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The Transgender Tipping Point and Trans Representation
in Contemporary Young Adult (YA) Fiction

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PhD Gender Studies

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I hereby declare that this thesis has not been and will not be, submitted in whole or in part to another University for the award of any other degree.

Signature:

Summary

The Transgender Tipping Point was a phrase used by *Time* magazine in 2014 to describe the increased visibility of transgender people in popular culture. Visibility is often viewed as not just progress, but proof that the fight for transgender acceptance is nearly over. However, upon closer inspection it becomes clear that only certain types of trans narratives are highly visible. Those favoured in the media are ones which conform to idealised stereotypes of gender and sexuality, the masculine heterosexual man and the feminine heterosexual woman. As they become the template for expected (and thus acceptable) transition narratives, other types of trans identity become invisible and not palatable for a mainstream audience. This thesis explores how trans youth, who are noticeably absent in studies on youth and gender, are represented in Young Adult (YA) fiction and popular culture. Taking a cultural studies approach, I analyse not just the text of YA fiction, but also the production of these texts in relation to The Transgender Tipping Point. I explore strategies used in the production of fiction, such as self-publishing, which allow trans-identified authors a greater freedom in their storytelling. The packaging of trans identities to make them palatable (as either acceptable or something freakish that can be demonised) is a theme central to this thesis and is explored through detailed analysis of cover art, plotting, metaphor, temporal relationships and youth subcultures. The issue of visibility is further complicated for trans youth as certain types of media focus on the morality or negative 'issue' of youth transition, framing transition as dangerous and frightening in a way which recalls the earlier treatment of lesbian, gay and bisexual people in the press.

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Table of Contents

Abbreviations	7
Introduction	8
A Brief Note about Terminology	10
Background	11
The Transgender Tipping Point	16
Bathroom Bills and Essentialism	20
Methodology	22
Text Selection	29
Trans Youth in YA Literature	31
History of YA Fiction, Book Awards and Censorship	35
Chapter Outlines	45
 Chapter 1. Packaging Trans Youth Identities: Tropes, Visibility, and Non-Binary Erasure in YA Cover Art	 48
Current Interest in Transitioning Youth	49
Cover Art	50
Case Study: The (Cover) Art of Being Normal	56
Conclusion	64
Images	66
 Chapter 2. Far from Perfect: Transgender Enfreakment in <i>Almost Perfect</i>	 69
Freak Shows and Enfreakment	71
Staring and Types of Gaze	74
Freaks in Literature	78
Stereotypes and Essentialism	82
Sexuality	94
The Invisible Rural Queer	97
Conclusion	103

Chapter 3. Transgender Subculture and Temporality in Elliott Deline's

<i>Refuse</i>	105
Self-Publishing Novels for Trans Youth: 'The Freedom to be Dangerous'	109
Subculture	111
The Trans Community in <i>Refuse</i>	115
Homo-Narcissism, Sexuality, and Psychology	120
'Stretch Out and Wait' – Temporality and Morrissey in <i>Refuse</i>	128
Conclusion	139

Chapter 4. Unstable Structures: Homelessness and Exile in Trans Youth

Narratives	141
<i>Roving Pack</i>	144
<i>Brooklyn Burning</i>	144
Choice and Exile	145
Spatial and Spectral Geography	147
Transcendental Homelessness and the Flâneur	149
Blame and Choice	153
Abjection and the Uncanny Home	155
Faulty Plumbing and the Trans Body	163
Conclusion	166
Conclusion	169
Beyond the Transgender Tipping Point and Future Research	174
Bibliography	176

Abbreviations

AP – *Almost Perfect* by Brian Katcher

BB – *Brooklyn Burning* by Steve Brezenoff

RP – *Roving Pack* by Sassafras Lowrey

RF – *Refuse* by Elliott DeLine

TTP – The Transgender Tipping Point

Introduction

Bailey: "...did you really hack into the DMV? Why would you do that?"

Casey: "Because my old licence referred to me as female. The DMV where I was living wouldn't change it, so I did. I'm a proud trans man Dr Bailey."

- *Grey's Anatomy*, Season 14, Episode 9, "1-800-799-7233."

Grey's Anatomy is a long-running US medical drama which began in 2005 and has become known for its diverse characters and storylines.¹ In Season 14, Episode 9, "1-800-799-7233," the hospital's computer system has been hacked, leaving the doctors in chaos with limited access to supplies and computer-controlled systems. Casey Parker, one of the hospital's young interns, offers Dr Miranda Bailey some advice about what the FBI should be looking for to stop the hacker. But when Bailey asks him to tell them himself, Casey admits that he is not allowed to as he has a previous conviction for hacking into the DMV. Bailey tries to find out why but to begin with he won't tell her, simply saying his driving license was taking too long. Becoming frustrated with the FBI's efforts, Bailey gives Casey her laptop and says no one will ever know. Casey becomes the quiet hero of the episode when he manages to fix the system. But Bailey seems not to believe that Casey would hack the DMV simply because his driving licence was taking too long, and the exchange quoted at the top of page follows. The episode aired in 2018 and takes on an interesting reversal of the old trans stereotypes of trans people as criminals, deviants and deceivers. Casey *has* committed a crime, but we soon find out he did it because, as a trans person, he was oppressed by the law. Then he uses these criminal skills to save lives and help everyone he works with, knowing it will always be a secret between himself and Dr Bailey.

Alex Blue Davis, a trans actor, plays Casey whose characterisation is about more than just his transness. Krista Vernoff, one of the writers and producers of *Grey's Anatomy*,

1. Amy Long, "Diagnosing Drama: *Grey's Anatomy*, Blind Casting and the Politics of Representation," *The Journal of Popular Culture* 44, no. 5 (2011): 1067.

says in a *GLAAD Chats* video where she is interviewed by Anthony Ramos alongside Davis that she hadn't known before talking to GLAAD how underrepresented trans men were on television in comparison to trans women. GLAAD (formally known as the Gay and Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation) are an American organisation who monitor media representation of LGBTQ people and work towards cultural change and shaping media narratives with the aim of LGBTQ acceptance.² Davis is asked what it means to him to be part of changing what the rest of the world sees on television. He replies that his character can do and be so many more things than just be trans which he is really excited about. Vernoff explains that when Casey's coming out scene was first written they hadn't included the word trans in the dialogue and when they took the scene to the director he didn't understand what the scene was about. When Vernoff asked GLAAD for advice she realised that most people might never have seen a trans man on television before and that it was important to be clear and use the word trans. Davis adds that there is no expectation for his character to explain more about his gender than he wants to. Vernoff adds: "we wanted to say that his transness is one piece of this whole, vibrant, beautiful human being."³ This representation of a young trans man on TV feels like an evolutionary step that considers what viewers might have expected (criminal, deceiver) and turns those acts into something noble and proud. While this is a representation that should be celebrated, there are many other representations in the media which show no signs of such an evolution. There are also certain types of trans narratives which are barely represented at all. In this thesis I put those kinds of narratives in relation to the concept of The Transgender Tipping Point.

The Transgender Tipping Point (TTP) was a phrase used by *Time* magazine in 2014 to describe the increased visibility of transgender people in popular culture. Visibility is often viewed as not just progress, but proof that the fight for transgender acceptance is nearly over. However, upon closer inspection it becomes clear that only certain types of trans narratives are highly visible. Those favoured in the media are ones which

2. <https://www.glaad.org/about>

3. "Glaad Chats with Grey's Anatomy's Alex Blue Davis and Krista Vernoff," interview by Anthony Ramos, Jan 18, 2018, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=j8hFg57av6Q>.

conform to hegemonic gender roles, the masculine heterosexual man and the feminine heterosexual woman. As they become the template for expected (and thus acceptable) transition narratives, other types of trans identity become invisible. This thesis explores how trans youth, who are often absent in studies on youth and gender, are represented in Young Adult (YA) fiction and popular culture. Taking a cultural studies approach, I analyse not just the text of YA fiction, but also the production of these texts in relation to the TTP. I explore strategies used in the production of fiction, such as self-publishing, which allow trans-identified authors a greater freedom in their storytelling. The packaging of trans identities to make them palatable for mainstream audiences (as either acceptable or something freakish that can be demonised) is a theme central to this thesis and is explored through detailed analysis of cover art, plot, metaphor, temporal relationships and youth subcultures. The issue of visibility is further complicated for trans youth as certain types of media focus on the morality or negative “issue” of youth transition, framing transition as dangerous and frightening in a way which recalls the earlier treatment of lesbian, gay and bisexual people in the press.

A Brief Note About Terminology

Throughout this thesis I use a variety of words associated with gender identities, dependent both on my own experience and understanding of gender and on the way a character or person self-identifies. Susan Stryker makes a note in *Transgender History* that there is a seemingly endless array of terms used to describe genders, and as such grouping them all under the label “transgender” requires transgender to be a very flexible term. She also notes the importance of paying attention to who is using the word and why.⁴ I have tried to take the same open-minded and flexible approach to identities in this thesis. However, the landscape of trans identity and specifically the language used to describe it is always evolving, and words I may use now could have become outdated in only a few years. Therefore, it is important for me to make clear that I have used a combination of terms which I hope encompasses current trends in

4. Susan Stryker, *Transgender History* (Berkeley: Seal Press, 2008), 23.

the language used and, as a priority, reflects self-identification. I often use the word “trans” in my writing as shorthand and hope that, in the same way Stryker describes, this will be taken not as a rigid set of identities, but one that is flexible. Next, I will provide some context for how this project began with the aim of clarifying why representation of young trans people is so important to the current fight for transgender rights.

Background

I began taking an interest in YA fiction with LGBTQ+ content during my master’s degree, when I took a class on children’s literature and another on young adult literature. As part of my essay for the young adult literature class I researched the number of YA fiction titles published from 2000 – 2009 with LGBTQ+ content in the USA. To find out exactly how many YA books with LGBTQ+ content there were I used *The Hornbook Guide Online*, an American website and journal which publishes critical reviews of almost every hardback trade book for young people in the USA, and *The Heart Has its Reasons: Young Adult Literature with Gay/Lesbian/Queer Content, 1969 - 2004* by Cart and Jenkins, which provides a detailed overview of 35 years of YA fiction with LGBTQ+ content. I found that of the 4000 hardback YA titles published in 2009 in USA, only 26 of those were recognised as having LGBTQ+ content.

In the US and UK there is a small but growing market for trans YA novels (by this I mean YA novels with a trans lead character or character who shares the lead), and in the years since 2009 more titles have appeared. I kept returning in my thoughts to how few books there were for young people with LGBTQ+ content, and specifically trans content. I questioned why the number of books I could find was so small, and who might be writing and publishing them. I wrote some YA fiction of my own in an attempt to write the story I could never find when I was growing up, a story with a non-binary main character which blended elements of horror with a coming-of-age story, and ended up workshopping this at the Lambda Literary Writer’s Retreat for Emerging LGBTQ Voices in 2013. As part of the Lambda YA workshop I spoke to other LGBTQ+ authors and gained some insight into what is expected of YA and its content, quickly

learning that my own work would be deemed inappropriate by mainstream publishers. How did authors get around this? Authors like Elliott DeLine and Sassafras Lowrey went the route of self-publishing, bypassing censorship to tell trans stories I wasn't finding in the mainstream YA novels. Why were some narratives deemed acceptable and others not? Whose stories were being told?

The Transgender Tipping Point was a phrase coined just before I began my PhD and became an ideal pivot to explain the privileging of binary transgender narratives that I was seeing in books, film and on TV, but also highlighted just how narrow this privileging was. Even stories that fit closely with an idealised transition narrative saw characters portrayed as deviant, freakish and tragic, recalling the gay and lesbian stereotypes seen in the media in previous decades. Because transgender people were suddenly more visible in the media there was a sense the battle for trans rights was nearly over, and that visibility must equal acceptance. But this hid another problem, that for all the positives of increased visibility, those whose stories were not privileged became more deviant and freakish than before. In March 2018, US president Donald Trump attempted to ban transgender people from serving in the US military, undoing former president Barack Obama's repeal of the ban.⁵ Judge Marsha Pechman ruled in the following month that transgender people could not be excluded from the military as they are a protected class of people due to a long history of systemic oppression and because they: "lack the relative political power to protect themselves from wrongful discrimination."⁶ Far from being over, the battle for trans rights and recognition is ongoing. "Bathroom bills" are another example of the continuing attempts to dehumanize trans people which happen alongside victories or positive events such as trans actors playing trans characters on mainstream TV shows like *Grey's Anatomy*. The controversial House Bill 2 (HB2), known as the "Bathroom Bill" in North Carolina, continued the demonization of transgender people in the USA. HB2 stipulated that people must use the bathroom which corresponds to their: "biological

5. "Trump Signs New Transgender Military Ban – BBC News," *BBC News*, accessed May 15, 2018, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-us-canada-43525549>.

6. "Karnoski vs. Trump," *Lambda Legal*, accessed May 23, 2018, <https://www.lambdalegal.org/in-court/cases/karnoski-v-trump>.

sex.”⁷ Although HB2 was repealed in North Carolina in 2017, 16 US states considered similar legislation. Also in 2017, 14 states considered legislation that would restrict the rights of transgender school children.⁸

The divide between visibility and invisibility, and between trans people as monsters and trans people as civil rights heroes that was playing out in the press, literature, and popular culture, fascinated me. For instance, the visibility of transgender children and youth was also a growing concern in the media, with the increase in trans representation in popular culture seemingly blamed for young people coming out at increasingly younger ages, as though they were victims of influence. This positions youth transition as a moral issue that needed to be solved. It becomes the fault of parents, schools, TV, literature, doctors, trans people and anyone else deemed to be “promoting” trans identities. My choice of the word promoting is deliberate, as I am reminded of Section 28 in the UK, which was a clause of the Local Government Act. The act stated that a local authority: “shall not intentionally promote homosexuality or publish material with the intention of promoting homosexuality,” or: “promote the teaching in any maintained school of the acceptability of homosexuality as a pretended family relationship.”⁹ Thankfully Section 28 was abolished on March 29, 2001, but for LGBTQ+ youth this didn’t immediately reverse all the damage done, just as the TTP, for all its good aspects, does not mean trans youth are suddenly accepted in all corners of society.

Why have I chosen to focus on youth? The example above of my master’s research was not just a set of figures I compiled, but something I had felt in my own childhood and adolescence – an absence of anyone who was quite like me, something I felt inside was different about me but I didn’t know what. I never saw that in the books I was reading,

7. *House Bill 2*, Sess. Of 2016-3 (North Carolina),

<https://www.ncleg.net/Sessions/2015E2/Bills/House/PDF/H2v4.pdf>, 1.

8. Joellen Kralik, “Bathroom Bill” *Legislative Tracking*,” accessed May 27, 2018, <http://www.ncsl.org/research/education/-bathroom-bill-legislative-tracking635951130.aspx>.

9. “Local Government Act,” *Legislation.gov.uk*, accessed May 15, 2018, <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1988/9/section/28/enacted>.

expect perhaps in the way that Kathryn Bond Stockton describes as: “fictions-with-a-gay-child-ghosted-in-them.”¹⁰ The gay child as a ghost has a relationship to the word gay which Stockton describes as a haunting, a complicated and terrifying future connection to the word. This fictional ghostly gay child, when read by a queer adult, may evoke a variety of memories and associations, particularly a wish to twist time sideways to avoid growing up and facing the fear of what this child may become.¹¹ On TV, Robin in *Batman* is just one example, says Stockton, of a character that gay people might have “found themselves” in. I can relate this to my understanding of the 1978 - 1979 TV portrayal of George in *Enid Blyton’s Famous Five*. When I was about 7 or 8, somewhere around 1990, my mum bought a VHS of three episodes of the series from Woolworth’s, and I watched it repeatedly. Neither of us remember whether it was intended for me, my brother or both of us, but it seems unlikely I would have picked it myself as I hadn’t been particularly interested in the book series. I was familiar enough, though, with the original books to know about George’s hatred of being a girl and doing “girly” things. In the 1970s TV version the stories are told in a contemporary setting, rather than the original time span the books were published in of 1942 - 1963.¹² The first character I saw in the intro was George, who rides through a field towards the camera on a BMX, skidding in the mud as her name appears at the bottom of the screen. A brief freeze-frame shows her holding the handlebars and wearing a boyish jacket with a blue panel on the front, short hair windswept and an expression on her face of happy exhaustion from riding around in the mud on a sunny afternoon. Seeing George on screen, played by Michele Gallagher, I remember feeling convinced for quite some time that George *was* in fact a boy, despite knowing from the books that she wasn’t. I never saw the rest of the series but I watched *Five Go to Smuggler’s Top Part 1* and *Part 2*, and *Five Go Off in a Caravan* (dir. Peter Duffell) many times. Looking back, I see myself with a connection to George, the tomboy antithesis to the character Anne who enjoyed all things stereotypically feminine. The feeling I had then

10. Kathryn Bond Stockton, *The Queer Child, or Growing Sideways in the Twentieth Century* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2009), 4.

11. Stockton, *The Queer Child*, 3.

12. “The Famous Five by Enid Blyton,” *Enid Blyton Society*, last modified May 2, 2018, <http://www.enidblytonsociety.co.uk/famous-five.php>.

wasn't something so concrete yet as feeling like I was a boy, or not a girl, but I "found myself" in George for a moment in time. However, this reflection is I think, really, my reading of this character as a trans adult recalling George as a trans and/or queer child ghosted in fiction.

At high school in the UK in the 1990s I didn't understand why my teachers were so reluctant to acknowledge what I was struggling with and the reasons I was being bullied; it wasn't just reluctance on their part, but fear of being seen to "promote" queer life just by talking about it. They may not have condemned it, being caring people and good teachers in the majority of cases, but they were evasive. So, when I see so much in recent media about trans children and youth, it is with a joint sense of hope and heartbreak. They can call themselves trans because they know what it means, but they are scrutinised and demonised as much as they are celebrated. Stockton argues that terms such as "gay child" are applied retrospectively in adulthood as a "self-ghosting" technique. But what about the young person who *can* call themselves a trans child in the present? Stockton explains why TV shows can offer new segments dedicated to trans children because there does not need to be reference to sexuality in relation to these young people, making it different from the experience of a queer child.¹³ However, having the right words to describe yourself if you identify as trans from a young age does not mean that growing up becomes linear. For LGBTQ+ youth growing up is not always marked by a linear progression through heteronormative conventions like marriage and having children. Halberstam describes "queer time" as a temporality marked by diminished or uncertain futures, leading to an emphasis on the present.¹⁴ The present is also about compression, where as much as possible must be squeezed out of the time remaining. In the same way that Stockton argues that the queer child grows or twists sideways, Julian Carter suggests that trans temporalities can move sideways through time which I will discuss in Chapter 3. This non-linear way of growing is particularly relevant to transgender youth who find ways of imagining possible futures by having transition goals or belonging to

13. Stockton, *The Queer Child*, 8.

14. J. Jack Halberstam, *In a Queer Time and Place: Transgender Bodies, Subcultural Lives* (New York: New York University Press, 2005), 2.

a subculture, ideas which are seen throughout the fictional narratives discussed in this thesis. However, as I have suggested so far binary trans narratives are given privilege in popular culture and the idea that trans people are now visible because of this leaves non-binary narratives hidden. To illustrate this point further the TTP and the divide between visible and invisible trans narrative will now be discussed in more detail.

The Transgender Tipping Point

The term The Transgender Tipping Point appears to have its origins in a *Time* magazine article called “America’s Transition” by Katy Steinmetz in the June 2014 issue. The cover of the issue features American actress Laverne Cox, known for her role in the television series *Orange is the New Black*, next to the words: “The Transgender Tipping Point: America’s Next Civil Rights Frontier.” Steinmetz states on the first page of the article that transgender people: “are emerging from the margins to fight for an equal place in society” and calls this emergence “transparency”, making the claim that this transparency is improving life for transgender people. Within the article are photos of 15-year-old Ashton Lee, 17-year-old Cassidy Lynn Campbell, and 18-year-old Victoria Avalos, as well as academic Paisley Currah and Jamie Ewing who was discharged from the National Guard. Although Cox and her celebrity are the initial attraction, the article also focuses on issues specific to youth, including discussion of generational differences for those transitioning in their teens and early twenties in the present, to those who transitioned in middle-age before internet access was wide-spread. Rose Hayes, a software-engineering director at Google, transitioned in early middle-age and feels certain that had she been born later her experience would have been much better.¹⁵ Increased awareness is credited as giving more possibilities to youth, for example the election of 17-year-old trans girl Cassidy Lynn Campbell as home-coming queen at a Californian High School.¹⁶ However, negative comments online affected Campbell, leading her to post a tearful YouTube video. Steinmetz cites the 2011 National Transgender Discrimination Survey which found that almost 80% of trans

15. Katy Steinmetz, “America’s Transition,” *Time*, June 2014, 43.

16. Steinmetz, “America’s Transition,” 44.

youth have been harassed at school.¹⁷ Ashton Lee, a 15-year-old trans activist filed a petition with more than 5000 signatures to support a law ensuring he has access to the boy's bathroom at school and is allowed to play on male sports teams.¹⁸ Mac Davis, an 11-year-old trans boy, found that sports are an outlet for his "bad days" and has been allowed to play on the male basketball team at school.¹⁹ The closing line of the article is quote from Laverne Cox in response to a child who has been bullied, showing a consideration for youth and the importance of their acceptance: "We need to protect our children," she says, 'and allow them to be themselves."²⁰ At the beginning of the article Cox described being bullied at school herself and attempting suicide, outlining early in the article how important visibility for trans youth could be.²¹ Visibility, in Steinmetz's article, is key to better lives for trans people. Cox says "[m]ore of us are living visibly and pursuing our dreams visibly, so people can say, 'Oh yeah, I know someone who is trans.' When people have points of reference that are humanizing, that demystifies difference."²² Trans people are indeed more visible within Western media, and the number of children in the UK seeking treatment at the Tavistock and Portman gender identity development service (GIDS) increased by 25% in 2017/18 compared to the previous year. Dr Polly Carmichael of the Tavistock and Portman NHS Foundation Trust says that there is no single cause for this increase but notes that there is greater public awareness of treatments for young adults.²³ This is obviously a good thing if it means that more young people are potentially able to seek help with transitioning. However, on examination of statistics around hate-crime towards transgender people in the USA (where the TTP phrase originated) it would hardly seem that we are at a tipping point. Interestingly it is the same author in *Time*, Steinmetz, who wrote in August 2015 that: "Transgender People are Being Murdered at a Historic

17. Steinmetz, 44.

18. Steinmetz, 46.

19. Steinmetz, 46.

20. Steinmetz, 46.

21. Steinmetz, 40.

22. Steinmetz, 40.

23. "GIDS Referrals Increase in 2017/18," *The Tavistock and Portman*, accessed April 8, 2019, <https://tavistockandportman.nhs.uk/about-us/news/stories/gids-referrals-increase-201718/>.

Rate.”²⁴ Certain transgender narratives, such as those which fit gender binaries or follow a formula seen in medical diagnosis are given privilege over non-binary identities, which are almost non-existent in this “large amount of media attention.” Alok Vaid-Menon of art collective Darkmatter wrote an article published on *The Guardian* website called “Greater Transgender Visibility Hasn’t Helped Non-Binary People – Like Me.” They say in relation to the TTP and the *Time* article:

...putting trans celebrities on pedestals doesn’t translate into safety for those of us who are visibly gender nonconforming ... I remember all the times I have been called a freak, an ‘it’ and ugly. To refuse to participate in the gender binary –the idea that there are only ‘masculinity’ and ‘femininity’ which exist in opposition – is to be considered a monster.²⁵

They also point out that while there are some positives associated with increased visibility, trans celebrities still tend to fall within the stereotypical masculine or feminine norms of mainstream media. Another quote, although prefaced with the personal “for me”, as Vaid-Menon is talking about themselves, is a good summary of what the TTP represents:

...yet another form of exclusion because it recognizes only those trans people who make claims to ‘real’ womanhood or manhood. Transgender people who present a fixed male or female identity are regarded as representative of all of us. And I wonder if their acceptance by society is less a reflection of progress than a question of palatability.

24. Katy Steinmetz, “Why Transgender People are being Murdered at a Historic Rate,” *Time*, accessed April 8, 2019, <http://time.com/3999348/transgender-murders-2015/>.

25. Alok Vaid-Menon, “Greater transgender visibility hasn’t helped non-binary people – like me,” *The Guardian*, accessed May 15, 2018, <http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2015/oct/13/greater-transgender-visibility-hasnt-helped-nonbinary-people-like-me>.

Reality TV celebrity and former athlete Caitlyn Jenner, who is often mentioned alongside Laverne Cox as a highly visible transgender woman, was the subject of an article in *Cosmopolitan* for comments she made in a *Time* magazine interview. She said to *Time*: “[i]f you look like a man in a dress, it makes people feel uncomfortable,” and goes on to talk about putting people at ease when a trans person: “authentically... looks and plays the role.”²⁶ Again, there is pressure to make yourself palatable according to a binary gender code as a trans person. The TTP then, can be interpreted as a sign for those it is being marketed to that there has been enough progress for trans people already. It becomes part of a current mythology that transgender people are already accepted by society.

Although it may be difficult to quantify the exact moment the TTP is supposed to have occurred, it seems fair to use 2014 as the year of the TTP based on the publication date of the *Time* magazine article which originated the phrase. With that in mind I am calling the years 2004 – 2013 pre-TTP (2004 being the year of *Luna*’s publication, considered the first YA with significant trans content) and 2014 onwards post-TTP. This will make it easier to identify any significant patterns in content, authorship, cover art, or otherwise. It should be noted that although the years immediately preceding the TTP can be viewed as the “build up,” the TTP is more a roughly-timed cultural concept than a concrete event. It is, however, useful as it allows us to imagine trends on a timeline. To get a picture of the increased visibility which is supposed to have led to the TTP it is helpful to look not only at events in the media but also scholarship in literary, cultural and youth studies to highlight the context in which this thesis sits. Before exploring the theoretical contexts I will give an overview of how “Bathroom Bills” and transgender people have been portrayed in the media, as it is useful to consider this rhetoric and its relationship to current portrayals of trans youth in fictional narratives.

26. Katy Steinmetz, “Caitlyn Jenner on Privilege, Reality TV and Deciding to Come Out,” *Time*, accessed April 8, 2019, <http://time.com/4142000/time-person-of-the-year-runner-up-caitlyn-jenner-interview/>.

Bathroom Bills and Essentialism

In Chapter 1 I will explore the connection to bathrooms and gendered symbols relating to bathrooms on cover art of YA fiction, showing how these link to the scare tactics used in Bathroom Bill campaigning and myths about transgender people. It is useful to provide some background here on what bathroom bills are, particularly the controversial House Bill 2 (HB2), known as the “Bathroom Bill,” in North Carolina and how they feed into the continuing demonization of transgender people in the USA.

HB2’s official title is: “An Act to Provide for Single-Sex Multiple Occupancy Bathroom and Changing Facilities in Schools and Public Agencies and to Create Statewide Consistency in Regulation of Employment and Public Accommodations” and it attempts to prevent transgender people using the bathroom or changing facility that corresponds with their gender identity. Instead the bill stipulates that people must use the bathroom which corresponds to their “biological sex” which is defined in the bill as: “[t]he physical condition of being male or female, which is stated on a person's birth certificate.”²⁷ Although HB2 was repealed in North Carolina in 2017, there were 16 US states in the same year which considered similar legislation. Also in 2017, 14 states considered legislation that would restrict the rights of transgender school children.²⁸ Despite the repeal of HB2, North Carolina replaced HB2 with House Bill 142 (HB 142). While HB142 means that people can, in theory, use the bathroom of the gender they identify with, it does not offer trans people any protection should they face repercussions. It also cannot force private business to comply with bathroom rules and prevents non-discrimination ordinance until the end of 2020.²⁹ Journalists

27. *House Bill 2*, Sess. Of 2016-3 (North Carolina),

<https://www.ncleg.net/Sessions/2015E2/Bills/House/PDF/H2v4.pdf>, 1.

28. Joellen Kralik, “Bathroom Bill” *Legislative Tracking*,” accessed May 27, 2018, <http://www.ncsl.org/research/education/-bathroom-bill-legislative-tracking635951130.aspx>.

29. Elliott C. McLaughlin, “North Carolina’s HB142: Repeal? Compromise? What Does It All Mean?,” *CNN*, last modified March 30, 2017, <https://edition.cnn.com/2017/03/30/us/north-carolina-hb2-repeal-hb142-explainer/index.html>.

have argued that HB142 is no better than HB2 for LGBTQ+ people.³⁰ These bills create fear, especially attempts to reinforce the notion that transgender women assault women in public bathrooms, framing transgender people as a threat.³¹ Proposition 1 was a referendum in November 2015 for or against the Houston Equal Rights Ordinance (HERO), which “protects Houston residents and visitors from discrimination in housing, employment and business services based on sexual orientation, gender identity, race, religion and 11 other characteristics.”³² The “Campaign for Houston,” which urged people to vote “No” on Proposition 1, portrays transgender people (specifically transgender women in this case who they call “men”) as paedophiles and sex offenders in their campaign propaganda. Opponents argued that this infringed on religious freedoms and posed a danger to women.³³ There is no subtlety here, with the words “Registered Sex Offenders” appearing on-screen in a 40 second advert paid for HERO opponents.³⁴ The advert ends with a young child being cornered in a toilet cubicle by an adult who is dressed in typically male attire.

“No Men in Women’s Bathrooms,” the slogan used by the Campaign for Houston, frames transgender women as sexually perverse, a stereotype which Susan Stryker and Joel Sanders argue is perpetuated on their website.³⁵ It is helpful to keep this

30. Mark Joseph Stern, “HB2 Repeal Bill is a Disaster for North Carolina and LGBTQ Rights,” *PBS*, last modified March 30, 2017, http://www.slate.com/blogs/outward/2017/03/30/hb2_repeal_bill_is_a_disaster_for_north_carolina_and_lgbtq_rights.html; Corinne Segal, “What the North Carolina legislation to repeal the HB2 ‘bathroom bill’ actually says,” *PBS*, accessed May 15, 2018, <https://www.pbs.org/newshour/nation/watch-live-nc-legislature-debates-repeal-hb2-bathroom-bill>.

31. Shane M. Graber, “The Bathroom Boogeyman: A qualitative analysis of how the Houston Chronicle framed the Equal Rights Ordinance,” *Journalism Practice* 12, no.7 (2018): 877.

32. Corinne Segal, “What the North Carolina Legislation to Repeal the HB2 ‘Bathroom Bill’ Actually Says,” *PBS*, accessed May 27, 2018, <https://www.pbs.org/newshour/nation/watch-live-nc-legislature-debates-repeal-hb2-bathroom-bill>.

33. Graber, “The Bathroom Boogeyman,” 870.

34. “Campaign for Houston TV Commercial,” Oct 12, 2015, video, <https://youtu.be/WYpko86x6GU>.

35. Joel Sanders and Susan Stryker, “Stalled: Gender-Neutral Public Bathrooms,” *South Atlantic Quarterly* 115, no. 4 (2016): 780.

information in mind when we explore the case studies presented in Chapter 1, as much of the “palatable” trans identity represented reinforces the gender stereotypes that feed dangerous trans-exclusionary rhetoric. There are strategies that trans youth use to resist and cope with these oppressive structures in the dominant culture, such as finding belonging in youth subcultures. I will outline this with an overview of the relevant works of Stuart Hall, one of the founders of the discipline of cultural studies, before moving onto discussion of other relevant theoretical contexts in studies of youth, literature and trans youth online culture.

Methodology

Cultural studies describes the field this thesis sits in broadly, but I have used various theoretical approaches to my analysis. Cultural studies has been largely derived from humanities and literary studies, but also draws on the social sciences and sociology.³⁶ Stuart Hall’s writing on the way discourses are produced and consumed, and his research on youth subcultures are useful for understanding YA fiction with trans youth characters. Hall’s work in the 1960s and 70s led him to be regarded as one of cultural studies’ most influential thinkers. He wrote on a wide range of topics including Thatcherism, race, racism and identity.³⁷ Hall himself credited cultural studies as emerging from the 1950s as a result of works by Hoggart, Williams, and E.P Thomson who explored change and the reaction to change in society. They did this by “reading” working class culture as though it were a literary text, giving meaning to patterns and arrangements.³⁸ There is no single definition of what culture is, and it remains a complex concept. Traditionally there had been distinctions between high and low culture, with art held up as such an example of high culture. But in their break away from traditional thinking, authors like Hoggart, Williams and Thomson set about describing culture not in terms of separating out its elements into high and low, but by

36. Michael Pickering, ed, *Research Methods for Cultural Studies* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2008), 3.

