they are all realistic French novels written in the past decade about the life of a fictional transgender character, focusing on how the protagonist experiences being transgender psychologically and socially. Moreover, the three novels are written by regularly sexed and gendered writers, who thus imagined how a life of a transgender could be like without being so themselves, which is also the position most readers are in. The viewpoints of the three authors and the situations of the characters they write about are thus not too different, which makes a good comparison between the novels possible. The characters of the three works differ in the sense that they each represent a different position in the transgender spectrum: Paradisi has written on an intersex and transgender character, Pagano focused on a MTF transsexual one and Châtelet on an intersex protagonist with FTM transsexual desires. This makes the selection even more interesting, because the analysis of these exemplary works together allows for an even more enriching look into the diversity and complexity of transgender representation.

Paradisi, Pagano and Châtelet have made the strained relationship between the inside and the outside world when it comes to gender transgression a major topic in their novels. The desires of the protagonists clash with the expectations and desires of not only institutions like school and medicine, but also of family and friends. This clash is what makes the lives of protagonists Camille, Adèle and Denise/Paul difficult, it makes them feel torn, but their implication in the social worlds of the novels also makes it interesting to see how they do manage to live while being unusually gendered and sexed. An analysis of the ways in which Paradisi, Pagano and Châtelet portray this clash between desires and norms will constitute the core of this thesis, as they have created in their novels exemplary situations which point to real-life issues related to the sex/gender binary, allowing the reader to realize how artificial

and constraining this binary is and to be inspired to perceive sex/gender in a new—less binary—way.

The specificity of the literary medium constitutes several opportunities when it comes to approaching the question of how gender transgression can be experienced. First of all, in opposition to theoretical texts, literature explores concrete situations individual characters find themselves in. Norms and conventions can have different effects on the lives of different people, for example depending on their ethnicity, sex/gender, sexual orientation and social-economic status. This is why Butler writes that “The critique of gender norms must be situated within the context of lives as they are lived”. (*Undoing* 8) Literature is especially suitable to explore questions related to identity, since it constitutes, as writer and theorist Monique Wittig writes, “le champ (de bataille) privilégié ... où s’affrontent les tentatives de constitution du sujet.” (“Vue” 91) It often offers the reader a way inside the minds of characters through an intense exploration of topics, showing how their subjectivity, their identity is constituted. The importance of this lies in the fact that, as literary theorist Jonathan Culler points out, a “literary work ... presents itself as exemplary”. (33) It invites the reader to reflect on the treated topics in relation to real life. The situated nature of literature, together with its exemplariness makes it a medium able to provide a deeper understanding of how transgenderism can be lived. Second of all, literary language is not just a means of communicating information, but the way it is written draws attention to the medium itself. As Buikema tells, “Form is what defines a work of art; form constitutes its singularity par excellence, which is why it will always withdraw from being appropriated by sheer identity politics.” (5) But the effect of this form does have societal relevance, since “diverging linguistic forms make us aware of our conventionally coded ways of dealing with the world.” (id. 6) Especially the use of metaphorical language allows a new way into issues, making the reader see them in a different light. Since language is the framework within which we think, transforming language means transforming our perception of reality. Our gendered view on the world is for example deeply ingrained in language and the work that literary writers do on language can have an important impact on our awareness of this. At the same time, the reader remains in a relatively safe place, as s/he can still say that it is just fiction, and will probably be more willing to imagine other perspectives than would be in the case of non-fiction. These aspects make literary works especially suitable to use for the analysis of a subject like transgenderism, which is a controversial topic that is also very personal as gender touches on the very essence of someone’s identity.

As I have shown in this introduction, the knowledge about, visibility and acceptance of transsexual, intersex and transgender persons is on the rise in Western cultures. But a lot of work still needs to be done. In the contemporary French academy, there is given little attention to Gender, Queer and Trans(gender) theory, especially when compared to America. Literary theorist Françoise Lionnet for example points out that “[t]here is only one program of ‘études féminines’ in France ... All too often ... French intellectuals are ‘en retard d’une guerre’ (one war behind), as we say, when it comes to understanding the issues and engaging with the existing debates and internal critiques within [this discipline]”. (104⁶) This thesis will make a step towards making up for that lack in not only interpreting the novels of Paradisi, Pagano and Châtelet in the light of the contemporary French situation, but also by partaking in a more theoretical reflection on the problematic nature of contemporary Western sex and gender normativity. As sociologist Sally Hines points out, this normativity “rests upon a naturalised binary gender model that recognises only male or female gender categories.” (6) For the theoretical reflection, I will draw on famous Gender, Queer and Trans Theories written in English by for example Judith Butler and Judith Halberstam on issues like intelligibility and passing, and supplement it with work done by French theorists like Christine Delphy and Elsa Dorlin, as well as medical and general background information about the situation of transgender persons. Fausto-Sterling’s work *Sexing the Body* holds a special position here, as it brings together biology and gender theory. The medical perspective is important to keep in mind, since, as Hines writes, “[m]edical perspectives on transgender have ... come to occupy a dominant position that has significantly affected how transgender is viewed and experienced within contemporary Western society.” (9) This is not only the case for outsiders, but transsexual persons also rely on the medical field if they want to transition. Moreover, many intersex children undergo assignment surgery because of the current medical perspectives; the fate of their bodies lies in their hands as we speak. In the three novels that take centre stage in this thesis, the transgender protagonists show how encounters with the gender binary can be lived by people who are not gender conform and offer possibilities of subversion of the binary. These subversions not only enrich theoretical and practical knowledge on transgender persons in the West and especially France, but are also of an advantage to people who consider themselves to be either male or female, corresponding to

⁶ For this reason French philosopher Elsa Dorlin, who also works with queer theory, mainly draws upon an Anglophone corpus in her work *Sexe, Genre et Sexualités*: “Ce volume privilégie un corpus Anglophone qui ... demeure sans commune mesure avec le développement encore embryonnaire des problématiques féministes dans la philosophie française.” (7)

their sex—like me—, since everyone is constricted by current gender roles. As transgender activist Dean Spade puts it in an interview:

when you look at how all people are subject to extreme regulation on broad scales like the law as well as narrow issues like what we wear and how and who we fuck, you begin to see that a struggle for transliberation and a deregulation of gender is a struggle to end a lot of systemic violence and suffering. (Spade, Willse and Nguyen)

The gender binary thus has an important influence on all our lives and at least lessening its strictness would mean more freedom for everyone.

In this thesis, I will address the question of how the inside and the outside worlds of the transgender protagonists of Paradisi's *Un Baiser sous X*, Pagano's *Les Adolescents Troglodytes* and Châtelet's *La Tête en Bas* cause friction. The transgender desires of respectively Camille, Adèle and Denise/Paul often clash with the desires and expectations of the people surrounding them, as well as with the societal demands of binary-gender-conformity, which are officially enforced by institutions. I will show that Paradisi, Pagano and Châtelet have created in these novels exemplary situations which point to real-life issues surrounding the compulsory gender binary, which allow readers not only to understand how artificial this binary is and how constraining—even maddening—it can be, but also to see that there are alternative ways of perceiving and reacting to gender. This will not only be done by analyzing what the authors are writing but also by how they do this and the effect both have on the reader, including its theoretical and real-life impact. The research question will be addressed by looking at it from three perspectives. In chapter one on appearances, the perspective of the complete outsider is addressed, which will set the context. In the second chapter I will move to the insider perspective by focusing on the experiences of the transgender characters themselves. In the last chapter, the attention will be on the perspective of people who know the transgender characters, which is in-between the two other perspectives and is, as opposed to the outsider perspective, very much interactive, as these characters know the transgender protagonists.

In chapter one, I will address the question of appearances specifically by focusing on how the protagonists of the three chosen novels, Camille, Adèle and Denise/Paul, appear to the outside world through an analysis of the degree in which they pass as a convincing male or female and an explanation of the importance of being able to pass if one is transgender. From this outsider perspective, I will move in the second chapter to the inside worlds of the protagonists. This I will do by directing my attention to the experiences of the protagonists themselves of being transgendered. The first focal point here will be the dynamics between

the need the protagonists feel to keep their unusual gender configuration secret in order to be accepted and their own desire to be open about who they are. In writing about these clashing needs, Paradisi, Pagano and Châtelet point to the constricting nature of the sex and gender binary. The next issue which I will discuss is the complex process of the identity formation of the protagonists of Paradisi's and Châtelet's novels. By showing how hard this is, Paradisi and Châtelet indicate that the sex and gender binary has great implications for one's identity. After this, two important ways in which the protagonists of these two works see beyond the oppositional sex/gender binary will be analyzed. These subversions the authors point to could inspire readers to perceive sex and gender in a less binary manner. In the third chapter, I will then direct my attention again to the outside world, but not, like in the first chapter to what complete outsiders might think of their gender, but to how the interactions between the network around the transgendered characters and the transgender protagonists themselves are influenced by their transgender nature. It is thus only about the reactions of people around the transgender character to his/her unusual sex and/or gender, but also how these reactions impact on the lives of these transgender protagonists. First, the difficulties family members and friends might have in understanding and coming to terms with the transgenderedness of the protagonists will be the focal point. Paradisi, Pagano and Châtelet show in their novels a variety of reactions to transgenderism, from rejection to proudness and indicate what kind of impact being close to a transgender persons might have on one's life and how their reactions in turn might affect a transgender person. After this, I will analyze how the institutional forces of medicine and school impact on the lives of the protagonists of Paradisi's and Châtelet's novels and how the representations these authors made are related to the gender-norms-enforcing power of institutions in contemporary Western society. All of these aspects of the mechanics of the strained relation between the inside and the outside worlds of the transgender protagonists in *Un Baiser Sous X*, *Les Adolescents Troglodytes* and *La Tête en Bas*, as well as the real-life issues Paradisi, Pagano and Châtelet have pointed to, which I discuss throughout the analyses, will be connected in the conclusion.

Chapter One: Appearances

In this chapter, I will concentrate on the appearances of the transgender protagonists of Paradisi's *Un Baiser Sous X*, Pagano's *Les Adolescents Troglodytes* and Châtelet's *La Tête en Bas* when it comes to gender. It is about whether they come across, appear, to complete outsiders—like people passing them by on the street—as male, female or something in-between. The section of this chapter focuses on passing, which is a central theme when it comes to appearances in a transgender context. As Dorlin defines it, “‘passer pour’ un homme ou une femme équivaut à tenter de passer pour réaliste, selon les règles et contraintes prédéfinies du réel communément admis.” (150-51) If someone is transgender, this implies that s/he does not fit into the Western gender binary. Differently gendered persons often pretend to be gender conform, at least for outsiders, in order to avoid being stared at or even face harassment. They thus try to pass as either male or female and conform to the norms of the society they live in regarding the appropriate looks and behaviour for men and women. I will show to what extent the protagonists of respectively Paradisi's, Pagano's and Châtelet novels succeed as passing and what their reasons are for doing so. This will give a good introduction of these characters in respect to the issue of transgenderism and by focusing on the novel as exemplary cases, I will show not only what is involved when one tries to pass, but also the importance of passing for transgender persons.

Do You Pass as Gender Conform?

Camille: Passing as a Boy and a Girl

I will now start by directing my attention to Camille, the intersex protagonist of Paradisi's *Un Baiser sous X*, regarding the question of whether s/he passes as gender conform. Camille is successful at passing as gender conform, no matter which gender s/he chooses. S/he lives as a girl when going to nursery school, but just before the start of primary school, s/he decides to 'become' a boy. Camille's change to the male gender involves a change in behaviour as s/he tries to become a convincing boy despite the fact s/he does not only have masculine, but also feminine inclinations. As s/he tells, “Je passais presque inaperçu, acceptais parfois de jouer aux voitures avec mes camarades, de copier leurs attitudes, d'imiter leurs cris en traversant la cour, de répéter quelques grossièretés en adoptant un air farouche.” (66) Camille's under-average level of masculine inclinations is thus hardly noticed due to him/her copying the

behaviour of boys. In order to pass as a boy, s/he not only imitates what the boys do, but also how they speak and behave more generally.

Paradisi points here to the fact that boys and girls have different hobbies and that boys are louder and have rougher manners than girls. Moreover, he shows that it is important to conform to this gendered behavioural pattern to blend in. This has to do with the fact that we tend to have what psychologist Laura Berk calls “strong beliefs about sex difference”. (521) These beliefs are carried on socially, for example through one’s upbringing: “Given that many adults view children through a gender-biased lens, perhaps it is not surprising that by the second year, children have begun to absorb these messages.” (id.) Thus from a very early age on, children are learned how to behave according to one’s gender roles. This is not to say that personal preferences do not play a role in behaviour, but it does account for the enforcement of the gender dichotomy on the behavioural level.

Besides behaviour, costumes play a central role in the passing of Paradisi’s protagonist Camille. As s/he explains, “[l]e vêtement cache mon indécision”. (119) Clothes can conceal the fact that s/he has an intersex body, but also Camille’s indecision about whether s/he would prefer to be female or male. As a teenager passing as a boy, s/he wears a corset to flatten his/her breasts while wearing what s/he calls an “habit de torero,” which provokes an association with the machismo of bull fighting, thus one can imagine these clothes to be very masculine. (120; 81-82) The rigidity of a torero vest also might conceal breasts, like a corset. As a teenager, Camille starts living as a girl again. When s/he goes out together with sister Margot looking like a boy, s/he sees Sarah, the photographer who discovered ‘her’ as a model, and quickly transforms him/herself into a girl: “nous nous sommes réfugiées aux toilettes, et tandis que je dégrafais le corset, ... Margot détachait mes cheveux. ... Elle a maquillé mes yeux et ma bouche, entrouvert ma chemise sur ma poitrine.” (138) Thus in order to pass as a woman, breasts shown through the means of cleavage and make-up are primary attributes. The transformation is successful, as Camille points out: “Sarah m’a reconnue au premier coup d’œil, ... a embrassé celle qui n’éveillait aucun doute dans son esprit.” (139) Sarah is thus certain that Camille is a girl.

By pointing to the importance of the way in which clothing is used, Paradisi indicates how important clothes are in passing. As Hines writes, “clothes are a key cultural indicator of gender.” (52) What someone wears, but also how s/he wear it is an essential part of gender norms. Fausto-Sterling points out how strongly socially enforced dress norms are:

Classmates, parents, teachers, and even strangers on the street evaluate how a child dresses. A boy who wears pants conforms to social norms, whereas one who dons a

skirt does not. And he hears about it right away! Gender, then, is never merely individual, but involves interactions between small groups of people. (244)

This enforcement has to do with the fact that especially when someone does not have an outspoken feminine or masculine physique, we tend to rely on clothes for gender assignation. This is why Détérez and Simon write that “[l]e comportement vestimentaire est à ce niveau crucial, l'habit étant censé ‘faire’ la petite fille, ou inversement, la ‘défaire’.” (44) This of course also applies to boys. A corset is particularly helpful, since, depending on if you tighten it around the chest or waist, you can create a more masculine or feminine physique.

The importance of clothes and behaviour for passing points to the performative nature of gender.⁷ As Butler writes, “gender is a kind of a doing, an incessant activity performed, ... One is always ‘doing’ with or for another ... the terms that make up one’s own gender are, from the start, outside oneself, beyond oneself in a sociality that has no single author”. (*Undoing* 1) Gender is thus not just an identity one might have, but we perform our genders through for example our behaviour and clothes in a way which is socially codified. As Paradisi has alluded to on the level of behaviour, imitation of others plays an important role in this.

Adèle: Passing and Becoming

Like Camille in Paradisi’s novel, Adèle, the MTF transsexual protagonist of Pagano’s *Les Adolescents Troglodytes*, shows no problem when it comes to the question of appearance that is conditional in passing. She used to be a feminine boy and as a young adult, s/he moves away from her home town and starts living as a woman. Adèle manages to look female by ‘sculpting’ herself every day into a woman:

Je me suis mise à réajuster mon corps comme un corsage ... c’était du temps ... plastique qui me rendait confiante. Je bordais mon sexe dans la peau de mes testicules remontée, ou dans le creux de mes fesses, dans un souci méticuleux de latéralisation. Je me sculptais fille ... [je] voulais être tenue, corset et gaines serrés. (80-81)

For Adèle, hiding her penis, wearing a corset and tight clothes are thus central for her transformation into a woman. Words like ‘réajuster,’ ‘plastique’ and ‘sculptais’ underline the transformative aspect of Adèle’s activities in this scene. The emphasis is put on creating a feminine silhouette with breasts and a small waist, both of which can be accentuated with a

⁷ A movie which shows how this passing on the behavioural and vestimentary level can look like is *Boys Don’t Cry* (1999), in which Hillary Swank plays a FTM transgender who passes. The viewer can recognize Swank in the movie, but she still looks like a convincing male.

corset (with the help of mousse to fake breasts (81)). Thus just as Paradisi, Pagano points here to the use of the corset to mould the body more into the desired body shape. Adèle is successful at passing as a woman: her friends and neighbours think she is female. As Adèle tells, “pour les autres j’étais la femme de mon frère”. (83) She also takes hormones, which make her body less muscular: “Les cures d’hormones ... me rendaient mon corps, dans une fonte musculaire progressive”. (82) As women tend to have a less muscular physique, the hormones make her body more feminine. Adèle eventually undergoes vaginoplasty: “Mes cicatrices dessinent les grandes lèvres”. (114) Both of these interventions make her confident that she can pass as a woman without trying to look extra feminine, which is why, as Adèle tells: “Depuis mon opération je ne me maquille plus, et j’ai laissé tomber les corsets”. (138) She feels she does not have to convince anyone anymore that she is a woman, her female sex and gender have become a certainty and she can adhere in a less strict way to norms of femininity. After her gender reassignment surgery, Adèle goes back to her old neighbourhood and decides to live there again. No one seems to recognize her, which shows that she passes very well. Adèle tells: “Au village on ne m’a pas reconnu ... J’ai joué à l’étrangère qui aimait la montagne et cherchait du travail, et ... la communauté des communes m’a embauchée, et même logée, presque tout de suite”. (90-91) She is thus accepted as a woman by the community. Even her lover Tony has no idea that Adèle used to be a woman: “Je couche avec [Tony] dans les secrets. ... aussi le secret de moi-même”. (140) She is able to do so, because she has a convincing female body.

Pagano represents in her novel a transsexual woman who passes perfectly. That this passing is crucial for transsexual persons is explained by transgender theorist Sandy Stone:

The most critical thing a transsexual can do, the thing that *constitutes* success, is to ‘pass’. Passing means to live successfully in the gender of choice, to be accepted as a ‘natural’ member of that gender. Passing means the denial of mixture. One and the same with passing is effacement of the prior gender role, or the construction of a plausible history. (231)

If one wants to live as a member of the ‘opposite’ sex, one must convince the outside world that one IS such a member and have always been so. A MTF-transsexual person thus has to pretend to be a ‘biological’ woman and a transsexual man to be a ‘biological’ male. Passing however comes at a price: passing implies lying about one’s past gender. As I will show in the next section, this is also addressed by Pagano, who writes about Adèle’s struggle with the fact she feels she has to lie about her past, which is already indicated by the emphasis on secrecy in the last citation I used of the novel. Halberstam points to something similar as Stone in

writing that “[p]assing as a narrative assumes that there is a self that masquerades as another kind of self and does so successfully; at various moments, the successful pass may cohere into something akin to identity. At such a moment, the passer has *become*.” (21) Passing is thus pretence, but if one is successful, the identity one passes as may become that person’s identity. Pagano shows an exemplary case of this: Adèle considers herself to be a woman and her environment does so too.

Denise/Paul: Failing to Pass

Unlike Camille and Adèle, the protagonists of Paradisi’s and Pagano’s novels, Denise/Paul, the main character of Châtelet’s *La Tête en Bas*, who is intersex and has FTM-transsexual desires, does not pass during an important part of his/her life. Denise/Paul grows up being a tomboy who soon desires to be male. In order to come across as one, s/he learns him/herself how to move like a boy by observing the differences in behaviour between his/her parents:

être garçon ... c’est une attention de chaque seconde, un travail à plein-temps. Il n’est pas vrai, par exemple, que les garçons et les filles dorment de la même manière, s’assoient ou marchent de la même manière. C’est toujours différent. À table aussi c’est différent. Mon père boit à grandes lampées, ma mère sirote. Mon père avale, ma mère grignote, la bouche en avant. J’étudie. J’apprends la différence et m’applique.
(39)

Males and females thus have each their own specific way of moving. Even if they perform the same acts, such as eating, they go about it differently. The movements of women tend to be more subtle and subdued. Châtelet thus points here to differences in behaviour between men and women, which Paradisi also did in his novel. Denise/Paul tries to capture the subtleties of these differences and copy the manly version.