37. James Procter, *Stuart Hall* (London: Routledge, 2004), 3.

38. Stuart Hall, “Cultural Studies: Two Paradigms,” *Media, Culture and Society* 2, no. 1 (1980): 57.

exploring how all social practices in general combine to create whole lived experiences.³⁹ Hall worked to unsettle distinctions between high and popular culture, and situated popular culture as a serious area of academic study because he believed that the struggles between dominant and marginalised groups in society are fought at the site of popular culture. Just as the term culture was difficult to define, popular was also problematic, with Hall describing what is popular not as a definable “thing”, but something we can only understand in relation to the cultural forces surrounding it.⁴⁰

This thesis, in particular Chapter 1 which focuses on cultural production, uses a similar approach to the one set out by Hall in “Encoding/Decoding.”⁴¹ Hall describes how traditionally linear conceptual models of the process of communication focus too much on the actual exchange of messages and not on this process as a: “complex structure in dominance,” where institutional power relations are “imprinted” onto each stage of the process. If no meaning can be taken from a discourse, Hall argues, then there can be no “consumption” of that discourse. In the example of a television newscast, Hall says that “[i]n the moment when a historical event passes under the sign of discourse, it is subject to all the complex formal ‘rules’ by which language signifies. To put it paradoxically, the event must become a ‘story’ before it can become a communicative event.”⁴² Throughout this thesis I use the terms palatable and sellable to signify this same idea for the transgender narrative and its production and audience. Discourses need to be meaningfully encoded to be understood, and there are certain visual signs which have been universally understood, producing a “natural” recognition which conceal coding practices. Foucault understood discourse not as simply connected written or spoken statements, but as the language that enables representation of a topic, moving discourse from the purely linguistic (what is said) to

39. Hall, “Cultural Studies: Two Paradigms,” 60.

40. Procter, *Stuart Hall*, 11 - 12.

41. Stuart Hall, “Encoding/Decoding,” in *The Cultural Studies Reader*, 2nd edition, ed. Simon During (London: Routledge, 1999), 508 – 517.

42. Hall, “Encoding/Decoding,” 509.

practice (what is done).⁴³ Martin Barker describes how discourse analysis is often concerned with theories of identity, language in society and 'giving voice' to marginalised groups.⁴⁴ A problem with researching cultural discourse is that discourses are constantly produced and reproduced, making it difficult to pin down the point of origin. When examining in the media, for example, the idea of The Transgender Tipping Point, we can argue that the *Time* article by Steinmetz may have originated the phrase but the processes that led to the tipping point will have been produced in many disparate ways over several years and cannot solely be attributed to a single media article. However, what can be suggested is that the media as a powerful institution of mass communication are in a position to influence the process of making meaning. Pickering argues that consumption is deeply entwined with culture and must be seen as a form of cultural practice.⁴⁵ The lines between cultural production and consumption frequently blur and discourse moves across cultural sites. The relationship between media and consumer discourses is complex, and this complexity has been reflected in the shift in terminology from 'audience' to 'cultural consumer.'⁴⁶ Cultural production and consumption are entwined, as for a product to be made sense of the consumer must produce meanings.⁴⁷

Also relevant to my thesis is Hall's work on youth subcultures. Together with Clarke, Jefferson and Roberts, Hall describes how the dominant culture portrays itself as the only culture, containing all other cultures within it. Cultures other than the dominant one become subordinate and struggle to exist within the dominant culture's

43. Stuart Hall, "Foucault: Power, Knowledge and Discourse," in *Discourse Theory and Practice: A Reader*, eds. Margaret Wetherell, Stephanie Taylor and Simeon Yates (London: Sage Publications, 2001), 72.

44. Martin Barker, "Analysing Discourse," in *Research Methods for Cultural Studies*, ed. Michael Pickering (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2008), 155.

45. Pickering, *Research Methods*, 7.

46. Pickering, 7-8.

47. Anneke Meyer, "Investigating Cultural Consumers," in *Research Methods for Cultural Studies*, ed. Michael Pickering, (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2008), 68.

hegemonic order.⁴⁸ Youth culture as a term is problematic, just as culture and popular are, in that it is hard to define as a singular descriptor, rather it is about the relations of youth and subcultures to class and style. Subcultures are explored by Clarke et al. as situational responses of working- and middle-class youth to societal changes and struggles.⁴⁹ The subculture – the subordinate class – uses strategies to resist and cope with the dominant culture. However, these strategies often do not solve the problems faced by the subculture in terms of creating a solution, but rather they may solve it in an imaginary way such as Teddy Boys dressing in an upper-class style to “cover” gaps between themselves and the dominant culture.⁵⁰ McRobbie describes Hall et al.’s approach as giving: “an account of the relations between media texts ... and the state and politics.”⁵¹ Hall et al. show how important the “micrological politics of meaning” are in even one single television program.⁵²

As well as cultural studies, I make use of textual analysis in the form of narrative and discourse analysis, and the theory of emplotment. Narratology often analyses the structure and technical aspects of a narrative without considering what is outside the narrative.⁵³ However, Paul Ricoeur proposes a distinction between narratology and emplotment which considers the social contexts of narratives. Ricoeur’s approach explores what narrative does rather than its structure, looking at relationships between story, producer, audience and meaning.⁵⁴

Part of Jay Prosser’s work in *Second Skins* describes the narrative structures which appear frequently in transgender autobiography and he compares the writing of autobiography to the initial doctor’s appointment where the trans person must tell

48. John Clarke, Stuart Hall, Tony Jefferson and Brian Roberts, “Subcultures, Cultures and Class,” in *Resistance through Rituals: Youth Subcultures in Post-War Britain*, 2nd ed., eds. Stuart Hall and Tony Jefferson (London: Routledge, 2006), 1–60.

49. Clarke et al., “Subcultures,” 11.

50. Clarke et al., 34 – 37.

51. Angela McRobbie, *The Uses of Cultural Studies* (London: Sage Publications, 2005), 16.

52. McRobbie, *Cultural Studies*, 16.

53. Lawler, “Stories,” 33.

54. Lawler, 33.

their story in order to be diagnosed. The “required” story is one that relies on early transgender identification, with flashbacks recounting very early childhood memories of expected events such as dressing in clothing of “the other” gender or wishing to receive the gifts given to other-gendered siblings at special occasions. These early childhood association stories in trans YA often feel awkwardly placed, like an “infodump” in the narrative to normalise the transgender experience as one the reader would expect. Prosser’s description of the archetypal trans autobiography could almost be a template for many of the trans YA novels:

...transsexuality emerges as an archetypal story structured around shared tropes and fulfilling a particular narrative organisation of consecutive stages: suffering and confusion; the epiphany of self-discovery; corporeal and social transformation/conversion; and finally the arrival ‘home’ – the reassignment.⁵⁵

Home in this case is of course not geographical, and as I will discuss in the chapters on freaks and homelessness, finding “home” in the felt and bodily senses is almost immediately followed by a relocation of the geographical home.

For the fictional version of the transition story it is as though the clinical narrative (the one told to a doctor) and what Prosser terms as the second autobiography are one and the same. The fictional character tells their story using the same archetypal narrative, but the difference for trans youth characters is that due to their age they may not have reached the doctor’s office yet. This clinical narrative is for the reader, and is told in a way that a fearful trans person may tell a doctor – sticking to the formula in hope of being correctly diagnosed and understood. As Prosser points out, to diagnose a person as transgender, the primary diagnostic tool is the patient’s narrative. The “trapped in the wrong body” trope Prosser writes about in 1998 shows no signs of leaving the cultural lexicon. Prosser explains that: “[t]he story the transsexual tells the clinician must mirror or echo the diagnosis, its details matching or varying those of this master

55. Jay Prosser, *Second Skins: The Body Narrative of Transsexuality*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998), 101.

narrative.”⁵⁶ The clinician polices the patient’s access to medical technology by being part-priest listening to a confession and part-detective decoding the “truth” of the narrative. For the trans youth, parents may also be a policing authority and the narrative heard in the same way – they are listening to their child confess and also deciding whether there is “truth” in the narrative or whether it is “just a phase” or even some kind of mental illness or danger. There is often suspicion around the trans narrative which has fed the formation of the master narrative:

Psychologists Leah Cahan Schaefer and Connie Christine Wheeler have astutely observed that it is in part this tendency among some clinicians to approach the transsexual subject as a suspect text – a lack of understanding from the medical establishment of the difficulty in rendering transsexuality as a story – that may provoke transsexuals to ‘falsify’ histories in the first place.⁵⁷

Narrative in that case is as Prosser writes “our keenest weapon” and a reflection of how able we are to represent ourselves. It is hard enough to tell the “right” story as an adult, but with the extra layer of parental gatekeeping the youth faces even more layers of narrative scrutiny. Prosser argues that what many critics have failed to consider is that the consistent and continuous nature of transsexual narratives, whether today or in the nineteenth- or early twentieth-century, are the very thing which has produced medical discourse, making transsexual diagnosis a “recognition of the ‘trans-history’ [...] of trans narratives.”⁵⁸ These historical and medical trans narratives play out their continuity in the novels which utilise the set tropes of the master narrative. In non-fiction narratives audiences have an expectation of truth and adherence to intelligibility norms.⁵⁹ Personal narratives draw from available cultural narratives and examining narratives allows for the subject to be conceptualised in time and space.⁶⁰ It is this close relationship to non-fiction narratives as well as the idea of

56. Prosser, *Second Skins*, 104.

57. Prosser, 111.

58. Prosser, 101.

59. Lawler, 44.

60. Lawler, 44.

emplotment which leads me to draw on not only cultural studies, narratology, and discourse analysis in this thesis but also literary theory, media studies, sociology, psychology, disability studies, youth studies, gender studies, trans studies, queer studies, philosophy and law. The fictional narrative and the non-fictional narrative can barely be separated in trans YA, and the relationships to institutions of power which effect trans youth play out in the fictional narratives as well as their production.

A drawback of narrative research is that a researcher may seem to have ‘free reign’ in their interpretation of a text, however if the narrative does not speak for itself (without the need for analysis) then hermeneutic theory would suggest that all readers will have their own interpretation.⁶¹ Lawler argues that although hermeneutic theory deals with a range of interpretations this range is not infinite. Consumers are not simply passive receivers.⁶² Everything we interpret comes to us mediated through cultural influences, and cultural texts are polysemic in nature.⁶³ Just because there are a range of interpretations does not mean that in research ‘anything goes’ with relation to analysis.⁶⁴ The limits of narrative research must be acknowledged – narratives can give insight into social worlds but are always bound up in interpretation.⁶⁵

It is my aim not only to analyse the text of YA novels but show the importance of the cultural contexts of these texts and the conditions under which they were produced. In this way I have gone beyond mere textual analysis to show how trans YA is subject to stereotypes and censorship, and how authors are turning to alternative methods of production such as self-publishing to challenge privileged narratives of trans adolescence. Cultural studies as a field is defined not by its methodology, which draws from an array of disciplines, but its areas of theoretical study, such as relationships of

61. Lawler, “Stories,” 46.

62. Meyer, “Investigating Cultural Consumers,” 72.

63. Lawler, 46; Meyer, 69, 71.

64. Lawler, 47.

65. Lawler, 47.

power, institutions, colonialism and postcolonialism.⁶⁶ It is these relationships of power and institutional influence that are “imprinted” onto each stage of the production of trans YA.

Text Selection

In my original search for primary texts I found more than 20 YA novels that I considered for inclusion. These were found through a combination of searching the catalogues of libraries and booksellers, reading blog posts and websites which curated lists of LGBTQ+ or trans fiction, word-of-mouth through colleagues and friends, academic journal searches, LGBTQ-specific literary venues such as Lambda Literary and reading lists of nominees for LGBT and YA book awards. The majority of these texts were American, with a small number from the UK and Australia. Aeron Davis outlines 3 considerations when choosing texts. First, the selection must be enough to support wider conclusions and be representative of the sample. Second, the quantity of texts may depend on the amount of time and space available to write about each text. Third, that the quantity will be decided in part by the number of texts available. Ways of increasing or decreasing a sample can include time spans, sticking to a particular media format and using key words.⁶⁷ It is usual in qualitative forms of textual analysis to focus on a small amount of texts in great detail, which is what I have done in this project.⁶⁸

Not every book I read in my original search is included in the main thesis. Firstly, this is simply an issue of the length and scope of the project and the amount of space each chapter needed to allow in-depth analysis of texts. Secondly there were books which featured some transgender themes or characters who identify as trans but were not the focus of the book. For example, *Jumpstart the World* (2010) is about a cisgender

66. Sarah Pink, “Analysing Visual Experience,” in *Research Methods for Cultural Studies*, ed. Michael Pickering (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2008), 129; Tony Bennett, *Culture A Reformer’s Science* (London: Sage Publications, 1998), 27.

67. Aeron Davis, “Investigating Cultural Producers,” in *Research Methods for Cultural Studies*, ed. Michael Pickering (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2008), 57.

68. Davis, “Investigating Cultural Producers,” 57.

teenager called Elle who is living alone for the first time and has a crush on her neighbour Frank, whom she discovers is transgender. Although Frank's journey is a key part of the book, the focus is on Elle's own struggles and coming-of-age journey. This is different to *Almost Perfect* (2009), which is also from the point of view of a cisgender character, Logan, but focuses on the protagonist's relationship with a transgender girl called Sage, with Sage's gender identity and journey the main source of material for the plot and Sage as much the main character as Logan.

In the analysis of cover art I included 15 trans YA novels. By "trans YA novels" I mean those which have either a transgender character as the protagonist or, like *Almost Perfect*, have a trans character in a leading role with their gender identity the main focus of the book. To fully explore the representation of transgender identity in YA fiction I wanted to examine the paratext, representations of binary gender, non-binary gender, books published by both mainstream publishers and self-published, and also books authored by both cisgender and trans authors. I hope the texts show this range and how these factors play into the overall creation of trans characters, privileging of binary narratives, the main themes which appear consistently in such novels, and the issues of authorship, marketing and the shaping of trans narratives due to trends in industry that promote some and exclude others.

In Chapter 2 I focused on the theme of enfreakment because it was so pervasive in trans YA. I chose to focus on *Almost Perfect* as the primary text in this chapter because it is a Stonewall Award winner and frequently recommended as having a positive portrayal of a transgender character despite the extremely violent and consistently transphobic and negative handling of the subject. This echoes the reasons given by Barbara Pini, Wendy Keys and Damien W. Riggs for examining the book in their 2019 article.⁶⁹ Due to its status as a Stonewall Award winner *Almost Perfect* is likely to

69. Barbara Pini, Wendy Keys and Damien W. Riggs, "Transphobic Tropes and Young Adult Fiction: An Analysis of Brian Katcher's *Almost Perfect*." *The Lion and the Unicorn* 42, no. 1 (2018): 58.

receive more attention, sales and longevity than texts which have not won a major award.⁷⁰

In Chapter 3 I chose Elliott DeLine's novel *Refuse* because it took the familiar theme of transition timelines (before and after; pre- and post- hormones/surgery) and subverted them with a self-awareness that I did not find in other novels. It was also one of the few novels which dealt with what it feels like to be transgender but not fit in with the transgender community and the expected narratives of gender normativity privileged in the media.

In Chapter 4 I decided to focus on two novels, *Brooklyn Burning* and *Roving Pack*, selected for their use of architecture as metaphor for the non-binary body and homelessness. Despite increased media visibility, many homeless LGBTQ youth remain 'hidden'⁷¹ and this increased media visibility has even been cited as a cause in the rise of LGBTQ homelessness.⁷²

Trans Youth in YA Literature

Trans youth are significantly absent in much of literary, cultural and youth studies, instead usually being the focus of sociology, medical and health scholarship or LGBTQ+ focused education studies. Scholarship on trans youth in teen TV shows *Glee* and *Degrassi* explores stereotypical representations of transgender people in negative

70. Pini, Keys and Riggs, "Transphobic Tropes," 58.

71. Terrance F. Ross, "Young, Homeless – and Invisible," accessed May 29, 2018, <https://www.theatlantic.com/education/archive/2015/02/young-homelessand-invisible/385355/>; Lata Pandya, "Homeless and Transgender: Searching for Shelter and Acceptance," accessed May 29, 2018, <https://www.kcet.org/shows/socal-connected/homeless-and-transgender-searching-for-shelter-and-acceptance>; Grossman and D'Augelli, "Transgender Youth: Invisible and Vulnerable," 112 - 113; Karen M. Staller, "Review Essay: Hidden in Plain Sight: Runaway and Homeless Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Queer (LGBTQ) Youth," *Qualitative Social Work* 9, no.4 (2011): 552.

72. Josh Spero, "Down and Out: Why So Many Homeless Youths are LGBT," *Financial Times*, May 12, 2017, <https://www.ft.com/content/1414f788-30e8-11e7-9555-23ef563ecf9a>.

situations with moves away from stereotypical narratives to show positive themes of love and friendship.⁷³

While transgender in literature and culture has been discussed by scholars such as J. Jack Halberstam, Jay Prosser, and Niall Richardson, Tom Sandercock argues that discussions of trans youth representation in this area has been sparse.⁷⁴ Sandercock also argued, in 2015, that there were few screen representations of trans youth. Since Sandercock's article there has been a growing number of programs focused on trans youth, mostly documentaries such as *Growing up Coy* (2016) and *Louis Theroux, Transgender Kids* (2015).

Scholarship on trans YA focuses mainly on two areas: recommendations for texts as library or educational sources, and negative stereotypes. Pini, Keys and Riggs explore transphobic tropes in Brian Katcher's *Almost Perfect*, noting that trans representation in young adult literature is minimal, and arguing that these texts can play an educative role for trans youth.⁷⁵ Despite the overwhelming transphobic themes in *Almost Perfect*, it continues to be recommended as a positive transgender representation.⁷⁶ Kate Norbury explores transgender creativity in young adult fiction and television and how creativity "overrides" negative portrayals of trans youth.⁷⁷ Kay Williams and Nancy Deyoe explore collections of LGBTQ YA texts in school libraries, focusing on the use of these books as a classroom resource rather than analysing individual texts.⁷⁸ Elsworth Rockefeller takes a similar approach, describing how resources for libraries can be

73. Tom Sandercock, "Transing the small screen: loving and hating transgender youth in *Glee* and *Degrassi*," *Journal of Gender Studies* 24, no. 4 (2015): 436.

74. Sandercock, "Transing the small screen," 438.

75. Pini, Keys and Riggs, "Transphobic Tropes," 58.

76. Mary C. Miller, "Identifying Effective Trans Novels for Adolescent Readers," *Bookbird: A Journal of International Children's Literature* 52, no.1 (2014): 83–86.

77. Kate Norbury, "Re-Writing the Script: Representations of Transgender Creativity in Contemporary Young Adult Fiction and Television," *Barnboken: Journal of Children's Literature Research* 37 (2014). DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.14811/clr.v37i0.180>.

78. Virginia Kay Williams and Nancy Deyoe, "Controversy and Diversity LGBTQ Titles in Academic Library Youth Collections," *Library Resources and Technical Services* 59, no. 2 (2015): 62-71.

found and used, and recommending and summarising a number of specific texts.⁷⁹ Rockefeller advises slowly introducing texts with LGBTQ themes into a collection in areas where these texts might be deemed controversial,⁸⁰ and notes that many trans YA books, like their gay and lesbian precursors, are offensive, unrealistic and stereotypical.⁸¹ Mary Catherine Miller lists what she called “effective trans* novels for adolescent readers,” recommending *Almost Perfect* among them.⁸² Jennifer Putzi explores the “born in the wrong body” model and its use in trans YA, arguing that this narrative trope limits the way trans teens may see themselves in the text.⁸³ Putzi offers *Freakboy* (2013) by Kristen E. Clark as a novel which complicates wrong body discourse, reflecting a wider variety of trans experience.⁸⁴

Transgender is also often a silent T in LGBTQ+. For example, there is excellent discussion of many concepts of youth studies in Cieslik and Simpson’s book *Key Concepts in Youth Studies* but in the chapter “Young People and Gender” trans and non-binary youth are not mentioned, instead appearing briefly in the chapter “Young People and Sexuality” to explain that “T” stands for transgender.⁸⁵ Similarly, in Furlong’s *Youth Studies: An Introduction* which is again a useful text on youth studies, transgender identities seem to be equated with homosexual ones.⁸⁶ In literary studies, Latrobe and Drury’s *Critical Approaches to Young Adult Literature* gives a definition of the T in “GLBTQ” in their chapter on gender criticism, but does not explore transgender in its own right, placing it more as a sexuality. This type of placement might give the misleading impression that “transgender” is a sexuality, or leaves the T

79. Elsworth I. Rockefeller, “Selection, Inclusion, Evaluation and Defense of Transgender Inclusive Fiction for Young Adults: A Resource Guide,” *Journal of LGBT Youth* 6, no. 2–3 (2009): 288–309.

80. Rockefeller, “Selection, Inclusion, Evaluation,” 293.

81. Rockefeller, “Selection, Inclusion, Evaluation,” 300.

82. Miller, “Identifying Effective Trans Novels,” 85.

83. Jennifer Putzi, “None of this ‘trapped-in-a-man’s-body’ bullshit: Transgender Girls and Wrong Body Discourse in Young Adult Fiction,” *Tulsa Studies in Women’s Literature* 36, no. 2 (2017): 424.

84. Putzi, “None of this ‘trapped-in-a-man’s-body’ bullshit,” 445.

85. Mark Cieslik and Donald Simpson, *Key Concepts in Youth Studies* (London: Sage, 2013).

86. Andy Furlong, *Youth Studies: An Introduction* (Oxon: Routledge, 2013), 130.

largely forgotten. Latrobe and Drury do however put forward the point that: “[t]he alienation that some GLBTQ young people experience can be partially assuaged with the selection of the best fiction and non-fiction titles and with classrooms and libraries establishing themselves categorically as a safe haven for everybody.”⁸⁷ Jane Sunderland’s book *Language, Gender, and Children’s Fiction* explores gender in children’s fiction but does not mention transgender children. The issue of how to write outside the gender binary, then, is a difficult one when it is not often acknowledged in studies that combine youth literature and gender.⁸⁸

However, there have been recent studies on digital media and transgender youth such as a 2017 article by Olu Jenzen called “Trans Youth and Social Media: Moving Between Counterpublics and the Wider Web.” Jenzen takes an empirical approach to the study of trans youth online cultures, incorporating close readings of user-generated online material with observational data.⁸⁹ This approach blends the sociological and cultural and helps to identify strategies used by trans youth subcultures, just as those like Stuart Hall outlined for youth subcultures in general. Tobias Raun and Laura Horak have also both explored trans youth cultures online through vlogging. These three detailed studies of trans representation on YouTube offer fascinating insight into non-fiction trans narratives and digital media.⁹⁰

This dissertation aims to help fill a gap in cultural studies work on YA fiction and trans representations. Previous scholarship in youth studies and literature has only mentioned trans in passing, with only a small number of articles on trans YA literature appearing recently and current cultural research specifically about trans youth focused on digital, non-fiction narratives, mainly those found in vlogs. I employ a

87. Kathy Howard Latrobe and Judy Drury, *Critical Approaches to Young Adult Literature* (New York: Neal Schuman Publishers, 2009) 189.

88. Jane Sunderland, *Language, Gender and Children’s Fiction* (London: Continuum, 2010).

89. Olu Jenzen, “Trans Youth and Social Media: Moving Between Counterpublics and the Wider Web,” *Gender, Place and Culture* 24, no.11 (2017): 1626 – 1641.

90. Tobias Raun, *Out Online: Trans Self-Representation and Community Building on YouTube* (London: Routledge, 2016); Laura Horak, “Trans on YouTube: Intimacy, Visibility, Temporality,” *Transgender Studies Quarterly* 1, no. 4 (2014).

cultural studies approach, considering literature with trans youth content from not only a literary perspective but also its cultural production and relationship to the TTP. There is a sharp dichotomy between visible trans lives and invisible ones. That dichotomy plays out in real life as we see in Raun's conclusion that while YouTube does allow alternative voices a platform, many trans narratives go unheard.⁹¹ But it also plays out in fictional representations of trans youth which are overwhelmingly reliant on trans as an "issue," placed squarely in the genre of realism, rather than one part of someone's story as portrayed in *Grey's Anatomy* (see pages 8-9). To understand why and how fictional portrayals in YA novels participate in these issues around the TTP and visibility it is important first to understand something about the history of how YA novels have been perceived as educating young people about contemporary social issues.

History of YA fiction, Book Awards and Censorship

Production of YA novels is different from novels for adults due largely to marketing. Young adult itself is not always a set age range, but as Michael Cart in "From Insider to Outsider: The Evolution of Young Adult Literature" describes it, the definition of what a young adult is has changed since the mid-1990s. Before the mid-90s young adult was usually thought of as those aged 12 – 18, until publishers began to embrace the age range of the "MTV Demographic" to expand their audience to those aged 15 – 25. Cart also attributes this expansion of age range to a movement of sophisticated young adult writing which held a "crossover" appeal to both young people and adults, such as books by Francesca Lia Block and Philip Pullman.⁹² "Crossover" as described by Cart is merely a buzzword meaning a book which has an unusually broad appeal. Since Cart wrote this piece in 2001 there have been many crossover YA books such as *The Hunger Games* (2008), *The Girl with all the Gifts* (2014), *Ready Player One* (2011), and the novels of Louise O'Neill to name only a few.

91. Raun, *Out Online*, 209.

92. Michel Cart, "From Insider to Outsider: The Evolution of Young Adult Literature," *Voices from the Middle* 9, no.2 (2001): 95.

S.E Hinton's *The Outsiders* (1967) is commonly viewed as the first YA novel that was categorised as such by publishers, and has been written about in a way which assumes many people take this to be the case.⁹³ However, Cart argues that a case could be made for Maureen Daly's novel *Seventeenth Summer* (1942) as the first young adult novel published "about the same time that America began recognizing the teenage years as a separate part of the life cycle."⁹⁴ Carolyn Smith writes in "Exploring the History and Controversy of Young Adult Literature" that Nilsen and Donelson's idea of young adult fiction as first appearing after the American Civil War would thus make Louisa May Alcott's *Little Women* (1868) the first YA novel. The realism featured in much fiction of the 1960s paved the way for authors writing about issues that were very real for many teenagers, for example writers like Robert Cormier. This led to the problem novels of the 1970s which dealt in social realism (for example drug addiction).⁹⁵ As noted by Cart these problem novels were done "ad nauseum" and it was perhaps in reaction to an oversaturation of such novels that the emergence of more genre YA novels appeared in the 1980s as well as paperback romance series such as *Sweet Valley*. After this in the 90s it was the expansion of the target "MTV Demographic" age range which allowed authors more freedom in the subjects they could tackle and depth of characters portrayed. In Britain the term "teenage fiction" was used interchangeably with "young adult fiction."⁹⁶

93. Cart, "From Insider to Outsider."; Judith A. Hayn, Jeffrey S. Kaplan and Amanda Nolen, "Young Adult Literature Research in the 21st Century," *Theory into Practice* 50, no. 3 (2011): 176-181; Carolyn Smith, "Exploring the History and Controversy of Young Adult Literature," *New Review of Children's Literature and Librarianship* 8, no. 1 (2002): 1 - 11; Cat Yampbell, "Judging a Book by Its Cover: Publishing Trends in Young Adult Literature," *The Lion and the Unicorn* 29, no.3 (2005): 348 – 372.

94. Cart, "From Insider to Outsider," 96.

95. Smith, "Controversy of Young Adult Literature," 2.

96. Cart, "From Insider to Outsider," 96 - 97.

Youth, or adolescence, emerged as a social category in the late nineteenth century.⁹⁷ It is a distinct category that is both separate from and part of childhood.⁹⁸ It is often defined not by a range of ages but as a period of transitional milestones towards adulthood.⁹⁹ Adolescence is a developmental narrative and situated as a site of discovery, framing adulthood as a final stage in knowing and selfhood.¹⁰⁰

Grossman and D'Augelli define youth in their study on transgender invisibility as ages 15 – 21 and research conducted by UK LGBT mental health charity PACE (2014) defined youth as those aged under 26 in survey findings they released to *The Guardian* newspaper in November 2014.¹⁰¹ Historically books with LGBT characters and themes which may have been intended for a YA audience have been categorised as adult fiction by publishers because they were deemed “obscene,” unless authors agreed to give these characters a tragic ending. Thus, the intended audience likely missed out.¹⁰² Coinciding with the evolution of YA literature as outlined above in the 1960s was also the growth in YA literature book awards. The National Book Award in the US began in 1950, adding a Children’s Literature category in 1969 which ran until 1984. Then, in 1996 the category Young People’s Literature was introduced which covered children’s fiction as well as YA. Other book awards feature YA categories such as the LA Times Book Prize and The Printz Award, but the most relevant award to this thesis are the

97. Gabrielle Owen, “Adolescence,” *Transgender Studies Quarterly* 1, no. 1-2 (2014) 1:22.

98. Rebecca Raby, “Across a Great Gulf? Conducting Research with Adolescents,” in *Representing Youth: Methodological Issues in Critical Youth Studies*, ed. Amy L Best (New York: NYU Press, 2007), 40.

99. Kelly Mandarino, “Transitional-Age Youths: Barriers to Accessing Adult Mental Health Services and the Changing Definition of Adolescence,” *Journal of Human Behavior in the Social Environment* 24, no. 4 (2014): 463; Owen, “Adolescence,” 22.

100. Owen, “Adolescence,” 22–24.

101. Arnold H. Grossman, and Anthony R. D'Augelli, “Transgender Youth: Invisible and Vulnerable,” *Journal of Homosexuality* 51, no. 1 (2006): 111; Patrick Strudwick, “Nearly half of young transgender people have attempted suicide – UK survey,” *The Guardian*, accessed Sept 24, 2016, <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2014/nov/19/young-transgender-suicide-attempts-survey>.

102. Michael Cart and Christine A. Jenkins, *The Heart Has its Reasons: Young Adult Literature with Gay/Lesbian/Queer Content, 1969 - 2004* (Lanham, MD: The Scarecrow Press Inc, 2004), 18.

Lambda Literary Award and the Stonewall Award. Laura M. Jiménez's analysis of Lambda Literary Award and Stonewall Award winning YA novels, "Representations in Award-Winning LGBTQ Young Adult Literature from 2000–2013," found that despite growing popularity of LGBTQ YA Literature "the dominance of White, gay, male characters contradicts the trend toward strong female protagonists in mainstream YA; stories about lesbians are primarily tragic; and there are no bisexual protagonists."¹⁰³ Jiménez describes the conception of the WeNeedDiverseBooks Twitter hashtag by authors Melinda Lo and Ellen Oh, which arose from the list of "best" Young Adult authors at the 2014 Bookcon featuring exclusively white male authors.¹⁰⁴ Jiménez cites Ehrlich to say that: "According to multicultural book publisher Lee & Low Books, only about 10% of children's books published in the United States in the last 18 years have featured multicultural stories."¹⁰⁵ This is used as a point of comparison for books featuring LGBTQ stories for which the percentage would be far lower, although hard to accurately quantify because industry standards do not specify that the number of books in particular categories should be reported.¹⁰⁶ The Lambda Literary Awards began their category for children's and Young Adult fiction in 1992, with the Stonewall Award beginning theirs in 2010.¹⁰⁷ Jiménez found that the winners of both awards between the years 2000 – 2013 were predominantly male. She and her team of three coders encountered an issue when trying to identify the race and ethnicity of the lead characters in the 16 books they read due to whitewashing, which in the case of these texts means that white models are sometimes used on the cover of the book even when the protagonist is not white. They found that 15 of 21 protagonists were white.¹⁰⁸ The protagonists are predominantly white gay males, with only one transgender protagonist in the 16 books – Sage, a trans woman, from Brian Katcher's

103. Laura M. Jiménez, "Representations in Award-Winning LGBTQ Young Adult Literature from 2000–2013," *Journal of Lesbian Studies* 19, no. 4 (2015): 406.

104. Jiménez, "Representations," 407.

105. Hannah Ehrlich, "The Diversity Gap in Children's Books: 21 Years," *Lee & Low Books*, accessed April 12, 2019, <https://blog.leeandlow.com/2017/03/30/the-diversity-gap-in-childrens-book-publishing-2017/>. Quoted in Jiménez, "Representations," 407.