Notwithstanding Denise/Paul’s efforts, s/he does not succeed at passing. This is because his/her physique mixes male and female characteristics. Even his/her mother, who recently heard from the doctor that her child is intersex, “sa fille est aussi un garçon,” finds her child’s appearance puzzling. (56) Denise/Paul tells:

Je surprends encore chez ma mère, malgré son zèle à me traiter en fils, ... ces mêmes yeux déroutés qu’autrefois quand ils se posent, silencieux, sur le duvet qui pousse sombre au-dessus de l’ourlet gracieux de ma bouche, sur les attaches trop fines, délicates, de mes poignets qui émergent du gros velours épais de mes vestons, sur mon cou, que j’ai gardé blanc, trop gracile dans le col rigide des chemises.

Ma voix, en particulier, la fait encore sursauter. Elle ne s'y est pas habituée, à cette voix grave, plus grave maintenant que celle de mon père ... à la colonie [de vacances], je sens bien qu'on s'interroge. (67)

Denise/Paul thus wears masculine clothes, jackets and shirts, has a low voice and fuzz on his/her upper lip, but at the same time has slight wrists, a delicate neck and a feminine mouth. This makes not only strangers at the holiday colony wonder about his/her gender, but also his/her mother.

Denise/Paul cannot bring him/herself to try to pass as a man, even as a young adult: "M'affirmer publiquement comme un homme est au-dessus de mes forces, au-dessus de ma raison." (90) This indicates that it takes a lot of courage and strength to do so, more than s/he has, especially considering the fact that his/her mental state is increasingly fragile. (90-91) But "au-dessus de ma raison" also seems to imply that s/he knows better than to try to come across as a man, because s/he is not just a man: s/he is not only legally a woman, but also has breasts and a feminine side, although he would prefer to get rid of them. Since his/her breasts have started to grow, "entre Denise et moi la guerre est déclarée ... je suis en grand danger, parce que, dans la guerre qui se prépare, l'ennemi est au-dedans de moi." (52) Denise/Paul feminine side is thus a part of him, even though he would rather have it otherwise.

At the age of forty, Denise/Paul undergoes breast removal surgery in order to make his/her body more conform to his/her desire to be a man. As the external narrator tells, "Les deux seins sont tombés et le voilà entier." (10) This surgery makes a huge difference. As we can read in the opening lines of Châtelet's novel, Denise/Paul finally passes: "Et pour monsieur, ce sera?' Aucune hésitation dans la voix. Pas de perplexité dans les yeux qui s'arrêtent sur Paul. La question est carrée, résolue, sans le vacillement habituel, cette gêne qui fait ondoyer le regard des vendeuses, parfois jusqu'à l'affolement." (9) Whereas before, saleswomen were at a loss about whether to refer to Denise/Paul as male or female, after the top surgery, s/he is immediately identified as male.

Châtelet shows in her novel an exemplary case of a transgender being who does not pass as gender conform for most of his/her life. Someone who does not pass is unintelligible on the gender axis. As Butler writes, "'persons' only become intelligible through becoming gendered in conformity with recognizable standards of gender intelligibility." (*Trouble* 22) This can be very problematic, because this puts into question their humanness: "coherent gender [is posited] as a presupposition of humanness." (Butler *Undoing* 58) If one is unintelligible, this means being unrecognizable to others as a fellow human being, others will not be able to relate to you, because they do not understand you. This is what Châtelet pointed

to when writing about the puzzlement of Denise/Paul's mother when she looks at her child's physique. But not everyone is even willing to try to understand transgender persons. We live in a society in which transsexual persons who have not (fully) transitioned are regularly murdered when people find out they do not physically conform to their lived gender. Chris Summers for example wrote in 2010 a BBC-article on four transsexual murder trials in England taking place the last two years. The most infamous example of these kinds of crimes is the rape and brutal murder of American FTM-transgender Brandon Teena by two former friends in 1993 when they found out he was biologically female, which is portrayed in the movie *Boys Don't Cry* (1999). (see Califia 1997) These may be the extremes, but as transgender activist Zoe O'Connell tells Summers, she feels as a transwoman "the constant threat of day-to-day abuse."⁸ There are also transphobic scholars, like feminist Janice Raymond, who infamously calls all transsexuals rapists while focusing on MTF transsexual persons in *The Transsexual Empire*: "All transsexuals rape women's bodies by reducing the real female form to an artefact, appropriating this body for themselves." (134) This violent statement implies that Raymond thinks that transsexual women can only physically look like a woman, but can never become one and will always continue to be representatives of patriarchal power subduing 'real' women. We can equally imagine how much empathy transsexual persons are likely to encounter with medical practitioners in a society where a psychiatrist specialized in transsexualism such as Colette Chiland thinks that "l'idée de changement de sexe est une idée folle" and repeatedly refers to it as "une mutilation, ... une transformation d'un organisme sain en un organisme malade". (73; 57; see also 120) Passing thus proves to be a strategy which is not only important to walk down the street without being stared at, but it may also prevent harassment and one's life may even depend on it. This is not only true for transsexual persons, but counts for all transgender and intersex persons. This is why Butler writes that "'performance' is ... a ritual reiterated under and through ... the force of prohibition and taboo, with the threat of ostracism and even death controlling and compelling the shape of the production". (*Bodies* 95) If one does not perform gender in a socially accepted manner, repercussions tend to follow. In order to avoid this, many transgender (and intersex) persons choose to pass.

⁸ There are no good estimates available of the prevalence of transphobic hate crimes, but the Hate Crime Report of 2008-2009 of the Crown Prosecution Service of the United Kingdom gives an indication. In three years, there were 786 prosecutions of homophobic hate crimes—under which transphobic ones are classed—in the United Kingdom with victims whose gender is unknown, making them almost half of all homophobic hate crimes. (Crown Prosecution Service. *Hate Crime Report 2008-2009*: 37. http://www.cps.gov.uk/publications/docs/CPS_hate_crime_report_2009.pdf)

Conclusion

I have started approaching the question of how the inside and the outside worlds of the transgender protagonists of Paradisi's *Un Baiser sous X*, Pagano's *Les Adolescents Troglodytes* and Châtelet's *La Tête en Bas* cause friction by focusing in this chapter on the perspective of the complete outsider. I have shown how Camille, Adèle and Denise/Paul, the protagonists of the respective novels, appear gender-wise to the outside world by focusing on the question of whether they pass as gender conform. I have also shown to which Western real-life issues the authors of the novels refer in this context. Both Paradisi and Châtelet point to the strategy of the imitation of the behaviour of gender conform persons, which implies that there are different norms males and females have to conform to. Paradisi and Pagano refer to the importance of clothes to perform gender and the usefulness of the corset to mould one's torso into a more gender conform shape. Paradisi shows in his novel that the intersex and transgender Camille succeeds at passing with the help of clothes and the imitation of behaviour of gender conform peers, no matter whether s/he chooses to live as a girl or a boy. In Pagano's novel, the transsexual protagonist Adèle also passes by wearing the right clothes, but also hormone therapy and a surgical intervention furthers her femininity. Pagano points here to a strategy employed by many transsexual persons to make their body more conform to their chosen gender. Moreover, Pagano shows through her portrayal of Adèle an exemplary case of someone who does not just pass, but has become her desired gender, as Halberstam puts it: for both herself and the outside world, Adèle is a woman.

Denise/Paul, the intersex and transgender character who takes the main stage in Châtelet's novel, does not pass, despite his/her masculine clothes and efforts to imitate the masculine behaviour of his/her father. Châtelet shows that clothing and behaviour are not all there is to passing: one's physique also plays an important role, as Pagano already hinted at with her referral to medical interventions for gender reassignment. Denise/Paul's appearance puzzles people, since s/he has a low voice and fuzz on his/her upper lip, but also breasts and a slight physique. S/he does not dare to live as male, not only because s/he is officially female, but also because s/he is physically partly female. Denise/Paul only has the strength it takes to go against this when he is forty. Then s/he undergoes top surgery, which allows him/her finally to pass as male. Châtelet's work shows an exemplary case of someone who is during a large part of his/her life what Butler calls unintelligible, which implies that others have problems understanding or relating to that person. This explains why transgender persons tend to be subject to insults and even hate crimes. These threats show the importance of passing for

transgender and intersex persons, even if this means that one has to lie about one's past if one switches gender role.

Chapter Two: Experiences

The experiences of Camille, Adèle and Denise/Paul, the respective protagonists of Paradisi's *Un Baiser Sous X*, Pagano's *Les Adolescents Troglodytes* and Châtelet's *La Tête en Bas* are the focal point of this chapter. I will analyze how they themselves experience their transgender identity by focusing on three key aspects of their experiences. In the first section, the tension in the novels between a desire to be open about being transgender, and possibly intersex, and the perceived impossibility to do so out of fear for rejection takes centre stage. This lays bare the internal frictions caused by enforced sex/gender normativity. In section two, I will look at the difficulties the protagonists of Paradisi's and Châtelet's encounter in their identity formation due to their unusual sex and gender. In writing about this, Paradisi and Châtelet point to the possible internal problems caused by binary sex/gender norms. The identity of Pagano's protagonist is however formed in a relatively linear way and remains quite stable. Moreover, it is mainly tied up with the problem of secrecy, which is why will I discuss this in the first section of this chapter. The third section of chapter two is about two important ways in which the main characters of Paradisi's and Châtelet's novels see beyond oppositional binary gender norms, which can inspire readers to do so as well. The focus of Pagano's work lies elsewhere: the problem of transsexual protagonist Adèle is not so much with the gender binary as with the acceptance of someone who wants to conform to the norm of the 'other' sex, which is why will I focus instead on the two other novels.

Having to Hold a Secret You Do not Want to Keep

Camille: Hiding a Transgender Identity

In Paradisi's *Un Baiser Sous X*, protagonist Camille perceives being intersex and transgender really as a secret s/he would prefer not to have to keep. As I have shown in the previous chapter, Camille passes successfully in his/her chosen gender, be it male or female. However, Camille's desire is to be able to be open about his/her intersexuality and live as both male and female. As a baby, Camille luckily encounters medical experts who do not intervene surgically on his/her body, as is often the case with intersex births, as I have show in the introduction. (Fausto-Sterling 2000; Chase 1998) Camille is raised gender neutrally and his/her double sexuality is lovingly accepted by both adoptive mother Bettina and sister Margot, who wait patiently until Camille decides which gender s/he feels most comfortable

with⁹. (26) Nevertheless, Camille has to choose a gender in order to be able to be enrolled in nursery school and decides to become a girl¹⁰. (34-35) But Camille does not stick with ‘her’ choice of being a girl. The summer before s/he goes to primary school, Camille decides to ‘become’ a boy. As I have shown in the previous chapter, Camille’s change to the male gender also involves a change in behaviour, which s/he performs by imitating the behaviour of gender conform boys. (66) S/he is however aware that becoming a regular boy is impossible for him/her:

Étais-je comme eux ? ... Ils n’aimaient que les voitures et les ballons, ne songeaient pas à habiller les poupées de leur sœur. ... Aucune ambivalence tapie dans leurs neurones. Leur corps regorgeait de testostérone. Cette virilité biologique dont je n’étais que partiellement doté. Je faisais tout comme un garçon avec ce regard de fille qu’ils ne voyaient pas. Ils ne savaient pas que des enfants des deux genres existaient ... Je n’obtiendrai les choses qu’à moitié, et n’incarnerai que la moitié de chaque chose. (56)

Camille thus has both inclinations that are deemed feminine and ones that are deemed masculine, but s/he feels s/he cannot openly act on them, since that would make his/her behaviour unacceptably different from other children. This forces him/her to show only half of who s/he is and restrain the rest, hence become an incomplete boy, who is not nearly as masculine as most boys. Camille points mainly to his/her biology when talking about his/her double gender identity, referring to neurons, but the gender neutral upbringing in an accepting environment may have also played an important role. S/he has been free to behave how s/he wants, regardless of whether this behaviour is deemed masculine or feminine and thus has not learned to fit one of the moulds. We can assume that Camille’s peers did have a gendered upbringing and did learn to internalize gender norms. This makes little Camille feel that s/he is the only one who is ambiguous in his/her gendered behavioural preferences.

This nature-nurture issue which Paradisi hints at is a long-standing controversial debate in science.¹¹ As I already indicated, many theoreticians now think that both biology and social norms play a role in gender role behaviour. (Butler 2004; Berk 2003; Détrez 2003; Fausto-Sterling 2000) As Détrez writes,

⁹ I will focus extensively on their reactions in “*Camille: Acceptance and Obliviousness*”.

¹⁰ See “*Camille: Choosing is Imperative*” for a discussion on the normalizing force of school.

¹¹ An example showing its controversial nature is the decades-long debate between psychologists John Money and Milton Diamond on the relative importance of upbringing and biological factors for someone’s gender identity around the tragic John/Joan case (a boy who lost his penis due to an operation gone wrong, who was raised as a girl, but turned out to have a male gender identity). (see in Fausto-Sterling 2000)

Le corps est ainsi le lieu où se nouent et s'articulent nature et culture : un donné apparemment aussi naturel que le corps, ... se trouve, ... dès l'élaboration comme fœtus, modelé par les normes et représentations en vigueur : celles-ci varient selon le lieu et l'époque, et également selon la situation sociale dans laquelle il s'insère.

Biology and cultural norms, which rely heavily on gender and differ depending on the time period and culture we live in, thus influence each other. What we often regard as natural feminine or masculine inclinations are thus culturally influenced. This is why Fausto-Sterling points out that “partitioning genes from environment, nature from nurture, is a scientific dead end”. (235) Transgender desires in an intersex person thus cannot be said to have exclusively biological origins, but social interactions between the transgender person and his/her environment equally play a role in them.

In Paradisi's work, gender conformity becomes even more complicated for Camille when in high school love relations start to extend beyond kissing. It then becomes dangerous for Camille to act on his/her 'true' desires: “Embrasser n'était plus un jeu. Embrasser éveillait les corps ... Cette dernière année au collège était un calvaire. J'évitais les filles qui me plaisaient”. (77) S/he thus has to hold back so that no one notices the sexual ambiguity of his/her body¹². This is very hard for Camille, since s/he is obsessed with kissing, a sensuous act for which the sex one has is not important. As s/he tells,

mon obsession pour le baiser résultait de ma singularité. À l'inverse des élèves de ma classe, je rejetais le clivage des sexes. ... Margot tempérerait mes ardeurs, le rapprochement des filles et des garçons resurgirait avec l'adolescence, les premiers émois, la conquête du baiser. Toute mon histoire. (67-68)

Kissing is thus beyond the gender binary and brings the sexes together, both of which can be said about Camille too. Around this time, Camille starts working as a female model and thus starts living as a girl again, but Camille feels s/he has to quit school in order to avoid problems: “J'étais devenue une femme, m'exprimais en public au féminin ... j'abandonnais mes études. À la prochaine rentrée, j'aurais dû me présenter en garçon au lycée, en fille sur papier glacé ; mener une double existence qui m'angoissait.” (118) S/he prefers not to lead a double life in order to prevent questions and possibly exposure. Throughout the novel, Camille changes from ungendered to girl, boy and finally girl again, but every time this coincides with a change in environment so that no outsider notices Camille's change in gender. The gendered coming out is thus hidden. Paradisi points to here to something which is

¹² I will come back to the dangers s/he could otherwise face in “*Camille: Acceptance and Obliviousness*”.

common when people change their lived gender. As Hines explains, “the emergence of new milieu through breaks with the past routines of work, home life and intimate relationships, enables a shift in gender identity.” (58)

Notwithstanding Camille’s fear of being exposed as intersex, as a model, Paradisi’s protagonist does play with gender and this is even one of the main reasons why s/he is a successful model. This is shown for example at the launch of the campaign for a perfume ad in which Camille plays the leading role: “La moitié de mon visage maquillé, le côté masculin s’affirme dans un costume aux rayures ocre, le côté féminin s’envole dans une robe décolletée. ... Des applaudissements ont retenti, admiratifs et incroyables.” (168) Camille’s ‘Hermaphrodite’ look is thus a great success. But Camille walks on thin ice and when a tabloid questions ‘her’ gender, Camille’s lawyer sues it for defamation:

[Mon nom] avait été éclaboussé par un tabloïd qui relatait dans ses colonnes les propos d’une call-girl tchèque. Elle affirmait m’avoir connu en garçon, que je m’étais contenté de l’embrasser, mais pouvait témoigner de l’effet qu’elle avait provoqué. Mon avocat avait poursuivi le journal en diffamation ... Je me souvenais très bien de la fille. (163)

This shows the perceived danger of crossing the gender divide: Camille thinks his/her reputation as a model would be ruined if s/he would be exposed as intersex. S/he can play with gender as a model, but being beyond the gender divide would be unacceptable.

Paradisi hints here at the complexity of our gender system. The way people perform their gender is quite varied—much more so than the binary gender schema seems to imply—and there is thus room to play with gender stereotypes. Moreover, the level of acceptance of famous persons who look different is much higher than for ‘regular’ people, since those who are famous are almost supposed to be extraordinary. Especially in the fashion industry, scouts are always looking for models with an unusual appearance in order to convey how avant-garde the fashion is the model is wearing. However, unreadability when it comes to gender is still seen as unacceptable.¹³ Halberstam explains the mechanics of this paradoxical situation:

gender’s very flexibility and seeming fluidity is precisely what allows dimorphic gender to hold sway. Because so few people actually match any given community

¹³ Interestingly, at the moment, there are two successful models who are not gender-conform: Léa T., an openly MTF-transsexual who has not entirely transitioned yet and works as a female model, and André Pejic, a male model who also shows women’s clothing. (see Tilmann Prüfer. “Wann ist ein Mann ein Mann? Die Mode verteilt die Rollen neu.” *Zeit Magazin*. 2011 (8): 21.) This indicates that there is indeed much more freedom for models to be non-gender-conform and someone like Camille might thus actually be accepted, although the lack of knowledge about intersexuality and having not one sex to begin with, nor chosen one gender identity might still be problematic.

standards for male or female, in other words, gender can be imprecise and therefore multiply relayed through a solidly binary system. At the same time, because the definitional boundaries of male and female are so elastic, there are very few people in any given public space who are completely unreadable in terms of their gender.

Ambiguous gender, when and where it does appear, is inevitably transformed into deviance. (20)

Hardly anybody fits every aspect of the male or female standard, which makes actual gender roles quite fluid. As a result of this, but very few people are completely unreadable on the gender axis and it is possible for the norm to continue to be functional and to cause a social exclusion of the few persons who are unreadable. As I have also shown in chapter one, gender deviants face rejection.

In *Un Baiser Sous X*, Paradisi's protagonist Camille feels torn between a longing to live openly as doubly gendered and the need for acceptance, which forces him/her to choose one gender. This makes Camille very unhappy and alienated: "Mon vrai visage de poisson-clown qui ne respirait jamais aussi bien que sous l'eau. Dehors, il s'asphyxiait. ... Et plus je m'exposais aux yeux des autres, plus je devenais invisible à moi-même." (158) S/he considers him/herself to be like a clown fish, which is a species that is able to change sex. (Paradisi 34) Clown fishes are all born male, but they are able to transform into females and the largest one of a group does so when the female of their group dies. (Newcomb and Fink 2004) Similarly, Camille changes gender and would like to be free to shift gender roles at will. Camille also loves water, like clown fishes do. S/he does so because sex does not matter when you swim and physical markers of sex are invisible under water. As s/he tells, "L'eau ne se souciait pas des sexes. ... À peine percevait-on ma présence, rien qu'une onde diamantine." (67) But outside of the water, gender distinctions do matter, which makes life hard for Camille: s/he feels smothered by gender norms, because they limit his/her self-expression and make him/her feel alienated. This is why s/he tells when modelling that "plus les filles affichaient mon ambivalence, plus je me sentais enfin moi-même." (149) Camille thus feels most happy when s/he can express both his/her femininity and masculinity. 'Les filles' probably refers here to the girls who dress Camille and put make-up on him/her. The greater possibility to play with gender as a model is probably what attracts him/her in the job.

Paradisi points in the cited passages to a way of conceiving of gender which is beyond the binary opposition male – female. The desired position he portrays, especially in his reference to clown fishes, is akin to "a pursuit of identity as a transformative activity." (Butler *Undoing* 8) Shifts would then characterize gender instead of stability, or as Butler puts it,

taking her cue from transgender artist and theorist Kate Bornstein, this means “to engage transformation itself as the meaning of gender”. (*Undoing* 65) As I have shown in chapter one, gender is actually not just a stable identity one has, but is performed through the way we dress, behave, etcetera. Being a woman is not identical to looking and behaving like a woman. It requires learning and effort to conform to gender norms. As Butler points out, “If one is not born a woman, but rather becomes one [like Simone de Beauvoir wrote], then becoming is the vehicle for gender itself.” (id.) Gender is thus already a transformative exercise and realizing this makes room for the possibility of change, not only in our erroneously stable view of gender (and identity), but also in the way we perform it. If there is no such thing as natural masculinity or femininity, it would make just as much sense not to limit ourselves to one eternally stable role if we do not desire to.