106. Jiménez, "Representations," 408.

107. Jiménez, 410.

108. Jiménez, 413.

Almost Perfect. In the study 16 books were read – two of the novels appear in both the Lambda and the Stonewall awards so there is a crossover for 2012 and 2013. Two of the 16 books were short story/essay collections. Of the 14 books that were novel-length fiction 12 were realistic fiction, some of these also featuring themes associated with the “problem” novels of the 1970s such as alcoholism or parental absence.¹⁰⁹ Jiménez makes a point about missing narratives and the effect this has on marginalised readers: “[a]s important as the stories of love, violence, disappointment, and triumph in these novels are the characters that are missing from them. Moje and MuQaribu call the power of omission a message of denial, so that when readers do not see themselves and their stories reflected in novels they feel they are invisible in society.”¹¹⁰ This culture of omission and under-representation of characters of colour is reflected in the same way among the novels in this thesis, and according to Lo and Enrich, within YA fiction in general. LGBTQ+ characters have been nearly invisible in YA fiction with only a small amount of YA novels published between 1967 and 2004 featuring LGBT characters.¹¹¹ When LGBT (almost entirely LGB) characters did make an appearance they were usually portrayed as predatory homosexuals, white, middle-class, and doomed to a bleak, solitary life, or to a tragic death.¹¹²

This under-representation of minority ethnicities, sexualities and genders does not reflect the lives of those in the “MTV Demographic” but rather seems to reflect the views of older people who have a lot of influence over the purchase of and production of novels for young people. The Pew Research Centre, an American nonpartisan fact tank who conduct research which the aim of informing the public about attitudes, trends and issues, published the results of a survey called “Where the Public Stands on Religious Liberty vs. Nondiscrimination” on September 28th 2016.¹¹³ Among the issues

109. Jiménez, 417.

110. Jiménez, 418.

111. Cart and Jenkins, *The Heart Has Its Reasons*, 2.

112. Cart and Jenkins, 18.

113. Pew Research Centre, “Where the Public Stands on Religious Liberty vs. Nondiscrimination,” accessed June 18, 2019, <https://www.pewforum.org/2016/09/28/where-the-public-stands-on-religious-liberty-vs-nondiscrimination/>.

discussed was transgender bathroom access. One of the findings of the survey, which had a sample size of 4538 adults, was that:

Most people who personally know someone who is transgender say that transgender people should be allowed to use public restrooms that match their current gender identity (60%). Americans who do not know any transgender people, by contrast, are more evenly divided as to whether transgender people should be allowed to use the restrooms of their gender identity (47%) or required to use the restrooms of their birth gender (50%).¹¹⁴

The survey showed that 67% of those aged 18 – 29 thought that trans people should be allowed access to the restroom of the gender they identify with.¹¹⁵ Of the other age categories, the results showed less than half of respondents agreeing, with the next highest being age 30 – 49 at 49%.¹¹⁶ No one under the age of 18 appears to have been surveyed. *TransgenderUniverse* point to an issue with the survey which is that only 532 respondents were 18 – 29, with other age groups having more than double that amount. However, they do conclude that: “[t]he survey shows a wider range of acceptance with the younger generation overall. The results also lend credence to the theory that normalization is a major key to acceptance in society. As the data shows, the more transgender people are known by others personally the more accepted they would become.”¹¹⁷

With normalization and “acceptance” comes the issue of whose representations are heard. Thomas Crisp writes about the Lambda Literary Awards (also known as Lammys) short-lived rule that authors must identify as LGBT for a book with LGBT content to be eligible. The rule was put in place in 2009 and revoked in 2011. The debate that surrounds this kind of ruling is one that involves the idea of “authenticity,” something

114. Pew Research Forum, “Public Split over Bathroom Use.”

115. Pew Research Forum, “Public Split over Bathroom Use.”

116. Pew Research Forum, “Public Split over Bathroom Use.”

117. “Transgender Acceptance.”

which is a familiar theme in the transgender world.¹¹⁸ Ellen Wittlinger who wrote *Parrotfish* and identifies as straight has been a winner of a Lammy and wrote an article for *The Hornbook Magazine* called “Too Gay or Not Gay Enough?” about her frustrations with the Lambda Awards and her position as a straight ally.¹¹⁹ Crisp highlights that the reasons given by Tony Valenzuela and Katherine Forrest of Lambda were “the continued exclusion of LGBT writers from heterosexual society,” and the “despair of our own writers when a heterosexual writer, who has written a fine book about us, wins a Lambda Award, when one or more of our own LGBT writers may have as a Finalist a book that may be the only chance in a career at a Lambda Literary Award.”

Wittlinger points out what she believes is irony, that she has been both shunned for the LGBT content in many of her books, and is “not gay enough” to have been eligible for a Lammy in the years that the rules were changed. Crisp labels this as confusion – it is not Wittlinger who is too gay, but her books. Crisp criticises this type of outcry, while making clear it is not a personal attack on Wittlinger, saying that straight-identified authors have the privilege to choose whether to become allies and can at any point walk away from the situation. He also points out that Lambda’s rule change would not discourage straight authors from doing the work they do. Crisp likens this sort of outcry to a white author saying they are discriminated against because they cannot win an award for black authors, or someone who identifies as male being angry at the fact they are not eligible to win a women’s literature award. Crisp argues, although anecdotally, that critics think the awards for LGBT writers are no longer necessary because things “are better for LGBT-identified youth.”¹²⁰ This is like the arguments that trans people have reached the “tipping point” where supposedly things are better. Crisp notes that the people who say that things are better tend to be self-identified heterosexuals. As some examples in the USA of proof that things are not really better,

118. Thomas Crisp, “It’s Not the Book, It’s Not the Author, It’s the Award: The Lambda Literary Award and the Case for Strategic Essentialism,” *Children’s Literature in Education* 42, no.2 (2011): 93.

119. Ellen Wittlinger, “Too Gay or Not Gay Enough?” *The Hornbook Magazine*, July/August 2010, 146 – 151.

120. Crisp, “It’s Not the Book,” 99.

Crisp points the situation in American high schools, such as the case of Constance McMillan was not allowed to attend her prom with her girlfriend because she wanted to wear a tuxedo, and Ceara Stugis, who was erased from her school yearbook because she wore a tuxedo in her senior photo. Oakleigh “Oak” Reed was denied the title of prom king which his class voted on because the gender he was assigned at birth did not match the one he identified with.¹²¹ These events happened in 2010, just 4 years before the TTP. Students are subject to gender policing at high school not only at the prom but also with bathroom access rights. Policies which restrict transgender student’s access to bathrooms reinforce the rhetoric that it is acceptable to deny LGBT people basic human rights.¹²² Trans students also face restrictive policies around their participation in sports, with schools traditionally operating sex-segregated policies.¹²³ It is not only transgender students who face restrictions around their participation in school sports, but also cisgender girls who are often barred from competing against boys or trying out for a boys’ team, even when they are more skilled or where no girls’ team exists.¹²⁴ Transgender discrimination in schools is part of a larger system of discrimination affecting young people which includes reinforcement of the gender binary and heteronormativity, and disadvantaging students on the basis of sex, gender, and sexuality.¹²⁵

Carolyn Smith describes the history of censorship in YA literature, which goes back as far as the conception of the category itself. In the 1960s people were concerned with the “filth” that teenagers were reading, namely books like *Catcher in the Rye* and *The Outsiders*. Robert Cormier and YA author Melvin Burgess believe in writing honestly for young people and both authors have been criticised for the content of their novels,

121. Crisp, 100.

122. Josh Corbat, “When Laws Solve Problems That Do Not Exist,” *High School Journal* 100, no. 2 (2017):86.

123., Michael J. Lenzi, “The Trans Athlete Dilemma: A Constitutional Analysis of High School Transgender Student-Athlete Policies,” *American University Law Review* 67, no. 3 (2018): 853.

124. Lenzi, “Trans Athlete Dilemma,” 850.

125. Susan W. Woolley, “Contesting silence, claiming space: gender and sexuality in the neo-liberal public high school,” *Gender and Education*, 29, no.1 (2017): 86.

which Burgess feels is hypocritical.¹²⁶ The censorship that began in the 1960s coincided with what Michael Cart describes as a period of writing which covered bold subject matter from 1967 to 1975, and which included the first YA novel to include homosexuality, John Donovan's *I'll Get There: It Better Be Worth the Trip* (1969). Smith, writing in 2002, says:

Yet today's authors are still attracting the same shocked attention as these 'ground breakers' were over three decades ago. One reason for this may be because during the 1970s there came a wave of what became known as 'problem novels'. In these books generally the subject matter over-shadowed the characterisation and plot. These books tended to only cover one subject at a time, whereas the book *Junk* (46) by Melvin Burgess for instance, covers drug abuse, prostitution and homelessness. The novel also has very strong characterisation, which perhaps is the most shocking area for adult reviewers.¹²⁷

These novels share a number of traits such as being narrated from an adolescent protagonist's point of view and dealing with subject matter that may once have been considered taboo. In the 1970s these novels were classified by their subject matter and focused heavily on the topic itself, for example drug addiction, rather than story-telling, as is often the case in YA novels with transgender content which seem to focus more on political content than style.¹²⁸

While *Junk* may not read as an educational tool, a Bafta Award-winning TV adaptation was made of it, which I was shown at high school during a "personal development" class as an anti-drugs education tool. This adaptation was, due of course in part to its length, a watered-down version of the book which felt heavier on the "say no to

126. Smith, "Controversy of Young Adult Literature," 6.

127. Smith, "Controversy of Young Adult Literature," 7-8.

128. Smith, 8.

drugs” rhetoric. It was part of the BBC Scene series designed for school audiences.¹²⁹ Robert Bittner in “Queering Sex Education: Young Adult Literature with LGBT Content as Complementary Sources of Sex and Sexuality Education” similarly sees YA novels with trans characters as a valuable educational resource:

Other excellent examples of trans narratives for YA audiences include *Luna* by Julie Anne Peters (2004); *Parrotfish* by Ellen Wittlinger (2007); *Almost Perfect* by Brian Katcher (2010); and *I Am J* by Cris Beam (2011). These narratives highlight the difficulties of trying to ‘pass’ in society, and some of the novels explore the even more difficult position of trying to have sex as a trans person before or during transition. These novels are valuable as educational resources, both for trans teens to see themselves represented in the literature and for nontrans teens to see the difficult and complex situations that trans teens navigate on a daily basis.¹³⁰

This quote sets up the idea of trans as an “issue” or “theme.” It also champions “visibility” in trans YA; these three novels stick close to the binary and have heterosexual protagonists, as a way for teens (or heteronormative teens) to see themselves represented. There is also the focus on trans people's sexual experience being difficult before and during transition, but not *after* transition, because by that point the conforming heterosexual trans person who fits the correct type of transition would have undergone genital surgery. The history of censorship and the underrepresentation of LGBTQ+ and especially trans youth in YA fiction presents a difficult situation where the books that do reach publication feature only certain narratives. In Chapters 1 and 2 of this thesis I will examine in detail some of the texts that fit into the typically normative narratives as described above, before looking in Chapters 3 and 4 at books which break away from this and how self-published books about trans youth

129. “Scene – Broadcastforschools.co.uk,” last modified August 23, 2012, <http://www.broadcastforschools.co.uk/site/Scene>.

130. Robert Bittner, “Queering Sex Education: Young Adult Literature with LGBT Content as Complementary Sources of Sex and Sexuality Education,” *Journal of LGBT Youth* 9, no. 4 (2012): 370.

by trans authors present fictional narratives in a very different way. The chapters are outlined below to give an idea of the main themes each will cover and will then be immediately followed by Chapter 1 which provides insight into the cultural production of fictional trans narratives in novels and on television.

Chapter Outlines

Chapter 1, “Packaging Trans Youth Identities: Tropes, Visibility, and Non-Binary Erasure in YA Cover Art,” is a visual analysis of YA cover art which shows how a narrow set of trans issues reinforce binary narratives as “correct.” Current issues affecting trans people such as bathroom rights are recognisable to mainstream audiences, and the use of gendered bathroom symbols is a way, I argue, that the texts became packaged in a palatable way. In contrast to this, texts about non-binary characters or self-published texts use imagery associated with youth subcultures, highlighting the character rather than the “issue.”

Chapter 2 focuses on the enfreakment of trans characters using a close reading of Sage in Brian Katcher’s *Almost Perfect* (2009). The novel is told from the perspective of Logan, a cisgender teenage boy. Sage when seen through Logan’s eyes is “visible,” but his gaze shames her and makes her appear freakish. Otherness is a significant in YA fiction, because it is aligned with identity, for example the protagonist Christopher in Mark Haddon’s (2003) *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Nighttime* who lives with an autism spectrum condition.¹³¹ The theme of trans youth as other and freakish is common in trans YA, and like Chapter 1 this is about the need for a coherent narrative to make trans bodies “palatable.” In *freak* shows the acts perform their visible different for the viewer, and I discuss how visibility is what *makes* the characters freaks using David Hevey’s mechanism of enfreakment.¹³² Enfreakment is a productive way of

131. Ben Screech, “Reading Otherness in British Fiction for Young People, 2001 – 2012” (PhD diss., University of West England, 2018), 73; Susan Petrilli, *Signifying and Understanding* (Italy: De Gruyter Mouton, 2009), 597; Mark Haddon, *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time* (London: Vintage Books, 2003).

132. David Hevey, “The Enfreakment of Photography,” in *The Disability Studies Reader*, ed. Lennard J. Davis (New York: Routledge, 2006), 369.

deconstructing the representation of transgender bodies or bodies that transgress cultural norms because freaks challenge gender boundaries but also arouse a supernatural terror and walk among us.¹³³ This mirrors the way that trans people are portrayed as threatening when their gender disrupts heteronormative ideals. The freak is also a symbol of otherness, and Hevey's examination of disabled bodies in photography shows how bodies deemed other have been framed as grotesque, in the same way that Robert Bogdan, Rachel Adams and Rosemary Garland-Thomson argue freaks are 'made' through the cisgender or normative gaze.¹³⁴

In Chapter 3 I explore belonging and the trans community in Elliott DeLine's novel *Refuse* (2011). Through the music of The Smiths and Morrissey protagonist Dean has a relationship through time with his idol, marking temporally his unbelonging to the present where, as a non-binary queer person, he doesn't feel part of the community. *Refuse* (2011) is a self-published novel by a trans-identified author, which gives the story a certain freedom which is not always available to those published by mainstream presses. DeLine describes this as "the freedom to be dangerous."¹³⁵

In Chapter 4 I analyse two novels, *Roving Pack* (2012) by Sassafras Lowrey and *Brooklyn Burning* (2011) by Steve Brezenoff, which portray homeless gender non-conforming youth. Homelessness becomes a dualism between choice and forced exile, and I explain this by discussing structures – both societal and architectural – which become metaphors for homeless trans youth. The architectural structures are often abject and can be described as uncanny, using Freud's definition of the uncanny as

133. Gilad Padva "Joseph/Josephine's Angst: Sensational Hermaphroditism in Tod Browning's Freaks," *Social Semiotics* 28, no. 1 (2018): 110; Leslie Fiedler, *Freaks: Myths and Images of the Secret Self* (New York: Anchor Books, 1978), 24.

134. Rachel Adams, *Sideshow USA: Freaks and the American Cultural Imagination* (London: The University of Chicago Press, 2001), 2; Robert Bogdan, *Freak Show: Presenting Human Oddities for Amusement and Profit* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1998), 2; Rosemarie Garland-Thomson, *Staring: How We Look* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 9.

135. "Self-publishing to destroy stereotypes: Elliott DeLine," *Arthur*, accessed April 20, 2017, <http://www.trentarthur.ca/self-publishing-to-destroy-stereotypes-elliott-deLine>.

something unhomely or haunted.¹³⁶ Anthony Vidler explores Freud's concept of the uncanny to analyse architecture as bodily metaphor in literature, and I make use of his theory of "dismembered architecture"¹³⁷ and Susan Stryker's description of the trans body as a monstrous body in pieces akin to Frankenstein's monster.¹³⁸ Delving further into this dismembered architecture we find the concept of "faulty plumbing" which sees the bathroom as the transgender closet and another way for the trans body to be abject.

By exploring the range of topics outlined above, I am attempting to analyse not only the text but the production of trans YA, showing that real and fictional issues and representations of trans people are tightly entwined. I start from the outside of the novel with the production of the cover art, working inward to discuss the process of making the trans subject a freak. Then I move onto the inherently meta writing of trans-identified authors such as Elliot Deline who make references to both trans stories as fictional genre and to structures of oppression historically faced by trans people, speaking to the reader from within the novel. Finally I look inside the architectural structures of the fictional, showing how even within and inside the walls of fictional buildings trans bodies cannot escape being viewed as abject.

136. Sigmund Freud, *The Uncanny*, trans. David McLintock (1919. Reprint, London: Penguin Books, 2003), 124.

137. Vidler, *The Architectural Uncanny*, 18.

138. Susan Stryker, "My Words to Victor Frankenstein above the Village of Chamounix: Performing Transgender Rage," *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* 1, no. 3 (1994): 238.

Chapter 1. Packaging Trans Youth Identities: Tropes, Visibility, and Non-Binary Erasure in YA Cover Art

The growing “visibility” of trans people and trans youth in popular Western media effects the way they are represented. Trans identity is being packaged or “sold” to the consumer audience through a specifically binaried, and often glamourized, form of it. This version of trans identity is made comfortable for a cisgender audience, for example, Caitlyn Jenner’s glamorous photoshoot for *Vanity Fair* in July 2015 and fitness model Aydian Dowling’s topless cover for *Gay Times* in February 2016. These photos of Jenner and Dowling are coded in accordance to gender-normative “pin-up” ideology. Richard Dyer describes the male pin-up as having a muscular body, with these muscles being associated with what is “natural” for a man and a legitimising of male power.¹³⁹ Dowling’s pose on the *Gay Times* cover shows clearly his solid muscular upper physique, and Jenner on *Vanity Fair* shows us the opposite with her pose and clothing showing her as soft and feminine. In this chapter I will argue that the popular concept of the TTP is a good pivot for understanding the current visibility of certain versions of binary trans identity, but it hides the invisibility of non-binary trans identity. The key texts in this chapter are a selection of English-language novels published between 2004 -2016, which are published as YA, or in the cases of self-published novels feature trans youth as the main protagonists.

In addition to the argument outlined above, I will also argue that trans representation falls into several traps in relation to visibility. The first of these traps is the tendency to privilege particular types of representation, most noticeably narratives which conform to formulaic “coming out” story arcs.¹⁴⁰ This argument emerges from Jay Prosser’s discussion of trans autobiography, which I will outline and which also serves to draw attention to the prevalence of realism (and lack of other genres) seen in the key texts. Another is the overuse of tropes, namely the “trapped in the wrong body” and “I’ve always known” (that I was trans) narratives. These do not work as a catch-all

139. Richard Dyer, “Don’t Look Now: The Instabilities of the Male Pin-Up,” in *Only Entertainment*, 2nd ed. (London: Routledge, 1992), 132.

140. Cart and Jenkins, *The Heart Has Its Reasons*, 16.

description of trans identity but yet might be among the most heard in popular culture, assuming a total and unflinching identification with a binary gender (male or female) including a history of gendered behaviour to match. There is also a lack of diversity within the texts with the overwhelming majority of trans characters being white and heterosexual and this again falls into a privileging and packaging of the trans identity into a comfortable, more marketable commodity.

Finally, while the written stories themselves are important it is also fascinating to explore the cover art - part of the paratext, as theorised by Gérard Genette¹⁴¹ - used for YA fiction with trans characters, as much of it shows clear links to gendered essentialism, conventions in horror fiction and fears of the unknown. I use this cover art case study to highlight that the production of YA fiction with trans characters has direct links to essentialised visual representation, and also to gender transition which for many means changes to exterior appearance. What is striking is the difference in cover art between texts published by mainstream or larger presses, and those that are self-published or feature non-binary characters. These covers convey links to subcultures (and a life beyond being transgender) or give faces to characters in stark contrast to the headless or featureless figures seen on the mainstream texts.

Current Interest in Transitioning Youth

Attempts to make cisgender audiences more “comfortable” with transgender people in mainstream media is an idea which can be seen in the way that trans identities are “sold” and packaged in mainstream television programs. Post-TTP there has been a noticeable rise in interest not just in trans people but specifically trans youth and transitioning children. In April 2015 TV presenter Victoria Derbyshire hosted a short documentary on transgender children in the UK for the BBC¹⁴², and in the same week the BBC also aired a documentary by Louis Theroux about transgender children in the

141. Gérard Genette, *Paratexts: Thresholds of Interpretation*, trans. Jane E. Lewin (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997).

142. Victoria Derbyshire. “The Story of Two Transgender Children,” BBC2. 7 April 2015.

US.¹⁴³ In the world of UK television soaps, *Hollyoaks*¹⁴⁴ and *EastEnders*¹⁴⁵ both introduced new transgender characters in episodes airing just one day apart in October 2015. While there have previously been trans characters in UK soaps, most famously Hayley in *Coronation Street*,¹⁴⁶ the new editions to *Hollyoaks* and *EastEnders* are notable for being played by trans-identified actors. In 2018 the hugely popular and long-running American drama *Grey's Anatomy* introduced a trans man to the regular supporting cast,¹⁴⁷ as well as featuring Candis Cayne as a guest star.¹⁴⁸ The parallels in the coming out speeches of character Kyle Slater in *EastEnders* to the formulaic plots seen in trans YA are striking.

Cover Art

Although the other chapters of this thesis will focus largely on textual analysis, the visual aspects of the novels are highly important in the representation of trans characters and trans identities. The cover precedes the text itself and gives the reader expectations, whether these turn out to be true or not, of what the novel is about and who it is about. What I aim to show here in an analysis of cover art is that trans identity has in many cases been distilled to a number of issues, which while they can be in themselves representative of real issues, present troubling reinforcements of the “correct” narrative of trans binary identity, just as we have seen in the previous sections of this chapter. Juxtaposed with the visual repetition of that narrative is also a creeping and subtle horror in the visuals which suggests that even those “correct” identities might be something to fear, with the transgender “freak” lurking in the

143. *Louis Theroux: Transgender Kids*. Directed by Tom Barrow. Written by Louis Theroux. BBC2. 5 April 2015.

144. *Hollyoaks*. “Episode 4249.” Directed by Chris Jury. Written by Daniel Moulson. Channel 4. 29 October 2015.

145. *EastEnders*. “30 October 2015.” Directed by Toby Frow. Written by Leo Richardson. BBC 1. 30 October 2015.

146. *Coronation Street*. “Episode 4341.” ITV. 26 January 1998.

147. *Grey's Anatomy*. “1-800-799-7233.” Directed by Bill D’Elia. Written by Shonda Rhimes and Andy Reaser. ABC. 14 February 2018.

148. *Grey's Anatomy*. “Harder, Better, Faster, Stronger.” Directed by Jeannot Szwarc. Written by Shonda Rhimes and Kiley Donovan. ABC. 7 March 2018.

shadows, or that trans identity only brings misery and confusion. I argue in this section that the cover art used in the majority of the sample latches on to stereotypical themes of the correct coming out narrative as well mingling these in with recognisable (to the consumer) issues such as bathroom rights, most likely to create a sellable and more acceptable product. I also argue that this in turn serves as a continuation of the erasure of non-binary identities seen throughout the discussion of the TTP. There is, however, another strand of cover art coming through which steers away from the familiar tropes of trans identity on the small number of novels that do feature non-binary characters or less typical (for trans YA) storylines. The ways in which these novels, which are all about subcultures, allow for a very different representation than the binary one associated with TTP will be explored further in the next chapter. In the second chapter, freaks - who may lurk in shadows or represent gender splitting - will be discussed, making this analysis a useful precursor.

To simplify the visual analysis, the sample is split into 3 groups. The groups are as follows: Group 1: An Assembly of Parts; Group 2: Headless/Faceless; and Group 3: Subcultures. Images of all the covers analysed can be found beginning on page 70, arranged into these groups for easy comparison. Group 1 features many images that serve as a silhouette – three of those being bathroom symbols, visually linked to the issue of bathroom access and transgender rights. An understanding of the negative connotation of shadows is also useful, particularly for Group 2 and also for some stylistic choices overall. Mirror images, doubles, and the myth of *Narcissus* are useful to this analysis as they represent issues such as authenticity, deception and concealment, and terror. Some interesting questions emerge about trans YA cover art: Does trans YA cover art reflect “normalization” of trans youth in popular culture? Are there any noticeable differences between pre- and post- TTP covers? Prior to this analysis some context will be given on the idea of the paratext as originated by Gérard Genette and used in Cat Yampbell’s research on the packaging of YA texts.¹⁴⁹ Secondly, historical contexts of art and German Expressionist cinema show how silhouettes and

149. Cat Yampbell, “Judging a Book by Its Cover: Publishing Trends in Young Adult Literature,” *The Lion and the Unicorn* 29, no.3 (2005): 348 – 372.

shadow have been used as representations of aspects of the human psyche and horror. Then I will commence the analysis of the sample, which draws on these histories as well as Jay Prosser's work on trans biography. As outlined above, I will now begin with the discussion of packaging.

The French literary theorist Gérard Genette wrote about the ways texts are presented in his book *Paratexts: Thresholds of Interpretation*, originally published in French as *Seuils* in 1987. Genette says that very rarely is a text presented merely as an unadorned product, but that there are several other productions which accompany it such as the author's name, a title, a cover, a preface, and so on. To *present* the text, as Genette says, these items surround and extend the text to ensure its presence in the world as a consumable product. It is these accompanying productions that Genette calls the paratext and which enable the text to become a book to be offered up to the reader.¹⁵⁰ The cover is defined further as part of the "publisher's peritext" which Genette says includes anything that is the principal responsibility of the publisher. The paratext represents a threshold which the reader can either cross or turn away from.¹⁵¹

Cat Yampbell explores this idea of paratext, in this case the peritext of the cover, as a threshold in the article "Judging a Book by its Cover: Publishing Trends in Young Adult Literature." Yampbell argues that the packaging of texts is something that had been previously ignored by publishers when it came to YA fiction, but publishers have come to realise that visual appeal is an important selling point in the teen market. Teen fiction book covers are becoming "sensational" and "abstract" according to Yampbell, who gives examples of holograms, digital art, and metallic book jackets.¹⁵² The cover can often determine the book's success, regardless of the quality of the inner text. Yampbell makes the same point as Genette that the paratext is inseparable from the text itself.

150. Gérard Genette, *Paratexts: Thresholds of Interpretation*, trans. Jane E. Lewin (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 1.

151. Genette, *Paratexts*, 2.

152. Yampbell, "Judging a Book," 348.

For Yampbell the content of the book is irrelevant if it cannot reach its reader, which it does largely through its packaging (at least in the case of general fiction; LGBT fiction does not always reach its reader for other reasons) - the process Genette calls making it present. "Grabability" is an important factor - the book must visually leap off the shelf and grab the buyer's attention. All aspects of the design are considered – shape, size, font, paper texture, and the spine in particular as this is often the first thing seen.¹⁵³ Yampbell considers Penguin's publication of S.E Hinton's *The Outsiders* in 1967 as the beginning of the market that would be known as Young Adult literature. *The Outsiders* was published in a smaller, cheaper edition called a mass-market paperback which meant that it visually represented something between a very small children's book and a larger adult book, but also may have been more affordable to a teen reader. This marks a clear visual difference from other books and makes it impossible to ignore the context of production.¹⁵⁴

Yampbell goes on to discuss the problem of the misleading cover. Some cover artists do not have time to read the whole book before designing a cover and instead have to work with input from sales and marketing about what will be pleasing. Yampbell highlights the case of Francesca Lia Block's teen novel *Weetzie Bat* (1989) which had five different covers in ten years.¹⁵⁵ With the context of the paratext and its importance now in mind, I will move on to theories in art history to better understand the themes I have identified among the covers in my sample, beginning with shadows.

Shadows, in the form of literal shadows or in symbols (specifically gendered bathroom symbols in this case) which double as silhouettes, are used frequently in the trans YA covers. There are negative connotations for shadow that have persisted in the history of Western representation, born out of Plato's myth of the cave, as shadow is "induced by a censure of light."¹⁵⁶ Shadows have also been seen as synonymous with reflections

153. Yampbell, "Judging a Book," 349.

154. Yampbell, 350.

155. Yampbell, 361.

156. Victor I. Stoichita, *A Short History of Shadow* (London: Reaktion, 1997), 25.

which Victor I. Stoichita in *A Short History of Shadow* (1997) explains using the myth of *Narcissus* as written by Ovid, stating that “[s]ight deceives, and the proof of reality, which should have come through touch does not take place.” Narcissus, who falls in love his own reflection on water, cannot touch the face he sees in the water. However, Stoichita argues this conflation is not helpful to understanding visual representation as shadow and reflection are “optically and ontologically different: the shadow represents the ‘other’ stage while the mirror represents the ‘same’ stage.”¹⁵⁷ This is an important distinction to consider when posing trans identity as “other.”

In figurative arts magnification and distortion of a person’s shadow is frequently used to “underscore a person’s negative side.”¹⁵⁸ The gendered outlines on some trans YA, the same as ones used commonly as bathroom symbols, are an unmissable form of silhouette, shadow, and in some cases a doubling and metamorphosis. These can also be a split image, representing two sides of the self and two sides of the binary. Freud describes the feeling of the uncanny in relation to doubles, which shows the connection of doubles and shadows to horror: “...the quality of uncanniness can only come from the fact of the ‘double’ being a creation dating back to a very early mental stage,” and “[t]he ‘double’ has become a thing of terror, just as, after the collapse of their religion, the gods turned into demons.”¹⁵⁹ The use of light and shadow to create uncanniness and doubles were a trademark of cinema from the German Expressionist era, which thematically often focused on threat and fear and offers good examples for comparison to trans identity which is often represented as threatening. There is a significant relationship between the queer and the uncanny, and the “queer uncanny” can be viewed as a way of confronting heteronormative ideals of what is real.¹⁶⁰ Olu Jenzen describes how Judith Butler’s example of drag performance as repetition, and hence a copy of a copy, throws original (normative) gender into crisis.¹⁶¹ The gender of the transgender subject when viewed in this way becomes a copy of what is deemed real, making it the Freudian object of terror.

157. Stoichita, *History of Shadow*, 34 – 35.

158. Stoichita, 134.

159. Freud, *The Uncanny*, 236.

160. Olu Jenzen, “The Queer Uncanny,” *Esharp* 9, (2007): 2.

161. Jenzen, “The Queer Uncanny,” 7.

A famous example from this era of the use of shadow to convey the atmosphere of threat as well as the uncanny double is the film *The Cabinet of Dr Caligari* (1920). These shadows reveal the inner or true self, for example the doctor's shadow appears gigantic, signifying what is happening inside the character.¹⁶² Another famous image is a still from Murnau's *Nosferatu* (1922) in which Nosferatu's shadow is seen climbing a staircase. Stoichita asks: "[i]s the famous silhouette that is about to climb the stairs the vampire himself, or his shadow?" But viewers and the director alike would be aware that vampires, according to ancient stories, do not have shadows. We may conclude then that the shadow is Nosferatu, making the director a "shadow-master."¹⁶³ When the morning light kills Nosferatu, the dark contents of the mind which are represented by the shadow are destroyed, giving contrast to darkness and light. This is reminiscent of the explanation Plato's myth of the cave, where negativity is contrived from shadow being the censure of light. This is important because the use of shadow and silhouette casts the trans person as monstrous and threatening. It also places publishers or those with decision-making power in the publishing world as the shadow-masters portraying the trans inner self, and hence inner monster.

This prevalence of threat in German Expressionist cinema is viewed by Ian Roberts in *German Expressionist Cinema: The World of Light and Shadow* (2008) as a reflection on the harsh conditions Germany endured in society throughout the 1920s such as mass unemployment, strikes, and inflation. The films of this period, which spans roughly 1919 - 1930 according to Roberts, have had a huge impact on cinema and the arts since.¹⁶⁴ Roberts notes that threat as portrayed in *Nosferatu* and *The Cabinet of Dr Caligari* can stem from both within society itself or from external monsters, and that this sense of horror is consistently present in films made in this period. Building upon the themes of silhouette and shadow I have explored so far, I will now analyse cover art, bringing in Prosser's work on trans autobiography. I will also discuss what I view as

162. Stoichita, 150.

163. Stoichita, 152.

164. Ian Roberts, *German Expressionist Cinema: The World of Light and Shadow* (London: Wallflower Press, 2008), 8.

a positive trend among cover art for novels with non-binary characters and/or trans youth involved with music subcultures, which offer up a very different threshold for readers to cross.

Case Study: The (Cover) Art of Being Normal

The subtitle of this section is a play on the title of Lisa Williamson's novel *The Art of Being Normal*. Not only is the front cover of this novel extremely interesting but the back cover and endpapers also play a large part in the presentation of the book (see fig.9) This cover will be the main focus of my analysis of the covers because it displays so many of the formulaic tropes of trans representation. Another reason that this particular cover is so interesting is that book blog *Once Upon a Bookcase* interviewed the designers who made the cover, Ness Wood and Alice Todd, giving an insight into the production. This interview is a valuable resource, as most of what we find as consumers in terms of interview is with the author. There are two other factors which make both this book and its paratext an excellent focal point. First is that author Lisa Williamson worked at the Tavistock Centre, the London gender clinic for under-18s, and credits the young people there as the inspiration for her novel.¹⁶⁵ Second is that this novel was shortlisted for the YA Book Prize 2016 and is ranked in three Amazon bestseller lists (on November 22nd, 2016) for teen and young adult books both in the category of "book" and "kindle book" at number 2, 3, and 10 respectively, so this is a well-received, well-publicised and, given those sales rankings, we may presume successful book in regard to sales.¹⁶⁶ With its success and readership it has wide-reach in terms of "visibility."

In the interview "A Novel Cover Up: Ness Wood & Alice Todd on The Art of Being Normal by Lisa Williamson" by the blogger known as Jo on the *Once Upon a Bookcase*

165. "About: Lisa Williamson Author," accessed May 28, 2018, <http://www.lisawilliamsonauthor.com/about.html>.