Adèle: Lying About One's Past

Unlike Camille in Paradisi's work, Adèle, the protagonist of Pagano's novel *Les Adolescents Troglodytes*, lives openly in her preferred gender from young adulthood onwards. Adèle however still has a secret: she does not dare to be open about the fact that she used to have a male body. The fact that her beloved brother Axel has great difficulties with accepting his sibling's transition probably played an overriding role in her keeping this secret for the rest of the world¹⁴. Ever since s/he was a little boy, Adèle, was very different from other boys, especially Axel. At home, s/he for example did the chores which were deemed feminine, Axel the 'masculine' ones: “[mon frère] rentrait le bois avec papa ... il jetait les bûches au sol et maman râlait pendant que je courais chercher un balai.” (46) Because of things like this, and his/her fear of getting a masculine body, s/he slowly realizes as a child s/he is actually a girl: “Je me comprenais fille lentement”. (35; 121) Adèle finally dares to live as a woman when s/he moves to the city as a young adult. She starts taking hormone therapy, which makes her feel great: “[l]es cures d'hormones, fatigantes et bienfaitrices, me rendaient mon corps, dans un fonte musculaire progressive ... ce corps m'avait manqué si précisément ... si longtemps”. (82) This shows that her desire to have a female body runs very deep. She really feels that this is the kind of body she should have had all along. Adèle also undergoes a vaginoplasty, which she sees as her “seconde naissance”. (115) After having undergone the operation, she returns to her home area to live there again. In the present of the novel, since ten years now, she is happy finally living there as a woman, but the problem is that “[j]e suis celle que j'ai toujours

¹⁴ I will focus on Axel's problems with his sibling's transsexualism in “*Adèle: a Brother's Ambivalence.*”

été, simplement je ne peux pas le dire.” (92) She thus does not consider herself changed, which shows that Adèle considers being female as a stable part of her identity. But she thinks the outer world would have a different perspective on this and deems it impossible to tell others that she used to be one of the boys living in the neighbourhood, even to her boyfriend Tony. Adèle feels guilty about keeping the secret: “aux gens je leurs mens, à ma vie je mens, ma vie même est un mensonge, et si Tony l’apprend, et si tout le monde l’apprend, je serai obligée de partir, Tony me quittera, l’exil sera comme une punition.” (145) She feels she is living a lie, which is underlined by the repetition of “mens[onge]”. This implies that she thinks it is important that others know about her transsexualism. This could be because Adèle deems this to be an important part of her identity, but the main reason is probably that she lied about being new to the region. Especially since her brother is in town and word gets out that she visits him, people start to ask questions and her secret very well may come out. One of the boys she drives to school as a school bus driver asks her for example: “Axel de la ferme du fond, comment tu l’as connu. Pourquoi tu portes le même nom. Et ta vie avant de venir ici”. (200) But Adèle keeps quiet, because she thinks she does not have a choice but to lie as she assumes that she will be rejected and forced to leave her beloved home region if she would tell her secret.

Pagano’s representation of Adèle could be seen as one of someone who largely holds a ‘classic’ transsexual position, since this is a case of a ‘trapped in the wrong body’ narrative based on what Hines describes as “the idea of the ‘wrong body’ as a vehicle in which the essential self is trapped.” (60) A change in the sex of the body is all that is needed to feel satisfied: “Surgical ‘correction’ is related ... as the means through which [someone’s] authentic gender is released.” (id.) One thus moves from one sex to another without ambiguity or mixing of genders. This either/or position goes hand in hand with passing, which has that same quality. As Stone pointed out, “One and the same with passing is effacement of the prior gender role”. (231) This is what gender clinics used to advise, as transgender writer Pat Califia tells:

transgendered men and women who had completed the process of sex reassignment were urged to destroy any mementos of their childhoods, create false stories about the past that were consistent with their gender of preference, hide their transsexuality from their partners, and live in a medically-mandated state of duplicity and amnesia. (199)

As a result of this, “[u]nder the principle of passing, ... relationships begin as lies”. (Stone 232) Pagano’s exemplary case does not exactly fit into the regular transsexual mould, because Adèle is portrayed as someone who does want to be open about her past and not efface it, but

only holds back out of fear of rejection. Desiring to be open about one's past is a move in the direction to being what Stone calls a posttranssexual. This means moving beyond passing, which is for Stone the "essence of transsexualism". (232) Stone deems it important that transsexual persons "take responsibility for *all* of their history, to begin to rearticulate their lives ... as a political action begun by reappropriating difference and reclaiming the power of the refigured and reinscribed body." (232) This implies being proud of one's body as it is, not just in its resemblance to the body of a biologically born man or woman, depending on which gender one has chosen. This also means seeing oneself as beyond the gender binary, as transgendered in the narrow definition. Pagano does not go this far, but does move somewhat beyond a classical portrayal of a transsexual person.

This move beyond the usual image of the passing transsexual person is underlined by Pagano in the final scenes of the novel. When Adèle is stuck in the snow with the children she drives home from school, one of them tells her secret. (202) Adèle's reaction is ambivalent: "Je voudrais le gifler. Je voudrais le remercier. Je ne sais pas. Je me dis c'est fait. Tony va être furieux, il me quittera. Oui mais c'est fait, tout le plateau saura qui je suis." (203) On the one hand, she is mad, because she is afraid of the consequences, but on the other she is happy that she will no longer have to keep the male past of her identity secret. Adèle ends up saying to the boy: "C'est pas grave je te dis, ça m'évite d'avoir à parler, c'est très bien comme ça." (208) She thus seemed to have considered it inevitable talking about it eventually and is ready to take responsibility for all of her history, as Stone would have it. As reviewer Yann Nicol writes, the school children, "les '*adolescents troglodytes*' permettent à Adèle de dépasser la gêne, d'assumer enfin son identité et de fuir le mensonge qui l'empêche de vivre pleinement."

Denise/Paul: Secret Detail

In Châtelet's *Le Saut de l'Ange*, the sex/gender configuration of its main character, Denise/Paul, is much more visible than in the cases of the protagonist of the two novels I previously analyzed. As I have explained in the previous chapter, s/he does not pass as unambiguously gendered during many years of his/her life, but clearly looks somewhere in-between male and female because s/he has both feminine and masculine physical traits. However, there is one scene which shows well that secrecy still plays a central role in Denise/Paul's life: the life-altering visit of the winged knight. This visit is described by Denise/Paul in the following way:

On vient me voir ... en secret. Je n'ose pas allumer ma lampe de chevet. ... Il ne faut pas que je le voie ... ne pas rompre le charme. Le visiteur est armé comme un

chevalier, et il a des ailes, j'en suis sûre. ... J'écoute seulement de tout mon être ce qu'on a à me dire, à moi seule. ... Je sens le doigt posé sur ma fente de fille ... et puis j'entends le mot ... 'Chut...' ... On demande à ces lèvres, à cette bouche, ouverte par erreur, de se taire, de ne plus parler, plus jamais. ... Mon messenger m'a laissé ... en présent aux portes de mon corps un peu de sa lance glorieuse. (41-42)

This visit is surrounded by secrecy: not only does it take place during the night in the privacy of Denise/Paul's room, but the message is according to him/her also only addressed to him/her and s/he does not even dare to look at the knight, fearing that this would chase him away. This knight urges his/her vagina to be quiet and gives Denise/Paul a small penis. This is like a wish come true: Denise/Paul has tried so hard to be masculine and now s/he has been given a penis in reward, which gives him/her a physical reason for being masculine, making Denise/Paul's desires to be masculine and silence his/her feminine side seem less random. Denise/Paul's penis really has grown notwithstanding the fantastic character of the scene, as it allows him/her to pee standing, whereas s/he could not before. (40, 58) Later, Denise/Paul turns out to be intersex. (56) Châtelet points here to the existence of a striking form of intersexuality. It seems incredible, but it is indeed possible that penis development is delayed until puberty. (Kalat 2001) People with a deficiency in the enzyme 5 α -reductase 2 have a penis that is so small at birth that it looks like a somewhat swollen clitoris¹⁵. (id.; Fausto-Sterling 2000) The growing of the penis is portrayed by Châtelet as a magical endeavour, because it seems unbelievable: protagonist Denise/Paul is aware that penises do not tend to grow overnight, but are supposed to be formed prenatally. The emphasis put on secrecy in the scene does not only have to do with the incredible nature of the event, but also because Denise/Paul knows that it does not fit into the general perception of sex as binary and established before birth. Others may not be so happy as s/he is with the penis, but may reject him/her for it or even enforce medical intervention to fix the 'defect'. Even though Denise/Paul's gender is a source of speculation, the real sex and gender configuration of him/her remains a secret to most people because of his/her fear of the reactions of others. Denise/Paul is made aware of the possibility of rejection through the questioning way others look at his/her gender ambiguous physique, not in the least place his/her mother, as I have explained in the previous chapter. (67) Moreover, in the chapter of *La Tête en Bas* which follows the knight scene, Denise/Paul is brought by his/her mother to the doctor, who gives him/her what seem to be hormone injections¹⁶, showing that the threat of medical intervention

¹⁵ Jeffrey Eugenides' novel *Middlesex* (2002) is equally about an intersex character with this deficiency.

¹⁶ I will analyze this scene in "*Denise/Paul: Enforcing Conformity and Discomfort*".

is very real for Denise/Paul. (43-44) We could see the knight scene as a comment of Châtelet on not only the general lack of knowledge about intersexuality in Western society, but also a lack of acceptance of differently sexed persons. The silence leads to a further silencing of intersex persons, who would otherwise face incredulity and if they would be believed, they could be rejected, as I explained earlier, because they do not fit into the sex binary. But by pointing to the rejection Denise/Paul's vagina by the knight while giving him/her a penis, Châtelet indicates that intersex children also often make a choice which fits into the gender binary. As the Intersex Society of North America, points out, "many intersex people are perfectly comfortable adopting either a male or female gender identity". ("Eradicating")

Conclusion

From the above analyses, it becomes clear that the three protagonists struggle each in their own way with what they feel they can tell and show others of their sex and/or gender. With Camille, the protagonist of Paradisi's *Un Baiser Sous X*, the problem lies in the fact that s/he is intersex and also wants to live as doubly gendered, but thinks s/he is the only one with these kinds of desires and assumes it would be unacceptable to society if s/he would act on them. In writing this, Paradisi points to the question of the relative importance of biology and culture. As theorists like Détrez points out, both biology and culture play a role in what we often perceive to be natural feminine or masculine inclinations. It may thus not be so much that no one has non-gender-conform desires as that people are learned not to express them to avoid negative reactions. In Paradisi's novel, Camille decides to choose a gender and hide his/her sexual and gender ambiguity, even if this makes him/her feel alienated and lonely. However, s/he does dare to play with this as a model. By showing that s/he can play with gender ambiguity, but not go beyond playing, Paradisi indicates the existence of a paradoxical mechanism when it comes to gender. As Halberstam explains, the relative fluidity of actual gender roles keeps gender norms in place as it makes most people intelligible gender wise, but it does exclude those who are unreadable on the gender axis. Moreover, Paradisi points to the performative nature of gender by portraying Camille's play with and perception of gender throughout the novel. As Butler explains, gender is actually a transformative exercise and not just a stable identity someone has.

In Paradisi's work, Camille changes lived gender several times, but this coincides with a change in social environment, so that others do not notice this. Adèle, the main character of Pagano's *Les Adolescents Troglodytes*, uses the same strategy. Paradisi and Pagano point here

to something which in reality often happens, as Hines tells. Pagano's Adèle lives from young adulthood onwards in the female gender and later also sex, just like she wants to, but her problem is that she would like to be honest about her physical male past, especially since there is a great chance that the secret will come out since she lives again in her home town, but she does not dare to because she is afraid of rejection. Pagano refers here to what Stone perceives to be the main problem with passing: having to lie about one's past. Even though Pagano's representation fits largely into the 'classic' transsexual story, showing a transsexual who passes and feels she was born in the 'wrong body,' meaning that a change in the sex of the body was all that was needed to be happy, this problem with lying is what makes it deviate from the cliché and moves more towards what Stone calls being a posttranssexual. This is shown by the fact that when in Pagano's novel someone tells Adèle's secret, she is ready to take responsibility for all of her history. However, the representation does not go as far as showing a transgender identity in the narrow definition, which is beyond the gender binary, as Stone would have it.

Unlike in Paradisi's and Pagano's novel, the gender of the protagonist of Châtelet's *La Tête en Bas*, Denise/Paul, is clearly ambiguous. Outsiders however do not know that this has to do with his/her intersexuality, which s/he keeps hidden. In the knight scene I analyzed, I found that Châtelet points to the existence of a specific form of intersexuality with delayed penile development which seems unbelievable, deconstructing the general perception of sex as binary and established before birth. This leads to a danger of rejection and surgical intervention. Châtelet also refers to the fact that intersex children also often make a choice which fits into the gender binary: in her novel, the protagonist desires to be just male. All in all, the three analyzed novels show the variety of transgender identities and the different societal problems transgender persons may encounter when one wants to live openly as transgender, which none of the protagonists of the novels dare to do.

The Search for an Identity in Paradisi and Châtelet

In this section, I will direct my attention to the difficulties the protagonists of respectively Paradisi's *Un Baiser Sous X* and Châtelet's *La Tête en Bas* encounter in their identity formation due to their intersex and transgender nature. By writing about this, the writers points to how much more difficult it is to form an identity when one is not conventionally sexed and gendered due to societal pressures to conform to these norms. Pagano's *Les*

Adolescents Troglodytes will not be discussed here, since, as I have shown in “*Adèle: Lying about One’s Past*,” it is not the identity formation of Adèle that is problematic, but the hiding and the lying about her transsexualism.

Camille: Never-ending Search?

I will now approach the question of how the identity formation of Camille, the protagonist of Paradisi’s *Un Baiser Sous X*, is made into a more difficult process because of his/her intersexuality and transgenderism. Camille has not fully internalized gender norms, as I have shown in the previous section, but nevertheless, parts of it still have seeped in. This is shown through his/her ambivalence towards his/her condition. Camille considers his/her body as “[u]n continent mâle et femelle qui m’émervillait autant qu’il m’effrayait.” (90) On the one hand, his/her intersexuality enriches his/her being in the world, but on the other, this richness is scary. Not only is s/he unable to act on this richness, having to hide it for fear of rejection, but s/he is also unsure whether his/her body as complete as the body of a regularly sexed person. Camille for example calls his/her body incomplete, since s/he menstruates irregularly: “[Mes règles] demeuraient intermittentes, comme si ma fémininité n’était que la succession d’un cycle hésitant, un portrait de femme dont seuls le visage et le buste avaient été peints, et le bas du corps à peine esquissé ; trahissant l’ébauche de mon inachèvement.” (166) In that respect s/he is an incomplete woman but this actually also makes him/her physically more than ‘only’ a man. His/her body will never be regularly feminine nor masculine, but is a bit of both. The fact that Camille refers to painting, a visual art, indicates that what s/he says here is highly influenced by the way others see him/her, which makes it still not entirely clear to what extent s/he agrees with this vision of him/her. The ambivalence shown in the previous citation thus stays intact here, which is underlined by the use of the hypothetical ‘comme si’.

Another thing Camille wonders about is the following: “Moi qui n’étais que la somme d’erreurs génétiques, comment pourrais-je former un tout ?” (90) This citation shows that Paradisi represents Camille as partly taking over the current medical view on the intersex body as defective instead of seeing it as part of natural variation, on which I elaborated in the introduction. (see Fausto-Sterling 2000; Chase 1998) But this is not done by Paradisi to convey a desire to ‘normalize’ the intersex body, but to indicate how difficult it is to have a coherent identity while living in an intersex body, the meaning of which can be hard for an intersex person to grasp too. It is difficult to combine male and female characteristics at will, because of societal gender restrictions which presume that ‘male’ and ‘female’ characteristics are mutually exclusive: just like it is impossible to be on two different continents at the same

time, as Paradisi puts it in one of the citations, it is deemed impossible to combine femininity and masculinity. Almost everyone internalizes binary gender norms, thereby conveying this normalizing ideal of gender also to those who do not. Moreover, this combining would make identity very much fluctuating and even though the idea of a stable and coherent identity is a fiction, as I already hinted at and will explain more thoroughly in the next subsection, we do need some kind of stability identity-wise. As Butler points out, “a livable life does require various degrees of stability. ... a life for which no categories of recognition exist is not a livable life”. (*Undoing* 8) Identity is based on recognition and without this, life would be as disorienting as when one has no memory.

In Paradisi’s novel, Camille does not encounter anyone who could act as example for how it is possible to combine masculinity and femininity, nor can s/he share his/her own experiences with many people, which makes him/her lonely and his/her identity formation all the more difficult. The many scenes in which Camille fantasizes about his/her biological mother show this particularly well. Camille is born ‘sous X’ as it is called in French, thus born from an anonymous mother who left her child at birth. (14-16) This already would make many children wonder about their biological parents and wonder about what they have in common. With Camille, there is the added element of intersexuality which makes him/her lonely and makes him/her even more curious about whether s/he would find in his/her mother, whom s/he refers to as “la jeune fille,” someone to finally share this with. S/he asks him/herself: “la jeune fille ... Était-elle comme moi? ... À ma manière, je devais lui ressembler. Parfois, je lui prêtais ma bouche pour me parler, mes mains apeurées pour me toucher, mon cœur pour lui pardonner.” (58) Camille seems to wonder whether his/her mother is intersex too and imagines her being close to him/her, which indicates how lonely s/he is and much s/he wants to find someone who is like him/her. This loneliness is underlined in the following passage: “[À l’école, l]’histoire me rappelait celle de la jeune fille. L’histoire me faisait comprendre que le passé n’est que l’archéologie d’un présent qui s’effondre. ... Un corps privé de ressources. Cette solitude me pesait.” (90) Camille thus learns to perceive the past as central for comprehending the present, which means that it is important for him/her to know more about his/her own past, about who his/her mother is, in order to construct his/her identity.

Paradisi points in writing about Camille’s loneliness and longing for recognition to an issue also mentioned by for example Hines (2007), who writes that many transgender persons stress the significance of their friendship with other transgender persons for emotional support, understanding, acceptance and counselling. One of the participants of the research on

which Hines' work is based tells: "It's been very important having a friend who has been through the same experiences." (157) Even if she talks here about transitioning, this also implies starting to live in another gender, something which is also depicted in Paradisi's novel and can also apply to intersex persons.

At the end of Paradisi's novel, Camille has not (yet) found a way out of this search for his/her identity. S/he decides to meet his/her mother, as s/he puts it: "Revenir à la réalité. ... Ne plus rêver nos retrouvailles." (188) This return to reality could imply facing the reaction of the outside world to his/her intersexuality, considering the impending lawsuit against the tabloid which questioned 'her' sex and his/her conviction that s/he will have to tell his/her mother about his/her intersexuality, "Cette mère ... à qui il me faudrait révéler ma nature." (159) What this would mean for his/her self-identity and whether this will go well is not sure, especially the fact that Camille identifies him/herself with New York's soon-to-be-destroyed Twin Towers could be considered a bad omen. S/he tells: "New York me ressemblait. Une ville en perpétuelle mutation mais identifiable au premier regard. ... Une île aux tours mâle et femelle, droite comme un garçon, fendue comme une fille." (150) Like New York, Camille is ever-changing with his/her gender shifts, but always recognizable, and the Twin Towers convey his/her double sexed nature, as they are phallic in shape, but also split in two, like vaginal lips. But while recounting the ending scene, s/he tells: "Comment aurais-je pu imaginer qu'elles allaient bientôt disparaître ? Deux tours jumelles." (187) S/he thus later knows that the towers will be destroyed. This could imply that Camille will face rejection by his/her mother and due to the lawsuit possibly by society in general. Thus until the end, the ambiguity of Camille's identity stays intact, just like Camille's ambiguity on the sex/gender binary axis. Paradisi may hint here at the uncertain acceptance of intersex persons, who now largely hide their unconformity to the binary sex/gender norms.