166. "Shortlisted Books," accessed May 28, 2018, <http://www.thebookseller.com/ya-book-prize/2016/shortlisted-books>; "The Art of Being Normal eBook," accessed May 28, 2018, https://www.amazon.co.uk/dp/B00Q1ULQU6/ref=dp-kindle-redirect?_encoding=UTF8&btkr=1.

website, published February 2nd, 2015, the cover designers were asked six questions about the design process and their inspiration.¹⁶⁷ When asked what they hoped the cover would tell readers about the story, Alice Todd replies: “[t]he cover addresses the key theme of the story, the issue of transgender. It expresses how one can feel trapped not only in one’s own body, but also social conventions and norms. I wanted the cover to express the characters journey of self-expression through the issues of gender and identity.” Here we have a dual representation, the classic “trapped in the wrong body” and also the journey to perceived empowerment against social norms, presumably achieved by no longer being trapped and, conversely, adhering to societal gender norms in finally passing as the desired gender.

As in Genette’s description of the *peritext*, we discover that the cover, while of course designed by Todd and Wood, is a collaborative process and Wood explains who else was involved: “the publisher David Fickling, the editor Bella Pearson and the sales director Phil Earle all get involved at the early stages.” Todd says that the team “were clear in what they wanted from the final outcome.” When asked what they like about the cover, both designers give interesting answers. Part of Wood’s answer is “the message and its very graphic nature” and Todd adds that: “it symbolises the themes rather than representing a specific event in the story.” This is fitting in a subcategory of fiction which lacks diversity in its storylines and genres, and tends to focus mostly on the theme or the “issue.” One of the ideas not used as the main cover became the “endpapers” of the book jacket, which is a repeated pattern of blue and pink triangles with dots placed to make them look like heads on figures. Wood says these were used because: “I felt it really needed the two colours to emphasise the message of the book.” What we get here, then, is again a thematic representation about binary gender, rather than something from the story itself. Todd says of an initial 8 or so ideas, that 3 were taken forward - the front cover, the triangle pattern and the images of coat hangers which have the Mars and Venus symbols for male and female as their

167. Joanne Stapley, “A Novel Cover Up: Ness Wood & Alice Todd on The Art of Being Normal by Lisa Williamson,” Feb 2, 2015, <http://www.onceuponabookcase.co.uk/2015/02/a-novel-cover-up-ness-wood-alice-todd.html>.

hooks. I would argue that these hangers symbolise the importance of dressing to your gender.

The front cover image uses the same colours – blue and pink - to represent male and female. A male silhouette, the blue, is being split down the middle by a female, pink, silhouette which appears to be emerging from within the male figure. The female figure looks like the traditional female bathroom symbol but with the extra feminine addition of pigtails tied with bows. The back cover features the blurb for the book with the male coat hanger in the same male blue colour above, and the female hanger in pink below. This reinforces again that these colours and genders are intrinsically linked. Todd adds that of the choice: “David Fickling Books know the industry well and the target audience, so the choice was theirs.” The cover is part of the sales strategy of the publisher, a reasonable thing to expect, and they have chosen something they think appeals to the target audience. Here is the paradox of visibility, that to be seen and entice people to cross the threshold, a comfortable and recognisable image which reinforces only the binary is considered the most appealing. This leads me now to the discussion of the rest of Group 1 which follow similar design choices to *The Art of Being Normal*.

Group 1 is subtitled “An Assembly of Parts” after a quotation from Chapter 3 of Jay Prosser’s book *Second Skins*, entitled “Mirror Images: Transsexuality and Autobiography,” which discusses the use of mirror scenes in trans autobiography and the ways trans narratives follow established plots which inform medical discourse. Prosser relates the mirror in these transsexual autobiographies to Lacan’s mirror stage, in that it is not identification but *disidentification* for the trans subject. It is from here, Prosser continues, that with the mirror image shattered the transsexual can approach the material body (which is different from the felt body) as “an assembly of parts to be amputated and relocated surgically in order that the subject may be corporeally integrated.”¹⁶⁸ In fig. 10., *Freak Boy* (2013) by Kristin Elizabeth Clark, a blue symbolically male silhouette which appears as though printed on glass or mirrored in

168. Prosser, *Second Skins*, 100.

glass is seen literally shattered and distorted. Looking closer there seem to be several layers of this glass and several layers to the silhouette, as well as reflections of what may be the moon and the night sky. The male silhouette is specifically that of a bathroom symbol. The quote by Ellen Hopkins in the top right corner includes the words “startling” and “brave” indicating to the reader that the text inside is likely to contain difficult or upsetting themes. The shattered glass looks somewhat dangerous at first - although it is not bloody and only some of the edges appear sharp. The pieces are large, and rather than looking injurious they appear as though they have been moved around and rearranged, but imperfectly, calling to mind this surgical relocation of parts Prosser describes. The figure underneath the top layers seems trapped and only barely visible under their outer layer, giving obvious association with “trapped in the wrong body,” although this figure beneath is still blue. Combined with the title of “Freakboy” on the cover, an impression of struggle, turmoil and a broken person are all conclusions we might make, as well as there being no immediate resolution - other than, perhaps, a surgical one to relocate the parts.

All of the books in Group 1 present gender as two sided, as a half and half split. Gender is also like a shell or cocoon from which a figure can either be seen to emerge transformed or to have been concealing themselves as something they weren’t all along. *If I Was Your Girl* (2016) (fig. 13) by Meredith Russo uses pink and blue but overlaps them in the middle of the cover using the trans pride flag. This matches the exact tones used to represent male and female, pointing the reader to see trans identity as the crossing over from one binary gender to another one. And not just a crossing over but a very defined and solid identification, marked by the solid colours. While this may well represent the characters journey in the novel, it also presents an image which links the trans pride flag to binary genders and also the trans symbol in the “o” of “your” to the binary despite its third prong which could be representative of non-binary identity. *If I Was Your Girl* also has an alternate cover in Group 2 and is notable for being the only book in Group 1 and 2 by a trans-identified author.

F2M: The Boy Within (2010) (fig. 12) by Hazel Edwards and Ryan Kennedy is a novel which I could have included in Group 3 because of its storyline which includes ‘zine and

punk music subcultures but I have placed it in Group 1 due to the imagery. The colours are not the typical pink and blue, but when placed underneath the title there can be no question that the image of Russian dolls represents one gender on the outside and one (hidden) within. The placement of the open Russian doll which forms the “reveal” is that it is set apart from 4 other closed dolls with the same colours of outer shell, making it the outsider. This mimics part of the storyline of the novel in which some members of the band protagonist Finn is in push Finn out when he comes out as they want to be an all-girl band. Even though the dolls are featureless in their faces - something they share with the bathroom figures - the position of the lighting on them makes it appear that the group are actually looking at the split open doll who is now exposed to their gaze as its outer layer lies on the ground. The dolls are also made of a shiny reflective material which can act as a mirror.

Happy Families (fig. 11) shares enough similarity with the other covers described that it does not need much explanation, merely to say the male and female figure are placed so that the male is in the foreground and is transparent to allow the female figure to be seen behind it or perhaps within it or merged with it. *I Am J* (fig. 15) is subtler but conveys the same idea. A grey hoodie is partially unzipped to reveal the blue boy underneath, the character J of the title who is a trans man.

“Splitting” is a term that Prosser uses, which fits well the covers from Group 1. Prosser writes that mirror scenes are a trope of transsexual autobiography, appearing consistently and usually written in a similar fashion. These scenes serve to capture the “definitive splitting of the transsexual subject, freezes it, frames it schematically in Narrative.”¹⁶⁹ The mirror image misrepresents how the trans person may really be, in cases at least where the subject feels at odds with their body. Prosser was writing specifically about those who undergo genital surgery, using the terminology “transsexual.” Mirror scenes are also used in trans autobiography to focus the narrative on the importance of the subject’s gender, which is similar to Todd’s focus on the “theme” of transgender in the cover art rather than the story. I have included in

169. Prosser, *Second Skins*, 100.

fig.14 *The Transvestite* (1967) by Charlie Sachs, an exploitation/pulp novel which claims at first to be autobiography but ends with Charlie Sachs committing suicide. *The Transvestite* also has chapters written from the perspective of Charlie's wife and her father, so we can assume it is fiction. The cover depicts a face that is half-male half-female, using the same pink and blue coding. Although the more recent novels reflect modern designs, the idea is the same. If we compare this to "half-man half-woman" circus freaks there is a lack of evolution which can be traced in the visual representation - from Josephine Joseph in Tod Browning's *Freaks* in 1932, to the cover of *The Transvestite* in 1967 and then on to the cover of *The Art of Being Normal* in 2015 and the other books in Group 1. In a period spanning more than 70 years trans identity is consistently shown as two distinct genders which are split down the middle.

Prosser describes a split between the past self and the self who is writing the story, with the transition serving to join these two selves into one "I." These mirror scenes also serve as foreshadowing by suggesting, as in the case of the autobiography *Mirror Image* which Prosser discusses, where the author recalls in childhood placing an object on his clitoris in front of the mirror to stand in for a penis, naturalising the plot and "suggesting that, in the imaginary (the mirror), the penis had been there all along."¹⁷⁰ So then, the mirror scenes, and I would argue the flashbacks as well, in trans YA serve to firmly foreshadow and thus normalize that the character was always this way. We see this in the cover art with the emerging gender, splitting or breaking out of the body it is trapped in, which has been there all along. The violent imagery which may come to mind when thinking about "splitting or breaking out of the body" leads me onto Group 2 which I parallel with horror, drawing on the German Expressionist representation of threat and fear that comes from both within or outside, which most horror relies on to make us feel afraid.

Group 2 calls upon conventions of the unseen threat. *Parrotfish* (fig. 16), *Luna* (fig. 17), and *Almost Perfect* (fig. 19) use figures that are identifiably human but which are hidden either in the shadows or partially outside of the frame. *Parrotfish* hides any

170. Prosser, 102.

features which a viewer might use, unconsciously or otherwise, to try and assume the gender of the subject. The parts of the back and shoulder that are visible are perhaps the only hint, as they appear soft and rounded rather than with accentuated musculature so that we might see the outline as stereotypically more feminine. The face is entirely in shadow as is the front of the neck (which could be smooth or could have an Adam's apple) as is the chest which could have breasts or be flat. The model's haircut appears androgynous yet soft and there is no clothing which can be seen and hence gendered. This has the dual effect that the model appears naked, which is the case as well in *Almost Perfect*. *Luna*, *Almost Perfect* and an alternative cover for Group 1's *If I Was Your Girl* (fig. 18) all show a lot of skin, hinting at sexualisation which is common in representations of "the other." If we are to assume that *Parrotfish* is hinting towards the stereotypically feminine outline then female sexualisation, which is rife in horror movies and represents another kind of threat, is a simple connection to all four covers. A comparison can be made to the cover of *Asylum* (fig. 21), a YA horror novel which distorts the subjects face. *Asylum* does not feature trans characters and is used here to show a comparison to common techniques used in horror fiction cover art. *If I Was Your Girl* is different though in that it does show the model's facial features, albeit still in shadow and still turned away to hide the body and suggest mystery surrounding their "true" identity. *Parrotfish*, *Luna*, and *Almost Perfect* are all pre-TTP, while *If I Was Your Girl* is post-TTP, which is interesting when looking at this group in isolation as post-TTP trans identity has literally been given a face. Also for comparison is R.L Stine's *Fear Street: The New Girl* (fig. 22) and a version of Shirley Jackson's *We Have Always Lived in the Castle* (fig. 20), a horror and a gothic-tinged novel respectively with young adult protagonists which have the arrangement of a female figure with the head cut off as we see in *Luna* and *Almost Perfect*. In *Fear Street*, *We Have Always Lived in the Castle* and *Asylum*, though, the figures wear dresses, strongly associating them with female identity that is modest with most of the skin covered as opposed to the sparse or non-existent clothing of the trans novels. The "assembly of parts" is also a consideration for *Luna* and *Almost Perfect* as we are shown what almost looks like a slice of a person, the rest of the body to be assembled around it.

Both Group 1 and 2 cleave to recurrent tropes and themes which are part of the current wave of trans visibility that hides the invisibility of non-binary identities. Group 3 however shows cover art which not only in some images gives characters faces but also focuses on parts of the novel that are not just about the body. There are two self-published novels in Group 3, which we may assume have not been subject to the same restrictions on peritext that those produced by publishing houses have been. They also do not have to categorise as YA, again leaving less restrictions. They are included here though because they have trans youth protagonists and are *Refuse* (fig. 23) by Elliott DeLine and *Roving Pack* (fig. 24) by Sassafras Lowrey. *Refuse* tells the story of Dean, a Morrissey obsessed queer trans man, aged 22, who is described in the blurb as mid-transition. The cover image is the author himself as model. The head and shoulders shot that we saw so much of in Group 2 is present here, but the positioning of the model shows vital differences. Firstly, the facial features are easy to see and it is not the face which resides in shadow or darkness, but the space to the left of the head suggesting perhaps a darkness which lurks for the character, but is not the character himself. He gazes not at the viewer but to something outside the frame. Although seemingly naked like some of those in Group 2, his nakedness serves a purpose in revealing part of a tattoo, which seems to be the last part of the song title “There is a Light that Never Goes Out” by The Smiths. This is integral to the story which features many mentions of The Smiths and Morrissey’s lyrics which in effect save Dean from suicide near the end of the book. The close-cropped hair and its style are clearly visible and suggest a typically masculine hairstyle, making no attempt to conceal the face or its features. The model looks somewhat depressed or maybe even longing and the darkness/shadow suggests depression, but does not suggest, unlike Group 2, that *he* is something dangerous waiting to split open - the trans person is showing himself and the viewer does not anticipate that there will be some kind of shocking reveal or mystery to come about his gender. *Roving Pack*’s cover is an illustration showing a character with typically masculine features such as facial hair, and also associations with alternative subculture through piercings and tattoos. The piercings and tattoos when combined with the style of the title, which looks like graffiti, hint that the character is involved with artistic subcultures or punk subcultures. The dog is a large part of the story and looks cute and faithful next to the owner. There is nothing in this

cover which suggests any kind of splitting, doubling or silhouette, rather it uses elements found in the story to present the text. The silhouette on *Lizard Radio* (fig. 26) by Pat Schmatz appears androgynous and the lizard which is also a silhouette has more cover space than the human counterpart. There is nothing which particularly suggests trans identity about the cover, and I would personally be more curious about the large lizard. When exploring beyond the cover art we find that this is a dystopian sci fi with a gender non-conforming teen as protagonist, making this a very rare trans YA belonging to genre fiction. The remaining two covers in this group do not have any human characters on them or silhouettes, instead favouring elements from the story. *Brooklyn Burning* (fig. 25) which features a non-binary main character shows a match being struck which ties into an act of arson in the novel. *Beautiful Music for Ugly Children* (fig. 27) is about a trans boy who hosts a public access radio show and shows a cityscape and headphones, although interestingly part of the headphones are pink against a blue background. However, with the absence of a silhouette to link this to, it does not appear immediately obvious that this is codifying gender.

Conclusion

Trans identity in the era of the TTP is often still coded visually in the same way that it was in the 1930s when Josephine Joseph embodied two genders which were split down the middle of their body, or the cover of 1960s pulp novel *The Transvestite*. I analysed cover art to show how many trans YA covers use the tropes of gender splitting and visually borrow from horror with threats that hide in the shadows. Bathroom rights, a recognisable trans issue, linked the use of gendered symbols and silhouettes which convey biological difference in an immediately consumable way. When novels were by trans authors, were self-published, genre fiction, featured a non-binary character or were heavily centred around subcultures (or combinations of these things) the covers were very different. This can be summarised as less issue-based and more character-driven stories have covers that reflect more than the characters' transness and move away from generic representations.

The differences between the first two groups of cover art and Group 3 are indicative of this alternative strand of trans narrative that is emerging post-TTP, in which fringe groups of society meet, giving trans characters faces and spaces to be, albeit while still living on the fringes. However, the narratives told in much of the sellable and carefully packaged texts creates a kind of visibility that is exclusive and which, as it gains momentum, continues to hide the invisibility of not just non-binary identities but also those which are non-white and not heterosexual. In this chapter I have shown several common tropes in these sellable identities, which both elevate the correct and potentially generic trans identities to a viewable platform but also remind us that those identities will never be *fully* correct or real. They come attached to stereotypes of deceivers, gender splitting, and threat. What we as viewers must discern is that what we see, however faithful it may be to some trans experiences, means that there is always someone else we do not see. It is not easy to be critical of trans representations that are for some meaningful and vital, which is something to remember throughout this thesis and bears repeating. All trans experience is valid, but what I wish to continue questioning is the contexts which mean that, within mainstream media and popular culture, some are portrayed as more valid than others.

In the next chapter I will move beyond the cover and into the text, to consider how being visible can lead to the enfreakment of trans identity.

Group 1: An Assembly of Parts

Fig. 1 (Image in Volume 2).

Fig. 2. (Image in Volume 2). Fig.3. (Image in Volume 2). Fig.4. (Image in Volume 2).

Fig. 5. (Image in Volume 2). Fig. 6. (Image in Volume 2). Fig. 7. (Image in Volume 2).

Group 2: Headless/Faceless

Fig. 8. (Image in Volume 2). Fig. 9. (Image in Volume 2). Fig. 10. (Image in Volume 2).

Fig. 11. (Image in Volume 2). Fig. 12. (Image in Volume 2). Fig. 13. (Image in Volume 2).

Fig. 14. (Image in Volume 2).

Group 3: Subcultures

Fig. 15. (Image in Volume 2).

Fig. 16. (Image in Volume 2).

Fig. 17. (Image in Volume 2).

Fig. 18. (Image in Volume 2).

Fig. 19. (Image in Volume 2).

Chapter 2. Far from Perfect: Transgender Enfreakment in *Almost Perfect*

“Shame never dies in a small town.”¹⁷¹

The freak in this chapter – eighteen-year-old Sage Hendricks in Brian Katcher’s 2009 young adult novel *Almost Perfect* – finds herself at odds with heteronormative assumptions of her freakishness, without her own freak community in which she can feel normal. I argue that literary representations of trans youth as freaks amplify stereotypical representations of trans people. Despite YA novels since 2004 showing advancement in the depth and understanding of transgender issues versus earlier representations of transgender characters (when they even existed at all), they return to the same tragic plots found in earlier gay and lesbian fiction and film.¹⁷² In the example of Brian Katcher’s *Almost Perfect*, the “pathetic trans” stereotype outlined by Julia Serano makes a tragic ending inevitable.¹⁷³

The media interest surrounding the idea of the TTP in 2014 onwards promoted the concept that all transgender visibility is progress and that we have reached a central stage of equality purely because there have been more representations of us, whether on television, film, in the news, or in literature. However, the portrayal of Sage in *Almost Perfect* as a freak suggests a different perspective is emerging. Within YA fiction that features transgender characters trans youths feel like freaks, are *made* into freaks, or are regarded as freaks. What varies is the reason for this freakishness and whether the young person is isolated because of it or welcomed by other non-normative groups. The sense of being a freak varies between novels depending on who is designating the label – the freak themselves, their local community, institutions or people with power, or a combination of these. I will also argue that protagonist

171. Brian Katcher, *Almost Perfect* (New York: Random House, 2009), 107.

172. Michael Cart and Christine A. Jenkins, *The Heart Has its Reasons: Young Adult Literature with Gay/Lesbian/Queer Content, 1969 - 2004* (Lanham, MD: The Scarecrow Press Inc, 2004), 18; Jiménez, “Representations,” 406.

173. Pini, Keys and Riggs, “Transphobic Tropes,” 64; Julia Serano, *Whipping Girl: A Transsexual Woman on Sexism and the Scapegoating of Femininity* (New York: Seal Press, 2007), 36.

Logan's representation of Sage makes her "visible" within the framework of staring and the TTP and that being visible is also what makes her a freak. In this chapter I utilise the concept of enfreakment even though this is a term which was not initially coined with transgender people in mind and is largely concerned with disability studies. Sage's narrative complicates the idea of enfreakment as we see transgender bodies presented as a form of disability, which challenges the concept of trans youth visibility as an avenue for opportunity. Rather than being elected home-coming queen like Cassidy Lynn Campbell,¹⁷⁴ Sage's visibility leaves her 'disabled' and she cannot enjoy any of the privileges her 'able-bodied' – that is cisgender – peers can.

Firstly, I will give some background to the history of the freak show to explain how freaks are "made," and how this also applies not just to the travelling show but to mass media such as David Hevey's idea of "enfreakment." For someone to be the subject of enfreakment they must be made visible and the types of gaze will be explained in relation to Logan's first-person narrative which is central to his curated view of Sage. Next, I will turn to Rachel Adams' argument that literary freaks can be made queer, and show how Sage becomes not trans but queer, threatening Logan's sexuality and masculinity and legitimising his fear of her if she is cast as a homosexual predator. Sage's sexual deviance is shown in the narrative by describing her in essentialist terms that make her comparable to a side show "exotic" freak. When she threatens Logan's sexuality and masculinity Sage also queers the surroundings and I will discuss this in relationship to the setting of a small rural town and Sage as the outsider, much like the freak show that moves from place to place.

Following on from Adams' framework above, Sage of *Almost Perfect* is a freak who in turn becomes queer and manages to assimilate, to an extent, with the culture of Boyer. *Almost Perfect* is told from the first-person perspective of Logan Witherspoon, a straight, white cisgender teenage boy living in the small town of Boyer, who falls for the new student at school, Sage Hendricks, a straight white transgender girl. The choice of title already suggests a defect or problem of some kind. The back-cover blurb

174. Steinmetz, "America's Transition," 44.

of *Almost Perfect* foreshadows the enfreakment of Sage in the novel in several ways. Firstly, Sage is described as: “[t]all, unconventionally pretty, and a bit awkward.” Sage’s tallness and awkwardness is something that Logan takes notice of and his choice of words surrounding this description within the novel will be discussed later in this chapter for its relationship to tall women of the freak show as well as gender authenticity. Sage’s “unconventional” prettiness is also of note particularly in relation to the stereotype of the LGBT “deceiver” in literature and film. The second point of concern within the blurb is the revelation of Sage’s gender, and Logan’s repulsion at having been attracted to Sage which is a major feature of the story. The terminology is also a revelation in itself – the blurb does not tell the potential reader that Sage is transgender but instead turns to biological essentialism to explain Sage’s body, immediately drawing attention to genital difference: “[o]ne day, he acts on his growing attraction and kisses her. Moments later, he wishes he hadn’t. Sage discloses a secret: biologically, she’s a boy.” Logan is “[e]nraged, frightened, and feeling betrayed” immediately after Sage comes out. The blurb describes Logan’s regret that he had been angry, and that he attempts to rekindle his friendship with Sage. Sage is described as “[i]mpressed that Logan is even trying to understand,” as though Sage should be grateful to anyone who would want to be her friend after her freakish reveal, and that it is somehow noble of Logan to try and understand. Although there is reference to Sage’s nobility in the situation when her forgiveness is described as giving Logan a second chance, Logan is clearly represented as the dominant starrer in this situation.

Freak Shows and Enfreakment

The history of the freak show has been well-documented by writers such as Robert Bogdan and Rachel Adams, so I will draw on some of the main points of their work to give a brief introduction to the history of the freak show and its relationship to gender and gendered bodies. The purpose of this chapter is not to set out the freak shows’ history in full, but to analyse freakishness in young adult fiction with transgender content in the context of the structure and language of the freak show and the relationship of freakishness in young adult texts to the visibility of transgender people

in Western media. The theme of “authenticity” will also be explored, relating to what or who decides what is a “real” man or woman, and how certain trans narratives are given privilege over others.

Robert Bogdan, in his book *Freak Show*, describes freak shows as formally organised exhibitions of amusement that were popular between approximately 1840 and 1940. These shows made a profit by exhibiting or creating acts of: “people with physical, mental, or behavioural abnormalities, both alleged and real.”¹⁷⁵ Bogdan argued that with only a handful of freak shows left (writing in 1988) the freak show was nearing the end of its popularity. Rachel Adams picks up from Bogdan’s conviction that the freak show is in decline in her book *Sideshow U.S.A* (2001) and calls this a false alarm because freak shows experienced a renaissance since Bogdan finished his research. These shows have been known by a wide variety of names such as “Congress of Oddities,” “Kid Show,” and “Museum of Nature’s Mistakes” to name only a few cited by Bogdan and others in freak show scholarship. Rachel Adams argues that freak shows never really vanished, despite a decline, and that there has been a resurgence of the freak show since 2000. Not only this, but today’s freaks are aware of the scholarship surrounding freak shows. Adams’ *Sideshow U.S.A* is a study of the recurrence of the freak show in the 20th century within American Culture. The freak show has always been a site for those with bodies deemed Other, but also those whose sex or gender was deemed Other: “[f]reak shows performed important cultural work by allowing ordinary people to confront, and master, the most extreme and terrifying forms of Otherness they could imagine, from exotic dark-skinned people to victims of war and disease, to ambiguously sexed bodies.”¹⁷⁶

The term enfreakment comes from David Hevey’s analysis of photographs of people with disabilities, in which the placement of them as the subject made them into freaks and symbols of otherness. The non-integration of the disabled body into mainstream

175. Robert Bogdan, *Freak Show: Presenting Human Oddities for Amusement and Profit* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1998), 2.

176. Rachel Adams, *Sideshow USA: Freaks and the American Cultural Imagination* (London: The University of Chicago Press, 2001), 2.

society becomes “a natural by-product of their impairment.”¹⁷⁷ Both Bogdan and Adams also argue that the freak can be or is “made,” with Bogdan’s example of a very tall man being approached by a show manager who asked him: “How would you like to be a giant?”¹⁷⁸ He says: “being tall is a matter of physiology – being a giant involves something more.” These over-exaggerated descriptions, such as the tall man who is labelled as a giant, are part the marketing which leads to enfreakment.¹⁷⁹ Freaks required a narrative to give their intolerable bodies coherence, such as accidents or miracles, and here we can recall Stuart Hall’s analysis of television in “Encoding/Decoding” in which meaning must be imprinted for the story to be relatable.¹⁸⁰ Alok Vaid-Menon’s idea that the TTP merely makes transgender people palatable evokes the same idea. Adams uses Judith Butler’s description of gendered performance to argue that freak as an identity is: “instituted by a stylized repetition of acts.”¹⁸¹ To give actors in the freak show agency, they must *perform* the visible difference between freakishness and normality. The body is the determiner of the freak’s identity.¹⁸² Freudian psychoanalysis provides another framework for Adams, which she uses to explain our responses to freaks as a dissolving of boundaries, when that which is monstrous infiltrates the normal world. Frankie Addams in Carson McCullers’ *The Member of the Wedding* (1946) feels that the freaks at the side show see her, they know her as though she is one of them. Adams argues that an exclusively psychoanalytic approach to freaks in fiction diminishes their meaning, particularly if they are solely read as a universal symbol for human alienation and despair.¹⁸³ Contemporary American freak show troupes rely on context that gives visibility to sexual and gender differences, for example transgendered bodies. Although the racial

177. David Hevey, “The Enfreakment of Photography,” in *The Disability Studies Reader*, ed. Lennard J. Davis (New York: Routledge, 2006), 367.

178. Bogdan, *Freak Show*, 3.

179. David Hevey, *The Creatures Time Forgot: Photography and Disability Imagery* (London: Routledge, 1992), 53.

180. Adams, *Sideshow USA*, 5; Hall, “Encoding/Decoding,” 509.

181. Adams, 6; Judith Butler, “Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory,” *Theatre Journal* 40, no. 4 (1988):519. Quoted in Adams, 6.

182. Adams, 6.

183. Adams, 8.

freak is taboo, we still find the transgender freak alive in popular culture. Freak shows may have been designed to visually signify a distinction between spectator and performer, but in reality audiences and actor alike are unpredictable. Wary of being tricked, people may have prodded rudely at the freak's body to check its reality, just as the media or characters in fiction focus on a person's genitals to check their gender "reality."¹⁸⁴ Garland-Thompson describes freaks not as freaks of nature, but "freaks of culture," an idea easily transferable to the queer subject when we think about heteronormativity.¹⁸⁵ Scholars have looked at the freak show and queer freaks in relation to temporality¹⁸⁶, and also in terms of how queer bodies can be read as disabled in their non-heteronormativity.¹⁸⁷ In the example of *The Member of the Wedding*, Frankie imagines that freaks have no future¹⁸⁸, just as Bond-Stockton proposed that the queer child may wish to move sideways in time instead of growing up or having a future.¹⁸⁹

Staring and Types of Gaze

Part of what makes the freak, then, is the act of looking, or more specifically, staring. Rosemarie Garland-Thompson examines staring and its effects in *Staring: How We Look*. Her understanding of why we stare is positioned first in biological terms. Garland-Thompson explains the role of dopamine in staring. Novelty stimulates the brain because of the "surprise" element, causing the brain to release the chemical dopamine in response to pleasure.¹⁹⁰ For the transgendered freak, whose enfreakment can rely on biological essentialism, this kind of explanation for staring could be argued as an excuse – simply that one cannot help but look at what surprises us. While it may be

184. Adams, 13.

185. Rosemarie Garland-Thompson, *Freakery: Cultural Spectacles of the Extraordinary Body*, (New York: NYU Press, 1996), 9.

186. Alison Sperling, "Female Adolescence in the Novels of Carson McCullers," *Girlhood Studies* 9, no. 1 (2016): 92.

187. Sperling, "Female adolescence," 92.

188. Sperling, 93.

189. Stockton, *The Queer Child*, 3.

190. Rosemarie Garland-Thompson, *Staring: How We Look* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), xiii.

true that our eyes are “caught,” causing the brain to: “[pump] out the dopamine providing us pleasure” the power dynamics of the starrer and the staree are more complicated than a physical reaction.¹⁹¹ We might be taught, for example, that staring is rude, yet to look away can also be “an active denial of acknowledgement.”¹⁹²

There are several types of “gaze” which can be applied to the trans person as freak, as well as the “stare” and the “look.” Richardson makes a clear distinction between the “stare,” the “look” and the “gaze.” The look is the biological action of the eye. The “stare” is taken by Richardson to suggest the dynamics of staring outlined by Garland Thomson, as mentioned above. The gaze is different from the look and the stare as it is an oppressive act and makes the subject subordinate.¹⁹³ Enfreakment not only blends the stare into the gaze but conflates all the different mechanisms of gazing. The male, or cinematic gaze acts out a position of patriarchal privilege, creating a masculine and feminine visual dynamic in theory which does not necessarily relate to actual people: “In other words, the male gaze as a form of dominance staring makes us into men and women.”¹⁹⁴ Laura Mulvey describes how the pleasure in looking is split in a gendered way, with the male gaze considered active and the female passive. The woman in this sense is a visual spectacle who becomes a hetero-erotic distraction for both the characters on screen and the viewer.¹⁹⁵ This is seen clearly in Logan’s view of Sage in *Almost Perfect*, and staring can be an act of dominance in place of aggression. Logan’s transphobic feelings, which can also be read as veiled homophobia as I will demonstrate later, do make him feel aggressive. This dominance staring gives him some control in a situation where he feels wildly out of his depth.

Michel Foucault’s theories of gaze and visibility focus on power relations in institutions.¹⁹⁶ Foucault shows how schools, prisons, and institutions of power operate like Jeremy Bentham’s panopticon as omnipresent, seeing everything but remaining

191. Garland-Thomson, *Staring*, 18.

192. Garland-Thomson, *Staring*, 83.

193. Richardson, *Transgressive Bodies*, 4.

194. Garland-Thomson, *Staring*, 41.

195. Laura Mulvey, “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema,” *Screen* 16, no.3 (1975): 11.

196. Sara Mills, *Michel Foucault* (London: Routledge, 2003), 45.

unseen themselves.¹⁹⁷ The panopticon is a ring-shaped building with a central tower, with cells for prisoners in the outer ring and windows in the central tower which allow a guard to see into the cells but do not allow the inmates to see the guard, or each other.¹⁹⁸ This structure creates a fear of being watched, and causes people to regulate their behaviour, which Susan W. Woolley suggests is the same as power structures used in schools to regulate student behaviour and enforce notions of gender as two sexes which adhere to masculine and feminine ideals.¹⁹⁹ Foucault's clinical gaze uses medical discourse to quantify difference, and is enacted by Logan in the many descriptions of Sage's physical difference.²⁰⁰ Difference as pathology is an obvious part of the "novelty" or "surprise" of the freak show, pointed out by acts which use disability as their attraction or shows which feature descriptions of acts such as "nature's mistake." There is also the Sartrean gaze, when subjectivity is made by the gaze of the other. This is when the other threatens to expose what or who the starrer is by seeing them.²⁰¹ For Logan, this feeds back into dominance gaze, when he feels terrified that people will view him as gay because of his attraction to a trans woman. Garland-Thomson argues that both Foucault's and Sartre's models of staring are limited within modern urban life because we are not restricted to a "cone of vision" as in Foucault's keyhole. In Sartre's model the staree seems to be the one who actually has the advantage because they threaten the starrer.²⁰² In relation to the transgender character, however, it would seem that these two models of staring can both be seen. In *Almost Perfect*, Logan's "cone of vision" is his limited experience of the world and the edges of fictional town Boyer. He generally does have dominance but Sage, the transgender teen he is attracted to, certainly threatens that and shames Logan by staring back. Garland-Thomson describes this as double shaming: "To use Sartre's

197. Mills, Michel Foucault, 45.

198. Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Vintage Books, 1977), 200.

199. Susan W. Woolley, "Contesting silence, claiming space: gender and sexuality in the neo-liberal public high school," *Gender and Education* 29, no.1 (2017): 86.

200. Michel Foucault, *The Birth of the Clinic: An Archaeology of Medical Perception* (1973; Oxon: Routledge Classics, 2003), 241.

201. Jean-Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness* (1957; London: Routledge Classics, 2003), 276–277.

202. Garland-Thomson, 44.

shame model of looking, staring as stigma assignment doubly shames starees – both for their supposed flaws and for exposing their starers. Staring, then, can be a matter of looking wrong and wrong looking for everyone in the encounter.”²⁰³ In the gendered gaze: “Not only must ladies refrain from staring, they must never draw the stare upon themselves.”²⁰⁴ In the strict gender-normative binary that Logan lives by, Sage must not only take responsibility for making Logan uncomfortable, but must also live up to his standards of how a lady should act. She is walking a tightrope in her relationship with him and must constantly right herself to assure that any shame is always on her.

This shame and blame dynamic can be seen directly after Sage comes out to Logan, who feels remorseful for reacting so badly, and for a moment does not think it is right that Sage might change because of him. But Logan never allows himself to take the blame for his actions and quickly reassures himself that she brought this upon herself. (AP, 114) It is also Sage’s fault in Chapter 14 when Logan considers talking to Sage after making a conscious effort to avoid her, and reasons to himself that he “could let bygones be bygones” if she keeps her mouth shut, a bizarre gesture which Logan seems to think would be forgiving and generous of him. (AP, 124) The way that Logan sees Sage is altered by the knowledge of her gender-identity, and he also becomes increasingly confused and conflicted in the way he thinks about her. When Sage meets Logan’s mother and holds out her hand it is described both as large, according to Logan’s knowledge of Sage’s anatomy, but also soft which is a feminine contrast to the harsh biologically male language Logan was using when Sage first confided in him. (AP, 174) He seems almost to be making what he considers allowances for her and for the fact that he feels deceived. Again, he uses the term “large” when he describes her feet, adding “but not huge,” rendering Sage’s feet simultaneously masculine to Logan’s post-revelation eye, but also feminine enough to justify being fooled. (AP, 175)

Tammi, Sage’s sister, telephones Logan after Sage has been brutally attacked by a transphobic man she went on a date with. Although Logan is clearly worried about

203. Garland-Thomson, 46.

204. Garland-Thomson, 70.

Sage he still points out that her femininity is something he considers laboured or an act: "Her voice was nasal, yet even with her injuries, she made herself sound feminine." (AP, 228) She does not embody femininity through identifying herself to Logan as female, but *makes* herself that way to him through what he perceives as conscious effort. She cannot just *be* a girl, she must always try in a way that satisfies Logan's stare. Long before characters like Sage of the 2000s and 2010s, the fiction of Carson McCullers was notable for its young gender freaks and outlaws, who have been categorised as queer by scholars, even without the label "transgender." These young freakish, queer characters are an important pre-cursor to the young queer/trans person who feels like or is treated like a freak in YA novels. They feel like outsiders but also feel "seen" by others they consider freaks under the right subculture circumstances, displaying the need to be seen described by Cart and Jenkins as a function of the YA novel. *The Member of the Wedding* by Carson McCullers gives an example of what Adams calls the freak becoming queer, when the freak can blend in by partially hiding their deviance, and I will now use this as a framework to show how Sage becomes queer in the same way.

Freaks in Literature

In McCullers' *The Member of the Wedding*, Frankie Addams is a twelve-year-old girl in a small American town who feels like a freak. Pamela Thurschwell notes that Frankie, who has a fear of growing freakishly tall, has a fear of growing *up*, another example of Stockton's growing sideways.²⁰⁵ She thinks that if she continues to grow as quickly as she has been that she would be over 9 feet tall which would *make* her a freak.²⁰⁶ She then recalls the Chattahoochee Exposition which comes to town for a week every October, which includes "The House of Freaks." Among the freaks is "the half-man, half-woman," a "morphidite," and a "miracle of science," whose body in relation to its

205. Pamela Thurschwell, "Dead Boys and Adolescent Girls: Unjoining the Bildungsroman in Carson McCullers's *The Member of the Wedding* and Toni Morrison's *Sula*," *English Studies in Canada* 38, no. 3-4 (2013): 116.

206. Carson McCullers, *The Member of the Wedding* (New York: Penguin, 1946), 11%. Kindle Edition.

gender is described as divided completely in half. The “half-man, half-woman” described in *The Member of the Wedding* sounds very similar to Josephine Joseph, part of the cast of Tod Browning’s film *Freaks*, and as Adams describes, there is “no visible evidence” that this freak is in fact a “morphidite” because the act seems to rely merely on clothing.²⁰⁷ Adams goes on to say that: “an actual morphidite (or hermaphrodite) would possess ambiguous secondary sex characteristics,” which of course makes visible evidence improbable unless the freaks were to perform naked.

Rachel Adams’ assessment of the queer freaks in the fiction of Carson McCullers works well as a framework for considering Sage in *Almost Perfect*: “A freak becomes queer when her deviance (often of a sexual nature) is partially hidden, allowing her to assimilate into the dominant culture, but with a constant sense that she does not belong.”²⁰⁸ While Sage does not identify in her sexuality as queer, those around her see her gender as a form of homosexuality. Adams argues that freak shows confirm the normality of the onlooker by showing them their difference from those on display. However, she argues, in McCullers’ fiction characters find strong identification with the freaks they see and instead of confirming any normality they find themselves reminded of their own awkwardness.²⁰⁹ Adams’ description of a partially hidden deviance for the freak who becomes queer is key to reading the trans freak whose ability to “pass” in the heteronormative gaze is seen as a form of deception. Sage is partially hidden when she is read as cisgender by most of her classmates, but she is still a freak due to her physical difference (her height for example), and still queer in Adams’ sense because she knows she does not really belong. As Alok Vaid-Menon says: “I wonder if we can understand this ‘tipping point’ less as a moment of triumph and more as a call for reflection. Society’s message to trans people feels like: Congratulations! As long as you look like a conventionally attractive, respectable, thin cisgender model. Otherwise expect to continue experiencing discrimination, hostility and violence – and to be blamed for it.”²¹⁰

207. Adams, *Sideshow USA*, 97.

208. Adams, 92.

209. Adams.

210. Vaid-Menon, “Greater transgender visibility.”

Queer in the work of McCullers is used to subvert or refuse categorisation of identity. Freak and queer have in the past been conflated. An example Adams gives is an explanation of the word *freak* being defined as “a homosexual” in Dr George Henry’s *Sex Variants*. Clothing the freak or queer body in McCullers’ fiction serves to hide the body’s irregularities, but also threatens to reveal them.²¹¹ Adams makes the point that this threat of reveal is a result of the freak being unable to wear clothes “properly.” In the same way, part of what makes a trans person pass as “real” in normative society is their ability to wear the clothes of their gender (in the case of trans people who identify with binary genders) properly. Vaid-Menon describes going out wearing both a beard and a skirt, embodying what society would deem improper wearing of clothes. Adams discusses the contrast of deviance for profit at the freak show with persecution of deviance in the outside world. McCullers had rocks thrown at her by her classmates in school for dressing in men’s clothing. When Sage shows Logan photos she has printed from a website of a woman who has transitioned much later in life, Logan thinks to himself: “[h]e was a man in a dress,” sounding unsympathetic and uncomfortable about this presentation of gender. This judgement reflects Sage’s fear that if she does not transition young then hormone replacement therapy will not be effective, meaning that she might be unable to wear clothes properly and hence not be read as real. The story of Lily Mae in *The Member of the Wedding* is another good example of the power of clothing, as character Berenice tells Frankie that Lilly Mae “turned into a girl” even though her further description of Lily Mae still cleaves to the stereotype of the feminine gay male or sissy.²¹²

I could have chosen any of the novels to explore in this chapter on freakishness but Logan’s treatment of Sage in *Almost Perfect* offers a clear example of the relationship between starrer and doubly-shamed staree, or as in the freak show, sideshow act and viewer. The rural setting of *Almost Perfect* contrasts with the usual urban environments of the high school novel and Boyer is portrayed as a town where there

211. Adams, *Sideshow USA*, 95.

212. McCullers, *Member of the Wedding*, 76.

are no queers. Queers in rural America is explored in the work of Mary L. Gray later in the chapter. For Logan, the eighteen-year-old straight, white, cisgender boy who narrates the story of his relationship with Sage, Sage's mere arrival and presence in the town of Boyer is strange and freakish, confirming that outsiders are exotic and dangerous. Her gender-identity is misunderstood as homosexuality by Logan whose only experience of transgender people has been watching them on television talk shows. Logan is presenting Sage to us, the readers, as his freak exhibit, capable of fooling him and everyone she meets. He describes Sage in sensationalist language to the reader to sell her gender "act" just like the American talk show hosts of the 1980s and 1990s. He is the one who packages her as a freak and assigns her the traits that he knows his audience will be familiar with to associate her with the image he wants to portray. When Sage makes her first appearance in the novel at Boyer High School in chapter three, Logan is shocked to see a new student after being with the same group of kids since kindergarten. Sage's entrance into Logan's biology class is marked with the same close attention to physical features that Logan applies to all the characters he encounters. He notices how tall Sage is: "She was almost amazingly tall. I was used to looking down at most women, but this girl had to be nearly six feet tall." (AP, 17) This starts her creation as a freak, because she is not like 'most women' and her physical difference is something he marvels at. Robert Bogdan describes this style of constructing freaks in his chapter "Modes of Presenting Freaks." He says: "... freaks were what you made them. How they were packaged, how they were dressed, how they acted and what the audience was told about them – their presentation was the crucial element in determining their success, in making a freak."²¹³ The format of the freak show is that it travels from town to town, appearing in each for a limited time before moving on again. In *The Member of the Wedding*, the freak show is a yearly occurrence, but for characters like Sage it seems unlikely that they would return once their stint as an exotic attraction has ended. The reason for this in *Almost Perfect* is the small-town mentality that "there are no queers here."

213. Bogdan, *Freak Show*, 95.

Thus Sage, when she becomes visible to Logan signifies the return of something banished and wrong, which he reads as homosexuality. Adams says of the freak show, in relation to the racial hierarchies of the south in America depicted by McCullers, that when freak shows return they bring a return of repressed and abject things which although hidden are still alive in their closeted forms.²¹⁴ Bogdan discusses two patterns of presentation for exhibits – first the exotic, in which the performer is a strange creature from a foreign land – in this case a mysterious out-of-towner, and secondly the aggrandized “which endowed the freak with status-enhancing characteristics.”²¹⁵ Sage is presented in both these ways, and can be easily tossed aside by Logan once, like the travelling freak show, she has moved on to her next destination.

When Sage is made “queer” in the ways described above, she becomes subject to the queer stereotypes that were first applied to gay and lesbian characters in literature and film and are now applied to transgender people, who threaten heteronormativity, in the same way. Stereotypes such as the sissy serve to keep Sage “queer” rather than transgender, thus allowing Logan to think of her in essentialist terms as a man and continue to assert his dominance. In the next section I will begin by describing the stereotypes of gay and lesbian people in film and literature, as well as recent research on transgender stereotypes. From here I will show how biological essentialism and stereotypes are used to present Sage as abject, freakish, and an object of fear.

Stereotypes and Essentialism

Stereotypes form a large part of the way Logan makes sense of the world and the people in his life, most obviously Sage but also his attitudes towards binary gender roles in general and the moral codes he should live by. Alok Vaid-Menon’s experience of the binary and non-binary gender shows that those who appear to conform to gender-norms are taken as representative of all trans people. Those who do not fit the

214. Adams, *Sideshow USA*, 95.

215. Bogdan, *Freak Show*, 97.

norm are excluded, and Vaid-Menon has been called a freak.²¹⁶ A study by Gazzola and Morrison suggests that negative portrayals of transgender people in the media likely inform stereotypical beliefs about trans people, just as Logan in *Almost Perfect* recalls seeing trans people on 1990s talk shows and Vaid-Menon feels unrepresented because they do not fit into a “fixed” gender.

This section discusses Gazzola and Morrison’s study in more detail, as well as studies of queer characters in film and TV to argue that trans stereotypes in current media are replicating earlier and current LGB stereotypes as the objects of derision, humour and horror in popular media. Part of this derision comes not just from a character’s implied homosexuality but also because they are coded as gender-dissident, for example as tomboys and sissies. These same stereotypes – that of the tomboy and the sissy – have often been applied to transgender people as well in the efforts of those who wish to deny the existence of trans people and label them as simply homosexual. This feeds further into the idea of gender authenticity – who or what is the “real” man or “real” woman? Some background on the reality of stereotypic beliefs about trans people and the discrimination attached to this is useful in understanding the stereotypes seen in trans YA fiction.

Gazzola and Morrison conducted two studies on stereotypic beliefs about transgender men and transgender women. They found in the research of Hill & Willoughby and Lombardi that: “transgender people are frequently victims of discrimination.” Many types of discrimination are documented, including in health care, housing, employment, and physical and verbal harassment in homes, schools, workplaces, and public places.²¹⁷ Statistics suggest that most transgender people will experience some

216. Alok Vaid-Menon, “Greater transgender visibility hasn’t helped non-binary people – like me,” *The Guardian*, accessed May 15, 2018, <http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2015/oct/13/greater-transgender-visibility-hasnt-helped-nonbinary-people-like-me>.

217. Stephanie Beryl Gazzola and Melanie Ann Morrison, “Culturally and Personally Endorsed Stereotypes of Transgender Men and Transgender Women: Notable Correspondence or Disjunction?” *International Journal of Transgenderism* 15, (2014): 76.

form of discrimination in their lives. As well as this discrimination, trans prejudice and transphobia have also been documented by researchers.²¹⁸ Participants in Gazzola and Morrison's 2014 studies were interviewed in focus groups formed of individuals recruited from a Western Canadian university, who were aged 19 – 30. They found that participants believed trans people to be abnormal, using such descriptions as "odd," "weird," "different," and "gross." Also found was that participants believed transgender people experience rejection in society and are perceived as freaks.²¹⁹ This research shows that transgender people are subject to stereotypical beliefs and Morrison's concluded that it is likely that the negative stereotypes of trans people are "derived from portrayals of transgender individuals in the media."²²⁰ So it would be fair to argue that the negative stereotypes portrayed in transgender YA novels could have a direct impact on the way transgender people are perceived. It is important then to explore what these stereotypes are and show how they are used to increase awareness of how damaging such narratives can be, so I am taking up Gazzola and Morrison's suggestion that future research be directed towards: "analysis of media representation of transgender individuals, [and] investigation into the associations between stereotype content."²²¹

Despite YA novels since 2004 featuring more transgender characters they return to the same formulaic tragic plots found in earlier gay and lesbian fiction and film. Cart and Jenkin's detailed study of YA novels with LGBTQ content, *The Heart has its Reasons*, describes stereotypes found among the roughly 200 YA novels with such content published in the US between 1969 and 2004:

A number of early novels – and even some of the more recent ones – perpetuate stereotypes in their portrayal of homosexual characters. Some are pictured as unfortunates doomed to either a premature death or a life of despair lived at the darkest margins of society. Others are portrayed as sinister

218. Gazzola and Morrison, "Stereotypes," 77.

219. Gazzola and Morrison, 81.

220. Gazzola and Morrison, 96.

221. Gazzola and Morrison, 96.

predators lurking in the shadows of sinister settings, or play the role of briefly viewed ‘fags’ or ‘dykes’ who are included only to confirm a more central character’s naiveté or sophistication.²²²

Books with LGBTQ content are some of the most controversial in US school libraries and often challenged which Cart and Jenkins saw as something that would not change in the near future. This has a direct effect on what YA publishers will buy and sell, because despite controversy sometimes proving good for marketing, it also leaves the publisher open to: “criticism, boycotts, and public censure – particularly when a book is aimed at a young audience.”²²³ They describe gay and lesbian novels of the 1970s and 1980s as being largely about “homosexual visibility” which are coming out stories in which the dramatic tension comes from “what *might* happen when the invisible is made visible.” Cart and Jenkins liken this to “social conscience” stories of racial integration where a society is interrupted by someone who is not “one of us.”²²⁴ They argue that YA literature has a special function in that they are books about outsiders who need to see themselves reflected in the novel and find comfort in knowing there are other people “like me.”²²⁵

In his famous study of gay characters in American film, *The Celluloid Closet* (1987), Vito Russo expressed the difficulties he had in finding people who would talk openly to him about homosexuality. He says: “Any type of openly gay enterprise is still highly suspect in culture in general,” and goes on to add that “[b]ooks on gay subjects and even non-gay subjects by openly gay writers have rarely been taken seriously in the straight press – when they are noticed at all.”²²⁶ Russo discusses the different stereotypical modes of homosexuality shown on film, and questions who these stereotypical representations are for: “[m]ainstream films about homosexuality are not for gays. They address themselves exclusively to the majority.”²²⁷ Given the recurrence of the

222. Cart and Jenkins, *The Heart Has its Reasons*, xvi.

223. Cart and Jenkins, xvii.

224. Cart and Jenkins, xx.

225. Cart and Jenkins, 1.

226. Vito Russo, *The Celluloid Closet*, (New York: Harper & Row, 1987), 325.

227. Russo, *Celluloid Closet*, 325.

same tropes in trans fiction, coupled with issues of access for readers, we can ask: Does the same apply to films and books about trans people – who are they for?

Tomboys and sissies are two classic stereotypical characters Russo describes. Tomboys have never been as threatening as the sissy.²²⁸ Just as the male vision of homosexuality has often rendered lesbianism invisible, trans men and trans masculine people are underrepresented in mainstream media. Of tomboys, Russo describes how they were usually portrayed as aspiring to strength and daring, whereas the sissy was the weak antithesis of that image. Cross-dressers (called transvestites at the time of Russo's study) have appeared on film as early as 1903 in Edwin S.P Porter's film which featured a cross-dresser posing in front of a mirror. Men often wore women's clothes for roles in silent movies, or played female characters. Critics called cisgendered actor Harold Lloyd's performance as a female pitcher in 1915 "repellent." Again we see the idea of real versus fake in those "repellent" female characteristics: "[t]he idea that there was such a thing as a real man made the creation of the sissy inevitable."²²⁹ The tomboy (which we might now also call dyke, butch, daddy or any number of other names) and sissy stereotype are directly related to transgender stereotypes, as they indicate what Niall Richardson calls failure to "perform either gender very well."²³⁰ Citing Julia Serano, Richardson explains: "that there are two main stereotypes employed in popular cultural representations of transsexuals: the pathetic and the deceiving."²³¹ The pathetic is someone who does not "pass" well and is inserted into the story for comedy. The deceiver is the transgender person who passes well but because of that becomes threatening, which Richardson points out is very similar to the model of the homosexual predator.

In the late 1980s, 1990s, and early 2000s shows with queer characters or content in the US had periods of both primetime success and failure. Ron Becker describes how

228. Russo, *The Celluloid Closet*, 5.

229. Russo, 6.

230. Niall Richardson, *Transgressive Bodies: Representations in Film and Popular Culture* (Surrey: Ashgate, 2010), 128.

231. Richardson, *Transgressive Bodies*, 128.

gay characters in the 1990s appealed to straight viewers who were socially liberal and well-educated, particularly upwardly mobile members of the baby boomer generation, and generation X.²³² The idea of this “hip” demographic of 18 – 49 year olds appealed to TV executives, leading to a gay-programming trend in the mid-1990s.²³³ Leading up to this trend, the early 1990s saw a preoccupation with cultural difference in the US, with corporations who wished to remain successful updating their equality policies and many advertisers – who provided key funding for television content – following suit.²³⁴ What gay meant was changing in early 1990s American culture. Queer people were still constructed as deviant others, particularly in relation to rhetoric around HIV and AIDS, but were also often represented by civil rights movements as ordinary Americans who just wanted to conform to mainstream American institutions such as marriage or the military.²³⁵ Becker argues that:

“In the early 1990s, the cultural logic of multiculturalism and shifting discourses surrounding homosexuality intersected with the economics of niche marketing and network narrowcasting to make gay-themed TV not only a possibility, but also one of the most noticeable network programming trends of the era.”²³⁶

Queerness was staged in such a way that it could be marketable, but also, Becker argues, in a way that fuelled anxieties around homosexuality.²³⁷

The Motion Picture Production Code of 1930 meant that the subject of homosexuality on screen had to be approached in a very different way than it had been in pre-code films, presenting “sissies” as homosexual only if the audience chose to see them that way, which was: “simply a reflection of the fact that the existence of homosexuals in

232. Ron Becker, *Gay TV and Straight America* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 2006), 108.

233. Becker, *Gay TV*, 109.

234. Becker, 114–115.

235. Becker, 124.

236. Becker, 134.

237. Becker, 136.

society was acknowledged only when society chose to do so.”²³⁸ Sissies were used as symbols for failed masculinity and therefore didn’t represent the threat of actual homosexuality – visible homosexuality being viewed as antisocial.²³⁹ In 1961 the Code was revised to allow the subject of homosexuality on screen. The suicide of LGB characters in film has been a trope that has appeared since: “[t]he very first gay man to be presented on film ended in the obligatory suicide that would mark the fate of screen gays for years to come.”²⁴⁰ This has been replicated in LGB YA fiction explored by Cart and Jenkins, and *Almost Perfect*’s Sage attempted suicide before moving to Boyer and threatened suicide again following being attacked. This is part of the way that Sage’s life becomes stereotypically tragic, but also a way she is coded as homosexual in her adherence to a familiar and tragic homosexual plot. Logan’s remark that she will be doomed to loneliness echoes the trope of the pathetic trans, leading Sage to an inevitably tragic end.²⁴¹ When Sage tries to talk to Logan about her suicidal thoughts he tells her it is weird, yet despite that she praises him for being willing to listen, showing how low the threshold of acceptable treatment is.²⁴²

Logan has hero fantasies about protecting or saving Sage: “I’d be like a brother to Sage. I’d make sure no guys got too close to her.” This saviour-complex begs the question: what is it that Sage needs saving from? It also serves to de-sexualise her and make her into the pathetic stereotype described by Richardson. Logan swoops in to save Sage from a group of frat boys who seemed to be forcing Sage to take part in the beer competition and possibly something more sinister. It is unclear whether Logan wants to rescue Sage from their physical grasp or simply protect himself. He puffs up his ego by saying he must have looked “frightening” as they let her go. His alpha-male displays of bravado are usually steeped in homophobia. The boy who calls him a “faggot” at a touch football game is attacked, even though in Logan’s world this is

238. Russo, *The Celluloid Closet*, 32.

239. Russo, 33 – 44.

240. Russo, 21.

241. Pini, Keys and Riggs, 66; Katcher, *Almost Perfect*, 329.

242. Pini, Keys and Riggs, 63; Katcher, 148.

usual banter between the heteronormative masculine guys in a town where there are simply no gays.

Logan continually references gender stereotypes, making assumptions about people or using them to explain his behaviour. He also embodies these stereotypes, for example he cannot say “I love you” to his mom (although she understands he does love her through implication of his stumbling words) and later comments that his friends Tim and Jack are guys and “therefore showed no feelings,” and he also says that “Men don’t discuss their feelings.”²⁴³ He cannot even discuss the way he feels about his ex-girlfriend to friends Jack and Tim as he fears they will see him as less of a man for showing feelings, and instead deflects what could be hurt with a crude sexual comment comparing her shutting him out emotionally to her literally not letting him inside her.²⁴⁴ Cleaning and having a tidy room is a “girl thing.”²⁴⁵ These stereotypes of gendered behaviours, and those of the sissy, tomboy, and transgender freak discussed so far function within the framework of biological essentialism.

Biological essentialism is the go-to framework of argument for trans exclusionary radical feminists (also known as TERFs). Key to the radical feminist debates about gender separatism is the work of Janice Raymond, who wrote *The Transsexual Empire: The Making of the She-Male* in 1979. Raymond argues that transsexualism is a problem, which has moral implications and has been perpetuated by advances in medicine. A transsexual woman to Raymond is actually a man who has been feminised and a transsexual man is a woman who has been masculinised. She describes these processes of masculinisation or feminisation as superficial, making it clear she believes that a person cannot separate their gender from the one they were assigned at birth based on biological features.²⁴⁶ Trans women are the main focus of Raymond’s argument, with trans men described as “rare.” This is an important part of Raymond’s

243. Katcher, *Almost Perfect*, 44, 118.

244. Katcher, 44.

245. Katcher, 227.

246. Raymond, *The Transsexual Empire: The Making of the She-Male* (London: The Women’s Press, 1979) 3-4, 15.

moral issue with transsexuals, as by focusing on people assigned male at birth she can legitimise trans exclusion through fear of sexual violence by men against women.²⁴⁷

Mary Daly writes in her 1978 book *Gyn/Ecology* that: “Transsexualism is an example of male surgical siring which invades the female world.”²⁴⁸ Daly is adamant that transsexuals can never be real women, only “feminine persons.”²⁴⁹ Sheila Jeffreys wrote in 1997 in an article called “Transgender Activism: A Lesbian Feminist Perspective,” that transgenderism is mutilation, and in her 2014 book *Gender Hurts: A Feminist Analysis of the Politics of Transgenderism* she argues that transgender is viewed as harmful and a disorder which hurts society. She used the word “amputation” when referring to transgender surgery, portraying it in its most violent sense to convey disease and harm.²⁵⁰ Sideshows have described freaks in biological terms, just as those who seek to expose the “reality” of the transgendered body obsess over biology.²⁵¹ Tod Browning’s film *Freaks* (1932) presents Josephine Joseph, a “hermaphrodite” described as “half man, half women,” as a voyeur who enjoys watching the sexual activity of other characters. Josephine Joseph has no dialogue in the film and can be associated through their voyeuristic actions with the “perverse eroticism that is frequently associated with the original freak medium.”²⁵² Biological essentialism is unescapable in *Almost Perfect* through Logan’s graphic descriptions and judgements of Sage and her body.

The main text of the novel begins with this same sense of foreboding and dread summarised in the blurb. Sage Hendricks is the line that Logan had sworn not to cross. (AP, 1) As well as being a line he didn’t want to cross, asking Sage on a date is foreshadowed by the ominous “What was the worst that could happen? I would find

247. Raymond, 29 – 30.

248. Mary Daly, *Gyn/Ecology* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1978), 29.

249. Daly, *Gyn/Ecology*, 68.

250. Sheila Jeffreys, “Transgender Activism: A Lesbian Feminist Perspective,” *Journal of Lesbian Studies* 1, no. 3- 4 (1997): 55–74; Sheila Jeffreys, *Gender Hurts: Feminist Analysis of the Politics of Transgenderism* (Oxon: Routledge, 2014), 2.

251. Adams, *Sideshow USA*, 20.

252. Adams, 75.

that out very shortly.” (AP, 23) Logan lives in a trailer with his mother in Boyer, a small-town of barely two-thousand people, made up of trailer parks, a factory, churches, and the high school football field which is maintained to pristine condition by the residents’ tax dollars. The high school itself, by comparison, is in disrepair. For Logan and his track-mate Jack, girls are there seemingly to be watched and then judged. The girls on the Boyer cheerleading squad aren’t “pretty” and “graceful” like they in in other towns, apparently because there is such a small student body to select from. Cheerleader Tanya who Jack thinks likes Logan, is thought of by Logan in a crude manner, which goes further than just lusting after her. She was “fat” in elementary school, then her “body mass had migrated into her chest.” He thinks that she isn’t bikini material but has a couple of “good points.” Tanya is regarded in purely physical terms before Logan moves on to the next thought.

It seems no coincidence that Sage’s arrival is timed with biology class, one in which dissection is about to occur, mirroring Logan’s fascination with physical details and foreshadowing what is to come later. Logan’s ex, Brenda, is described physically as someone who “didn’t turn heads. She was too skinny, too mousy for most guys to notice” and on the previous page Logan is critical of Tim’s weight and seems disgusted by his eating habits. Logan’s attention to the physical negatives he finds in all around him seem obsessive. (AP, 15) Yet he then says that Brenda was “perfect.”

Logan seems confused that he is so drawn to Sage, thinking to himself that she is not any prettier than Tanya. He relents and thinks to himself that she is not bad-looking and is physically fit with a nice face. Even the tallness “isn’t necessarily that bad.” During one lunchtime Logan and his friends Jack, and Tim discuss Sage’s sister, Tammi, who is also new in the school and much shorter than Sage. They wonder if one of them is adopted, further drawing attention to Sage’s height. Although she is “nearly six feet tall,” Tim asks of Sage’s sister “Is Tammi a seven-footer as well?” (AP, 21) Jack later says that Sage has “got that jungle woman thing going on.” (AP, 109) This exaggeration gives even more of a sense of Sage’s freakishness, in the same way that Bogdan describes the freak show promoters spiel: “[i]nches were added to the height of giants

(a twelve-inch inflation was common) or subtracted from that of dwarfs.”²⁵³ Jack’s jungle woman comment is a direct example of the exotic presentation of freaks, when promoters would tell the audience that the exhibit came from a country that seemed mysterious because it appealed to white audiences at a time of British colonialism.²⁵⁴

While these exotic exhibits were usually racially motivated during the period of freak shows that Bogdan examines, Sage is seemingly just as exotic to the students in Boyer who rarely meet anyone outside of their own community. Sage’s voice is “throaty” in chapter 10, as though Logan is offering up hints to the reader that he had spotted these physical traits that he would later associate as male all along. (AP, 91) The biological is also applied to ex-girlfriend Brenda in chapter 9 when Logan thinks about his breakup in terms of “gross bodily functions” when describing it to Sage. He wants to “vomit” out the experience, “[l]ance it like a boil” and purge himself like “a bout of diarrhoea.” (AP, 79) At the end of chapter 10 Sage and Logan kiss, after which Sage says: “I’m a boy,” ending the chapter on a seemingly shocking revelation. (AP, 99) Chapter 11 sees Logan running away from Sage’s home where they shared the kiss, and a focus on her physical traits which have gone from “sexy” to “disgust[ing].” Sage’s voice which was originally “feminine” to Logan, and comparable to a phone sex worker is now “husky,” a progression from “throaty” just pages before the reveal. Later he changes his mind, thinking that even though she is “bellowing,” Sage’s voice is definitely that of a girl. (AP, 184) Not only is Logan disgusted but he imagines Sage’s genitals in a graphic manner: “Big, hairy balls. An eight-inch cock.” He equates his attraction to her with homosexuality, assuming that her body makes him a “fag.” (AP, 100) He proceeds to rant angrily, calling Sage a “sicko” and wondering why he didn’t put her in hospital by punching her. This is an extremely violent reaction, both transphobic and homophobic, but what is even worse for Logan is the thought that other people might find out. (AP, 101) The relationship of shame between starrer and staree threatens him, and he asserts that he “believed Sage was a girl,” showing that he can no longer perceive her as a girl and also that he feels deceived. Soon after in

253. Bogdan, *Freak Show*, 97.

254. Bogdan, 105–106.

the next chapter he refers to “Sage’s betrayal” and calls Sage a “liar.” (AP, 112) This is reinforced in chapter 13 when he says: “I had to remind myself that Sage made a very convincing girl, convincing enough to fool me,” as though Sage had set out with the intention to deceive. (AP, 117) This is further reinforced by his constant reminders: “I had to remind myself of how she had betrayed and deceived me.” (AP, 121) The phrase which Logan uses several times, “I had to remind myself,” shows that he is battling with himself against any feelings he may have for Sage and mentally punishing himself every time he sees her in a good light. Time and time again Logan refers to Sage as “pretending” to be a girl. (AP, 128, 142, 150) Sometimes he judges her to be a “believable girl” but qualifies this quickly with something masculine: “Sage made a believable girl, but she definitely had a guy’s stamina.” (AP, 161)

The foreshadowing now comes into play as Logan says: “Now that I knew, Sage’s true sex was fairly obvious.” He is unable to make the distinction between her gender and her body and attributes genitals as the measure of what is “true.” (AP, 101) Logan’s thoughts become even more disturbingly violent as he scrubs himself raw in the shower and thinks about telling Sage that if anyone ever finds out about their kiss he will hurt her. (AP, 103) For a moment he sees her as Sage, a girl who had liked him, but quickly reverts back to hatred and self-loathing, and describes her voice once again as “husky.” He finds the thought of telling anyone about Sage “perverse,” seemingly because she has a penis. (AP, 104) Chapter 11 finishes with Logan calling Sage an “ass-pirate” and “faggot,” and imagining that a ball he throws at a tree is Sage’s head, “her brains spewing everywhere.” (AP, 105) In the next chapter, chapter 12, Logan makes a statement that captures his sense of fear that he will be labelled gay with the Morrissey-esque line: “Shame never dies in a small town.” (AP, 107) At this point not much has happened that would cause the reader to fear for an LGBT character in Boyer – only Logan’s perception of the population and the assumptions that go along with the values a “small town” may hold. It is only later when Sage goes on a date with someone from Mizzou College which is outside of and much larger than Boyer that severe physical violence is enacted. (AP, 289) Sage was also scared that Logan would beat her up if she told him she was transgender, a thought that does not seem

unreasonable given Logan's behaviour and shows his own character rather than that of the town. (AP, 128)

Sexuality

Logan finds Sage's body a mixture of perverse, disgusting, and attractive. When honour-roll students are allowed a trip to a local swimming pool, students in swimming attire is the perfect environment for Logan to cast his judgemental eye. Sage is an honour student too, and Logan is shocked when he realises that Sage has breasts. Before he notices that she is there he decides that: "None of the female honour-rollers looked very impressive in their swimsuits" and also thinks rudely about his friend Tim's body, calling his chest "man-boobs" which is also an obvious play on his feelings about Sage's body and deems Tim's attempts at diving "sissy." (AP, 196 – 197) Logan calls Sage's gender-identity a "condition," pathologizing her within a "clinical gaze," and uses that as a reason to stop himself thinking of her sexually because it would be "pure sickness to imagine Sage in any other way." (AP, 201) Logan demands an explanation of her breasts from Sage, showing up uninvited at her home. She tells him she is taking illegally obtained female hormones. She drops her bathrobe to show Logan her breasts and he runs away but masturbates when he gets home. (AP, 206 – 208) Shame plagues Logan, with several references to just how terrible Sage's "secret" is and how vital it is to keep it that way. He is "desperate" to keep it a secret once he knows, and it is with a sense of mounting fear that the gravity of the secret is conveyed to the reader. (AP, 64) Again, there is foreshadowing of just how much of an impact Logan thinks this secret will have on him, as he recalls in hindsight that Jack saying "It'll be a year you never forget" is "one of the most profound things I'd ever heard Jack say." (AP, 91) This is much like a reworking of the homosexual shame found in gay and lesbian novels of the past.