Denise/Paul: From a Fight for Masculinity to Experiencing Intersexuality as a Richness

In Châtelet's *La Tête en Bas*, protagonist Denise/Paul also encounters difficulties when it comes to his/her identity formation. Young Denise/Paul is a tomboy, who loves doing sports and is muscular: "Je sauté à la corde, j'escalade le mur ... Je trouve les autres petites filles molles, leurs bras et leurs cuisses n'ont pas la fermeté, la vigueur des miens." (16) When his/her body starts becoming more masculine, s/he realizes s/he wants to be a boy: "N'être pas une fille de dix ans dont la voix déraile. ... Il aura fallu ... que ma voix déraile, s'empêtre dans une écharpe de brume, pour que l'évidence devienne aussi désir." (30-31) Denise/Paul also starts making conscious efforts to behave like a boy, by for example copying his/her

father way of acting, as I have shown in “*Denise/Paul: Failing to Pass*”. (39) His/her gender identity seems quite clear, but there are complicating factors: s/he has not only male, but also female bodily characteristics and even if s/he tries hard to forget this, this is impossible, especially since s/he is officially female and s/he does not look unambiguously male nor female, which makes for often ambivalent reactions of others, as I have explained earlier. (67) These reactions probably play a central role in Denise/Paul’s perception of his/her intersex body as monstrous. S/he tells: “À la foire, les gens paieraient pour me voir, pour voir le monstre. Ils admireraient le spectacle, le bas avec le haut, le haut avec le bas, tout l’imbroglio, et ils repartiraient ... soulagés aussi, les femmes d’être des femmes, les hommes d’être des hommes.” (64) Denise/Paul thus considers him/herself to be a circus freak. People might be interested in seeing his/her body from which the top half with breasts does not match the bottom half, which has a penis, but they would also be relieved that they had an regularly sexed body themselves. His/her body would only be acceptable in a circus, as it is not perceived as one of a fellow human. It is thus unsurprising that s/he says: “Je préférerais être un homme ordinaire”. (90) The fact that his/her close ones tend to choose a sex they prefer Denise/Paul to be instead of loving him/her regardless of his/her sex, as I will show in “*Denise/Paul: Choosing Between Loving the Girl or the Boy?*”, emphasizes the importance laid on sex by the social environment.

By letting Denise/Paul refer to him/herself as monstrous, Châtelet points to the influence of gender norms on the self-image of intersex persons. As Butler writes,

The very criterion by which we judge a person to be a gendered being, a criterion that posits coherent gender as a presupposition of humanness, is not only one which ... governs the recognizability of the human, but one that informs the ways we do or do not recognize ourselves at the level of feeling, desire, and the body ... [This] may well feel like the unrecognizability of one’s gender and, hence, the unrecognizability of one’s personhood. (*Undoing* 58)

This shows that the internalization of gender norms may in the case of intersex persons thus lead to feeling unintelligible to oneself as well as to others: one cannot understand what one is on the binary sex/gender axis, which can lead to identity (and self-esteem) problems.

The lag between Denise/Paul’s intersex body, his/her male gender-identity and his/her enforced female social gender represented in Châtelet’s novel has also implications for the protagonist’s mental health. As Denise/Paul tells: “la torture du déguisement, du faire-semblant, l’affolant malaise du décalage, ... depuis quelque temps me préoccupent, parce que c’est ma tête qu’ils font souffrir”. (75) S/he has the impression as if a weed were growing

inside his/her head, which leads to increasingly strange bodily sensations: “L’impression que le grain a poussé, germé, mauvaise graine venue du jardin fou, au point d’éprouver des sensations inhabituelles, ... la sensation singulière que ma peau se décolle comme si elle se détachait de moi et comme si, moi aussi, je me détachais de moi-même”. (75) S/he has the feeling that his/her skin is detaching itself, which has an effect akin to an out-of-body experience, to dissociation. The unhappiness with the body is thus coped with through a detachment from it. The botanical metaphors for his/her madness seem to indicate that s/he perceives his/her upcoming madness as inextinguishable as weeds, which indicates how much effort it takes for Denise/Paul to hold together the different forces working on his/her gender identity.

The apotheosis of the increasing mental health problems takes place during a biology class at university. During this class, Denise/Paul, who is still officially Denise, assumes the professor talks about his/her hybrid sexuality recognizably via a ornithological metaphor, comparing swallows with swifts. (98) S/he thinks s/he is unmasked as intersex and that everybody is making fun of him/her: “Des rires fusent dans les travées, des gloussements moqueurs.” (99) It is however unclear whether this has anything to do with him/her, as the professor’s metaphor is so indirect that it is unsure whether it even was about Denise/Paul. Moreover, when Denise/Paul leaves class and walks down the street, s/he seems quite paranoid, thinking that everybody notices his/her deviation from the norm, which is shown through a repetition of the words “les gens vont le voir / le voient”. (100-101) Denise/Paul also starts having delusions and/or hallucinations described by metaphors which are repeated throughout the novel. When s/he gives over to the madness, this is for example associated with doing ‘le saut de l’ange,’ which was originally meant as a fly-jump from the trapeze s/he still wanted to do someday. (22) Just before giving over to the madness, Denise/Paul imagines finally daring to do the jump: “au grand trapèze ... Je renverse le corps. Dans le vide. La tête en bas. Je lâche les mains. ... Tu as vu mes ailes ... Je le ferai... le saut de l’ange !” (103) However, this scene morphs into another one, which underlines the delusional and/or hallucinatory state Denise/Paul is in. The reason why s/he never dared to do the fly-jump as a child was that s/he believed that s/he would fall if s/he felt uncertain due to bad thoughts. (22) This is what happens now, as is shown by the following internal dialogue:

L’homme qui a pris ta place. C’est lui qui va l’enfourcher, Geneviève, avec son sexe ... immense ! Je suis formel.

On peut tomber si une mauvaise pensée vient vous couper les ailes ?

Oui, on peut tomber.

Tomber de ... toute sa hauteur, dans les herbes folles couchées, écrasées, au fin fond d'un jardin fou. (103)

The citation shows that Denise/Paul's madness is very much related to his/her unhappiness with his/her body. The stranger inside him/her represents his/her insecurities (or bad thoughts) about his/her masculinity, his/her fear of not being able to measure up to a 'regular' man. The wings address his/her desire to flee the gaze of others, to be unaffected by them, but the fact that s/he falls down shows that s/he is incapable of doing so and s/he 'falls' into the madness which is inside him/her, which is shown again by the use of botanical metaphors, with 'herbes folles' playing on the two meanings of 'folles,' the words together referring to weeds, but 'folles' in itself also referring to Denise/Paul's madness. This fall shows his/her inability to bridge the gap between societal demands of gender conformity, his/her male gender identity and his/her intersex body. We could say that the different forces working on Denise/Paul's identity cause him/her to feel so torn that s/he breaks down psychologically. This severe psychotic episode will be followed by a stay at a psychiatric institution for over three years. (104)

Through the many interlinked metaphors Châtelet uses, the psychological struggles of her protagonist are powerfully conveyed to the reader: they give a way into Denise/Paul's desires and feelings, as they make them more visual. Even if the reader does not completely understand the complex ways in which these metaphors are connected, they do have an emotional effect that ordinary language cannot convey. The metaphorical and fantastic allow for more possibilities than reality and because of that can be helpful in rethinking issues like the gender binary in an original and also less threatening way, as the reader can say that it is just fantasy¹⁷. This underlines the potential of literature as a means through which gender norms can be seen in a new light.

In Châtelet's portrayal of Denise/Paul's psychological problems, she points to the severe psychological impact gender norms can have by connecting the symptoms of Denise/Paul's illness to his/her gender-non-conformity. Not only does one risk rejection or even violence from others if one does not pass, but a lack of conformity to binary sex/gender norms can equally threaten one's psychological well-being if one has internalized these norms. Both of these reasons cause Hines to write: "For many [transgender persons], social

¹⁷ This also applies to Harpman's novel *Orlanda*, in which the metaphorical or—depending on how you interpret the novel—fantastic also plays an important role: in this work, the masculine side of protagonist Aline leaves her in order to place 'him'self in a living male body, because 'he' is repressed due to Aline's upbringing which led her to adhere strictly to the female gender role.

and cultural pressures to conform to ascribed gender identity are experienced as problematic and, for some, can bring detrimental psychological and physical consequences.” (53)

In Châtelet’s *La Tête en Bas*, there are short moments during which Denise/Paul accepts being intersex, like while playing the piano, but it is only after the top surgery s/he undergoes at the age of forty, when s/he has been mentally stable for an extended period, that ‘Paul’ really accepts being also in part ‘Denise’. As the external narrator tells, having a flat chest allows him/her to be finally at peace with his/her body: “Son corps, bien qu’encore imparfait ... Il veut bien l’habiter maintenant, de haut en bas, de bas en haut. ... La minuscule fente ... ne le révolte plus. ... Être homme n’est plus sa passion, mais une évidence tranquille.” (147-48) Denise/Paul can thus finally accept his/her body now that it is mainly masculine and s/he can pass as male. With the help of his/her friend and lover Flore, s/he ends up seeing his/her intersexuality as a richness. The narrator explains:

Sa présence en lui [de l’enfant fille], lumineuse, lui fait mesurer le manque où sont contraints les gens normaux qui l’entourent, condamnés à l’unité, si pauvre finalement, si limitée.

Il les plaint. Il voudrait partager avec eux la richesse de son savoir, sa voyance née aujourd’hui de la complétude heureuse, qu’il a si cher payée de sa chute dans les herbes folles, au fin fond du jardin fou. Trop cher ... un prix monstrueux. Comme lui. Mais la guerre est finie. Le temps est venu de la paix.

Pourtant Paul, ... n’a qu’un unique vrai regret d’homme ... Paul rêve d’éjaculer. (149)

The surgery thus allows Denise/Paul to see clearly and perceive his/her feminine side as a part of who s/he is, which actually increases his/her knowledge and capabilities, as s/he can see the world from both the male and female perspective, of which s/he is proud. S/he however had to pay a high price for this experience, as his/her incapacity to see his/her intersex body as acceptable led to severe psychiatric problems. Presently, Denise/Paul is still not completely satisfied with his body, but continues to have the impossible wish to have all the capacities a regular male body has. But as I will explain in “*Denise/Paul: Music as a Place Beyond Gender Constrictions*,” s/he finds soon after this scene his/her virility while playing the piano, as s/he works together with ‘Denise’. (152) Denise/Paul’s being able to pass as male, as gender conform, thus paradoxically enables him/her to think of him/herself as beyond the gender binary. Through a change in his/her physical body, which has become more masculine, his/her gender identity has also shifted somewhat, from overzealously male to mostly male and somewhat female, as well as his/her lived gender, which used to be

ambiguous and is now male. The surgery thus allows these three aspects to converge more or less, which brings peace of mind.

One of the things Châtelet indicates here to is that gender identity can shift over time, also over the course of transitioning. One of the participants of the research on which Hines' book is based for example addresses the point that "gender subjectivity may shift through the stages of transition." (75) Moreover, by letting Denise/Paul refer to regularly sexed and gendered persons as "condamnés à l'unité," Châtelet also criticizes the idea that a unified identity is desirable. (149) As the earlier citation of Butler showed, coherent gender is posited as a presupposition of humanness and hence enforced on the societal level. (*Undoing* 58) Identities are in themselves however not really stable, as I have indicated earlier. Butler explains that "the subject is the incoherent and mobilized imbrication of identifications". (*Bodies* 131) What and who we identify with tends to be contradictory and changeable over time and depends on the setting we are in. There are "tacit cruelties that sustain coherent identity, cruelties that include self-cruelty as well, the abasement through which coherence is fictively produced and sustained." (Butler *Bodies* 115) Châtelet has shown an exemplary case of this self-cruelty by letting Denise/Paul refer to him/herself as a monster and with the resolution of the novel, she points out that letting go of a strict adherence to the norm of coherence can be a way out of this kind of cruelty. However, in her representation, medical intervention to make the body more conform to the overriding gender identity, more coherent according to the oppositional binary sex/gender norms, was needed in order to feel free to do so. This indicates how complex the imbrications of body, mind and societal norms are.

Conclusion

In Paradisi's *Un Baiser Sous X* and Châtelet's *La Tête en Bas*, the identity formations of respectively Camille and Denise/Paul are processes which are made more complex due to the intersex and transgender nature of these characters. In Paradisi's novel, Camille, who is mostly proud of being intersex, still feels ambivalent about his/her body and especially worries about how to construct a unified identity while having a body which combines elements which are deemed mutually exclusive. Paradisi seems to refer here to the medical discourse of intersex bodies as defective, as well as the importance of some form of stability in one's identity to live, which Butler stresses. The ambivalence portrayed by Paradisi is also related to Camille's loneliness due to the fact that s/he feels s/he has to keep his/her intersexuality a secret and does not encounter persons who could provide an example of how to live as transgender. Camille's obsessive fantasizing about his/her unknown birth mother

show that s/he longs for someone to identify with and still searches for his/her identity. Paradisi points here to another important issue: as Hines tells, transgender persons often stress the importance of knowing people who are like them. In Paradisi's novel, it is not sure how the search for an identity will end: Camille plans to meet his/her biological mother and be open about his/her intersexuality to her and the impending lawsuit against the tabloid questioning 'her' gender may also be implied in his/her intended return to reality, but how the reactions will be and how they will impact on Camille's self-identity is unsure. His/her identification with the soon-to-be-destroyed Twin Towers may point to a dark future. This ending could be read as a way of Paradisi to point to the uncertain acceptance of intersex persons, who now tend to pass as sex/gender conform.

In Châtelet's novel, Denise/Paul's identity seems stable as s/he desires to be male as a child already, but due to the fact that s/he is intersex, s/he still has a body which does not conform to these desires, which causes many mental struggles, especially since most persons surrounding him/her stress the importance of the sex/gender dualism and react ambivalently to his/her ambiguously sexed body which does not conform to the female gender norms s/he is supposed to adhere to. This makes Denise/Paul feel like a monster. Châtelet points here to the impact the internalization of gender norms can have on a person's self-image, making one, as Butler would say, unintelligible to oneself. The extent to which this unintelligibility can be problematic is conveyed in an impressive manner by Châtelet through her representation full of interlinked metaphors of Denise/Paul's fall into madness as a result of feeling torn by the different forces playing on his/her gender identity as his/her body, his/her social gender role and his/her preferred gender do not concur. Denise/Paul only feels a long-lasting satisfaction with his/her body after receiving top surgery decades later, which allows him/her to not only accept his/her feminine aspects, but see them as enriching. Châtelet's story points here not only to the fact that bodily changes may enable a shift in identity, which Hines also shows, but also that identities are not inherently stable: as Butler explains, coherent identity is socially enforced, but actually a fiction. Paradisi's and Châtelet's novels show that the impact of the social sex/gender binary runs deep, as it can cause severe problems on the level of identity formation.

Seeing Beyond the Oppositional Gender Binary in Paradisi and Châtelet

The novels of Paradisi and Châtelet offer several examples of how to see beyond the oppositional sex/gender binary. In this section, I will take a closer look at two important ways in which the protagonists of these novels do so and show how enriching these are for our view on the current gender binary of Western society. As I explained, subversions of the binary do not play an important role in Pagano's work as the focus lies elsewhere, which is why I will concentrate on the two other novels instead. I will start by focusing on the proliferation of categories in Paradisi's novel and will then explore the way in which music is perceived as an area beyond gender constrictions in Châtelet's work.

Camille: Proliferating Categories

In *Un Baiser Sous X*, Paradisi points to activities which are beyond gender, like kissing and being in the water, as I have shown in the previous section. Another in which the gender binary is subverted is by the proliferation of categories. Camille, who has been raised gender neutrally, finds out when s/he goes to nursery school that the world is divided in two colours, blue for boys and pink for girls:

Dès mon arrive à la maternelle, j'ai découvert un monde divisé, rose d'un côté, bleu de l'autre. ... Moi qui urinais debout comme un garçon et m'asseyais comme une fille, je ne comprenais pas qu'une couleur puisse désigner un sexe. Mais en mélangeant ces deux teintes, j'ai appris à faire apparaître du violet. Ma couleur. Dès lors, le poisson-clown a créé un univers à son image, proposé un nouveau jeu dans lequel chaque enfant serait un animal. ... Mais on ne trouvait qu'un vrai poisson-clown. (35)

Camille finds it odd that genders are associated with a colour. Paradisi indeed points here to a strange habit. Historical investigation has shown this. As Dr. Jo Paoletti tells Sandra Salmans of *The New York Times*,

For 300 years, American infants of both sexes were dressed ... generally in white frocks. That changed shortly after the turn of the century ... Around World War I, the boys wore pink ('a stronger, more decided' color, the literature of the day declared), and the girls blue ('delicate, dainty'). It was only after World War II that pink and blue assumed their current identities. (C14)

Thus, there used to be no colour differentiation for children and when there was one, it was first reversed, which underlines the arbitrary nature of associating gender with colour. Paradisi shows in his novel that protagonist Camille is able to make this colour division work

for him/her, despite the arbitrariness of the colour association. S/he does so by creating a new option to fit him/herself into the existing category: as s/he considers him/herself to be doubly gendered, s/he mixes both blue and pink to create violet. Second of all, Camille makes new categories by designating each child an animal which suits him/her. S/he is the only clownfish, as s/he is the only who is bipotentially sexed, just like clown fishes are, since they can shift from the male to the female sex. (Newcomb and Fink 2004) Camille thus creates with his/her imagination a space to exist for him/herself where there was none before, even though s/he only does so for him/herself: besides Bettina and Margot, no one knows about these new categories Camille created. (34)

Paradisi points in this passage to a strategy of proliferating categories. Halberstam is a theorist who is in favour of this, as she tells in an interview: “I embrace categorization as a way of creating places for acts, identities and modes of being which otherwise remain unnamable. ... I try to offer some new names for formerly uninhabitable locations.” (Halberstam and Jagose) Forming new categories thus can help in making other ways of being more intelligible, as it makes room for what would otherwise remain unnameable and uninhabitable. However, this strategy does not suit everyone, since, as Halberstam points out, there are people who think “that categories inhibit the unique self and [that the proliferation of categories] creates boxes for an otherwise indomitable spirit. People who don't think they inhabit categories usually benefit from not naming their location.” (Halberstam and Jagose) Nevertheless, we live in a society in which categorization is important and conforming to this need for categorization could be perceived as a way into this society, to help others recognize and accept the existence of people who are different. However, if we do this, it would be most helpful to add more than just one category to a binary, like gender, since we would otherwise lump all those who do not conform to the binary together in a homogenizing move. As Halberstam writes, “‘thirdness’ merely balances the binary system and, furthermore, tends to homogenize many different gender differentiations under the banner of ‘other’.” (27-28) This is also indicated by Garber, who underlines that “the ‘third term’ is *not* a *term*. ... The ‘third’ is a mode of articulation, a way of describing a space of possibility.” (11; italics in original)

Denise/Paul: Music as a Place Beyond Gender Constrictions

The protagonist of Châtelet's *La Tête en Bas*, Denise/Paul would prefer to be a regularly sexed male than an intersex person. Nevertheless, s/he also subverts gender norms at times. The most important way in which this happens is through music. Music plays a central role in this novel. Little ‘Denise’ loves playing the piano and is also very gifted. Both parents love

him/her playing, especially the sonatina s/he invents brings them together despite their differing views on which gender their child should have. As Denise/Paul tells, “mes parents ... se reconcilient quand je joue pour eux.” (83) Music is for Denise/Paul a refuge, it is a place of freedom, also of gender constrictions. This is what s/he says about it:

D’entendre les notes toutes composées dans ma tête, de voir courir mes doigts sur le clavier et je ne m’inquiète plus alors d’être fille ou garçon. Je peux bien même être les deux à la fois quand j’invente ma sonatine, jouer à quatre mains s’il le faut, du moment que c’est beau. Car c’est beau. Je ne connais personne qui joue à quatre mains avec deux mains seulement. (54-55)

Composing and playing music thus bring Denise/Paul to a place where gender is not important anymore. S/he even works together with his/her feminine side in order to play better. This is significant, since until s/he undergoes top surgery, Denise/Paul feels that s/he is at war with ‘Denise’, as his/her friend Geneviève says to him/her, “être Paul est ton combat”. (89)

Châtelet points here to music as a medium which is beyond the oppositional gender binary¹⁸. Language, the main medium through which people express themselves, plays an important role in the enforcement of the gender binary, which I will show in “*Camille: Acceptance and Obliviousness*.” Music can be a way to step outside of the binary, as it is more fluid than language, since if you invent a word, it is deemed useless, because no one will understand it, whereas music is allowed to be more abstract and can have a different meaning for everyone. This is already indicated by the emphasis placed on beauty in the cited passage, which implies that the form and not the meaning is of primary importance in music. As Wittig writes, “le son n’a pas de signification en musique, et le sens qu’ils prennent une fois devenus formes n’est bien souvent, ou même la plupart du temps, un sujet de préoccupation pour personne. ... Tandis que dès que quelque chose est écrit, cela doit avoir un sens.” (“Cheval” 99-100) Music is thus deemed to be enjoyable in its abstractness.