Sage's voice is sexualised by Logan, described as "deep but sexy, [a] feminine voice, the kind you hear on ads for 900 numbers." (AP, 18)²⁵⁵ Logan dislikes the idea of Sage changing in a public dressing room when clothes shopping with his sister, but this appears to be more to do with his fear that she will be found out than any concern for her safety. (AP, 230) He finds it amusing that his sister would be "discussing fashion and hairstyles with a boy," again showing that he feels that Sage is deceiving and lying to everyone she meets by omission. (AP, 232) Logan, Laura, and Sage go to a frat party when they visit Laura at her campus dorm. A beer drinking competition takes place in which girls are supposed to hold beer with their breasts. Laura looks like she wants to take part but when she sees Logan has noticed her she walks away. His disapproving gaze and strict code of what is acceptable in the people he knows has an effect on his sister, but he also thinks that she has done wrong for even considering it: "I'd pretend I hadn't seen that." Laura is allowed a free pass, but not without knowing she has been judged. (AP, 241) They kiss and Logan is still fighting with himself to drown out his inner voice which says that she isn't a girl. They have sex, but only because Logan can excuse it in his drunken state. (AP, 251) He describes it as "forbidden passion," again harking back to earlier representations of homosexual relationships. (AP, 250)

Logan confronts his intentions to place blame onto Sage in an extremely revealing moment of thought, showing that not only does he feel that she can plausibly be "blamed" for having deceived him, but also that he seems completely unaware that he has been blaming her all along in his narrative, making sure to place clues and hints for the reader so he can give his story credibility later. He imagines ignoring Laura until he starts university himself, to give her the impression that: "...Sage and I had broken up. [she would] Believe that Sage was a liar and a drag queen who'd deliberately misled me. Turn Sage into the villain, blame everything on her. I'd look like the victim." (AP, 272) He feels like he has no choice, again fearing that his sister, who he has put on a relative pedestal, will think he is gay. (AP, 273)

255. 900 numbers are phone numbers starting with the code 1-900 in the US, which are typically adult (sexual) chat lines.

“Why couldn’t Sage just be a normal girl?” Logan’s measure of “normal” is confusing. He sets extremely high standards for everyone around him. His ex is a “slut,” his peers look bad in swimsuits, Tim eats too much. “She’d never be a real woman to me” says Logan. He appears to judge everyone around him with the same harsh disposition, leading the reader to conclude that for Logan “normal” has to do more with your physical condition and genitals, which in turn decide your sexuality, than the way you behave. He is simultaneously “disgusted” by the idea that Sage has a penis, and only a few pages later he concedes that she is beautiful. (AP 211 – 221) It is no coincidence that Logan notices how much of a “woman” his sister Laura has become, especially since she is perhaps the only person he does not judge in the same way as everyone else. (AP, 226)

Logan seems to feel that it is Sage’s responsibility to keep him turned on if they are to continue the relationship by making sure he never sees “it” – her genitals. As long as she confirms visually to a feminine ideal for him he will feel able to carry on finding her attractive. (AP, 254) When Laura calls to tell Logan that she saw accidentally Sage’s penis when she walked in on her in the shower, Logan’s immediate worry is that Laura will “think I’m queer.” (AP, 268) Sage thinks Laura would understand and that Logan should just be honest. Laura later tells Logan that she *does* understand, but even her approval is not enough to diminish Logan’s internal-hatred and he shouts at her. It is as though he has been conditioned, or conditioned himself never to accept Sage fully no matter what people may really think. (AP, 282) The culture of homophobia in his small-town bubbles quietly beneath the surface. Rarely moments erupt like a boy who uses faggot as an insult towards Logan or the man who brutally attacked Sage. But for the large part this is an unspoken thing, which must be deemed so abhorrent that it is easier for people to believe there are simply no LGBT people in Boyer. He thinks that Laura might consider him a “secret homosexual” for the rest of his life, even though she offered acceptance of his relationship with Sage and never labels it a homosexual relationship. (AP, 282 – 285) Laura is now an outsider too as she has moved away from the family home and to university, so her accepting attitude could a sign of assimilation to the urban environment she now inhabits in contrast to Boyer. The contrast between the urban setting which here might stand for acceptance and rural

the setting provides further opportunities to queer Sage using stereotypical beliefs. Logan believes that living in his small rural town he has never met “a homosexual, a Muslim, a Jew, a Communist, or a New Yorker.” His only exposure to the idea of a transgender person has been on television: “Up until this year, people like Sage were just perverts who appeared on talk shows.” (AP, 163) When a trans outsider (with outside being urban) threatens Logan’s rural life, it is not just his sexuality that becomes fragile but issues of race and class also arise as Sage who is economically more stable than Logan makes Logan feel shame at his own situation. The freak then, disrupts everything, not just gender and sexuality. By exploring queer rural visibility and the limited representations Logan has seen on television I will now discuss how Sage, who has been made queer, also queers everything around her.

The Invisible Rural Queer

Boyer becomes the perfect place for the visiting freak show that Sage becomes, where her difference holds a high novelty value. Mary L. Gray’s study *Out in the Country: Youth, Media, and Queer Visibility in Rural America* (2009) examines how “strategies of visibility that currently drive mainstream gay and lesbian social movements in the United States work out in the country.”²⁵⁶ Gray notes that among her study participants, most were white teenage men, and that overall 31 of 34 participants were white. She also notes this “superficially reflects the ethnic makeup and distribution typical of rural communities” in the regions she explored. This, like census data, does not reflect communities of colour and undocumented Latino/a immigrant families who may go uncounted.²⁵⁷ Gray uses “queer” as a term to define anyone who is at odds with heteronormative culture, which includes both sexual and gender identities. She says that rural LGBT-identifying youth disrupt (or queer) their surroundings simply by being there, because their “mere presence defied local and national expectations no matter how much they might conform to the most normative

256. Mary L. Gray, *Out in the Country: Youth, Media, and Queer Visibility in Rural America* (New York: NYU Press, 2009), 4.

257. Gray, *Out in the Country*, 25.

gay and lesbian standards.”²⁵⁸ Gray builds an argument using Halberstam’s example of “metronormativity” which is a word Halberstam coined to “characterize this peculiar tendency to conflate the urban with visibility and sexual enlightenment,” while thus leaving the rural devalued, and as Gray shows, under-studied for its queer populations by anthropologists. She summarizes the work of Binnie and Valentine, who review cultural geography literature to show that only a handful of studies of queer populations in the US have moved beyond the urban, showing that this handful of rural sexuality studies “demonstrate how much we take for granted that lesbian and gay lives are lived in the urban environment.”²⁵⁹

Gray found that hers was the only study to focus specifically on queer-identified youth in rural America, and she focuses on larger cultural issues, such as race, class, social-funding, media representations and the everyday lives of queer youth as they negotiate their identity.²⁶⁰ Gray argues that: “[m]ass media consistently narrate rural LGBT identities as out of place, necessarily estranged from authentic (urban) queerness. These images teach rural youth to look anywhere but homeward for LGBT identities” and: “The politics of LGBT visibility’s demanding refrain to ‘come out, come out, wherever you are’ echoes the rhetorical invocations of disembodied freedoms and escapist anonymity attributed to the “effects” of the Internet.”²⁶¹

Chapter 6 of Gray’s study called “To Be Real: Transidentification on the Discovery Channel” examines the experience and engagement of two rural trans-identified youth called AJ and Ashley with a 1985 documentary called *What Sex Am I?* which they both viewed as a repeat broadcast on the Discovery Channel many years after it was originally aired. Gray reviews the discourses of “real trans identity” which came about through *What Sex Am I?* to “highlight how the interplay of media-generated and –circulated discourses of realness and the materiality of class, location, and society’s gender norms” shape AJ and Ashley’s queer identity. By exploring this outdated

258. Gray, 26.

259. Gray, 10.

260. Gray, 11.

261. Gray, 11, 15.

representation of transgender people, Gray questions “what rural queer and questioning youth do with the resources on hand to transform media consumption into identity production.” Class status, access to healthcare, and what constitutes a “real” man or woman feed into popular ideas of what is a real or “true” trans-identity.²⁶² By making queer people visible, as Gray argues has been done since the medicalizing of homosexuality in the 19th century, they become distinguished from “normal” people (p.146): “[o]nline coming-out stories hail rural young people to become visible, and therefore authentic, through the convention of not only claiming an identity but also retelling it as a personal story.”

Gay and lesbian identities have been publicly discussed since the 1970s in terms of realist narrative forms and the discourses of visibility in a similar way that transgender identities are now publicly discussed: “Queer realness, engaged online or through television documentaries, extends affirmation while modelling and streamlining a public narrative of what shape that subjectivity should take.”²⁶³ When discussing Jody, one of the people documented in *What Sex Am I?* Gray makes the point that some transgender identity expressions are seen as more authentic than others and how they are crafted varies: “These discursive practices of crafting narrative involve borrowing, incorporating, and reworking not only storylines but also remediating styles of storytelling. What young audiences are able to do with these genres of queer realness depends not only on the hegemonic media discourses and preferred reading strategies in circulation but also on the resources that mark the boundary publics in which they circulate.”²⁶⁴ We see this idea in much of the scholarship referenced, that certain narratives of the transgender “journey” are more acceptable or adapted to be more “palatable.” What is most striking though in relation to “progress” and the TTP is this line which is read out by film-maker Lee Grant in *What Sex Am I?*: “Transsexuals feel they were born in the wrong body and are driven to change their sex permanently through surgery.” This is the biological essentialism that persists 30 years later and is still mythically viewed as the “right” way to be transgender. Sage’s gender is treated,

262. Gray, 145

263. Gray, 146.

264. Gray, 145,146.

and referred to, as a “condition” in the same way that Gray explains the medicalising of transgender people in *What Sex Am I?*: “medical experts who define transsexuality as a condition in need of medical intervention.”²⁶⁵ AJ, who is 18 at the time Gray spoke to him, tells his story to Gray who concludes: “The more versed he became in recalling the story of his journey, the more AJ’s narrative normalized his gender in a way that made it imaginable and describable – if not fully acceptable to his loved ones.”²⁶⁶ Ashley uses the story of her viewing of the documentary to narrate the origins of her gender story. Both young people “draw on the documentary as a resource.”²⁶⁷

Joshua Gamson discusses the representation of LGBT people on American talk show television in *Freaks Talk Back: Tabloid Talk Shows and Sexual Nonconformity*. Gamson paints a vivid picture of the environment on talk shows in the late 1980s – 1990s, where transgender people are part of a circus-like freak show on *Geraldo*, are inauthentic because of their genitals, as “gender-liars” and many other examples of LGBT people as trash and “monstrosities.”²⁶⁸ Guests are lied to and even blackmailed with the threat of no return plane tickets if they do not appear with the other freaks on the show.²⁶⁹ Trans people were pushed into an essentialist medical discourse where “genitals are gender.”²⁷⁰ Andrea Stulman Dennett also writes about the talk show as closely resembling the conventions of the freak show in the chapter “The Dime Show Museum Freak Show Reconfigured.”²⁷¹ Stulman Dennett compares talk show hosts to the museum lecturers who “guide their audiences from exhibit to exhibit.”²⁷² In the same way Logan becomes the host, guiding his reader through the freaks of Boyer who disturb his idea of normal – Tim who is overweight, Brenda who would not have sex

265. Gray, 152.

266. Gray, 159,

267. Gray, 162.

268. Joshua Gamson, *Freaks Talk Back: Tabloid Talk Shows and Sexual Nonconformity* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1998), 97, 13.

269. Gamson, 66.

270. Gamson, 162.

271. Andrea Stulman Dennett, “The Dime Show Museum Freak Show Reconfigured” in *Freakery: Cultural Spectacles of the Extraordinary Body*, ed. Rosemarie Garland Thomson (New York: New York University Press, 1996), 315–326.

272. Stulman Dennett, “Dime Show”, 321.

with him, and Sage who takes up the role of the “half-man, half-woman” exhibit in Logan’s freak show. He attempts to manipulate his audience, portraying himself as a hero and a normal straight white cisgender male who has been cruelly deceived. We see the story as focalised through Logan’s eyes, in which he seems to be trying to prove his innocence to the reader in a case of deception.

Sage’s freakishness is not only about her physical presence but also her status as an outsider. Logan feels somewhat ashamed or angry about his living situation and Sage’s set up is noticeably different. Logan and his mother are always struggling to stay above the poverty line, and Logan earns money mowing lawns and shovelling snow whenever he can. His mother is a waitress and works for long stretches without a day off. Logan knows everyone at school and the class photos reveal that people could pick out their relatives dating back to 1939, including Logan’s now absent father. (AP, 113) This firmly establishes Boyer as a town where an outsider would be immediately noticed. Not only that but everyone is white with the exception of Asian student Tim Tokugowa, and “a couple of Mexican kids.” (AP, 114) This is similar to Gray’s description of race in her study and the fact that communities of colour may go uncounted. It is hard to imagine that Logan’s description of an almost entirely white town could be accurate.

The difference in class between Sage and Logan is shown most obviously through the fact that Sage lives in a house and Logan a trailer. Logan feels like a “hick” and like he’d “just come from the farm.” (AP, 225) But as well as this Logan is ever conscious of his class when describing his living situation to the reader, commenting that his kitchen is the size of a “tiny closet” and that he knows he qualifies for the free school meal program but his mother insists on cooking him breakfast at home as a way to spend some time with him because of the long hours she spends at work. The kitchen table is another example of their status, as it was not bought by him and his mother, but given to them by his grandfather, and even then it is “cheap.” (AP, 24) Logan notices that half the vehicles parked at a basketball games at his school have NRA stickers on their bumpers, which comes with some associations of class. (AP, 58) At Thanksgiving Logan again implies how small the kitchen is by noting that there isn’t room for both himself

and his sister to prepare food there. (AP, 69) This class difference is also connected to familial structure – Sage’s parents are still married, whereas Logan’s father is absent. Logan feels this absence often even though he has a far more loving and stable relationship with his mother than Sage does with her parents, and may even contribute to him excusing Sage’s father’s actions when he institutionalises Sage. Logan seems to be making up for the fact that he himself feels like an outsider for living in a trailer, and must find ways to normalise himself in his judgement of other people.

Sage’s father calls Logan over to his house and tells Logan that he has put Sage on a psychiatric ward after she suffered a severe beating from the out of town college boy. Institutionalising her serves a variety of purposes – her freak body is hidden, she is protected from the people his father considers outsiders which could be anyone (he says he has done research into hate crime), and her gender can be rationalised to his mind as a medical condition. He reveals the true extent of his transphobic hatred and, as Logan did earlier, he confuses Sage’s gender identity for homosexuality. Despite his moments of guilt and remorse Logan uses the attacker as a way to shift the blame not only from himself but also from the appalling treatment Sage suffered from her father: “But we all know the SOB who beat Sage up is the real bad guy here.” (AP, 317) The man in question, the college student from Mizzou University is easy to blame as an outsider, for all the wrongs that have happened during Sage’s life. He is certainly guilty of a violent and vile hate crime, but cannot be blamed for the years of abuse Sage went through at home and the months of cruelty Logan has inflicted on her. Logan even goes on to say explicitly that no one had actually been greedy or self-absorbed: “Sage’s father, cruel as he was, only wanted his son back. Tammi just wanted a sister. I wanted a ‘normal’ girlfriend. And Sage – all she wanted was to be herself.” (AP, 319) Grouping Sage’s actions in with the actions of cruelty and misunderstanding of other characters clearly shows that despite his moments of guilt Logan still equates Sage’s transition with something she should feel bad for wanting, and that he deems it forgivable provided everyone else is forgiven too.

Conclusion

I argued in this chapter that literary representations of trans youth as freakish further stereotypic representations of trans people because they return to the same formulaic tragic plots found in earlier gay and lesbian fiction and film. The freak show, which labelled itself as such and displayed the acts for paying spectators, moved from town to town during the height of its popularity. Although there are not as many actual freak shows which function in the same way as those from the 1840s to 1940s, the freak show is alive in different forms, such as on television, the media and in literature. By making the transgender freak queer they are viewed as though their gender identity were a sexuality, allowing the same anxieties that have been projected onto LGB people to be assigned to them.

I also argued that protagonist Logan's representation of Sage makes her "visible" within the framework of staring and the TTP but that being visible is the cause of her enfreakment. Her visibility makes her the subject of several types of gaze. The male/cinematic gaze places her as a female object of erotic distraction. But this is complicated by her body, leading Logan to view her with a clinical gaze, where her physical difference is portrayed as a shocking abjection. Because Sage is made queer and thus homosexual she threatens to expose Logan, meaning he must shame her with his gaze to preserve his heterosexuality and masculinity. For as long as she conforms visually to a feminine ideal he can find her attractive, but he cannot turn off his clinical gaze leading him to feel constant conflict. She becomes the stereotypical sissy as soon as he sees her in an essentialist way. It is not always easy to like Logan, but what we can take from his portrayal of Sage is that transgender is made into a deviant sexuality to legitimise his fear of it.

Dressing properly changes in its significance when Sage is in the psychiatric unit and Logan's guilt affects his view: "These might have been men's clothes but it didn't matter; she still looked like a girl." (AP, 327) When Sage says she is going to live as a man after all that has happened to her Logan says: "You're not a guy, you're a chick," at a point when he knows it is probably too late and that his words are meaningless.

(AP, 331) He leaves the hospital and never sees Sage again. Tammi says that Sage and her mom have moved away. When Logan starts college the next fall he gets a letter from Sage with no return address telling him not to try and find her. The story ends with Logan meeting a new girl called Chris who “wasn’t a girl who would turn heads” and would have a difficult time living up to Sage. This is a repetition of Logan’s pattern both of harsh judgement and comparing his current love interest to the previous one. It is disheartening for the reader that not only did Sage feel the need to disappear but also that Logan has really experienced no personal development. (AP, 356) It also signifies that Sage’s “act” has packed up and moved on to another town, as she states in the letter she sends to Logan that even though she said she would live as male she simply can’t, giving the impression that although her “act” came to its end for Logan and Boyer, it will start again somewhere else.

Sage was visible but not acceptable, constructed and deconstructed multiple times by Logan and his talk show/freak show spiel. Steinmetz’s article in *Time* magazine hailed a new era for trans people, they then reminded us that trans people are murdered at a startling rate, two things that seem completely incompatible. While the indie kids of *Refuse*, *Roving Pack* and *Brooklyn Burning*, which will be discussed in the next two chapters, may feel like or be seen as freaks, their involvement in alternative subcultures provides avenues for non-heteronormative and non-binary narratives of trans experience. Their status as outsiders is not wholly negative as it can lead them to overcome problems or find some sense belonging. There is an implied lesson that unifies all these freak stories though, whether you are the sole freak or a troupe, that you can transition but the price is sacrificing your normality. You may be different, as long as you do not do it near us. Being a freak is not always a bad thing, just as being visible is not always progress.

Chapter 3. Transgender Subculture and Temporality in Elliott DeLine's *Refuse*

There's a club if you'd like to go,
 you could meet somebody who really loves you,
 so you go, and you stand on your own
 and you leave on your own
 and you go home, and you cry
 and you want to die.

From "How Soon is Now" by The Smiths

The lyrics above, from the 1985 song "How Soon is Now" by The Smiths, summarise well the fate of a James-Dean-quiffed transgender misfit called Dean, the sarcastic and self-styled tragic literary hero who is the protagonist in Elliott DeLine's 2011 novel *Refuse*. Dean is obsessed with Morrissey and The Smiths, Morrissey's lyrics and personal ideals are a huge influence on Dean. He does try, as the song suggests, to go to some clubs of a kind - the subcultural groups of indie musicians and the "trans community" – but is usually the one standing on his own and eventually wishing he could die, just as the lyrics here suggest. The title of the song too relates to Dean's journey, as his relationship to "now" is fragile and his love for Morrissey seems to cross temporal boundaries as I will explain in more detail later. Before outlining my argument for this chapter I will first briefly describe *Refuse*. *Refuse* follows Dean through his time at college studying an English literature degree, where he is placed in shared campus accommodation with another transgender student called Colin Mahr. Colin identifies as male and embraces his position as a member of the "transgender community." Dean, in contrast, is unsure how he feels about his gender identity, and although he sometimes uses masculine identifications he never seems truly comfortable with needing to label himself as a "man." It is not easy to categorise Dean, a deliberate effort on his part as his refusal to conform, but he lives and stylises himself in a masculine way and uses male pronouns having been assigned female at birth. Dean and Colin have an on and off romantic relationship, but it is fraught with tension due to Colin's need to conform to heteronormativity and keep up his

relationship with a cisgender woman called Maggie. As the novel progresses the two write songs together in a creative partnership which seems to be based on that of Morrissey and Johnny Marr of The Smiths. They also engage with the “trans community,” a group Colin seems to fit in with and Dean does not. By the end of the novel Colin and Dean no longer have either a romantic or a creative relationship but Dean has matured and perhaps does not hate himself as much as he once did.

I will focus on *Refuse* in this chapter because of its portrayal of the “trans community” and because of protagonist Dean’s obsession with Morrissey and The Smiths which brings a sense of a subcultural relationship through space and time with Morrissey’s music, image and public persona. Morrissey describes himself as “humasexual,” which he defines as being attracted to humans before clarifying this with, “[b]ut, of course... not many.” He has also identified as celibate.²⁷³ Dean also shuns the typical labels of sexuality like Morrissey and explores asexuality and romantic attraction throughout *Refuse*, portraying himself as potentially asexual. This communicates Dean’s sense of unbelonging to his own time, the “now” of the happy and happily visible trans person who has heterosexual relationships. In his unbelonging to the current time he finds others who he connects with through subcultural interests such as Colin and Teddy. The fate of these characters is very different however, with Colin who “performs” a heteronormative role seeming to succeed within both the music subculture he loves and the trans community, and Teddy who shares Dean’s sense of unbelonging and tendency towards refusal of the norm ultimately committing suicide. Dean finds some kind of middle-ground between Colin and Teddy, still refusing to conform within trans society but being saved from his own suicide attempt by his connection to Morrissey and his fragile personal relationships.

In my methodology I outlined ideas of narrative analysis which allow the trans subject to be conceptualised in time and space by drawing on available cultural narratives.²⁷⁴

273. Miriam Coleman, “Morrissey: ‘Unfortunately I Am Not Homosexual,’” *Rolling Stone*, October 20, 2013, <https://www.rollingstone.com/music/news/morrissey-unfortunately-i-am-not-homosexual-20131020>.

274. Prosser, 101; Lawler, 44.

Refuse uses Dean's connection to Morrissey as a way of connecting Dean to the past and disconnecting him from the trans community of the present. As Prosser argued, consistently similar trans narratives have produced medical discourse for transgender diagnosis²⁷⁵, and Dean's narrative complicates this by going against a narrative consistent with medical discourse. This is further complicated by Dean's relationship to the past, via Morrissey, as he acknowledges that his current position as an out trans man is a result of cultural history. The Transgender Tipping Point presented visibility as a means of increased opportunity for trans youth, and although the people who seem to benefit from this are those who fit in with binary gender norms, *Refuse* does not shy away from the fact that however much Dean feels at odds with the transgender community, his position as a transgender person out at university is likely a result of those who came before him and the very 'norms' of the trans community that he despises. In this way *Refuse* challenges what visibility has produced and also its effect on non-binary identities.

I argue that Dean's social isolation coupled with his desire for acceptance in the indie music scene create a paradoxical tension between being both the Other as a trans person of unlabelled sexuality and his default "belonging" to the "trans community," a subculture he finds deplorable. Dean's retelling of the myth of Narcissus from a transgender perspective reinforces this tension and also expands upon the ways in which narcissism has been associated with gay male sexuality through the love of "the same," a same which can be *both* the same and different for trans people at different stages of transition. This is parallel to Dean's feelings for his transgender roommate Colin, who at first appears to be "the same" but turns out to be different when he feels certainty about having more surgery than Dean and also his desire to retain a heteronormative life. Dean is acutely aware of the trans and queer people who have come before him and that he lives in a time where he is supposed to be happy to be "out." This mirrors the position expressed by Alok Vaid-Menon about the invisibility of non-binary trans people in the time of heightened binary visibility, *The Transgender Tipping Point*. *Refuse* was published in 2011, 3 years before the TTP, but certainly close

275. Prosser, 101, 104.

enough to be considered part of the social and media build up to the tipping point and increased visibility. It was also only one year after Dan Savage's *It Gets Better* project was first seen on YouTube, a project created to give hope to LGBT+ young people that life for LGBT+ people is getting better and will continue to change.

For *It Gets Better* people create videos to share inspiring stories with young people; it is in particular for older LGBT+ people to pass on thoughts they wish someone had said to them when they were younger.²⁷⁶ However, Derritt Mason has argued that *It Gets Better* is not about queer youth themselves but the adult anxieties about how queer youth should be addressed.²⁷⁷ This era near the tipping point which Dean inhabits is particularly related to his sense of isolation and longing, in a world where he should be more "visible" as a "queer" (this is not necessarily his preferred label but one he sometimes uses) trans person and where things should be "getting better." However, he feels and often seems to wish he actually was "invisible" to the point that he considers suicide. The future is very uncertain for Dean and I will discuss how temporality relates to subcultures and also to transition, using ideas of queer time and space set out by Halberstam, "hormone time" as described by Horak, and "transitional time" which Julien Carter argues can move in multiple directions concurrently. *Paris is Burning*, a 1990 documentary about drag balls in New York in the 1980s, shows transgender, gender-variant and queer subcultures as family structures within which difference and individuality is celebrated as well as, contrastingly, the ability to blend in convincingly to heteronormative aesthetic ideals, known as "realness." Becquer and Gatti discuss these syncretic ideas in relation to voguing and I will relate this to Dean's opposing desires. I will also discuss *Paris is Burning* in relation to the trans community. *Paris is Burning*, which focuses on "poor, young black and hispanic gays,"²⁷⁸ shows family structures and the idea of "realness" which are useful when considering how trans people use subcultures to find belonging and create a community, an idea which

276. 'About,' *It Gets Better*, accessed April 20, 2017,

<http://www.itgetsbetter.org/pages/about-it-gets-better-project>.

277. Derritt Mason, "On Children's Literature and the (Im)Possibility of *It Gets Better*," *English Studies in Canada* 38, no. 3 - 4 (2012): 85.

278. Marcos Becquer and Jose Gatti, "Elements of Vogue," *Third Text* 5, no. 16 - 17 (1991): 66.

Dean is hyper-aware of and rebels against. Dean's identification with Morrissey and The Smiths is part of his loneliness, and his disdain for the working world mirrors that found in Morrissey's lyrics as does his bitter humour. He finds comfort in The Smiths, a band from the 1980s in a time and space where he feels displaced.

Refuse is different from the novels discussed in the prior chapters in its production because it is a self-published novel by a transgender author. I will discuss this first before moving on to the trans community as a subculture. Warner's discussion of homo-narcissism will then be discussed in relation to both subculture and the portrayal of Dean's romantic feelings which are tightly bound with his experiences of isolation and the trans community. Finally, I will explore temporality within the novel, specifically the relationship of time to transition and Dean's temporal relationship to the music of Morrissey. LGBT+ subcultures can occupy alternative times and spaces, a theory important to the way Dean copes with feeling detached from the trans community in his present. As outlined above, I will now briefly discuss how self-publishing can produce a novel which is able to deal with themes mainstream publishers might deem unsellable because, as DeLine puts it, it allows the author the "freedom to be dangerous."²⁷⁹

Self-Publishing Novels for Trans Youth: "The Freedom to be Dangerous."

Refuse is a self-published novel and not labelled as a YA as the ones discussed in the previous chapters have been, but it is a novel about trans youth *by* trans youth. DeLine started writing *Refuse* at the age of 21 in 2009²⁸⁰, and Dean addresses the adult as an "intruder." Dean classes the reader and himself as youth, urging the adult reader to "Kindly go fuck yourself and leave us kids alone," signposting who the book who is intended for.²⁸¹ Being unbound by the restraints of publishing houses and editors,

279. 'Self-publishing to destroy stereotypes: Elliott DeLine,' *Arthur*, accessed April 20, 2017, <http://www.trentarthur.ca/self-publishing-to-destroy-stereotypes-elliott-DeLine>.

280. 'Self-publishing as a Trans Person,' *Trans Guys*, accessed April 20, 2017, <http://transguys.com/features/self-publishing-trans-writers>.

281. Elliott DeLine, *Refuse*. (USA: Self-published, 2012), 27.

Refuse feels markedly different to read than the more formula-based YA novels with trans characters which are generally written by cis-gender authors. DeLine has talked about self-publication in interviews, saying that: “I would never consciously change my writing to make it sell,” which is a decision more easily made by a self-published author than one signed up to a contract who may have little agency.²⁸² Censorship, as I have discussed in the introduction, factors in to which stories about trans people are told and which are not. DeLine describes how self-publishing can be beneficial to portrayals of LGBTQ people:

LGB and especially T people historically have little to zero input on how they are portrayed in media. When artists take it upon themselves to create more thoughtful, human representations, they provide others with a new way to see themselves. They aren’t just seeing stereotypes reflected back from books and movies. I think that’s one of the worst feelings — to think you are a stereotype. In short, it’s empowering. ‘It’ being the ability to make art about LGBTQ people and share it, regardless of what the mainstream media are interested in portraying.

You have the freedom to be dangerous, too, without other LGBTQ people trying to rein you in. It’s escaping many ways that you would otherwise be censored. The struggle is reaching an audience.²⁸³

This “freedom to be dangerous” is something that will become clear in relation to *Refuse* as this chapter progresses. The content of the novel was unlikely to have ever been marketed as a YA by a mainstream publisher despite the clear intention that the story is for young people. The trade-off however, as DeLine points out is reaching your audience. Without a team of staff behind you and a story that conforms to the narratives privileged by the TTP this becomes more difficult, which we could easily speculate would effect the self-published trans author’s ability to generate sufficient

282. ‘Self-publishing to destroy stereotypes: Elliott DeLine,’ *Arthur*, accessed April 20, 2017, <http://www.trentarthur.ca/self-publishing-to-destroy-stereotypes-elliott-deLine>.

283. “Self-publishing to destroy stereotypes.”

sales revenue to survive as a full-time writer, a luxury that may be afforded (albeit often at the lower end of what a liveable wage would be) to those who choose a more traditional publishing route. What we have though, in *Refuse*, and as we will see in the next chapter in Sassafras Lowrey's *Roving Pack* are stories that by having the freedom to be dangerous give us representations we are unlikely to see in the mainstream media. In the previous chapter I discussed the portrayal of Sage in *Almost Perfect* as a freak and also spent some time in Chapter 1 examining Lisa Williamson's *The Art of Being Normal*. These two books, as well as others published specifically under the YA label, follow particular narrative arcs that we might expect to see in relation to the types of narrative privileged in the media in the time of the TTP. But what happens to the narrative when being a freak means you do find acceptance in communities - not heteronormative or mainstream ones, but subcultural and groups on the fringes? In this chapter and the following chapter I will be writing about novels that feature portrayals of youth subcultures, the "trans community" as a subcultural group and also queer or alternative sexualities, punk subculture, and the music and ethos of Morrissey and The Smiths. I will now turn briefly to some of the classic texts on youth subculture to outline what subcultures have traditionally represented before exploring more recent scholarship on LGBTQ+ subcultures and Dean's relationship to the trans community.

Subculture

Although here I am using Dick Hebdige's book *Subculture: The Meaning of Style*, there are other excellent texts considered classics on the subject such as Stanley Cohen's *Folk Devils and Moral Panics* or editors Stuart Hall and Tony Jefferson's *Resistance Through Rituals* which would yield similar information in terms of what a subculture is and what it stands for. I chose Hebdige's text simply because his description of the significance of objects to subcultures feels more closely bound to Dean's stylistic expression than other explanations of style I found. Hebdige's use of the term Refusal is also particularly relevant. Subcultures in the simplest terms are groups within society that are made up of those who hold less power than the most dominant groups in society. These subcultures engage in practices, deliberately or otherwise, that go

against the “natural order” of the time. Crimes against the natural order can be any deviation, Hebdige says, something as simple as cultivating a quiff or acquiring a certain record both of which Dean does. These deviations construct a style and became a gesture of defiance, which Hebdige called a Refusal. Dean’s journey as an outsider in *Refuse* then shares in its title the obvious Refusal to conform which is so much a part of Dean’s life. Mundane objects, such as the punk’s safety pin “warn the ‘straight’ world in advance of a sinister presence - the presence of difference.”²⁸⁴ Dean’s beloved quiff hairstyle which people instantly recognise as either like James Dean or Morrissey performs a similar function and: “outrage can be encapsulated in a single object, so the tensions between dominant and subordinate groups can be found reflected in the surfaces of subculture.”²⁸⁵ James Dean portrayed characters who failed to embody masculinity, particularly Jim Stark in *Rebel Without a Cause*. Frances Smith describes the beginning of *Rebel Without a Cause* where Jim is watching a toy monkey. Jim appears to construct a bed for the toy out of a leaf and paper, in an attempt to nurture it. As the toy is tin it cannot be nurtured and it also does not amuse Jim, which Smith argues leaves him positioned between boyhood and adulthood, and so between two identities.²⁸⁶

As we see when Dean visits a transgender youth support group, the structure of the group and the majority of the members alignment with binary gender ideals sets out a given expectation of how the group members are supposed to behave and feel. Dean is expected to behave in the same way as the others at the group through a purely demographic relationship, the fact that everyone there identifies as transgender. The group when related to society at large go against the natural order, but within the group a politics exists that creates another natural order between those who conform and those who refuse. Hebdige’s example of a university building and its lay out shows that before a course is even taught the arrangement of the building sets limits in what is taught and how it is taught: “Here the buildings literally *reproduce* in concrete terms

284. Dick Hebdige, *The Meaning of Style*. (London: Routledge, 1979), 4.

285. Hebdige, 2.

286. Frances Smith, *Rethinking the Hollywood Teen Movie: Gender, Genre and Identity* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2017), 28.

prevailing (ideological) notions about what education *is* and what it through this process that the educational structure, which can, of course, be altered, is placed beyond question and appears to us as a 'given' (i.e. as immutable)."²⁸⁷ Hebdige says that the specific ideologies (that appear universal) at any given time depends on which groups and classes have power in a given situation. Groups that are less favourable have "less power to produce and impose their definitions of the world on the world."²⁸⁸ This is the process of "naturalization" which Hebdige describes as a process through which particular ways of organization and social relations appear as though they have always been this way. Hebdige says that subcultures represent a challenge to hegemony but that it does not come from the group itself but is expressed through style, albeit in an indirect way. "Humble" objects can be appropriated and given "secret" meanings which codify resistance (refusal).²⁸⁹ For the LGBTQ+ community style has long been a means of codifying resistance, but also for the trans community the body itself challenges the "natural" order. For Stuart Hall codes are "maps of meaning" and represent the "interests of the *dominant* groups in society."²⁹⁰ In the case of the trans support group Dean's body is different to the other trans men in the group, making them the dominant group and their post-surgery chests a code which excludes Dean but also signifies his resistance to becoming part of the community.

Subcultures often become family for the LGBTQ+ person when their own family has rejected them. Jennie Livingston's 1990 documentary *Paris is Burning* also reveals the centrality of chosen communities to queer and trans lives and portrays the necessarily hybrid nature of queer and trans culture. The movie follows the lives of several New Yorkers involved in gatherings known as balls in which predominately gay men, drag queens, and transgender women compete against each other in front of judges and the crowd to show "realness." "Realness" as depicted in *Paris is Burning* often expresses how well the competitor conforms to the category, which are usually different styles of heterosexual gender normativity ranging from street styles, hyper-

287. Hebdige, 13.

288. Hebdige, 14.

289. Hebdige, 17.

290. Hebdige, 15.

masculine military dress to executive and high fashion. Individuals compete (known as “walking” the ballroom floor much like a catwalk), but those who do well (or sometimes just those who are well-liked by the house members) are recruited by “houses” who became a family unit, for example Willie Ninja was the house mother of the house of Ninja.

This tradition can still be seen in popular culture on the drag circuit and American television series *RuPaul’s Drag Race*, in which competitors will sometimes refer to their “drag mother” and successive seasons have featured queens whose drag mother has competed before them. One example is the Haus of Edwards, with Alyssa Edwards as drag mother to Shangela and Laganja Estranja, all three of whom have competed on the show. Songs by RuPaul feature references to drag ball culture such as “The Realness” and RuPaul sometimes sets challenges where contestants must “read” each other and throw shade, a practice shown in *Paris is Burning* when queens insult each other in competitive and comedic one-upmanship.

Marcos Becquer and Jose Gatti’s article “Elements of Vogue” is a discussion of the relationship between discourses implicated by voguing, a dance featured in *Paris is Burning*. It can act as an extension of “reading,” again as a form of one-upmanship. They see voguing as an intersection of gender, sexuality, race and class. They describe house members as “poor, young black and hispanic gays,”²⁹¹ to which I will add that some of the house members self-identify as transsexual in the documentary. Voguing blends: “poses from the magazine of the same name, breakdancing moves, and gestures represented in Egyptian hieroglyphics.”²⁹² For Becquer and Gatti, voguing is an articulation of many diverse social practices which have particular reference to historical identities and cultures. This is not so much a hybrid practice but a syncretic one, a distinction Becquer and Gatti make as the elements of syncretism have boundaries that are permeable. Historically syncretism has been used to describe a period of progress or evolution, when, for example: “uncivilised societies ‘assimilated’

291. Marcos Becquer and Jose Gatti, “Elements of Vogue,” *Third Text* 5, no. 16-17 (1991): 66.

292. Becquer and Gatti, “Elements of Vogue,” 66.

more ‘advanced’ cultures.”²⁹³ Elements which seem separate or even opposed, like Dean’s desire for both solitude and love are syncretized. He is also both outside the trans subculture and within it. In *Paris is Burning*: “Voguers [are] depicted as grotesque embodiments of contradiction.”²⁹⁴ These contradictions which the trans or gender variant person embodies are a constant theme in *Refuse*. I will now examine in more detail the way that the trans community is depicted in *Refuse* and how this creates a narrative that is both opposed to privileged representations of trans youth and also painfully aware of trans stereotypes, offering a syncretic portrayal of Dean as the Other.

The Trans Community in Refuse

There are two subcultural scenarios which I will use as examples to show clearly how the different communities within *Refuse* are seen by Dean, how those outside of the communities see trans people, and how trans people who identify with the binary see those who do not. The first, a gig at which Colin’s band plays, sees various subcultures pitted against each other through Dean’s eyes and Colin’s uncertainty about identifying as transgender within the music scene. The second is the transgender youth support group Dean and Colin attend in which binary and non-binary ideals are seen in opposition. Before these scenes we are shown that Dean’s disconnect from the trans community and the narratives usually privileged in trans autobiography begin when he is a child. The story of childhood in *Refuse* does not take the usual form - trying on male clothes, looking in mirrors, or being certain from a very young age that the assigned gender is wrong and then telling these events in such a way as to frame the present with a clear objective to presenting a binary gender. There is a reflection on the past in relation to gender though, in that Dean’s given name was Laura, which he was unable to pronounce due to a speech impediment which made it sound like “Yahweh.” Dean comments that in Hebrew Yahweh translates as “he is” (and also translates as God) and that maybe his mispronunciation was actually prophetic. (RF, 8)

293. Becquer and Gatti, 69 - 70.

294. Becquer and Gatti, 74.

He says that he was “certainly not a little girl” but that what he is is not certain. This affirmation that he did not feel like his assigned gender comes right at the beginning of the text, the place usually reserved for “I have always known” or “I was trapped in the wrong body.” But what is different is that this slip back in time to childhood lasts less than two pages showing more concern with the present than the past and features no mention of the physical aspects of gender. There is no affirming statement along the lines of “I was always a boy,” rather just that Dean knew he was not a little girl. Dean questions what he is now, at the age of 22: “But more importantly, what am I? I’ve been called tomboy, lesbian, bisexual, asexual, it, androgyne, transsexual, transgender, genderqueer, plain-old queer, and the dreaded *tranny-fag*.” (RF, 8)

None of these titles feel right for him, and he does not try to convince the reader of his maleness, even saying: “You see, I know I’m not a real man.” (RF, 9) Dean hates the idea of getting a job, just as Morrissey does, and when he imagines the reader asking him “But isn’t that all you ever wanted?” he replied “No. I wanted to be a boy.” He identifies as a *boy* here but not a man, and wishes he could be Peter Pan. (RF, 35) Being Peter Pan means avoiding growing up and also in a queer sense it means growing sideways in the way that Stockton outlined as a strategy for queer people who find it impossible to imagine a future.²⁹⁵

At Colin’s gig, the first of the two scenes which show the reader different ways the trans community is portrayed, Dean overhears some presumably cisgender men discussing Colin’s gender. They say that they have heard a rumour that Colin is a girl or “a transgender.” Their words are crude and offensive as they try to make sense of which gender Colin may have been assigned at birth and which he is transitioning to. Their conversation ends with the words: “Dude, that’s sick,” showing clearly that they are being transphobic. (RF, 31) It emerges later that the two men had been staring at Colin and Dean describes them as “crust punks.” Craig, the lead singer of Owl Eyes, Colin’s band, is described as a “hipster” by Dean. Here we have opposing subcultures in the microcosm of the small gig venue: trans vs cis, hipsters vs crust punks. Colin’s

295. Stockton, *The Queer Child*.

response is one that sets up another subcultural divide - straight vs queer. The tension for Colin is that if he is out he feels that is all he'll ever be known as, the trans-guitarist, yet he also seems to yearn for more than only being booked for the queer gigs:

I hate being in the spotlight. I should just quit. If I'm out as transgender, then that's all I'm known for. I'm always the trans-guitarist, always booked for queer events. And to the straight audience, I'm always seen as a sideshow freak, no matter how open minded they pretend to be. (RF, 32)

Dean is sarcastic towards activists who use the term "trans umbrella" as a catch-all term, because he does not feel like any of the terms adequately work. But for all his issues with trans identification he *does* identify with Colin as a fellow trans person after the transphobic encounter at the gig when he says: "I'm ashamed too. We've got every right to be." (RF, 32) It is not just Colin as a friend he seems to sympathise with here, but all trans people who feel ashamed for wanting to be stealth or fit in. Colin is offered a record deal for his band later on, but his manager recommends that he should come out as transgender because it "could do a lot of good for the community." (RF, 130) Dean questions whether the transgender community even exists, stating that: "I thought we were all isolated maniacs," referencing the stereotype of transgender people as dangerous loner criminals such as Buffalo Bill in *The Silence of the Lambs*.²⁹⁶

In the second scenario, the support group, the focus is narrowed to differences within the trans subculture rather than between cisgender and transgender. At the group the leader, Ethan, asks everyone to say their name, pronoun preference, identity and favourite candy. All the trans men in the group identify as either trans men or FTM. Dean refuses to answer this part of the introduction and finds a kindred spirit in Teddy, who describes herself as "trans....ish." (RF, 70) He also separates himself from the group by saying he doesn't like candy but does like chocolate, recalling Hebdige's use

296. James L. Nelson, "The Silence of the Bioethicists: Ethical and Political Aspects of Managing Gender Dysphoria," *GLQ* 4, no. 2 (1998): 223.

of mundane objects to warn the “straight,” or in this case gender-conforming, people of deviance. The group press him to identify himself, asking if he is queer or straight, and again he identifies as neither. They then question if he is even trans, to which Colin steps in and says he is a “trans guy.” Dean mumbles an agreement but it is clear he is only doing so to end the questioning. (RF, 72)

The others in the group advise Teddy to see a therapist, but Dean reassures her that he feels the same way. She becomes distressed, saying: “Why can’t I just be happy now, like everyone else?” (RF, 72) Although the transgender tipping point is not mentioned as *Refuse* is pre-tipping point, this is loaded with the implication that “now,” at this moment in time, transgender people are supposed to be happy. The next point of discussion at the support group is a Facebook petition for a trans man who posted a topless picture of himself that Facebook deemed too graphic. As a show of solidarity, the group want to pose topless in their profile pictures. The other trans men are excited to take part, and when Ethan asks Dean, Dean remains silent. It is then that Ethan realises Dean has not had top surgery, and tells Dean that he had “assumed” and that if Dean gets surgery “soon” he should take part. Dean is excluded from this moment of activism and protest because of his body, only deemed fit to join in if his body matches the way the other trans men perceive it should be. Dean turns his attention back to Teddy and says: “The whole transgender cult is stupid. What do they know about you or me?” (RF, 75) Ethan gets defensive, asking Dean if it is wrong that he is happy with his reflection now. TJ, a trans man at the group, suggests that Dean and Teddy should get surgery because it would do wonders for them. Teddy’s image is also something Dean can relate to, as he thinks to himself that she looks like “Patti Smith, Joey Ramone, and a Halloween witch.” In contrast, TJ proudly identifies with a series of labels: “I’m a radical queer, pre-t, straight-edge, vegan-anarchist trans guy.” (RF, 72) Teddy, who is trans-ish and far from straight-edge as she smokes and smells like she has been drinking alcohol is the antithesis of TJ. There are styles that are seen as cool and uncool within what Dean thinks of as the trans community, and this contrast marks Teddy and Dean as outsiders.

Dean's identification with Teddy becomes even more obvious when it is her turn to say what has been good and bad about her week. She talks about transgender memoirs and the moment the person finally sees who they really are in the mirror. Colin has played out the mirror scene, a trope firmly established in transgender autobiography and used to present a splitting of two gender identities,²⁹⁷ early in the novel when he touches his raised top surgery scars in the shower. Dean's telling of it makes Colin sound narcissistic: "He wiped the steam off the mirror and stood only a moment, stroking his stubble. He knew he looked like a man now, and nothing else in his reflection had ever preoccupied him." (RF, 12) Although this seems like a natural and even joyful reaction to seeing the effects of transition, it is the word preoccupied that suggests a sense of self-indulgence – that all trans people are obsessed with looking at their reflection just like Narcissus.

Those two scenes show us some of the relationships and their dynamics in *Refuse*. In the gig scene we saw cisgender people as ignorant and also hostile, but there is another side to the representation of cisgender people. As well as the hostile people there are also the well-intentioned yet clueless cisgender people who Dean encounters. The most ridiculed of these by Dean is Colin's girlfriend Maggie who is a threat to his romance with Colin. The way that Maggie describes Dean to Colin hints at the way Dean imagines he is spoken about or even trans people in general. In a clearly tongue-in-cheek description Maggie pauses before she tells Colin that Dean is transgender for "dramatic effect." Colin asks her how she knows and she gives him a stereotypical answer, Dean in charge of the narrative and making fun of her for her presumption that she is better than other people at telling who is trans: "Well,' Maggie paused, choosing her words carefully. 'I didn't actually talk to him or anything, but I'm almost positive, just from how he looks. He's kind of androgynous and slight, with small hands and feet. I don't think other people picked up on it, but I've developed a sixth sense for this stuff.'" (RF, 11)

297. Prosser, 100.

Although Maggie is Dean's main target, other cisgender people are similarly ignorant. A note informing Colin that he will be sharing his dorm with Dean from the residential office describes Dean as "an FTM transgender." Not transgender person, but a transgender. Terminology is important here, even for Dean who hates labels and categories, as this signals that there is no separation between a trans person's gender and the other aspects of who they are. Again the tone seems mocking, as though Dean is showing us that most people don't understand. Colin is described as also not understanding, showing us that Dean does not discriminate when it comes to his disgust with people's cliché or stereotypical views of trans people - binary trans people are just as likely to display ignorance about other trans people for Dean as cisgender people are. Colin makes an assumption that Dean will have "surgical scars" that the two of them can compare and that they might share coming-out stories, exactly the kind of thing we already have a feeling Dean would despise. (RF, 14) Elise, Dean's temporary roommate seems quite relieved to see Colin as: "[H]er friends agreed, Colin Mahr seemed really normal despite his disorder." She is also disappointed not to hear Colin and Dean's conversation as it "interested her, from a sociological standpoint." (RF, 17) Dean narrates this with sarcasm to the reader, placing Elise as an ill-informed cisgender person who views transgender people from a pathological perspective. When Colin and Dean get to talk alone Colin is pleased that Dean hadn't immediately known he was a trans man, saying thanks as he perceives this as a compliment. This is obviously the opposite to Maggie's interpretation of Dean who she claimed to know was trans, suggesting that Colin "passes better" than Dean, or at least this is the way Dean thinks people will perceive them both. There is another layer of opposition within the trans community of *Refuse*, that of sexuality, which I will now discuss.

Homo-Narcissism, Sexuality, and Psychology

Dean is seen as a misfit because of his sexuality, and his retelling of the myth of Narcissus from a transgender perspective sets up his continual dislike for what he sees as trans people's obsession with their bodies, including himself. But this obsession is also a trope that he is playing with, that of the narcissistic trans or queer person. Drawing on Warner's chapter on homo-narcissism and Freudian ideas of homo-

narcissism, I will explore in this section Dean's struggle with his attraction to Colin, who is to begin with "the same," which contradicts Dean's abject hatred for the "trans community" and the placing of himself as "the same" as other transgender people. Colin then becomes "different" when he chooses to remain in the heteronormative culture of the trans community and when he has lower surgery. Being a member of the trans community and being attracted to each other made Dean and Colin superficially the same, but once issues of sexuality and surgery arise their relationship begins to break down. Warner argues from a psychoanalytic perspective that when a man who is the "other who is also the same" is the object of desire to another man, they become a subject who cannot make a distinction between self and other.²⁹⁸ In Freudian psychoanalysis homosexuality is a version of narcissism because a man chooses "himself in the guise of another."²⁹⁹ Freud's conclusion had huge influence on psychoanalytic theory, and while homosexuality may no longer be defined as a disease, the pathological status of homosexuality is often still assumed, just as it can be for transgender people. Warner says "[I]f homosexuality is taken to be a symptom, then etiology provides a logic for saying that it reduces to narcissism."³⁰⁰ But this narcissism is also seen in Freudian terms as a "normal" part of heterosexual development, leading Warner to question how heterosexuality is able to transcend narcissism more than homosexuality. He argues that psychoanalytic discourse assumes: "that the heterosexual (male) is a better realist than the homosexual (male). The heterosexual male chooses the Other - woman - but the homosexual male only *thinks* he chooses another."³⁰¹ However, difference and sameness can co-exist, a conclusion Freud does not make, and Warner points out that they can co-exist in both desire and identification, not only gender as per the Freudian model. For Dean difference and sameness co-exist with layers of tension and contradiction. Warner

298. Michael Warner, "Homo-Narcissism; or, Heterosexuality," in *Engendering Men: The Question of Male Feminist Criticism*, eds. Joseph A. Boone and Michael Cadden (New York: Routledge, 1990), 191.

299. Sigmund Freud, "On Narcissism," in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud Volume 14*, ed. James Strachey (London: Hogarth, 1953 - 1974), 88.

300. Warner, "Homo-Narcissism," 194.

301. Warner, 195.

goes on to distil the nature of the psychoanalytic tradition as not: “a difference between sexualities of otherness and sameness, it is an allegory about gender.”³⁰² Gender is the only line of questioning in these traditions that is subject to this structure of sameness and difference. Warner gives the examples of ethnicity, age and class to highlight that erotic attraction is not defined by the same structure when erotic objects are chosen partially through bias towards one of these categories. These choices do not lead to the assumption that the subject has “eradicated the distinction between self and not-self.”³⁰³ Warner says that if this psychoanalytic tradition only reflected intolerance among one or two rogue theorists then we would not need to worry, but that if it is part of the structure of psychoanalysis then we need to rethink modern ideas of psychoanalysis.³⁰⁴ This essay by Warner is itself a reinforcement of binary gender when Warner uses “both” to describe gender and talks only of men and women. He writes in terms of homosexual and heterosexual without mention of bisexual or other sexuality. However, his ideas do not seem bound only to the binary but to gender in general as allegorical and the psychoanalytic tradition of reducing homosexuality to narcissism. Dean’s narcissism is nearly always tinged with sarcasm, treading a thin line between narcissism and self-hatred, recalling what Julian Stringer says of Morrissey in “The Smiths: Repressed (but Remarkably Dressed)”: “an ordinary, working-class anti-star who nevertheless loves to hog the spotlight, a nice man who says the nastiest things about other people, a shy man who is also an outrageous narcissist.”³⁰⁵

This narcissism and sarcasm relates to both transgender people, cisgender people, sexuality and mocking. Does Dean love himself and hate the reader? Or is it the other way around? By causing the reader to feel so unsure Dean protects himself and asserts his superiority, while simultaneously creating a strong reaction from the audience. It would be hard to be indifferent to Dean, whose narcissism might push us away at the

302. Warner, 198.

303. Warner, 200.

304. Warner, 200 – 202.

305. Julian Stringer, “The Smiths: Repressed (but Remarkably Dressed)”, *Popular Music*, Vol. 11, No. 1 (1992): 16–17.

same moment he asks us to love him. In a typically narcissistic way for Dean, he checks in with the reader to ask how they are, before promptly talking about himself again. He says: “it is my duty as a transgender writer to make you realise I am just like you.” He mocks the reader by explaining that: “I may eat some apple sauce. Don’t get the wrong idea; transgender people are able to consume solid foods, it’s just a custom that we often don’t.” (RF, 99) He also makes visible his invisibility as a gay trans man by imagining what the reader might be thinking: “[a] female who is a man who is a gay man? I don’t mean to offend you but that’s sort of absurd.” He also says that, “[t]o be transgender is to be perpetually offended.” (RF, 21)

Dean’s sexuality is seen as strange by those who fit in with the trans community, and Colin tries to persuade him that being “stone,” meaning he does not want to be touched sexually, is no way to live. Colin attributes Dean saying no to him in bed and not wishing to be naked with him as self-hatred towards his trans body. Colin says Dean should celebrate the differences between himself and other men, meaning his genitals. Dean writes an angry first-person tirade to the reader after this scene in which he wishes that trans men would stop talking about their genitals and says: “I’m not brain-dead like most you queers who base your entire lives around what’s between your legs and the legs you fuck.” (RF, 82) He feels like he does not belong to the queer or the trans community as his feelings towards sex are not the same as the way he perceives they are for most queer and trans people. Colin seems to shame him for being stone. Dean again feels misunderstood purely for being himself and saying no to things he is not comfortable with. It is understandable that he is angry after this and he says that all types of sex are equally boring to him. This strengthens Dean’s relationship to Morrissey, who was once celibate.³⁰⁶ Regardless, his right to say no is not taken at face value but attributed to a need to embrace being trans. When Colin rejects Dean again after drunkenly saying he loves him, he dismisses his feelings for Dean as vanity: “I see myself in you, you know? We’re too similar, I need someone who can balance me out.” (RF, 170) Colin says that this is partially because they are

306. Miriam Coleman, “Morrissey: ‘Unfortunately I Am Not Homosexual,’” *Rolling Stone*, October 20, 2013, <https://www.rollingstone.com/music/news/morrissey-unfortunately-i-am-not-homosexual-20131020>.

both transgender. These interactions show the complexity of how sameness, difference and narcissism are operating in the novel.

Teddy is also “strange” like Dean and is described by Sheila, the girlfriend of Dean’s friend Viv, as saying in high school that she did not have a sexuality, giving Teddy and Dean another connection as both members of the trans community and outsiders in the trans community. (RF, 105) Dean tells Maggie that he can’t be gay because trans men can’t have gay sex. His reasoning is because trans men don’t have “cocks.” Maggie tells him he is being offensive to other trans men to which he replies: “Well, I didn’t make the rules, I just enforce them. Now leave me alone.” (RF, 58)

There is another narcissistic character whom Dean associates with besides Morrissey. The opening few pages of *Refuse*, with its brief account of family and childhood recalls the opening of *The Catcher in the Rye*, in which Holden Caulfield declares:

If you really want to hear about it, the first thing you’ll probably want to know is where I was born, and what my lousy childhood was like, and how my parents were occupied and all before they had me, and all that David Copperfield kind of crap, but I don’t feel like going into it, if you want to know the truth.³⁰⁷

Holden is more concerned with getting straight to his own story rather than that of his parents, in the same way that Dean is quick to move on from a brief mention of childhood to the point where *he* wants the story to start, not where he thinks, just like Holden, the reader might want the story to start. Both of these openings display an insecurity which the narrator feels the need to take control of immediately by telling the reader he can do so. Dean is quick to state early on that “I suffer from an inflated sense of self-importance (yes, suffer).” (RF, 9)

307. J.D Salinger, *The Catcher in the Rye* (1951; Reprint: London: Penguin, 2010), 1.

Dean's hairstyle is modelled on James Dean, as well as Morrissey, whose films Dean describes as "mirrors in which to view himself," referencing not just James Dean's supposed vanity but of course his own. He is comparing himself to famous literary characters, film stars and musicians, placing himself as the misunderstood yet brilliant anti-hero. He is quick to make sure he not only stays one step ahead of any criticism the reader may give him, but also can prove himself superior. He is aware of the "trashy" status that transgender autobiography has had and proclaims his is something different: "I'm an existentialist!" *The Catcher in the Rye* has been banned in classrooms, and Dean ponders that his book will probably never make it to classrooms, despite the literary terms he carefully uses. He even speaks directly to the scholars who may want to make use of his work, seemingly pleased with himself that there will be nothing for them to find: "By the end I will have picked over this story to death. There will be nothing left for you hungry vultures in your Contemporary Queer Literature Seminars that I haven't made plain in English. Close-read all you want, you philistines. Do a close-reading of this sentence. How did that go? I hate you." (RF, 10) He is mocking from his position in the narrative's present those who will come to his work in the future, as if to say if you don't understand me the first time you're too stupid, whilst simultaneously planting references that some readers might not immediately know. If you are not already an expert in the culture of Dean you are not an expert at all. Of Colin Mahr, he muses that the reader might find the name Mahr similar to another guitarist, but says that he is "unready to cite that particular source (then you'd know everything!)" (RF, 11)

Dean is self-conscious that he is talking about himself as transgender too much, but also seemingly makes a dig at transgender people in general (himself included) that they are obsessed with their bodies: "It's alright to admit transgender people are unattractive. Not because they have supposedly deviant bodies, but because they won't shut up about them." However, at the end of the same paragraph he makes another dig, this time at the reader and those who view trans people as freaks when he says: "Maybe turn on the television. Perhaps Oprah is doing a special." (RF, 20) Now we wonder if he is in fact not berating himself and transgender people but instead trying to highlight that actually it *is* valid that transgender people talk about

themselves and their bodies. This is loaded with significance as Dean wants the reader to know that *he* knows all the tropes and stereotypes. This is both narcissistic in the respect that he places himself as disgusted by those who watch the talkshow-freakshow representations of transgender people but it is also in contrast a part of his self-defence mechanism. He will not leave room to be attacked, he will acknowledge that he seems like a narcissist, and he will do so in a way that might alienate people who have come to his story seeking a “trans 101.” The duty to make trans people visible is not one he feels he should take up by writing his story to the expected formula.

The expected formula includes the mirror scene and Dean does have his own mirror scene, but instead of it being placed with the childhood narrative or about looking and seeing himself as another or wrong gender, his mirror scene is about his disgust with what he deems an egotistical choice to “know myself inside-out over getting to know someone else.” (RF, 34) He acknowledges his disgust with his own body, but seemingly at first only so much as anybody else might hate their body. His internal monologue is arguing with him, calling him out on his lie and overwhelming him with self-hatred for even thinking he is worthwhile enough to try and change his outside appearance. He is in direct conflict with himself, both as narcissist and self-hater. Again he is aware that as a transgender person and a potentially queer person he might be seen as self-absorbed by society.

Dean puts down author J.D Salinger even though he mentioned Holden Caulfield on the first page of the novel, and when Maggie guesses Salinger might be his favourite author he says: “You think I’m a joke.” (RF, 37) This comes directly before the first portion of Dean’s retelling of the myth of Narcissus. Yahweh, young Dean’s given name “Laura” when spoken with a speech impediment is God in this story. Satan asks Yahweh if Narcissus, a beautiful boy, has ever thanked her for making him so beautiful. As punishment Satan suggests that they take away his penis:

‘I suggest we leave his youth intact, but take away the particular extremity he holds most dear; the very attribute of his masculine self-love.’

‘Are you suggesting we make him a eunuch?’ Yahweh asked.

‘What’s more,’ Satan said, ‘I’m suggesting we make him female.’ (RF, 39)

In Dean’s story of Narcissus, Satan suggests he go out into the world to find love. Narcissus tries a bathhouse but the men laugh at him when he undresses and say they do not want a girl. This reflects the fear that he may have as a trans man who doesn’t count himself as a “real man” that he will be rejected by other “real men.” (RF, 40) Narcissus violently kills two of the men and the story continues that every time he went home with a man and they saw what he was he killed them. He was not caught because Satan protected him, mirroring another stereotype of trans people as criminals and deviants, and especially as those who may appear “normal” but are a “threat.” When he finally finds a man who loves him the way he is, Satan appears and says he is now trapped forever in this form. Instead of embracing his new-found love, he is so disgusted with his body that he pushes him away. This story perfectly reflects Dean’s mind set.

Both Colin and Dean say they are not gay when Dean confronts Colin about his relationship with Maggie. (RF, 126) Colin relents on his assertion that he isn’t gay, but doesn’t say that he *is* gay either, following it up with a remark Dean made about trans men not being accepted in the “gay-guy community.” (RF, 131) TJ from the support group assumes that all “trans bros” are straight. (RF, 138) He remarks that the “trans-fag” thing is confusing to cisgender people. Dean is enraged by TJ’s assumptions and attitude.

Dean has two sexual encounters with cisgender men, firstly Alessio. Vivian, Dean’s friend from high school, is upset when she finds out Dean had sex with Alessio, whom she had once dated. Her concern comes from the fact that Alessio did not know that Dean is transgender, saying: “Oh god, I just remembered his father has guns!” (RF, 128) As long as Alessio thinks Dean is “the same” as him it seemed as though Dean was precariously safe, but should he have known that they are not the “same,” even though they are two men who are sexually attracted to men, Dean could have been in danger. Vivian says she never wants to see Dean again and it is after this argument

with his best friend that Dean has a transgender mirror scene that is no longer steeped in sarcasm. He notes that however much weight he may lose his chest will still be the same and he concludes that the mix of “male and female secondary sex characteristics could be nothing but repulsive, to anyone of any orientation.” (RF, 129)

TJ and Vivian’s assumptions and the inner-fears implied within the retelling of Narcissus are later disproved through the character Craig, a cisgender gay man who is attracted to both Colin and Dean and transness has nothing to do with the attraction. After this scene Dean speaks directly to the reader about going to the county clerk’s office to legally change his name. During the name change scene Dean refers to himself as a man. Previously he had referred to himself as a boy, stating that he would never be a man. It is as though Craig’s revelation has changed the way Dean views himself. (RF, 153) He calls himself a man again when he is planning to commit suicide and admits that although he has grown up he didn’t want to. (RF, 184) This association with being a man reflects his growing acceptance that cis people could find him attractive and that he is a sexual and romantic object of desire.

Vivian’s younger brother, Adrian, who is transgender and seeks out Dean for advice, calls Dean out on his jokes saying he has learnt about defence mechanisms in psychology. Dean seems to think the way he is is well-hidden, but Adrian tells Dean that he is obvious. (RF, 91) If we consider Dean as narrator, he is doing exactly what Adrian says in the very way he writes, by showing the reader that he is self-aware that he may seem obvious. When Adrian seeks out Dean again for advice, Dean lends him his Smiths CDs, as though he is passing down his wisdom to the next generation. The significance of The Smiths and lead-singer Morrissey is something I will now explore in more detail in relation to temporality and youth transition.