In Châtelet’s novel, Denise/Paul does not play the piano for about twenty when s/he is an adult, probably because s/he did not desire to reconcile him/herself with his/her feminine side during that period, but just wanted to get rid of it. But after having undergone top surgery, Denise/Paul is happy with his/her body, which enables him/her to reconcile him/herself with the little girl s/he once was, as I have shown in the previous section. (148-49)

¹⁸ This freedom from the weight of gender in music is also referred to by Jackie Kay in her novel *Trumpet* (1998). (London: Picador, 1999: 135-36.) Its protagonist Joss Moody is a seemingly male trumpet player who posthumously turned out to be physically a woman. (44) The novel is inspired by the case of jazz musician Billy Tipton. (Hargreaves 2003)

This is underlined by the upcoming urge to play the piano again. While playing his/her sonatina at the closing of the novel, the reconciliation also takes place in music. The narrator tells that while playing, “il comprend qu’il n’est plus seul. ... Ces mains impulsives, ... il les attendait, il les espérait ... la musique perdue remonte de la lointaine mémoire. Il la laisse venir comme il laisse venir la sensation oubliée de son corps de fille”. (151) For the first time, ‘Paul’ seeks ‘Denise’ and the long-repressed physical connection between the two sides is regained as Denise/Paul imagines how his/her body felt like when s/he was a little girl. But the sonatina is still describes as phallic: “la sonatine jaillit de ses quatre mains, glorieuse. Comme une lance. Comme une lance ? Chut.” (152) This shows that the male side still (secretly) has the upper hand in Denise/Paul, even though s/he feels his/her feminine side to be an integral part of him/herself.

The phallic nature of this ending scene is one of the reasons why Détérez and Simon reject the view that music is represented here as a medium which is liberating from gender constraints. They write in their article on tomboys in contemporary French literature that art is often the medium through which the tomboys unify their incongruous identities: “autre point commun à la plupart de ces romans, la résolution des identités éclatées de ces paradoxales petites filles, réside dans l’art, territoire pourtant éminemment et séculièrement masculin.” (50) Art is a phallogocentric territory, because through it, the hierarchical binary of male spirit and female body is enforced. Taking their cue from writer Nancy Huston, they point out that “l’exclusion des femmes de l’art manifeste de domination masculine intériorisée et de dualisme : depuis Aristote, aux hommes les hauteurs de l’esprit, aux femmes l’abaissement des corps.” (50) For a long time, women were excluded from the position of artist and the women who did succeed in becoming artists and becoming part of this men’s world, like Virginia Woolf, did so by sacrificing their bodily side in for example refusing to become mothers. As Détérez and Simon write, “Si elles veulent écrire, il leur faut ... renier l’incarnation de leur féminité”. (50) Even if this is not necessarily the case anymore, it is still through a spiritual activity that the tomboys in the novels come to resolve the incongruence of their bodies and make themselves accepted: “c’est grâce à l’art, à l’activité spirituelle, bref à l’âme, que ces petites filles ‘se’ naissent et se reconnaissent artistes, revendiquent leur aspect ‘monstrueux’ de femme-homme ... elle parvient à dépasser son organisme biologique. Se faire un nom”. (51) They thus become accepted by surpassing matter, which implies that spirit is more important than body. In Châtelet’s representation of Denise/Paul, this is seen according to Détérez and Simon by the fact that “[il] trouve dans la musique, par la métaphore éjaculatoire explicite qui clôt le roman, la jouissance qui lui est refusée sexuellement.” (51)

Denise/Paul may not be physically able to ejaculate, but through the means of his/her spirit, s/he can achieve a similarly phallic kind of pleasure.

I agree that music is not entirely beyond gender in the case of Denise/Paul. S/he still speaks of having four hands, showing that s/he does not consider his/her feminine side to be inextricably interwoven with his/her masculine side and the novel indeed ends with a strong masculine metaphor. But we must not forget that Denise/Paul is not just a tomboy, but an intersex person who wants to be male. S/he is thus not entirely female biologically, nor is s/he just boyish, but s/he really wants to be male. It is hence not surprising that masculinity has the upper hand. Nevertheless, there is a move towards equality and peace: with the help of music, a place is being made for the female in Denise/Paul's identity, it is accepted, including its physicality, whereas it was previously pushed away. And it is while the masculine and the feminine are working together that an orgasmic state is achieved, underlining that in music both the contribution of 'Denise' and 'Paul' are important. The bodily feminine is thus not surpassed in favour of a masculine spirituality. The physicality of playing music is actually underlined by the reference to the four hands and to 'Denise's' body. Both the masculine and feminine in their physical and mental aspects work together when Denise/Paul plays, even though Denise/Paul's bodily appearance has become more masculine due to the top surgery, but this surgery actually made this working together possible, showing that the physical and psychological are entwined. I believe that Châtelet points to music as a form of expression which is beyond the gender divide. This is potentially true for all forms of art, except linguistic ones, since language plays an important role in the gender binary. This shows that there are areas in which gender normativity has not entirely seeped in yet. Moreover, the experiences taken from performing art can lead to a rethinking of the actual importance of gender in everyday life, as well as its seemingly oppositional nature. If one has for example experienced that combining characteristics that are usually deemed incompatible, because they are masculine and feminine, makes one's artistic expression better, one would probably be less inclined to worry about conforming to gender norms in everyday life.

Conclusion

I have shown in this section that in Paradisi's *Un Baiser Sous X* and in Châtelet's *La Tête en Bas*, the protagonists Camille and Denise/Paul each find an important way in which to see beyond the Western oppositional binary sex/gender norms. In Paradisi's novel, Camille does so by pointing to the oddness of and extending the existing category of pink (girls) – blue (boys) with violet for his/her intersex and –gender self. S/he also creates a new categorization

by assigning each person an animal, him/herself being the only clownfish. Paradisi points here both to the arbitrary nature of the habit of assigning a colour to a gender and to a useful strategy for undermining the sex/gender binary: the proliferation of categories. As Halberstam points out, this is a way of making other ways of being nameable and thereby inhabitable. This allows for transgender and intersex persons to be more intelligible to others in a society which relies heavily on categorization. It would be most constructive to create more than only a third category to a binary, since, as Halberstam explains, this would homogenize all the different ways of not fitting into the binary together. Another way to look beyond the oppositional sex/gender norms is through music, like Denise/Paul does in Châtelet's novel. S/he loves composing and playing the piano, which reconciles not only his/her parents, but also his/her own masculine and feminine side, because only beauty counts in music and to make his/her work more beautiful, 'Paul' is willing to work together with 'Denise,' whereas they are otherwise sworn enemies. Châtelet points here to the abstract nature of music, in which form overrides meaning, as Wittig points out. In Châtelet's work, Denise/Paul accepts having a male and female side in everyday life once s/he has undergone top surgery and this reconciliation with his/her feminine side also takes place in music. After having stopped playing for two decades, s/he finds the bodily memory of the little girl s/he once was when s/he plays again and together they achieve an ejaculatory state. Détrez and Simon point out that art tends to be a phallogocentric medium which reinforces the association of male with mind and female with body and they argue that this is reified in works like *La Tête en Bas*. Music is indeed described as phallic in Châtelet's novel, but the female, including its physicality, plays an important role in its creation, even though Denise/Paul would like to be only male for most of his/her life. Music, and non-linguistic forms of art in general, could thus be seen as a form of expression beyond gender, showing that there are areas in which gender has not entirely seeped in. The experiences taken from these kinds of expression can lead to a rethinking of both the importance and the apparently oppositional nature of gender. Paradisi and Châtelet thus point to inspiring ways to perceive gender differently.

Conclusion of Chapter Two

In this chapter, I have approached the issue of how the inside and the outside worlds of the transgender protagonists of Paradisi's *Un Baiser sous X*, Pagano's *Les Adolescents Troglodytes* and Châtelet's *La Tête en Bas* clash by taking a look at the perspective of the

main characters themselves, how they experience being transgender and possibly intersex in a society in which binary sex/gender norms are of great importance. I have done so by analyzing one to three key aspects of the experiences portrayed by the authors: the importance of secrecy and in the case of Paradisi's and Châtelet's protagonists also seeing beyond oppositional binary gender norms and the problematic nature of their identity formation. In these sections, I have shown that being transgendered often implies hiding and lying: lying about one's past if one has switched gender role, hiding one's sexual characteristics if they are unusual and hiding one's gender identity if it does not conform to the male/female binary. This can lead to loneliness, as one seems to be the only person who is not conform to the binary sex/gender norms. These norms can even lead to major—potentially maddening—identity problems if one cannot put together the lag between the sex of one's body, one's social gender and one's preferred gender identity, as this makes it hard to understand who one 'really' is. The assumption that identity has to be coherent and stable make these problems worse, as what and who one identifies with are actually inherently contractive and shifting. Especially if one realizes that sex is not really binary and what are deemed to be natural masculine and feminine inclinations are highly influenced by societal norms, acceptance comes at quite a price for a significant amount of persons, if not everyone, as we are all forced into a mould by sex/gender norms. Learning to see beyond the binary way of thinking about sex and gender could then be liberating. This can for example be done through the creation of more than two (or three) categories, which would make transgenderism more intelligible to others, or through seeking ways of expression in which gender is not relevant, such as non-linguistic forms of art.

Chapter Three: Interactions

In this chapter, I will focus on the reactions of other characters to the unusual gender and/or sex of the protagonists of Paradisi's *Un Baiser Sous X*, Pagano's *Les Adolescents Troglodytes* and Châtelet's *La Tête en Bas*. These protagonists, respectively Camille, Adèle and Denise/Paul, do not live in isolation, but interact with other persons, like their family, friends and representatives of institutions, and all of them live in a society in which the compulsory gender binary is deeply ingrained. The reactions these three transgender characters get can be seen as exemplary for the different ways in which people react to transgender persons in contemporary Western society. These responses also point to how the enforcement of the sex/gender binary is acted out in social interactions, which gives a deeper understanding of the workings of this binary and the assumptions underlying it as well as in some cases how it can be reworked. It also indicates how these norms can impact on lives of transgender beings. In the first section of this chapter, I will focus on the question of how family, friends and other individuals Camille, Adèle and Denise/Paul encounter respond to their transgender and possibly intersex nature and to the importance of these reactions for our view on the sex/gender binary. I will first discuss the three cases individually and then turn to two overlapping empowering ways in which Camille's and Denise/Paul's environment respond to intersexuality and transgenderism. In the second section, the influence of institutions on the transgender aspect of the lives of two of these three characters and how this enriches our understanding of how institutions enforce the normative view on gender of contemporary Western culture will be analyzed. I will focus in this section only on Paradisi's *Un Baiser Sous X* and Châtelet's *La Tête en Bas*, because institutions do not play an important role in Pagano's *Les Adolescents Troglodytes*.

Coming To Terms With Transgenderism

Camille: Acceptance and Obliviousness

I will now approach the question of how outsiders react to intersexuality and transgenderism in the case of Paradisi's *Un Baiser Sous X*. There are two aspects I will address. The first one is the accepting stance of both adoptive mother Bettina and sister Margot towards Camille's intersexuality, which is especially shown by his/her upbringing 'beyond' the gender binary. The second issue I will address is the impact of the obliviousness of outsiders to Camille's

intersexuality on especially Camille's behaviour. After analyzing important scenes on the respective topics, I will point to the relevance of the issues Paradisi brings up in these scenes with regards to our way of thinking about sex and gender and to what extent this can be changed.

In Paradisi's *Un Baiser Sous X*, both the adoptive mother Bettina and sister Margot are in total acceptance of Camille's double sexuality. As a young child, Camille is raised 'beyond' the gender dualism. As s/he tells, this is done through several means: "Toute ma garde-robe était unisexe, comme mes jeux d'éveil, l'ocre de ma chambre, et même les mots doux de Bettina". (26) This way, Bettina keeps the options open in order for Camille to decide him/herself which gender s/he feels most comfortable with, following the advice of the psychiatrist. Bettina is "convaincue que le temps déciderait pour moi." (26) She thus assumes that Camille will end up wanting to make a choice, which will later turn out not to be the case. But she only forces Camille to do so when this is needed in order to be enrolled in nursery school. Camille tells: "Cette formalité était indispensable, mais [Bettina] me répétait que je pourrais changer d'avis plus tard". (35) This indicates that the gender restrictions rather lie on the institutional level, since Bettina would not mind if Camille would change gender, as s/he will later do. Bettina's complete acceptance is underlined by the fact that she speaks in a complimentary way about Camille's double genderedness, calling it his/her "richesse". (53) Margot learns to be just as accepting of her sibling and, as Camille puts it, "me considérait comme une exception grammaticale s'accordant aussi bien au féminin qu'au masculin. Un genre nouveau." (26) For Margot, her sibling thus embodies a new gender, who is like a grammatical exception. In French, all nouns are either male or female, but Camille can be both sexes/genders just as well. S/he is thus perceived as double sexed/gendered. Throughout Camille's life, the two remain supportive of whichever social-gender-choice s/he makes and Camille continues to live as doubly gendered in the privacy of his/her family. Bettina and Margot do not try to influence Camille's gender choices in any way and have a positive attitude towards his/her intersexuality.

Paradisi shows in his novel a strategy for raising an intersex baby which conforms to Halberstam's ideal, who wants to depathologize existing gender variances and proposes "a concept of 'gender preference' as opposed to compulsory gender binarism," since this "would allow for gender neutrality until such a time when the child or young adult announces his or her or its gender." (27) A gender-neutral upbringing allows for this as the child is not forced into a gendered mould, but has the time and freedom to choose whether s/he would prefer to live as a boy or a girl, regardless of which sex that person has. Halberstam allows for more

than these two gender possibilities, but takes into account the fact that the binary gender system is deeply ingrained in current Western society by writing: “Even if we could not let go of a binary gender system, there are still ways to make gender optional—people could come out as a gender in the way they come out as a sexuality.” (27) Paradisi also indicates how much the binary is internalized in his novel by making Bettina assume that Camille will want to make a gender choice which fits into the binary, even though Bettina has a positive view on intersexuality. Halberstam sees being able to make a choice between being male and female as already a big step forwards in comparison to the current situation in which sex and gender are supposed to concur. One can imagine that this would make for example transsexual desires much less of an issue. If everyone has to choose a gender instead of getting assigned one at (or even before) birth, this implies that biological body and gender are not inherently linked, but that what we currently perceive to be cross-identification is simply one of the options everyone gets to think about. Allowing people to choose themselves their gender is thus a good strategy to give people more freedom than they have with the current configuration of gender as directly related to sex. However, it still forces people to make a choice between living as either male or female and this is not a choice everyone wants to make.

The closest family of Camille is thus very affirmative of Camille’s intersexuality in Paradisi’s novel. This is in stark contrast to the lack of knowledge of outsiders about intersexuality. When protagonist Camille is an adolescent, s/he increasingly feels that there is one major drawback of pretending to be conventionally sexed and gendered: s/he cannot get physically close to someone s/he finds attractive without that person finding out that his/her body is unconventional. When Camille goes out to a club, s/he is very frustrated that s/he has to hold back instead of acting on erotic impulses just like other young people:

Le dos appuyé au bar, j’observais la foule féline, dansant ... dans un désir primitif. Les pulsions éclataient dans le cerveau des garçons, s’impatiaient dans celui des filles, rôdaient dans le mien. Une jeunesse qui ne songeait pas à ce qu’elle deviendrait si la nature la privait brutalement de sa part animale. Ma jeunesse. (137)

Camille thus remains an observer, an outsider, of the erotically charged arena of the dance floor. S/he perceives the young people who dance as acting on their libidinal desires without worries, oblivious to the situation, or even existence of persons like him/her. According to Camille, in the boys, these impulses are very strong, they are exploding in their brains, thus taking over their thoughts, like an orgasm can. In the dancing girls, the desires are less pressing, but still mounting and they feel increasingly the urge to quickly act on them.

Camille has these libidinal impulses too, but they seem to wander around the brain without a clear purpose. This indicates that Camille will not act on them. The last two sentences show that this is because s/he feels s/he is not able to do so. S/he has to keep his/her head cool, stay rational in order not to be exposed as intersex. According to Camille, it is paradoxically nature which prevents him/her from acting on his/her natural, animal, impulses. It is indeed his/her body which causes this holding back and worrying, but it is not about Camille's body in itself, but about the way it would be perceived by others, thus through a mediation on the social level. There is in this scene thus an opposition between the dancing young people who act on their erotic impulses by for example flirting and kissing and Camille who has to stay rational and merely observes the dancers. This is because if s/he would get physically close to someone, that person would remark s/he has breasts as well as a penis, which would be cause for rejection. But whereas Camille worries about this, the dancers are oblivious to the fact that there are people with an intersex body. In their minds, such a thing does not even exist, making the gap between Camille and the dancers even greater. The scene shows that there is a problem on two levels: first, most people do not realize that there are people with intersex bodies and second, if they would find out, this would be cause for rejection. This leads to Camille avoiding situations where people could find out about his/her intersexuality, like intimate dancing.

In writing this scene, Paradisi points to a problem of knowledge and acceptance when it comes to intersex persons. This question of knowledge in relation to power is also addressed by queer theorist Eve Sedgwick. She writes that "it is the interlocutor who has or pretends to have the *less* broadly knowledgeable understanding of interpretive practice who will define the terms of the exchange." (23) To translate this to an encounter between an intersex person and a regularly sexed person, the latter is probably in command. As I have explained in the introduction, many regularly sexed people are not even aware that there are persons who do not fall easily into the sex/gender binary or at least assume that persons they encounter are either male and female, thus they tend to have, or pretend to have less knowledge than their interlocutor, who will probably feel s/he has to conform in order to be able to interact. This can lead to intersex persons pretending not to have the extra knowledge and experience and act as if they were regularly sexed. Sedgwick points out that these kinds of ignorances, "far from being pieces of the originary dark, are produced by and correspond to particular knowledges and circulate as part of particular regimes of truth." (25) The current Western regime of truth assumes that everyone has one sex that is either male or female and that one is to behave according to the societal gender norms which correspond with the birth

sex. Most of us internalize the binary sex/gender norms so that we perceive them as truth and we behave accordingly. They however provide an oversimplification of reality: intersex persons do exist, (as well as transgender persons) but due to the lack of attention given to intersexuality in society, which is reinforced by the hiding of their bodies due to medical interventions which make their bodies more conform to the gendered ideal, many people are ignorant about their existence. This ignorance of other sex configurations is powerful in that it suppresses these configurations even more than possible rejection would, since rejection would at least grant them some place to be, something closer to intelligibility, like in the case of transsexualism. This unknowing silences intersex persons and forces them to hide their differences on the sex and possibly gender axis. This creates a paradoxical confinement within. As the French philosopher Gilles Deleuze writes, taking his cue from the equally French philosopher Maurice Blanchot, “l’enfermement renvoie à un dehors, et ce qui est enfermé, c’est le dehors. C’est ‘au’ dehors, ou par exclusion, que les agencements enferment”.

(50) What is striking is that in the case of intersex persons who do not come out as such, their confinement is not visible, but is created insidiously and unconsciously by the societal enforcement of the compulsory sex/gender binary. Those who do not conform to the binary sex/gender norms are placed outside the assemblage (‘agencement’) that is society. Intersex persons who pass as either male or female seem part of society, but are in some ways always outside of it, because they have to stay on their guard in order to continue to pass and thus can never take sex/gender norms for granted, but tend to feel alienated by the people surrounding them, since they would not be intelligible subjects if they would be openly intersex. This shows the importance of passing as well as the earlier mentioned reworking of categories, of which Paradisi’s character Camille shows several examples, to make a place for differently sexed and/or gendered persons.

In Paradisi’s novel, Camille assumes, without having experienced reactions of outsiders to his/her intersex nature, that others will not accept him/her the way s/he is, as the earlier citation indicated. As an apparently female teenager, s/he talks about his/her masculinity as “[c]elle que je possédais également, qui me définissait comme personne et que personne ne pouvait assumer.” (158) Camille points here out that being not only female, but also male makes that s/he is not a subject, but a nobody. His/her double sex and gender makes Camille unintelligible and as I pointed out, intelligibility is necessary to be seen as a subject. The latter part of the citation explains the effect of not being a subject: this means that nobody would accept Camille as intersex and transgender. S/he would be rejected by society.

Paradisi indicates with this phrase that being differently sexed and gendered would be cause for rejection. The irony is that although we live in what literary scholar Tracy Hargreaves calls “a culture that insists upon a correlation between biological sex and cultural sex,” this correlation is problematic in the case of an intersex transgender person, since in the West neither intersexuality is perceived as a real sex, nor complete androgyny as an intelligible gender. (6) Thus even if the sex and gender identity concur of an intersex person, this does not make him/her more acceptable. The binary sex/gender norms are indeed very important in contemporary Western society. Even though gender is a construction, it is virtually impossible to do without. As Delphy explains, our learning about the gender binary is very deeply ingrained in us:

les sociétés genrées telles que les sociétés occidentales créent leurs propres subjectivités et, en particulier, ... l’incapacité de se former une identité individuelle qui ne soit pas genrée. Nos langues excluent déjà cette possibilité ... [Cela] est confirmé par les études en psychosociologie : la notion d’‘être humain’ n’existe pas dans nos sociétés, ou plutôt, il existe deux idées de l’‘être humain’—un ‘être humain mâle’ et un ‘être humain femelle’. (Hurtig et Pichevin 1991)

C’est là notre constitution psychologique—une constitution non seulement genrée mais créée par le genre et par les autres aspects de notre structure sociale—dont nous avons hérité ... de toutes les minutes que nous passons sur cette planète. (331)

Due to our socialisation, we cannot imagine persons without also imagining their gender. This is not to say that it is impossible to conceive of someone who is ambiguously gendered, we could think of someone who looks androgynous, but we always have recourse to the gender binary and would still think of an androgynous person as primarily male or female. This is exemplified by the reviews of Garréta’s novel *Sphinx*, a love story between two people whose gender(s) are undefined. All reviewers assigned the two a gender, even though all the four possibilities were mentioned, because it is impossible to assign the two a gender with reasonable certainty. (Livia 2001) This shows well that gender is information the reader needs or the reader will work with a working hypothesis in order to be able to imagine the character, for them to be intelligible. (id.; Romaine 1999) Moreover, Garréta had to go to great lengths in order to avoid linguistic gender markers, which influenced her writing style considerably, for example by using the passé simple verb tense¹⁹. This shows that it is difficult, especially in

¹⁹ For an analysis, see Anna Livia’s *Pronoun Envy* and her “‘One Man in Two is a Woman’: Linguistic Approaches to Gender in Literary Texts.” Ed. Janet Holmes and Miriam Meyerhoff. *The Handbook of Language and Gender*. Maiden: Blackwell, 2003: 142-58.

French, to avoid gender markers in language, although not impossible, as Delphy thinks. The importance of linguistic gender markers is also mentioned in Pagano's *Les Adolescents Troglodytes*, in which the ultimate sign of brother Axel accepting protagonist Adèle's female identity is him grammatically referring to her as female. After having not seen each other for ten years, as Adèle tells, "pour la première fois sans contrainte, naturellement ... , il s'était disputé avec moi en faisant l'accord de genre, deux fois. C'était déjà arrivé bien sûr, mais sous la pression sociale seulement". (75) In the case of a transsexual person, a switch in the use of gender markers is enough, but if we could easily refer to persons in a non-gendered way, this would make communication with and about ambiguously gendered persons less problematic, as the shopping scene in Châtelet's novel I referred to in chapter one indicated as well ("Et pour monsieur, ce sera?" (9)).

The fact that the gender binary is so ingrained in contemporary Western society leads the Intersex Society of North America, to arguing for a (provisional) choosing of gender for intersex children, as not making a choice would "unnecessarily traumatize the child," since "many intersex people are perfectly comfortable adopting either a male or female gender identity". ("Assignment"; "Eradicating") Parents of intersex children are thus encouraged to let their child conform to the gender binary, even though the biological sexual characteristics do not equivocally point to which gender would fit best, as usually is the case, making this conforming all the more artificial. Nevertheless, it does work for many of these children. As Butler remarks, there is another reason why not choosing would be traumatic, besides the fact that many intersex persons fit into the gender binary: "intersex children ... may well need [gender assignment] to function". (*Undoing* 7-8) If intersex persons do not adhere to gender norms, they would, as I have explained, not be intelligible and thus not be seen as subjects, but be rejected by society. Life is much easier when passing as either male or female. This is why, as Butler puts it, "children do not need to take on the burden of being heroes for a movement without first assenting to such a role." (*Undoing* 8) Stepping outside of the gender binary thus should be a conscious choice and not something parents enforce on a child.

According to Delphy, we hang on to the gender binary out of an irrational fear of general indifferentiation: "La peur de l'indifférentiation générale ... serait provoquée par la disparition de la seule différence que nous connaissons apparemment". (254-55) Men and woman are supposed to be complementary and gender is the only difference we know apparently, thus if there are no gender differences, how am I to distinguish myself from someone else? (id. 2009; cf. Bessard-Banquy 2010) Thus, if someone would be openly intersex and double gendered, this would be potentially very threatening, since the

compulsory gender binary is one of the main bases of our society and identity and a transgender intersex person would deconstruct so many assumptions and norms of our everyday lives by not choosing a gender and neither a sex and hence questioning the naturalness of the binary, that s/he could destabilize the identity of other people.

Nevertheless, there are transgender persons—who might or might not be also intersex—who reject passing as gender conform, since it reinforces the gender binary, and dare to come out as differently gendered. This is for example the position Stone advocates, who stresses that passing implies being dishonest, as I have shown in “*Adèle: Lying about One’s Past.*” (Stone 1991) As Califia tells,

some transgendered activists are touting the view that passing is privilege, and to pass means buying into an oppressive polarized, binary gender system. An ideological connection has been made between being out of the closet as a lesbian or gay man and being visible as a transgendered person, someone who is gender-ambiguous. (210)

Living gender ambiguity is thus possible. However, that would imply forcing one’s way into everyday reality, which could potentially lead to violent acts, as the considerable amount of murders of transsexuals who are in transition indicates. (Summers 2010; Butler *Undoing* 6) Living as transgendered is thus difficult and potentially dangerous. This makes it understandable that many persons do not dare to come out as transgender, of which Paradisi describes an exemplary case in his novel.

Adèle: a Brother’s Ambivalence

Whereas in Paradisi’s novel, the sibling of protagonist Camille was very accepting of her sibling’s unusual sex and gender, in Pagano’s *Les Adolescents Troglodytes*, protagonist Adèle does not have such luck. Brother Axel is almost the only person responding to Adèle’s gender performance as she hides her transsexualism for others. His ambivalent response will be the focal point in this subsection, as well as how the reaction Pagano describes relates to real-life issues close ones of transgender persons might have.

Axel is very ambivalent about Adèle’s femininity, rejecting it, but also reinforcing it. When they are little, Axel insults Adèle for having ‘feminine’ hobbies: “Il me traitait de liseuse. Je n’étais pas encore une fille pour les autres, non, je l’étais à peine pour moi, mais dans la bouche de mon frère, c’était plus insultant encore de se faire traiter au féminin. Lire au lieu de jouer au foot, c’était un truc de fille.” (34) He thus does not accept that his sibling’s tastes are not gender conform like his. Little Adèle would probably not have minded being regarded as feminine, which s/he was, and later becomes increasingly, but s/he realizes that

Axel addressing her as female is meant as insulting and for that reason also perceives it as such. His behaviour is however also enabling in a way, since combined with Adèle's perception of his masculine body, it fastens Adèle's realization that s/he is actually a girl. As she tells: "Je me comprenais fille lentement, en creux du corps et des coups de mon petit grand frère." (35) The violent reaction of Axel to her femininity as well the fact that s/he dislikes looking at the faster developing body of her younger brother, since it reminds him/her of how masculine his/her body will soon look like, thus fastens his/her female identity formation. She explains that "son corps me troublait ... Je ne supportais pas ... de voir ce que j'allais devenir, ce que j'aurais déjà dû être (papa plaisantait de mon retard)." (121)

Pagano addresses in the mentioned instances the interaction effects between a transgender character and her social environment. Persons learn the rules of society through their interactions with other persons who have already internalized these norms and often enforce them on others. As Butler writes, "the social norms that constitute our existence carry desires that do not originate with our individual personhood." (*Undoing* 2) We thus have to learn these norms. For example, "many parents view children through a gender-biased lens ... children ... absorb these messages." (Berk 521) But we do not only learn by perceiving the way others react to us. Berk points out that "modeling is important in gender typing". (535) We thus also look at others as models for our behaviour as well as for the way in which we will look physically, we tend to form our identity and adapt our behaviour and physical appearance. Other persons thus make us aware of the existence of norms like the gender binary as well as of what the stakes are when we do not conform to them. As I have explained, gender non-conformity tends to be a cause for rejection and this is also what Pagano shows in her novel. But the non-conform desires of a transgender person can be so strong that they override the negative reactions and the normative model may even have a off-putting effect on them. This is explained by Butler:

There are advantages to remaining less than intelligible, if intelligibility is understood as that which is produced as a consequence of recognition according to prevailing social norms. Indeed, if my options are loathsome, if I have no desire to be recognized within a certain set of norms, then it follows that my sense of survival depends on escaping the clutch of those norms by which recognition is conferred. (*Undoing* 3)

A MTF-transsexual would for example not want to conform to the norms of masculinity, but would prefer to be perceived as unintelligible on the gender axis because of her effeminate appearance than lead a quiet life conforming to societal gender norms, since the latter would make that person unhappy and self-alienated, since her gender identity and social gender role

behaviour would not match. Estrangement from societal norms would then be preferable to social intelligibility, since the latter would make the life of a transgender person unliveable for him/herself. However, most transsexual persons will end up looking more or less gender-conform, implying intelligibility if they pass, whereas this is not necessarily the desire of all transgender persons.

In Pagano's novel, Adèle and Axel live together as young adults pretending to be a couple, since Adèle lives as a woman now and Axel cannot bear to see her as his sister. Axel accepts that Adèle lives as a woman for the outside world not just because he cannot force her not to do so, but also because he cares very much about her. As Adèle explains,

il n'a jamais pu dire ni mon travestissement, ni ma transsexualité, ni ma véritable identité, parce que le reste, c'était l'impensable, plutôt crever ... que le dire. Il pleurerait si grasement ... Il était en rage d'être vulnérable. ... tu seras jamais ma sœur, ça jamais, mais tu sais je t'aime ... Mon grand frère me manque. Tu seras jamais ma sœur, mais je serai toujours ton petit frère, alors ça me fait rien devant les autres de t'embrasser dans le cou parce que je le faisais bien à maman. (84)

Axel thus feels torn between his love for his sibling, his desire for her to be happy, and his incapacity to accept that he does not really have a brother, since he cannot stretch his conventional views on gender identity enough to grasp what it is to be transsexual. He liked having an older brother and he feels that this is taken away from him due to Adèle's transsexualism, even though Adèle's femininity has always been a part of her, even when she was still living as a boy.

Pagano points here to the conflicting emotions and desires people close to a transgender person can have. On the one hand, close ones love the transgender person and wish them a happy life, but on the other, there is a rejection of the transgender desires of that person and an incapacity to understand these desires. Moreover, there can be a clash between the needs of the transgender person and those of their family and friends. As gender theorist Gayle Rubin points out in writing about the network of FTM-transsexual persons, "Friends and lovers of FTMs often have intense feelings of loss, grief, and abandonment. They need support in handling such feelings". (478) This applies to close ones of transgender persons in general. They might feel they lost the person they knew when that person is transitioning to the 'other' gender. This shows that it is hard for close ones to adapt to the huge change that the gender transitioning of a loved one implies for them. They need support for their emotions and often time to get used to the change. The fact that Western societies tend to reject

transgenderism makes this process of acceptance, as well as the availability of support, all the more difficult.

The fact that in Pagano's novel Axel does not understand what it means to be transsexual becomes clear in some of the very violent and hurtful letters he writes his sibling Adèle after he moved away. Adèle tells that "[d]ans certaines lettres il essayait de me faire avouer que j'étais un homosexuel refoulé, impossible pour lui de séparer identité et sexualité. ... je me voyais coucher avec une fille ..." (117) Axel seems to think that Adèle only wants to become a woman in order to have relationships with men without having to admit to him/herself to being homosexual. This is for Axel an easier explanation of why Adèle is feminine, homosexuality being for him more understandable than transsexualism. However, when Adèle imagines herself as homosexual, she thinks of sleeping with a woman, which clearly shows that she thinks of herself as female and not male, as Axel still does. As Adèle points out, gender identity and sexual orientation are two different things, although people tend to confuse both. Even if she is attracted to men, this is not in direct relationship to her femininity.

In letting Adèle refer to the difference between gender identity and sexuality, Pagano criticizes a widespread assumption. Dorlin writes about the logic behind this association between gender and sexuality: "le concept de genre est lui-même déterminé par la sexualité, comprise comme système politique, en l'occurrence l'hétérosexualité reproductive, qui définit le féminin et le masculin par la polarisation sexuelle socialement organisée des corps." (55) Men and women are thus defined as different when it comes to their gender roles as a consequence of their sexually reproductive complementariness. If we follow this logic, gender roles could be seen as a consequence of reproductive sexuality (although there is no telling of what actually came first, since sex, gender and sexuality influence each other). For most regularly sexed and gendered heterosexual people, the association between gender and sexuality thus makes sense as both spring from a desire for complementariness. However, sex, gender and sexuality do not actually automatically concur to this normative ideal. Neither the sexes nor the gender roles of couples have to be complementary. This is why Butler criticizes the assumption that desire and identification are mutually exclusive:

if to identify as a woman is not necessarily to desire a man, and if to desire a woman does not necessarily signal the constituting presence of a masculine identification, whatever that is, then the heterosexual matrix proves to be an *imaginary* logic that insistently issues forth its own unmanageability. The heterosexual logic that requires

that identification and desire be mutually exclusive is one of the most reductive of heterosexism's psychological instruments. (*Matter* 239)

Butler points here not only to the fact that there are homosexual couples, who are thus not complementary when it comes to their sex, but also to the existence of couples consisting of people who are both masculine or both feminine (or maybe even neither) when it comes to their gender roles—which can go from being a masculine woman or feminine man to transgender identification—regardless of their sex(es). It is quite possible to desire someone with whom we identify. The heterosexual logic of complementariness is thus very reductive of reality.

Denise/Paul: Choosing Between Loving the Girl or the Boy?

In Châtelet's novel *La Tête en Bas*, much more people know about Denise/Paul's unusual sex and gender than in the case of Adèle in Pagano's novel. Denise/Paul's parents and friends respond to it in very varying ways. First, the parents' views will be analyzed and secondly, the ones of two of Denise/Paul's main friends: Geneviève and Max. Since I will discuss the position of his/her third friend Flore in the next subsection, I will focus instead on the other characters. Throughout the analyses I will show the important issues Châtelet points to in relation to the gender binary and the acceptance of transgenderism and intersexuality.

Denise/Paul's parents each have a very different view when it comes to the preferred sex and gender of their child in Châtelet's work. As Denise/Paul tells, "Ma mère, c'est par amour pour mon père et par tendresse de mère qu'elle a fini par bien vouloir d'un fils, mon père, lui, n'a jamais voulu autre chose, pas une fille en tout cas." (71) The views of the two thus clash and in the end, it is the mother who binds in out of love for her husband and child and accepts that her child wants to be male, in accordance with the wishes of her husband. What makes it even harder for her to accept having a son, besides wanting a daughter herself, is the fact that she is quite conventional and values normality: whereas "elle ne raffole pas de ces exercices physiques [sur le trapèze] auxquels mon père m'entraîne", "une petite fille au piano, elle trouve cela normal. Elle utilise beaucoup ce mot, ma mère: 'normal,' ou 'pas normal'." (19-20; 23) Because of this, obeying to gender norms is even more important for her. But this also makes her more attentive to the potential problems Denise/Paul is facing. When Denise/Paul for example starts studying and struggles very much with his physique, s/he tells that "[m]a mère, plus attentive à moi [que mon père], plus clairvoyante, m'imagine en danger, j'en suis certain ... Elle tend les mains vers moi, comme pour prévenir un trébuchement, une chute possible et inexplicable". (91) It is because she thinks about

Denise/Paul's behaviour and physique in relation to what is deemed normal that she is able to understand that this potentially leads to rejection as well as inner strife and in that respect, she tries to be supportive, whereas her husband is not as in touch with the gender norms which accompany the society the characters live in. Denise/Paul's father's position is also problematic in another respect, as Denise/Paul tells:

mon père m'est reconnaissant des efforts inaccoutumés que j'ai dû déployer pour devenir son Paul ... C'est pourquoi il les a si bien accompagnés, sans impatience ni lassitude. C'est pourquoi il est si complice. Sur l'imbroglio, il est clair qu'il ne souhaite pas en connaître trop. ... La petitesse de ma verge, il ne veut pas la voir. (72)

Denise/Paul's father thus helps him/her with becoming more masculine, but the problem is that he is only interested in his child's masculine side and does not want to know about Denise/Paul's gender ambiguity and is unaware of the difficulties s/he is facing.

In these passages, Châtelet explores several difficulties which can arise in a family with an intersex and transgender child. Parents may have different views on how to respond to the desires of their child, which can put a strain on the relationship between the parents, as well as with the child. Furthermore, when a parent has conventional views on how gender should be performed, s/he will have more difficulties accepting the transgenderism of her child. However, conventionality can also have an advantage, as that person will understand better what kind of reactions the child can elicit in outsiders and if this parent is supportive, s/he will be more empathic towards the societal difficulties his/her child faces. Another problem might arise when a parent prefers to ignore the fact that his/her child has mixed sex characteristics as that person will not be able to provide support to the child when it comes to these difficulties. These are significant issues, since as Hines writes, "support from parents and close relatives is important in affirming self-identity." (149) As I have explained in chapter two, identity formation can prove to be quite difficult if one is intersex and/or transgender and support from others to live in one's desired gender might significantly lessen the difficulty of this process.

In Châtelet's *La Tête en Bas*, Denise/Paul's friend and lover Geneviève has a similar view on Denise/Paul's sex and gender as the latter's father. This is helpful as she supports him/her in his/her masculine desires. However, when Denise/Paul is with his/her new friend Max as a student, s/he realizes that there is a major drawback to Geneviève's viewpoint:

Trop haute est la barre avec Geneviève, qui veut d'un homme mais pas du reste, alors que le reste est toujours là : l'imbroglio. Max, lui, mon imbroglio ne le dérange pas.

Pour lui c'est ma manière à moi d'être différent, comme lui aussi est différent, ni plus ni moins. Il est évident que Geneviève est trop normale.

La normalité des autres est fatigante quand on est différent, au point de ne plus vouloir faire d'efforts, au point de parfois rêver de ne plus vivre qu'avec ceux qui me ressembleraient. (96)

Denise/Paul thus thinks that Geneviève, who is a feminine heterosexual woman who is not interested in Paul's feminine side, is too normal. When s/he is with her, s/he has to try very hard to be sufficiently masculine. Max on the other hand accepts him/her the way s/he is, including the sexual incongruence Denise/Paul refers to as the imbroglia. Moreover, Max is different too as he himself wants to be female, "être femme est son obsession," so they understand each other. (94) This is great, because it is tiring for Denise/Paul to be surrounded by regularly sexed and gendered people, since s/he feels forced to try to be regular too and he has had enough of having to try so hard and sometimes dreams of living only with people who are like him/her. There is thus a contrast between the normative Geneviève and the accepting and unconventional Max. The encountering of Max opens a new world to Denise/Paul: s/he is not alone anymore, not the only one with gender issues (although probably Max is not intersex). With him, s/he can be perfectly him/herself and does not have to pretend to be either completely male or female. Max is in total acceptance of Denise/Paul's intersexuality, telling him when Denise/Paul confesses s/he is intersex: "Homme, femme, les deux à la fois, qu'importe ! Tu es un être !" (95) This shows that Max loves Denise/Paul for who s/he is without focusing on his/her sex and gender. Throughout Paul's life, Max is the only one who does so.

The standpoint Châtelet describes at this point in her novel is also referred to by Pagano in her novel *Les Adolescents Troglodytes*. When protagonist Adèle is stuck in the snow with the children she drives home from school at the end of the novel, one of them tells her secret. The boy who tells the secret, Sylvain, says: "Pour moi c'est tellement pas important, enfin, moi je m'en fous, de ces trucs." (208) He thus does not think Adèle's transsexualism is that big of an issue. His attitude helps Adèle feel confident that most of the villagers will end up accepting her. She says to herself: "le plateau est assez grand pour que les bouches se fatiguent. Sylvain a raison, chez nous il n'y pas que des fachos." (210) With Sylvain's utterance, Pagano suggests that there are other ways to regard a person than on the gender axis.

The view that the sex someone has does not define his/her worth is for example held by David Reimer, known in medical theory as the John/Joan case. During surgery as an

infant, Reimer's penis was accidentally burned off and he was subsequently raised as a girl, but since this made him very unhappy, he later started living as a boy again and subsequently as a man. (Butler 2004) Reimer considers himself to be irreducible to his genitals, saying that "these [doctors] gotta be pretty shallow if ... they think ... that the only reason why people get married and have children and have a productive life is because of what they have between their legs". (in Butler *Undoing* 71) He thus considers himself to be lovable for other reasons than his genitals, he exceeds this body part. According to Butler, Reimer's position shows that it is possible to live at a critical distance from norms revolving around the sexed body and still be partly intelligible as a human:

It is precisely because we understand, without quite grasping, that he has another reason [for seeing himself as loveable] ... that we see the limits to the discourse of intelligibility that would decide his fate. ... positioned somewhere between the norms and its failure ... he is the human in its anonymity, as that which we do not yet know how to name or that which sets a limits [sic] on all naming. And in that sense, he is the anonymous—and critical—condition of the human as it speaks itself at the limits of what we think we know. (id. 74)

Reimer thus cannot be pinned down, completely identified, and is thus not entirely intelligible, but he remains at a critical distance to the norms, showing these norms to be limited by saying that he is irreducible to his sex. In doing that, he points a sympathetic listener to a deeper understanding of the norms of sexual intelligibility and makes him/her conscious of the existence of a world outside of the norms, other ways of thinking about and acting on them. This shows that Reimer is not entirely unintelligible either, since a sympathetic listener can understand that someone is more than his/her genitals, even though he neither explains what that more is, nor is this reason completely understood by this hypothetical listener. Pointing to the fact that there are also other aspects of someone's being than his/her sex that are important is thus a helpful strategy in dealing with transgenderism as well as intersexuality. It indicates that it is narrow-minded to focus so much on the sex of persons, because there are also other sites of identification which could make a transgender and/or intersex person more intelligible to society.

Historical Inspiration for Revaluing Intersexuality in Paradisi and Châtelet

Paradisi's and Châtelet's novels point to several overlapping ways in which people around Camille and Denise/Paul go beyond the gender binary with their views and actions. When it comes to their views, Camille and Denise/Paul both hear from others that they are inspired by

the fact that intersexuality used to be a cause for reverence in the West. In Paradisi's work, Camille's biological mother—whom she never met—is probably the singer Lady Loup, who is an inspiration to Camille with her empowering lyrics about among others hermaphrodite²⁰ sibyls of ancient times. Camille talks about an important Italian sibyl: “la sibylle Aristodème, élue reine de la cité [Naples] accueille tous les êtres apparentés à son hermaphrodisme.” (78) This s/he does in relation to Lady Loup's music, which gave or at least inspired him/her to look for this knowledge. A couple of lines later in the novel, s/he tells: “au temps des sociétés préjudiciaires [ils] nous élevaient au rang de prêtresses, nous considérant comme des intermédiaires entre le monde des divinités et celui des mortels. Ce temps que Lady Loup avait ressuscité par sa musique arborescente.” (78) Hermaphrodite persons thus used to be held in high regard. Châtelet refers to this point too through the words of Flore, a friend and lover Denise/Paul meets as a young adult. Flore is in awe of her friend's double sexedness, seeing in it a mystical kind of perfection. As Denise/Paul tells,

Elle dit que je suis la perfection puisque tout être est en quête de sa complétude et que moi je l'ai trouvée, je la porte en moi. Elle dit que, chez les Grecs anciens, on me vénérerait comme un demi-dieu, que je suis son dieu à elle. ... Elle dit que sa longue pratique du dérèglement de tous les sens ... devaient la conduire jusqu'à moi qui en suis l'accomplissement, la réponse.

Flore célèbre ma monstruosité comme une énigme résolue. Et moi, l'énigme vivante, le monstre demi-dieu, il m'arrive d'y croire. (133)

Flore thus talks about hermaphrodite half-gods in Antiquity, just like Lady Loup. In the first sentence, she also refers to Plato's theory that each person is looking for his or her other male or female half, from which they were separated by the gods who were jealous of their happiness.²¹ However, being seen as more-than-human is not necessarily very helpful for intersex persons, especially if they want to be accepted as normal. This is indicated by the words “monstre demi-dieu,” which point to a bipolar move from Denise/Paul's very negative self-perception to Flore's extremely positive appraisal of intersexuality, without a position in-between. Denise/Paul sometimes feels empowered by Flore's view, but these moments are

²⁰ The preferable term to be used now is ‘intersex,’ but in the past ‘hermaphrodite’ was used. (Fausto-Sterling 31) Strikingly, in *Un Baiser Sous X*, Paradisi only uses the term ‘hermaphrodite’. This may have been done because this is the more common term, but as Dorlin's text (2008) shows, ‘intersexe’ is used in contemporary French texts and Paradisi does use medical terms, thus he could very well have used this as well. Châtelet mentions neither of the terms.

²¹ See Aristophanes' speech in Plato's *Symposium*, beginning at 189c. This theory is also mentioned in Jacqueline Harpman's *Orlanda* when referring to the need protagonist Aline and her masculine side Orlanda, who left her body, have to be physically close to each other. (Paris: Grasset and Fasquelle, 1996: 120.)

short lived and s/he still has episodes during which his/her mental health is failing him/her, which is very much related to his/her perception of his/her body as monstrous, as I have shown in “*Denise/Paul: From a Fight for Masculinity to Experiencing Intersexuality as a Richness*.” Unsurprisingly, if this happens, s/he goes to his/her friend Max, who is more attuned to the harsh reality Denise/Paul is living and does not focus on Denise/Paul’s gender so much: “Quant à Max ... c’est vers lui que je reviens quand, devant le miroir, je me fais peur à nouveau”. (135)

Notwithstanding this drawback, Paradisi and Châtelet point in their novels to the fact that views on intersexuality and their acceptance have changed over time and are also culturally influenced. Feinberg gives a similar example showing this:

Ancient societies on the European continent were communal. Thousands of artifacts have been unearthed dating back to 25,000 B.C. that prove these societies worshipped goddesses, not gods. Some of the deities were transgendered, as were many of their shamans or religious representatives. (208)

I explained earlier that gender norms are not innate, but culturally influenced, and the cited examples point to the amount of change it has undergone in Western regions, indicating the amount of change that is possible in the future, although we may hope that this change will not have to take thousands of years.

Naming Beyond the Gender Divide in Paradisi and Châtelet

The second point Paradisi’s and Châtelet’s works have in common is that there are also people surrounding the protagonists who go beyond the gender binary with their actions, by showing creativity when it comes to naming. In Paradisi’s *Un Baiser Sous X*, a good strategy is shown to avoid the use of a gender specific name: the staff of the hospital where protagonist Camille is born decide to give him/her the non-gender-specific first names Camille Sacha Lou because of his/her intersexuality. As Camille tells, “Le pédiatre et la sage-femme sont prévoyants, mes prénoms répondent à mon genre ambigu.” (17) Moreover, adoptive mother Bettina, who gives her child Camille a gender-neutral upbringing, only opts for non-gendered pet names. She calls her child “‘mon ange,’ ‘mon cœur,’ ‘mon amour,’ ou un ‘chéri’ dont elle ne connaissait pas la terminaison.” (26) Strikingly, the given examples are all grammatically masculine, except possibly for ‘chéri[e],’ but none of them designate something with one inherent sex. In Châtelet’s *La Tête en Bas*, the parents of main character Denise/Paul did not know their child is intersex when s/he was born and give ‘her’ the specifically feminine name Denise. However, they avoid calling their child Denise, but use nicknames in order to make a

compromise between their different reactions to Denise/Paul's masculinity. His/her mother, who would like her child to be feminine, calls Denise/Paul her 'trésor' and her 'ange,' both male words on the grammatical level, but designating something non-sexed. (26) Denise's father, who encourages his child to be masculine, calls him/her 'mon petit,' which is slightly more radical, since there is also a female version of this nickname: 'ma petite'. (id.) He thus consciously refers to his child as male. Somewhat later in the novel, Denise's mother uses the same nickname, showing therewith that she complies increasingly with her child's wish to be male. (47) After they found out that their child is intersex and Denise/Paul tells s/he wants to be called Paul, they accept this. As s/he tells: "Mes parents ont bien voulu de mon nouveau prénom." (60)

Paradisi and Châtelet thus point to the fact that most names, such as Denise and Paul, are gender specific, which shows again the importance of language in the gender binary.²² This is also exemplified by the use of s/he, him/her, etcetera in this thesis. Besides the use of non-gender specific names, giving nicknames, which tend to be non-gendered, can be a good strategy when dealing with transgender persons, especially when that person does not want to choose between the two genders or when there is no agreement about someone's gender and one wants to avoid strife about this. The use of nicknames is also recommended when a child is born intersex and no choice of gender has been made yet. Activist Helena Harmon-Smith for example writes that physicians should "encourage the family to call their child by a nickname ... or by a non-gender-specific name." (303)

Conclusion

In this section, I have explored the question of how characters close to the protagonists of the novels Paradisi, Pagano and Châtelet react to the transgender—and in the case of Paradisi's and Châtelet's works intersex—nature of the main characters and what these three writers tell us about the intricacies of the interactions between transgenders and their community. Paradisi points in his *Un Baiser Sous X* to how acceptance of intersexuality can lead to an upbringing 'beyond' the gender binary, which gives the child the time and agency to choose a gender him/herself. In Halberstam's terms, this is a way to make gender optional and would depathologize some gender variances, like transsexual desires, although it still assumes that there are only two gender options, since moving away from the gender binary would probably be too radical a change in current Western society. The second important point Paradisi makes

²² Garréta also points to this problem in her novel *Sphinx* by not fully naming its two protagonists ('je' and 'A***') in order to prevent conclusive gender assignment of them.

in his novel is that most people do not realize that there are people with intersex bodies and that if they would find out about them, they would reject these intersex persons. This lack of knowledge forces according to Sedgwick the people with more knowledge to adapt to the lower level of knowledge of their interlocutor. This often means for intersex persons hiding the body parts which are deemed incompatible with the gender they pass as. This unknowing is related to the compulsory gender binary, which creates an assumption of binary sex and concurring gender which is reinforced by societal pressures to conform. This creates a confinement within society, since these intersex persons seem part of society, but can never take sexual normativity for granted, but feel they have to hide their deviation from the norm. If there would at least be more general knowledge about the existence of intersexuality, like there is of transsexualism, this would already be a step in the direction of intersex persons becoming intelligible subjects. Most of us have internalized the gender binary up to a point where gender seems to be the main defining character of a person: we cannot even imagine a person without having recourse to gender, in which language is very much implicated, and letting go of the gender binary is potentially threatening for our identities for fear of general indifferentiation. This importance of the gender binary leads the ISNA to recommend rearing intersex children as either male or female. This makes it not only easier for them to live in current society, but they later also tend to be comfortable with adhering to the binary. Nevertheless, there are persons—intersex or not—who not only prefer, but also dare to live openly as both male and female or neither, even though this is difficult and potentially dangerous.

Pagano points in her novel *Les Adolescents Troglodytes* especially to the difficulties a sibling of a transsexual person might have. That person can be a normative force, enforcing gender norms, but at the same time also constitute an example not to follow. As Butler points out, estrangement from societal norms can be preferable to social intelligibility, since the latter would make the life of a transgender person unliveable for him/herself. Pagano also shows that love and lack of understanding can conflict. Pagano equally points to the fact that sex/gender and sexual orientation are often confused. According to Dorlin, this is due to a heterosexist assumption of a desire for complementarity. As Butler writes, this is a reduction of reality, as we can both desire and identify with the same person.

In *La Tête en Bas*, Châtelet indicates that having an intersex and transgender child might put a strain on the relationship between the parents, as well as with the child, if the views on which gender the child should live in do not concur. Conventionality makes acceptance more difficult and the ability to empathize with the position the child is in is

important to give him/her much-needed support. A helpful strategy focalized in Châtelet's novel, but also in Pagano's is focusing on other aspects of someone's being than his/her sex, because, as Butler indicates, there are also other sites of identification which could make a transgender and/or intersex person more intelligible to regularly sexed and gendered persons.

Both Paradisi and Châtelet point to ways of revisiting or bypassing the gender binary. The protagonists of the novels of these writers hear from other people about how in the past, 'hermaphrodite' people were revered. Paradisi and Châtelet point here to the fact that perceptions of sex and gender have changed, as Feinberg has shown too. This underlines the amount of cultural variability of gender norms. Paradisi and Châtelet also point to creative approaches when it comes to naming. Most names are gendered, which shows to what extent language is implicated in the gender binary. The protagonist of Paradisi's novel, Camille, has been given gender-neutral names and his/her mother uses non-gendered nicknames. In Châtelet's work, Denise/Paul's parents circumvent the use of the female first name of their child also by using nicknames. As Harmon-Smith points out, both strategies can be helpful when it comes to referring to an intersex child before gender assignation. In general, it is a helpful strategy when dealing with transgender persons. All in all, these novels indicate that it can be difficult for people close to transgender (and intersex) persons to come to terms with their non-conformity on the (sex and) gender axis, but that there are also ways to make this easier.

Institutional Forces in Paradisi and Châtelet

Not only family and friends react to the unusually sexed and/or gendered Camille and Denise/Paul, who are the main characters of respectively Paradisi's *Un Baiser Sous X* and Châtelet's *La Tête en Bas*, but representatives of institutions, like medicine and school, do so too. Our societies are built on institutions who are normative forces which force people to fit into the moulds society values, such as e.g. 'male' versus 'female'. Because of their authority, the impact of the actions of representatives of institutions is often great. I will show in which ways Paradisi and Châtelet point to institutions as enforcers of gender norms.

Camille: Choosing is Imperative

To start with Camille's encounters with institutional forces in Paradisi's novel, there are two which are important in *Un Baiser Sous X*. The first one is the psychiatrist s/he regularly meets

and the second one, which I will discuss briefly, is school. Turning first to the psychiatric side, in *Un Baiser Sous X*, Camille's psychiatrist respects the choices s/he makes when it comes to sex and gender. Both he and mother Bettina are happy that medical practitioners did not intervene on Camille's body and that Camille decides not to let this happen later either. Camille tells:

Quand à l'âge de sept ans, j'avais demandé à être enregistré en tant que garçon dans les registres de l'état civil, j'avais néanmoins refusé d'aller au-delà. Bettina et le psychiatre approuvaient ma décision, ce rejet de l'opération qui m'aurait fait garçon à part entière. Une irréversible mutilation. Nombre d'enfants intersexués en étaient victimes. À l'adolescence, leurs corps ne correspondaient plus à leur identité sexuelle. (65-66)

Bettina and the psychiatrist thus think that the common practice of operating on intersex children equals mutilation, because the altered bodies of these children might later not correspond to their gender identity. It is striking that the last sentence seems to imply that Bettina and the psychiatrist think that to be the case for all intersex children whose bodies have been made more gender-conform, although this does not seem very realistic to me. However, the fact that Camille makes use of elliptic sentences, like "Une irréversible mutilation.," points to the possibility that s/he also left out a part of the last sentence of the citation, like a nuance such as "il arrive que".

Paradisi refers in this passage to the medical fact that few intersex persons have the privilege of choosing a gender themselves (or even getting told about their special condition), but often get reassignment surgery as soon as possible. As Fausto-Sterling points out, "Medical manuals and original research articles almost unanimously recommend that parents and children not receive a full explanation of an infant's sexual status." (64) Psychiatrists Benjamin and Virginia Sadock write that "[i]n the view of most experts, ... such intervention contributes substantially to the well-being of both parents and child." (737) This is because Western medicine generally assumes that intersex persons have a "birth defect of unfinished sexual characteristics," as Fausto-Sterling puts it. (50) However, their anatomy and endocrinology are part of natural variation, since "complete maleness and complete femaleness represent the extreme ends of a spectrum of possible body types." (Fausto-Sterling 76) With often the best intentions, doctors operate on intersex children, because they think that they would otherwise face social rejection and lead impossibly harsh lives, even though there is rarely a medical need for these surgeries. As Chase puts it,

[t]he sort of deviation from sex norms exhibited by intersexuals is so highly stigmatized that the likely prospect of emotional harm due to social rejection of the intersexual provides physicians with their most compelling argument to justify medically unnecessary surgical interventions. (302)

But Butler points out that these mainly unnecessary operations reinforce the male-female dichotomy on the physical level: “The norms that govern idealized human anatomy ... work to produce a differential sense of who is human and who is not, which lives are livable, and which are not.” (*Undoing* 4) With the enforcement of reassignment surgery on intersex persons, medicine implies that having an intersex anatomy is unacceptable as it would make one’s life unliveable, but at the same time it produces this position as it tries to eliminate the existence of ambiguously sexed bodies, making them unliveable.

The situation Paradisi describes in his novel of an intersex person who does not have to undergo surgery and is allowed to make his/her own choice of gender is thus a great leap forward in comparison to common practice, especially considering the physical and emotional scars of the ones who did undergo surgery without their knowledge. Butler for example tells that the surgeries on intersex infants and children “often leave those bodies maimed for life, traumatized, and physically limited in their sexual functions and pleasures.” (*Undoing* 6) Instead of being objectified by the medical gaze, a person who is in the same position as Paradisi’s character Camille has the agency to make his/her own “knowing choice”. (Butler on Chase *Undoing* 63) Fortunately the view on surgery Paradisi makes express the psychiatrist in his novel is spreading recently in the mental health department, as is shown by the works which pay attention to criticism, in the case of psychiatrist and psychologist David Barlow and psychologist Mark Durand even advising to “consider surgery only as a last resort”. (Barlow and Durand 317; Sadock and Sadock 2003, Kalat 2001; see Fausto-Sterling 2000)

As I have explained in the previous section, the main character of Paradisi’s novel, Camille is brought up ‘beyond’ the gender dualism. This is what the psychiatrist advised for his/her mother Bettina, who agrees with this. Camille tells: “Selon le psychiatre, ‘une erreur dans le choix du sexe d’élevage induit de lourds traumatismes à l’adolescence. Les parents d’un enfant intersexué ont tendance à commettre cette erreur. L’enfant saura assez tôt à quel sexe il appartient.’ Bettina partageait cette position”. (26) The psychiatrist thus points again to the risks of making the wrong assignation, which is his reason for advising a gender-neutral upbringing until the child him/herself makes a choice of gender. But he also assumes that an intersex person really is either male or female and that s/he ends up finding this gender

identity, which turns out not to be the case for Camille. The fact that Bettina and the psychiatrist again have the same viewpoint may be a question of a good fit between the two, but it may also indicate that he has a big influence on her way of perceiving intersexuality.

Paradisi points here again to something that is common in contemporary Western medicine, in this case the assumption that intersex persons fit into the gender binary. As Fausto-Sterling writes, “doctors believe that an intersexual child is ‘really’ a boy or a girl.” (50) This is another reason why sex assignment surgery is still common. It also shows again how entwined cultural beliefs are with medical practice. According to Fausto-Sterling, “it is possible to visualize the medical and biological only by peering through a cultural screen.” (95) The views and subsequent actions of medical practitioners are thus influenced by the current dimorphic sex system of cultural intelligibility, although they influence this system too by their views and practices, not only surgical, but also by means such as monitoring.

There is a second kind of institution encountered by Camille in Paradisi’s novel which has an important impact on his/her gendered life: school. Even though Camille’s sex has not been changed and s/he is raised gender-neutrally, s/he has to choose a gender in order to be able to be enrolled in nursery school and decides to become a girl, as s/he tells: “Sous quelle identité Bettina devait-elle m’inscrire [pour la maternelle]? ... Cette formalité était indispensable ... ‘Une fille,’ ai-je finalement décrété”. (34-35) It is impossible to apply for nursery school without specifying the gender of the child and this forces Camille to make a choice between being officially male or female, which also implies that s/he will have to try to pass as a girl at school, thus act and look girlish.

Paradisi indicates in this scene how an institution like school forces people to fit into the mould of gender. This is pointed to by Châtelet as well when the mother of protagonist Denise/Paul tells her child that s/he has wear a skirt to school: “La jupe est obligatoire au lycée.” (46) As Foucault writes, not only medicine, but also other institutions play a central role in the formation of the gender binary:

les théories biologiques de la sexualité, les conditions juridiques de l’individu, les formes de contrôle administratif dans les États modernes ont conduit peu à peu à refuser l’idée d’un mélange des deux sexes en un seul corps et à restreindre par conséquent le libre choix des individus incertains. Désormais, à chacun, un sexe, et un seul. (116)

In the modern age, everyday life has become increasingly regulated and different institutions have come to force people to make a choice between being male and female. In order to become part of society, one has to conform at least officially to the gender binary, because on

every legal document, from birth certificate to drivers licence, the sex of a person is mentioned and with every form we fill in, we have to specify our sex.

Denise/Paul: Enforcing Conformity and Discomfort

Like in Paradisi's novel, in Châtelet's *La Tête en Bas*, the most important encounters with institutions that are portrayed are the ones with medical practitioners. In this section, I will focus on the encounters intersex and transgender protagonist Denise/Paul has with two representatives of medicine. The first part will be about the mysterious injections s/he receives as an adolescent. In the second part, the response of the doctor to Denise/Paul's intersexuality when the latter is admitted to a psychiatric institution will be analyzed. In both parts, I will show how Châtelet points to the gender normative nature of the reactions of these doctors.

As an adolescent, the protagonist of Châtelet's novel Denise/Paul is brought to the doctor by his/her mother who is worried something is wrong, because s/he still has not had his/her period. When the doctor inspects Denise/Paul's body, he is not happy with what he sees and he gives him/her mysterious injections. Denise/Paul tells: "Le métal de mes cuisses n'a pas plu au docteur, ni mon buste lisse d'acrobate, qu'il effleuré d'un regard contrarié avec ses doigts glacés. ... Le mal des piqûres ... est nulle part et partout à la fois". (43) From the perspective of Denise/Paul, the doctor frowns upon his/her unfeminine muscular legs and flat chest, which is in opposition to his/her own proudness of his/her masculine and sporty physique. Denise/Paul is not told about the specifics of the doctor's treatment, but s/he tells that "[l]es piqûres sont pour Denise—j'en suis sûre bien que je n'aie pas de preuve—, pour aider Denise à faire ce que ma mère attend. ... Chez [Geneviève], tout le monde est content qu'elle ait eu mal au ventre". (44) Moreover, a bit later, Denise/Paul's breasts start to grow: "mes seins ne sont plus tout à fait pareils. Ils ont gonflés." (51) Denise/Paul thus has probably been given hormone injections in order to get a more feminine body and finally menstruate, which is euphemistically described by Denise/Paul as a stomach-ache. The doctor thus enforces the gender norm of femininity on Denise/Paul's body. In order to do so, he intervenes in his/her body in a violent way by subjecting him/her to hormone therapy without his/her own consent or even full knowledge. He probably did not even realize that Denise/Paul is intersex, since this only comes out when s/he sees a second doctor, who tells that "les piqûres sont vaines" and both parents subsequently accept Denise/Paul's desire to live as male. (56; 56-57) The examination of the first doctor was thus probably not even sufficiently thorough in looking for the reason why Denise/Paul's body was not gender conform, although a lack of knowledge

about intersexuality may also have contributed to him overlooking this. Détréz and Simon write about the normative nature of medicine:

L'écart par rapport à la norme, devant lesquels se sentent impuissants les parents, les conduit ainsi à avoir recours à la médecine, autre lieu du panoptisme social et du pouvoir sur les corps, puisque son regard s'avère capable de traverser les chairs pour les transformer en agissant cette fois non plus sur les comportements mais sur l'organisme lui-même, de restaurer l'ordre et d'assurer, dans la violence la plus extrême puisque la plus intérieure, la diffusion de la norme. Denise/Paul est ainsi traitée à coups de piqûres hormonales visant à créer morphologiquement cette femme qu'elle récuse en elle (et effectivement vont lui pousser des seins). (46)

Medicine is thus a normative force which has the privilege to intervene on the physical bodies of persons, whereas others can only try to influence someone's behaviour. Because of this, medicine has great normative power.

Châtelet points in the cited scenes to the way in which medicine can enforce gender norms without allowing for agency on the part of the patient. As I have explained in the previous subsection, medical interventions on intersex bodies are common in an attempt to make them conform to the fictive ideal of binary sex. The lack of consideration for the wishes of a non-sex-conform patient is a particularly grave matter, especially since in the case of an adolescent, a doctor has the possibility of asking about his/her wishes. It is not the doctor who has to live with the body he changes and since, as Fausto-Sterling points out, "infant genital surgery is cosmetic surgery performed to achieve a social result," it should be up to the patient to decide whether s/he can have what Butler calls a liveable life with a non-gender-conform body. (80; Butler 2004) As Chase puts it: "intersex subjects should not be violated for the comfort and convenience of others." (306)

In Châtelet's *La Tête en Bas*, besides the doctor who gives Denise/Paul injections, there is another medical specialist represented who reacts to Denise/Paul's physique: the doctor of the psychiatric institution s/he spends over three years in as a result of a major psychotic episode. (101-104) This doctor is clearly uncomfortable around him/her. As Denise/Paul tells, "le médecin ... sursaute chaque fois que j'entre dans son bureau". (107) He probably finds Denise/Paul's gender-ambiguous physique unsettling and cannot get used to it. This indicates that he has not come across many people who are hard to read on the gender axis. It is quite possible that he has never consciously encountered an intersex person before, let alone someone who also rejects his/her official gender. The physician is aware of Denise/Paul's condition, since he writes an attestation that he suffers from virilisation

syndrome, which is attached to ‘Denise’s’ ID card when s/he is allowed to go out intermittently. Denise/Paul tells: “Dans le portefeuille, sur une feuille à en-tête agrafée à ma carte d’identité –où Denise figure toujours–, le docteur a inscrit ces mots qui me laissent assez perplexe : ‘syndrome de virilisation,’ au cas où, sur la voie publique, il étonnerait, cet homme bizarre.” (121-22) The doctor has written this medical attestation as an explanation for why this person who is officially a woman looks masculine. The authority of it is underlined by the use of a difficult medical term which is not explained. The fact that the physician felt the need to do so indicates that he foresees problems with officials when they look at ‘Denise’s’ ID card. Looking unfeminine as a woman is thus potentially cause for legal trouble. What is also striking is that the medical explanation implies that Denise/Paul is not at fault for his uncommon physique, s/he did not choose to look like this—like a transsexual person for example might—, but it is a result of a biological defect. This puts Denise/Paul in the passive position of a patient who has no control over his/her own body, s/he is objectified by the medical gaze, which is stigmatizing. It also indicates that the doctor thinks that people have no right to decide themselves whether they want to conform to norms of how a man or a woman should look like: only biological reasons are valid. Thus like in the encounter with the first doctor, there is a problem on the level of agency.

In both passages about the doctor of the institution, Châtelet indicates how problematic lived sexual ambiguity can be. Even a medical practitioner who knows that someone is intersex is uncomfortable around that person. As Sadock and Sadock point out, this is an important issue which may for example cause problems in therapy: “Countertransference problems must be addressed assiduously by therapists, many of whom are uncomfortable with patients with gender identity disorder”. (736) A therapist’s negative perception of gender may thus interfere with good therapy if this is not addressed. In general, there is, as Hines tells, “an unfamiliarity and incomprehension of non-normative bodies among health care professionals”. (162) Moreover, sexual ambiguity can be so problematic when it comes to identifying yourself officially that it is deemed necessary to have a medical explanation for it. Many transgender persons indeed encounter difficulties when the gender on their ID does not match their lived gender, for example when trying to find employment. (Léotard 2009) Passport checks while travelling abroad is also often an issue. As is stated in *Polare*, the magazine issued by the Gender Centre, “It is dangerous for transsexual women to travel abroad on male passports, and vice versa, as they can be subjected to searches,

intimidation, arrest, violence and embarrassment.”²³ Even every-day issues, like the choice of public bathroom to use, potentially lead to legal problems. Dean Spade, an American FTM transgender legal activist for example writes that people who see him for the first time tend to show an overall “disappointment in my inadequate masculinity” and this lack of passing has resulted in his “arrest for trying to use a men’s bathroom in Grand Central Station in 2002.” (65, id.) This happened after he refused to show his ID, implying that he probably would not have been arrested if he would have been officially male and would have shown so. (Spade, Willse and Nguyen; Crane 2002) Transgender persons are thus discriminated against and are even potentially criminalized for transgressing the gender divide. This shows that not only passing as someone of the gender of choice is important in order to become a full member of society, but also having the legal papers to confirm this. For transsexual persons, most of these problems might be of a temporary nature if they can pass and obtain their legal change in status, but there are also transgender and intersex persons who may be objected to these kind of discrimination throughout their lives.

Conclusion

I have addressed in this section the issue of how institutional forces impact on the lives of the intersex and transgender protagonists of Paradisi’s *Un Baiser Sous X* and Châtelet’s *La Tête en Bas* and to which important real-life issues these authors point. Paradisi shows through his portrayal of the psychiatrist his main character Camille encounters how the agency of intersex persons can be restored through letting them choose themselves which sex and gender they feel most comfortable with. This allows for what Butler calls a “knowing choice,” instead of letting medicine enforce cosmetic body modification on intersex infants without giving full disclosure, as is often the case in contemporary Western societies. (Butler on Chase *Undoing* 63) However, there is still the assumption that one wants to be either male or female, which is not always the case. School can also be an important gender-normative force by requiring a specification of the gender of the to-be-enrolled child and prescribing a dress code whereby girls have to wear a skirt.

Châtelet gives attention to similar issues through her representation of a doctor and a psychiatrist Denise/Paul, the protagonist of her novel, meets. She gives an account of how

²³ One can find an extensive list of air travel tips for transgender people on the website of the National Centre for Transgender Equality, which gives a good impression of the array of difficulties transgender persons might encounter when flying, from encountering X-ray machines to taking with you hormones, syringes and prosthetics. See <http://transequality.org/Issues/travel.html>.

violent enforced body modification can be perceived to be if this goes against someone's will. In doing this, she puts to the forefront the problem of agency in relation to medical interventions to make bodies more gender conform. Moreover, she indicates that medical practitioners themselves might feel uncomfortable around differently sexed and gendered persons, which is often the case, out of lack of knowledge and comprehension. A third issue which comes up in Châtelet's novel is how problematic it can be on the social level if one's lived gender does not match one's official sex. This can lead to discrimination and even legal problems if a transgender person tries to find employment or travels abroad and even when one goes to a public bathroom, especially if one is not willing to subject oneself to medical scrutiny in order to get a declaration to explain the gap between one's official and lived gender or even to change one's legal sex status. Medicine and school are thus two examples of how gender-normative institutions can be and how due to their power they are able to enforce the societal gender norms.

Conclusion of Chapter Three

In this chapter, I have analyzed how the inside and the outside worlds of the transgender protagonists of Paradisi's *Un Baiser sous X*, Pagano's *Les Adolescents Troglodytes* and Châtelet's *La Tête en Bas* clash by focusing on the perspective of characters these protagonists interact with, on the one hand their close ones and on the other institutions. In writing about these interactions, these authors have given a good insight in the way the binary sex/gender norms work on the societal level. They have indicated that sex/gender binary is so ingrained in our Western way of thinking that we cannot even think of persons without having recourse to gender and that letting go of this binary is potentially threatening for our identities for fear of general indifferentiation, which is why it is so persistent, even in persons interacting with transgender persons, and why transgenderism tends to be cause for rejection, although there are still people brave enough to live as transgendered. This internalization of gender norms leads on the institutional level among other things to the violent enforcement of body modification to make intersex bodies more gender conform in medicine and administrative rules and regulations forcing people to be officialy male or female, which, if it does not concur with the lived gender can lead to discrimination or even legal problems. Gender conformity is also enforced in informal ways, through for example remarks people make, harassment and people showing they feel uncomfortable around transgender persons.

This has to do with the fact that people tend to have problems relating to transgender persons, because they cannot understand what they are on the gender axis, since they do not fit into the binary. In the case of intersexuality, there is also a huge lack of knowledge: most people do not even know that it is possible not to be either biologically male or female. This creates a confinement within society as the intersex persons who are lucky enough not to have been subjected to sex assignment surgery tend to feel forced to hide their intersex body, making them even more unintelligible than transsexual persons, whose existence is at least known. Fortunately, Paradisi and Châtelet also point to the fact that binary sex/gender norms are not cut in stone, but are changeable and actually do shift over time. An upbringing 'beyond' the gender binary could for example make gender optional and would at least depathologize transsexualism. We could also learn to focus on other aspects of someone's being than his/her sex and gender, because there are also other ways of identifying with someone, which could make a transgender and/or intersex person more intelligible to regularly sexed and gendered persons and would lessen the relative importance of sex and gender.

Conclusion

In this thesis, I have shown how the inside and the outside worlds of the transgender protagonists of Paradisi's *Un Baiser sous X*, Pagano's *Les Adolescents Troglodytes* and Châtelet's *La Tête en Bas* cause friction. With the help of the works of gender theorists like Butler and Delphy, transgender theorists such as Chase and Stone and Fausto-Sterling, who brings biology together with feminist and transgender issues, I have also explained how these writers point not only to the artificial and constraining nature of the Western binary sex/gender norms, but also to ways of seeing these norms in a new light, subverting them even. In the first chapter, which is on appearances, I have shown that passing as gender conform is central if one wants to be accepted by society and avoid risking rejection or even hate crimes. All three of the protagonists strive to do so through the means of their clothes and behaviour: in Paradisi's novel, intersex and transgender Camille succeeds at passing as either male or female, in Pagano's work, MTF-transsexual Adèle not only passes as female, but has even become one in her view as well as of the people around her who do not know about her past sex, and in Châtelet's novel, intersex and transgender Denise/Paul would like to pass as male, but only does so when his/her breasts are removed. Châtelet shows an exemplary case of someone who is throughout most of his/her life what Butler calls unintelligible. This implies that others have problems understanding and/or relating to that person, because s/he does not fit into their binary view on sex/gender.

In chapter two, I have turned to the experiences of being transgender and possibly intersex. I have shown that because of the need to pass, this often implies hiding and lying. If one has switched gender role, one tends to lie about one's past, which implies that one has shifted environment in order to switch roles, which both Pagano and Paradisi show through their protagonists. Intersex persons also often hide their 'mixed' sexual characteristics, like Camille does in Paradisi's novel. Moreover, a self-identity as both male and female (or neither) would have to be hidden if one wants to pass, which position Paradisi portrays. The imperative to pass also leads to loneliness, as not many people dare to express non-gender-conform desires. On the level of identity, the effect of binary sex/gender norms can be tremendous, especially if one cannot put together the gap between the sex of one's body, one's lived gender and one's preferred gender identity, as this makes it hard to understand who one 'really' is. Châtelet portrays this poignantly through the descend into madness of her protagonist Denise/Paul. In Paradisi's work, the identity formation of protagonist Camille is also problematic, since it is represented as a possibly never-ending search. Even if the

assumption that identity has to be coherent and stable is false—identifications are shifting and contradictive—we do need some identitary stability in order to live, some fixed, recognizable points in one's 'I'. This lying, hiding, loneliness and the problematic identity formation show that trying to adhere to societal gender norms can come at great costs. However, these norms do not reflect reality: sex is not really binary and what are deemed to be natural masculine and feminine inclinations are highly influenced by societal norms of how gender should be performed. Everyone is actually forced into a mould by the Western binary sex/gender norms. It would thus be liberating for all of us if we would learn to see beyond this binary. Paradisi points to the strategy of proliferating categories as a way to make room for differently sexed and gendered persons in our ways of perceiving. In Châtelet's novel, music helps 'Paul' to come to terms with being also 'Denise,' which points to the fact that there are ways of expression in which gender is not relevant, such as non-linguistic forms of art, which can lead to a reappraisal of the importance and the oppositional nature of gender.

In the third chapter of this thesis, I have focused on the reactions of persons the transgender persons interact with and the impact these reactions have on them. I have explained that the sex/gender binarism is so deeply ingrained in our Western way of thinking, in which language plays an important role, that we always have recourse to gender when we imagine someone. Binary gender is a central part of our identity and we tend to feel threatened identity-wise by a questioning of this out of fear of being otherwise unable to differentiate oneself from another person. This explains why binary thinking is so persistent, even in persons accepting of transgenderism, and why if one is openly transgendered, one tends to be rejected. Paradisi refers to these issues as reasons for why protagonist Camille does not dare to live as doubly-gendered. Gender conformity is informally enforced through ways varying from remarks people make and people showing they feel uncomfortable around non-gender-conform persons to transphobic harassment. In Pagano's novel, attempts at enforcement are shown through the reactions of protagonist Adèle's brother to his sibling's transsexualism, who for example bullies her for being feminine as a biological boy. The internalization of binary sex and gender norms leads also for example to medical practitioners enforcing body modification to make intersex bodies more conform to the binary ideal. This is criticized in Paradisi's novel as an unnecessary mutilation. Châtelet shows how violating this interference in someone's bodily integrity can be as her protagonist is subjected to hormone injections which cause breast growth in Denise/Paul, who actually wants to be male. Largely because of these medical interventions, there is a general lack of knowledge about the existence of intersexuality: most people do not even know that it is possible to have both male

and female bodily characteristics. As a result of this unknowing, intersex persons who have not been subjected to sex assignment surgery tend to feel they have to hide the unusualness of their bodies, which confines them within society and makes their existence even more unintelligible than the ones of transsexual persons, whose ‘condition’ people at least know about. Gender norms are also part of administrative rules and regulations: people are forced to be either officially male or female and if this official gender does not concur with the lived gender, this tends to lead to discrimination and even legal problems. Châtelet points to this through Denise/Paul’s doctor, who writes a medical attestation explaining why ‘Denise’ does not look feminine in order to prevent him/her from having problems with officials. Fortunately, Paradisi and Pagano also point to the fact that binary sex/gender norms change over time and hence are changeable. Paradisi shows a way which could change the binary through his representation of Camille’s upbringing ‘beyond’ the gender binary. This could be enabling, since this could make gender optional and would denaturalize the connection between sex and gender. Pagano and Châtelet show another helpful strategy by their portrayal of characters who are able to see beyond the unusual sex/gender configurations of the transgender protagonists and appreciate them for reasons which are unrelated to their sex/gender. If we would stress the importance of sex/gender less and focus instead on other characteristics of a person, we could find ways there to identify with someone too and this would make a transgender and/or intersex person more intelligible to regularly sexed and gendered persons.

By looking at the exemplary portrayals of transgender characters in Paradisi’s *Un Baiser sous X*, Pagano’s *Les Adolescents Troglodytes* and Châtelet’s *La Tête en Bas* together, we get an impression of how much the desires and experiences of transgender persons can vary. Each protagonist holds a different position, in which biological sex, upbringing, institutions and informal social environment all play a role in both their choice of lived gender and their personal gender identity. Moreover, the authors give imaginative representations which point to ways in which being transgender can be lived despite the difficulties encountered due to the binary sex/gender norms and how the social environment is not only an impediment, but can also have enabling views on transgenderism and reactions to transgender persons. By writing on the controversial topic of transgenderism, Paradisi, Pagano and Châtelet enrich not only the literary field with a fascinating topic, which brings together the preoccupation with the body in contemporary French literature and its interest in gender, but also denaturalize the reader’s conventional conceptions of sex and gender by making felt what it can mean to be transgendered. Moreover, by writing on intersex

characters, Paradisi and Châtelet can decrease the general ignorance about the existence of intersexuality.

Sex and gender transgression is an overlooked topic in not only French literature, but also in the French academy, which even pays little attention to gender issues in general. In this thesis, I have shown that it is an important topic which should get more attention, especially since we are all constricted by the binary sex/gender norms. Throughout my thesis, I have pointed to a number of ways in which research on transgenderism in literature could be further developed. One could for example take an intercultural approach by also focusing on how writers like Nina Bouraoui and Tahar Ben Jelloun approach transgenderism in their works. Bouraoui writes on tomboyism in works like *Garçon Manqué*, like Châtelet does in *La Tête en Bas*, but in the case of Bouraoui's work, this is related to homosexuality and written in a franco-algerian context. Ben Jelloun focuses in his novels *L'Enfant de Sable* and *La Nuit Sacrée* on transgenderism in a Maghreb country, but unlike in Paradisi's, Pagano's and Châtelet's works, this transgenderism is enforced, since the father of the protagonist decides that his youngest daughter will be a boy in order not to be mocked anymore by others for the fact that he only has daughters and this girl will only come to live as female after the death of her father. A comparison between works on transgenderism in French and in English, like Jeffrey Eugenides' *Middlesex* and Jackie Kay's *Trumpet*, could also be enlightening. Especially a comparison of these two novels with Châtelet's *La Tête en Bas* would be interesting, since even though the three of them are very different when it comes to style and point of view, the English works have elements in common with Châtelet's novel: Eugenides writes on a character which has the same form of intersexuality—which is characterized by delayed penile development—as the protagonist in Châtelet's work and Kay points through her portrayal of a FTM-transgender trumpet player to music as an area in which gender is not important, like Châtelet does. There are thus several interesting ways in which we could further explore the exciting and important topic of gender transgression in literary research.

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