“Stretch Out and Wait” – Temporality and Morrissey in Refuse

Jack Halberstam explores the “stretched-out adolescence of queer culture makers” and says that subcultures make the various forms of “unbelonging” visible in his

chapter “What’s That Smell? Queer Temporalities and Subcultural Lives.”³⁰⁸ This stretched-out adolescence is certainly applicable to transgender youth who might find themselves going through a “second puberty,” which could be hormonal or could be cultural.³⁰⁹ We find out that Teddy was 27 when she died making her too old for the boundaries of the youth support group which is for youth aged 14 – 22. (RF, 172) The stretched-out adolescence that Dean experiences in which he still feels like a boy at age 22 is part of his refusal to conform. As well as the stretching of time Dean also has a relationship to the past through his connection to Morrissey and, to lesser extents, James Dean and Holden Caulfield. Holden Caulfield in *The Catcher in the Rye* resents adult life much in the same way that Dean admonishes the idea of having to get a job later in *Refuse*. He is a depressed and rebellious youth who thinks of committing suicide in chapter 14. Even more interesting than those commonalities is that the character appeared in an earlier short story by Salinger called “Slight Rebellion off Madison” in which his full name is given as Holden Morrissey Caulfield.³¹⁰ These connections signify his “unbelonging” to his own time as well as a fatalistic knowledge as the narrator that his relationship with Colin is doomed through the obvious parallels to Morrissey and Marr whose song writing partnership ended.

In this section I will explore the various ways in which temporality is employed in *Refuse* and how temporality relates to subcultures and the trans community. While this discussion of temporality further supports my assertion of Dean’s tension between “belonging” and “unbelonging,” I will also argue here that both belonging and “unbelonging” temporally are essential to Dean’s literal survival in the present and he must navigate them both. Horak’s theory of “hormone time” enables trans youth to imagine a future as they continue towards an affirmative goal, which contrasts with

308. Halberstam, In a Queer Time and Place, 175.

309. Serene Hadj-Hammou, (2014) “The experience of a ‘second adolescence/puberty’: A thematic analysis of gender transition in adults,” *SAGE Research Methods Cases* (2014): 8. doi:10.4135/978144627305013519221; Griffin Hansbury, “Sexual TNT: A Transman Tells the Truth About Testosterone,” *Journal of Gay & Lesbian Psychotherapy* 8, no. 1-2 (2004): 17.

310. J.D Salinger, “Slight Rebellions off Madison”, *The New Yorker*, December 21, 1946, 82.

Carter's idea of "transitional time" in which time can move in all directions concurrently. Because Dean does not conform to the binary goals associated with "hormone time," in particular that he does not fully identify with the label of "man," his relationship with time is a reflection of his instability in mainstream society as a non-binary trans person. I will begin by reviewing scholarship on temporality in relation to queer and trans lives as well as scholarship on temporality in the lyrics of Morrissey. In the song "Stretch out and Wait," Morrissey sings: "So ignore all the codes of the day/Let your juvenile impulses sway" and replies to someone asking him big questions about life that "All I do know is we're here and it's now." Dean tries to ignore the codes of the day but finds it impossible, and the present for Dean involves a wait for the inevitable end of his relationship but also a wait for the unknown, without the hope that "hormone time" would bring. Morrissey's refrain of "wait" in the song summarises the agony many trans people face as they wait for hormones, wait for surgery, or wait for society to accept that they can still be trans without these things.

The references to Morrissey's lyrics start early and Dean uses them to affirm and seemingly claim his difference, and to tell the world he doesn't care if his identity is not one they can grasp: "This is the same problem I have encountered deciphering my own meaning, in a world where people force identities down your throat. Appropriately, I stick my tongue out and drop my trousers to the queers and straights alike." (RF, 9)

This references The Smiths' song "Nowhere Fast" from the album *Meat is Murder*, which opens with the line "I'd like to drop my trousers to the world" and repeats it later with the variation "I'd like to drop my trousers to the Queen." Elise whom Dean very briefly shares a dorm room with due to being registered as female finds it awkward to share "with a transsexual" and describes the music he listens to as "that terrible moaning man over ancient 80s guitar riffs." (RF, 15) Although many readers would likely have already picked up on a reference to Johnny Marr a few pages back, Dean has an awareness or assumption that some people his age may never have heard of The Smiths, placing him out of own time as well as setting him apart from other people for more than just being transgender. He quickly turns his music off when Elise

enters the room, as this is his secret kinship with a subculture, as a fan of The Smiths, and a time, the 1980s, which he prefers to experience alone.

Dean first discovers The Smiths after his best friend, Vivian, is banned from seeing him by her parents. He visits a second-hand record shop and finds an affinity with the album cover for *The Queen is Dead*. He says of the person on the cover “[T]heir gender was indeterminable.” (RF, 25) As well as the very obvious naming of Colin Mahr, Dean recalls in this story of the stolen CD that he believed his own Johnny Marr would soon appear, taking us back into the present narrative where Dean is moving into Colin’s dorm room. (RF, 28) If this relationship is the same as Morrissey and Marr’s then we know that it cannot last forever. To cement this further the first thing Colin plays for Dean on his guitar is the opening riff from “This Charming Man.” The album cover of The Smiths *The Queen is Dead* “stirred something deep in Dean’s psyche, like a memory from a past life.” (RF, 26) The person of indeterminate gender (who is actually Alain Delon in a film still from the 1964 film *L’Insoumis*) on an album from the 1986, found by Dean in his past and recounted by Dean in the present.³¹¹ He is connected to several different times at once, an idea we will see in Carter’s theory of “transitional time.” A voice seems to urge him into shoplifting the CD - a child’s voice, which is “far away,” likely a reference to The Smiths’ song “Shoplifters of the World Unite.” (RF, 26) We don’t find out who the child is, but it is “far away,” which does not suggest any particular direction in time. Colin asks Dean what he wants to be when he graduates and Dean replies: “I dunno. Morrissey?” (RF, 25) When Vivian asks the same question Dean is insistent that he does not want to get a job, even though he will need to find money to stay on testosterone. He says, “Why should I do something I hate for someone who doesn’t even care about me,” recalling The Smiths song “Heaven Knows I’m Miserable Now” when Morrissey sings: “I was looking for a job, and then I found a job, and heaven knows I’m miserable now.” Vivian tries to be the voice of reason but Dean is banking on becoming a writer because that is the only ambition he has. (RF, 105)

311. Dave Fawbert, “25 Things you Didn’t Know about The Queen is Dead”, *Shortlist*, accessed April 20, 2017, [http://www.shortlist.com/home/25-things-you-\(probably\)-didnt-know-about-the-queen-is-dead](http://www.shortlist.com/home/25-things-you-(probably)-didnt-know-about-the-queen-is-dead).

Just as trans adolescence can be argued to be stretched-out, trans and queer time can also be compressed. Time and space in queer cultures have oppositional meaning to those in heteronormative institutions, as Jack Halberstam describes, specifically the family unit and reproduction. Halberstam sets out that: “the queer ‘way of life’ will encompass subcultural practices, alternative methods of alliance, [and] forms of transgender embodiment.”³¹² The AIDS epidemic in the 1980s and 1990s gave “queer time” a focus on the now with the future being so unsure that the present time becomes about compression, with as much squeezed into it as possible. But more than that it is a life that is not dictated by heteronormative conventions, such as having children.³¹³ Halberstam points out that the majority of early writing on the subject of subcultures assumed that males were the dominant gender in subcultural activity. As well as this assumed male dominance, the study of subcultures has usually focused on youth groups, which has rendered it: “trapped in the oedipal framework that pits the subculture against the parent culture.”³¹⁴ McRobbie says that it is no longer the case that youth cultures are only the product of the working-class, however Halberstam notes that the framework used by McRobbie is still a heterosexual one.³¹⁵ These queer subcultures then are a chance to rethink the divide between youth and adulthood.

Laura Horak’s article “Trans on YouTube: Intimacy, Visibility, Temporality” discusses vlogs made by trans youth which compress time and connects trans youth.

On YouTube, media created by transgender people is predominantly in the form of vlogs made by youth where the subject directly addresses the audience with a first-person narrative.³¹⁶ Horak describes the time she is writing in, 2014, as a “crucial moment,” calling to mind the rhetoric of the Transgender Tipping Point. She acknowledges the fact that some of these videos may be formulaic but that trans

312. Halberstam, *Queer Time and Place*, 1.

313. Halberstam, 2. It is worth pointing out here that queer life has changed drastically since the 1980s and 1990s and many more queer people do have children now.

314. Halberstam, 160.

315. Halberstam, 160.

316. Laura Horak, “Trans on YouTube: Intimacy, Visibility, Temporality”, *Transgender Studies Quarterly* 1, no. 4 (2014): 572.

youth are exploiting YouTube as a platform to affirm themselves and build community. Horak explores the strategies that vloggers use to communicate their gender to viewers. She says that these “talking head” videos help to establish trans youth as experts and create a sense of intimacy.³¹⁷ The same technique is used by Dean when he breaks up the third-person narrative with sections of direct address to the reader. Rather than attempt to build his link to the transgender community however, Dean uses these sections of direct address to affirm his position as an outsider, perhaps trying to build his own community. Dean creates a sense of intimacy just as trans youth in vlogs do by appealing to anyone who has ever felt like they don’t belong. His arrogance and humour, and his attempt to always stay one step ahead of the reader, for example his comment about a close-reading of his work in a queer literature class. Here he makes himself an expert in “unbelonging” to the trans community, but also belonging by reaching out to those he knows will understand what he says.

The transition videos on YouTube often make use of temporal compression, for example the many slide-show videos set to music which chronicle the subject’s transition from points as far back as infancy to the current day, but sometimes beginning with one or two years pre-hormones. Horak describes this temporality as “hormone time” in contrast to theories of “queer time.”³¹⁸ “Hormone time” certainly exists to an extent within trans YA, but within many novels (for example *Being Emily*, *Luna*, *I am J*, and *The Art of Being Normal*), reaching “hormone time” or in other cases what I will call “surgery time” (consisting of pre-surgery and post-surgery as important temporal markers of success) comes at the ending of the novel, although most often all we see as the reader is pre-surgery time when the character has either decided they want surgery or has secured the means to do so. Horak describes “hormone time” as “linear and teleological, directed toward the end of living full time in the desired gender.”³¹⁹ *Refuse* starts when Dean is already well-established on testosterone and has left high school and the family home. “Hormone time” is of course not the only marker of the transition experience. Hormone time is threatened for Dean when he

317. Horak, “Trans on YouTube,” 573.

318. Horak, 573.

319. Horak, 580.

becomes too old for his parent's health insurance to cover his testosterone. He needs to work, but to do this he needs to legally change his name which also costs money. He starts to question his idol Morrissey and his lyrics about not bothering with work. He says for the first time that he would like chest surgery. This and his hormones are all out of reach financially. (RF, 56) He both hates Morrissey in this moment and also still finds that his lyrics reach him. Hormone time is important in the trans youth support group, with TJ using "pre-T" as part of his introduction, adding that he starts T in a week. Teddy refers to a different time, "back then," when she was invisible, instead of "now" when she feels that the "radical-sex-positive-queer-feminists still hold me up to this plastic ideal." (RF, 76) There was no expectation for Teddy to belong to the community in "back then." When Dean is recalling a time when he was 17 and meeting with his friend Vivian he notes that his voice was still high-pitched as he was "not yet injecting one milliliter of testosterone biweekly into his body, as was the custom for boys like him." (RF, 23) This shows us pre-hormone time, complete with the "before" voice. Unlike the YouTube vlogs though, this is narrated in a non-linear format. There is reference within the text to Dean's non-linear writing style, in a letter Dean receives from Vivian when her parents tell her she cannot see him anymore. Vivian's father says of Dean's writing: "It's not linear like a male writer. It's circular and disorganized... overtly emotional like a female writer." (RF, 24)

Transition is not always linear. Julian Carter, in his essay "Embracing Transition, or Dancing in the Fold of Time," uses a close reading of *Lou* (2009), a dance piece about trans activist Lou Sullivan by Sean Dorsey to describe transition as non-linear. By exploring the different movements of the dance, for example a sideways step or a forward movement, Carter makes the case for "transitional time," which can move backwards, forwards and sideways at the same time.³²⁰ In most trans YA, the end-goal of "hormone time" simplifies the journey for the reader and, although the resolutions in these novels are quite often bleak or unsure, there is at least a hope for a future

320. Julian Carter, "Embracing Transition, or Dancing in the Fold of Time," in *The Transgender Studies Reader 2*, eds. Susan Stryker and Aren Z. Aizura (New York: Routledge, 2013), 130.

filled with possibilities. Dean has reached “the future” in terms of “hormone time” and navigates the narrative through the present, his past, and also the mythological past.

While there are other types of trans videos on YouTube, Horak says that the transition ones are the most popular. This leads some trans vloggers to question these transition videos and argue that they give a stereotypical impression that all trans people are the same and that there are only two genders. What these videos do though is create a convention which has “made the videos easier to create and circulate than any previous media form.”³²¹ Here we can draw a parallel with formulaic YA novels in that once a convention has been set this template can be more easily reproduced, and in the publishing world then has a track-record of selling and the cycle repeats. DeLine’s character Dean is acutely aware of the stereotypes and formulaic plots that have come before him, so much so that his continual references to trans history and his trans retelling of the myth of Narcissus present a different kind of compressed transition temporally that is not just the story of Dean but the story of the systems that have led Dean to live the way he does. He says: “let us jump back in time about five years. After all, it isn’t proper if I don’t include some whining about my teen years.” (RF, 21) Here he is not just referencing the trans back story that might be expected but also the structure of the memoir. Colin asks Dean when he went on hormones, to which Dean replies that it has been a few years. Colin is disappointed that Dean doesn’t want to share more of his trans experience. Ironically, Dean says he has rebelled against the predetermined, having already determined his own fate with Colin through the way he has characterized him in the role of Johnny Marr.

Trans vlogs, Horak says, are a form of political action, even when not conceptualized as such by the vloggers themselves. The vlogs grant them this expertise as mentioned above as well as allowing them to be the author of their own stories.³²² *Refuse* can also be seen as a form of political action in this way because of its semi-autobiographical nature. The “expertise” factor is so important to trans stories, whether vlog or fiction,

321. Horak, “Trans on YouTube,” 574.

322. Horak, “Trans on YouTube,” 574.

because the expertise that is being contested is that of the medical profession, as well as parents and other authorities.³²³ Novels such as *Almost Perfect*, which I explored in Chapter 2, and *The Art of Being Normal*, which I explored in Chapter 1, have plots which give the trans characters little agency and expertise, showing their “successful” transition as heavily dependent on transitioning the “right” way. The characters in these novels still live within nuclear family units and are still attending high school. They find themselves judged by parents, peers and the medical profession. Dean is aware of being judged by the reader, but makes it clear he really doesn’t care, but what he is also doing is speaking directly to the reader in the same way that vloggers do. Horak claims that: “[T]hese formal qualities [...] make the claim that this person is *real* and their statement true. They also position the viewer as a secret confidant.”³²⁴ Dean’s direct address gives him control and agency over his own story, and goes against mainstream representations of trans people that are often objectifying and see them positioned as freaks to be stared at.³²⁵

This strategy of presenting realness and searching for truth as a young person is also thematically present in Morrissey’s lyrics, as Jean-Phillipe Deranty describes in “The cruel poetics of Morrissey: Fragment for a phenomenology of the ages of life.” Deranty examines the poetic lyrics written by Morrissey as a case study for the stages of life - most frequently late adolescence and early adulthood - in which moments of crisis cause the self to question its truth. Morrissey’s music is described by Deranty as a “genuine outlet for young people’s desires and anxieties.” Existential phenomenology uses a model of subjectivity in which: “the constitutive relation of the self to itself is shown to be a specific relation to time.”³²⁶ Using Heidegger’s *Dasein*, which is a way of thinking of humans as beings in the world, Deranty explores the relationship of *Dasein* to time when considering that *Dasein* changes over time.³²⁷ *Dasein* is often translated

323. Horak, 575.

324. Horak, 575.

325. Horak, 575; Viviane Namaste, *Sex Change, Social Change: Reflections on Identity, Institutions and Imperialism* (Ontario: Women’s Press, 2005), 52.

326. Jean-Phillipe Deranty, “The Cruel Poetics of Morrissey: Fragment for a Phenomenology of the Ages of Life,” *Thesis Eleven* 120, no. 1 (2014): 90.

327. Deranty. “Cruel Poetics of Morrissey,” 91.

as “existence” but in German translates literally as “being there.”³²⁸ These changes over time can be both internal and external. From a sociological perspective, pop songs can be viewed as capturing the essence of a particular time, or mood in society at that time.³²⁹ Truth is particularly interesting when we relate it to the trans person and *Dasein*. Deranty writes, referring to developmental psychology and philosophy: “Truth then is simultaneously the truth of the subject, that is, the authentic mode of existence that the subject can define for herself, but also, the ground for any further ‘true’ cognition of the world, and finally, the truth of a social-historical time.”³³⁰ Part of the “truth” in *Dasein* is disclosure, and there are issues of authenticity - when there is a projection of the possible future then the past becomes the preparation for this authenticity, a temporal loop which leads back to a “renewed sense of the present.”³³¹ This is also very tied into the ways in which queer narratives are often structured around coming out.³³² There is a retrospective idea which we see in the fictional trans narratives in books such as *Luna* or *The Art of Being Normal*, and many others, where the story of childhood is told from the renewed sense of the present now that the character is beginning to explore their gender identity. For example, the common narrative where we see the character trying on clothes meant for another gender at a very young age is told with a very specific theme because of the time this story of the past is being told in. This is part of what Deranty describes as the “tradition” of retracing meaning from the past into the present. The fatalistic nature of Dean and Colin’s relationship which I described earlier is a good example of this.

With being, or as above “being there,” also comes not being, or death, and, specifically in some of Morrissey’s lyrics, suicide. Near the end of *Refuse*, Dean wishes to take his own life but is saved by the lyrics of The Smiths when he accidentally plays the wrong song on his personal CD player. In Kieran Cashell’s article “Sing me to sleep: Suicide,

328. “Daesin,” *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, accessed April 21, 2017, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Dasein>.

329. Deranty, 91.

330. Deranty, 93.

331. Deranty, 94.

332. Angus Gordon, “Turning Back”: Adolescence, Narrative and Queer Theory,” *GLQ* 5, no.1 (1999): 1.

philosophy and The Smiths,” Morrissey describes in several Smiths-era interviews, that suicide is not the act of a coward but rather honourable because the subject takes total control of their own life.³³³ Morrissey is open about having contemplated suicide himself, and Cashell says that: “The Smiths also seem to have supplied crucial support to many vulnerable people by providing a vivid expression of suicide-ideation that they have strongly identified with.”³³⁴ There are examples of Smiths fans who claim that their music saved their lives, which Cashell uses to argue that this isn’t merely a speculative opinion. In the song “Asleep” there is a calmness about suicide. Cashell argues that the theme of Auld Lang Syne at the end of the song places the narrative in New Year’s Eve symbolising a sorrowful entrenchment in the present. When Dean goes to the cemetery to commit suicide, heartbroken by Colin’s rejection, he takes his CD player to listen to “Asleep.” By accident he plays the wrong track, “Unlovable,” which causes him to laugh and change his mind about death. Suddenly he is not the grown up he thought he had become: “I was still a child, with all potentials intact.” (RF, 186) Dean compares himself to Hamlet, who cannot kill himself because his religious beliefs lead him to believe that if he does he will be damned. This comparison to Hamlet comes early in the novel and seems to another predictor of Dean’s fate. Teddy was similarly displaced in time, but went through with her suicide attempt. Teddy is shown as almost completely isolated, while Dean does make some attempts to form relationships. Dean writes letters to Teddy as she doesn’t use the internet or have a phone. Even Teddy’s house and car are described as old-fashioned. (RF, 106) In his letter, Dean wonders if being transgender means to be “obsessed with the wrong style of social performance.” (RF, 94) Their observations of the support group and general feelings about the community seem to reflect this, and point to the binary assumptions placed on both of them by the members of the group. Being behind the trends with technology is significant as when Dean is in the company of Maggie, Colin and three “trans bros” everyone has an iPod to listen to. Dean has only a CD player, which he has forgotten to bring. (RF, 142) He shares an association, that of listening to

333. Kieran Cashell, “Sing me to sleep: Suicide, philosophy and The Smiths” in *Why Pamper Life’s Complexities? Essays on The Smiths*, eds. Sean Campbell and Colin Coulter (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2010), 85.

334. Cashell, 86.

music, with others even if his version of it is from the past. Teddy is not shown as having any such companionship. Dean seemingly survives not only because of his connection with The Smiths but also because he is not truly isolated in the same way that Teddy is, crossing the lines between belonging and unbelonging, the past and present continually and concurrently.

Conclusion

At the beginning of this chapter I set out to show how Dean's conflicting desires create a tension between his belonging and unbelonging to various subcultural groups, most importantly that of the transgender community, and how this mirrors the real-life experiences of non-binary people. He knows, as does Teddy, that there is an expectation for them to be happy as trans people living in the present, the moment just before what would become known as The Transgender Tipping Point. Dean and Teddy who do not conform to the gender binary struggle to find acceptance within not only the trans community but the cisgender community as well. This unbelonging becomes further complicated when Dean refuses to label his sexuality, and finds that the trans men he meets assume that he will be straight. Not belonging to the present, he forms a temporal relationship to the music of The Smiths and to Morrissey. He also rewrites mythical history with a retelling of Narcissus which mocks the pathologized stereotypes of queer and transgender people.

Adding to my original argument, I made a case that Dean has to have some relationship to the present and the trans community because his life literally depends on it. Teddy's narrative which goes in the direction of total isolation shows what could happen to Dean if he continues not to belong - he might commit suicide, or less literally be totally alone. He must constantly make small sacrifices from his own refusal and rebellion in order to survive, while still only barely making sense of the communities who seem not to want to understand him. Dean must move between being "the same" and being different, showing his transition, as a non-binary person, to be more aligned with Carter's "transitional time" which can move in multiple directions than with the more linear time presented for binary transitions. He is both in

the past and the present, and as the narrator he tells his story from a future vantage point. There is no straight-forward happy ending in *Refuse* or the “success” that might be implied in other trans novels by meeting transitional goals, but that fact in itself would be a success for Dean who wishes not to conform to transgender biographies. Although much of Dean’s narrative is about unbelonging, his material conditions are middle class; there is a roof above his head and an education he is accessing. In my next chapter I will explore what happens when unbelonging is more literal for homeless trans youth.

Chapter 4. Unstable Structures: Homelessness and Exile in Trans Youth Narratives

“In 2015, the Supreme Court declared gay marriage legal across the US; emboldened, more young people started to come out, without realising that society had not moved as fast as the courts. Kids thought to themselves, ‘Oh my god, I can be out now because of the whole marriage equality thing,’ and in fact that calculus was still not perhaps right.”³³⁵

In the quote above, Gary J. Gates co-author of “Serving Our Youth: Findings from a National Survey of Service Providers Working with Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Youth Who are Homeless or at Risk of Becoming Homeless,” describes the failure of society to catch up to legislative change which has contributed to LGBTQ youth homelessness. LGBTQ youth are often identified as invisible or hidden.³³⁶ They remain “hidden” despite increased visibility in the media which may at first appear as mainstream acceptance, or in the case of gay marriage a misconception of acceptance, but has conversely been cited as a cause for the increase in numbers of LGBTQ youth who become homeless. When Justice Ruth Bader Ginsberg spoke about the issue of gay marriage in an interview with Bloomberg, she made a similar point that as more people come out (as gay) then it becomes more acceptable. She says that people have: “[L]ooked around and we discovered it’s our next-door neighbour - we’re very fond of

335. Josh Spero, “Down and Out: Why So Many Homeless Youths are LGBT,” *Financial Times*, May 12, 2017, <https://www.ft.com/content/1414f788-30e8-11e7-9555-23ef563ecf9a>.

336. Terrance F. Ross, “Young, Homeless – and Invisible,” accessed May 29, 2018, <https://www.theatlantic.com/education/archive/2015/02/young-homelessand-invisible/385355/>; Lata Pandya, “Homeless and Transgender: Searching for Shelter and Acceptance,” accessed May 29, 2018, <https://www.kcet.org/shows/socal-connected/homeless-and-transgender-searching-for-shelter-and-acceptance>; Grossman and D’Augelli, “Transgender Youth: Invisible and Vulnerable,” 112 - 113; Karen M. Staller, “Review Essay: Hidden in Plain Sight: Runaway and Homeless Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Queer (LGBTQ) Youth,” *Qualitative Social Work* 9, no.4 (2011): 552.

them.”³³⁷ Of importance here is the idea of “the neighbour” and that those who appear to conform to homonormativity, presumably by being the married neighbours of straight couples, are acceptably domestic and belong near our homes. The progress seen here in attitudes towards gay rights and the move to welcome gay people into the domestic sphere is not mirrored for the trans community who face increasing efforts by those on the hard right to exclude them from public spaces, such as the bathroom.³³⁸ This is not only the case in the US, as similar issues are evident in the UK. Tim Sigworth of the Albert Kennedy Trust in the UK also cites positive changes in legislation as masking the difficulties faced by LGBT people, acknowledging that they are beneficial for some but that LGBT youth homelessness is on the rise, noting specifically that trans youth homelessness in particular has increased.³³⁹ This creates more of the same cycles in which trans youth are simultaneously hidden and scrutinized.

Homelessness for trans youth is positioned in both fiction and the media as a dualism between choice and forced exile. The trans youth can only *be* trans if they leave home, but they are only forced to leave if they “choose” a trans identity. The concept of homelessness is both a metaphor for trans identities as well as a reality for trans people who cannot find “home” in society at a time when the TTP portrays acceptance. In this chapter I will analyse two novels, *Brooklyn Burning* by Steve Brezenoff and *Roving Pack* by Sassafras Lowrey, which both portray homeless non-

337. Greg Stohr and Matthew Winkler. “Ruth Bader Ginsburg Thinks Americans are Ready for Gay Marriage,” *Bloomberg*, last modified Feb 12, 2015, <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2015-02-12/ginsburg-says-u-s-ready-to-accept-ruling-approving-gay-marriage-i61z6gq2>.

338. Josh Corbat, “When Laws Solve Problems That Do Not Exist,” *High School Journal* 100, no. 2 (2017): 86.

339. Tim Sigworth, “LGBT Youth Homelessness: A UK National Scoping of Cause, Prevalence, Response and Outcome,” *The Albert Kennedy Trust*, accessed June 20, 2019, <https://www.akt.org.uk/Handlers/Download.ashx?IDMF=c0f29272-512a-45e8-9f9b-0b76e477baf1>; Adam Lusher and Matt Watts, “Gay Youngsters Being Forced from the Family Home in ‘Dramatically Increasing’ Numbers, Charities Warn,” *The Independent*, December 18, 2016. <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/homelesshelpline/lgbt-gay-hate-crime-homophobia-homophobic-bullying-homeless-helpline-centrepoint-albert-kennedy-a7480326.html>.

binary/gender non-conforming trans youth in the USA. The main characters - Kid in *Brooklyn Burning* and Click in *Roving Pack* - live in unstable architecture and face three distinct structures in relationship to the home and homelessness as non-binary people. Firstly, there is what is *outside* the unstable architecture they make home, that is society and family. Secondly, Click and Kid hide from society *inside* unstable architecture, becoming almost part of it, or rather the architecture becomes part of them, acting as a reflection of psyche, and a metaphor for the aesthetics of the body. Finally, there is the inner workings of the house, its *plumbing*, which represents essentialist biological views of gender and seems to “go wrong” as a near organic extension of Click and Kid, always waiting to cause problems no matter how much the decor improves. These three layers correspond to three discourses which most clearly show links between homelessness and trans identity. These are: choice and exile; abjection and the uncanny home; and faulty plumbing and the trans body. To begin the chapter, I will give a brief summary of the novels *Brooklyn Burning* and *Roving Pack*. Then I will discuss the three themes identified in relation to the two novels, beginning with choice and forced exile. Next, I will move on to abjection and the uncanny home where the frightening, and often filthy, derelict housing seen in *Roving Pack* and *Brooklyn Burning* represent the unclean/disordered portrayals of minority groups in society as well as the specific view of the nonbinary body as permanently strange. This has an obvious relationship to the transgender body as one that may be built upon or completely rebuilt, or as we have seen in the analysis in previous chapters, something which can be “fixed” if the “correct” medical procedures are employed to take the body from one binary gender to the other. But for non-binary trans youth, the home cannot simply be rebuilt in order to become a stable, liveable space in literature. I will then explore the themes of faulty plumbing and the trans body which continues to be uncanny, paying close attention to Lucas Crawford’s and Oren Gozlan’s exploration of the bathroom as the transgender closet and Jay Prosser’s writing on the body as home.

Roving Pack

Roving Pack tells the story of Click, a transgender youth using ze/hir pronouns who experiences familial rejection, rejection among the trans community and homelessness. Click spends time in various places throughout the novel, sometimes couch surfing, and at other times trying to rent housing. Click's name comes from clicker training used with hir dogs, who are an important part of Click's sense of belonging to a "pack." Click has to take out a restraining order against hir mother whose is a physically abusive alcoholic. Click is portrayed as moving around from one unstable situation to the next. Click's non-binary identity is not accepted by many in the trans and queer community and ze tries to make hir identity fit in with what is expected – a binary identity - but eventually becomes confident enough to accept hir identity at the end of the novel.

Brooklyn Burning

Brooklyn Burning tells the story of Kid, a teenager who is thrown out of home by their father who does not accept Kid's gender identity or sexuality: "I've got the only kid I know doesn't know whether to be straight or gay or a girl or a boy or what."³⁴⁰ Central to the story is a warehouse fire, which police are investigating with Kid in mind as the suspect. As the story unfolds we learn about the derelict warehouse which local homeless people sleep in, including Felix with whom Kid was romantically involved. Kid's story is told without the use of pronouns or labelling, so for the purposes of this chapter I will use "they" since I interpret this to mean that Kid does not identify with a binary gender. *Brooklyn Burning* is frequently mentioned in lists of transgender books online suggesting that others also read Kid this way, but as the author uses no

340. Steve Brezenoff, *Brooklyn Burning* (Minneapolis, MN: Carolrhoda Lab, 2011), 122.

pronouns or labels it is of course possible that others will have a different interpretation.³⁴¹

Choice and Exile

Homelessness can be defined in a number of ways which can vary between experiences of a lack of stable housing to living in places which are not intended for habitation. In “Seeking Shelter,” the authors describe homeless youth in the USA as young people aged between 12 and 24 who do not have a safe family or alternative living arrangement. Homeless youth are often categorized by scholars as either “runaway” or “throwaway”, runaways being those who have willingly left home without the knowledge of their family, and throwaways whose guardians have forced them to leave home against their will.³⁴² However, the two characters I focus on could be described as belonging at times to both of these categories, something which will be explored in relation to choice and relates to the complicated nature of homelessness for transgender youth, which include sex segregated services and a lack of services designed specifically to meet their needs.³⁴³ A third category, the “independent” youth are those who feel they have no home to go back to, have

341. Amanda Shepard, “Ten YA Books Featuring Gender Non-Conforming Characters,” accessed May 29, 2018, <https://nerdybookclub.wordpress.com/2016/12/03/ten-ya-books-featuring-gender-non-conforming-characters-by-amanda-shepard/>; Becky Thompson, “List of the Week: Genderqueer and Transgender YA Leads,” accessed May 29, 2018, <http://www.yainterrobang.com/list-of-the-week-genderqueer-and-transgender-ya-leads/>; “Masterlist: Transgender,” *Gay YA*, accessed May 29, 2018, <http://www.gayya.org/masterlist-transgender/>.

342. Andrew Cray, Katie Miller, and Laura E. Durso, “Seeking Shelter: The Experiences and Unmet Needs of LGBT Homeless Youth,” *Centre for American Progress*, accessed May 29, 2018, <https://cdn.americanprogress.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/09/LGBTHomelessYouth.pdf>. 3; Katherine L. Montgomery, Sanna J. Thompson, Amanda N. Barczyk “Individual and relationship factors associated with delinquency among throwaway adolescents,” *Children and Youth Services Review* 33, no.7 (2011): 1127; Christopher L. Ringwalt, Jody M. Greene and Marjorie J. Robertson, “Familial backgrounds and risk behaviors of youth with throwaway experiences,” *Journal of Adolescence* 21 (1998): p.241.

343. Jama Shelton, “Transgender youth homelessness: Understanding programmatic barriers through the lens of cisgenderism,” *Children and Youth Services Review* 59 (2015): 10.

homeless families or have lost contact with their family.³⁴⁴ Click and Kid cannot be described as independent because their family homes still exist and they do have contact with their families. Their homelessness cannot be easily categorized, leading to the limbo-like state they live in which becomes a metaphor for their non-binary bodies and identity.

Farrugia describes the “symbolic burden” of homelessness as the notion that homelessness is a cultural trope but also that it has a fixed set of characteristics. This means that homelessness itself is seen as an identity causing homeless youth to be treated as suspect members of society.³⁴⁵ Media representations show homeless people as separate from the larger community and in a 10 year study of ITN TV news reporting in the UK, Hodgetts et al. found that reporting shaped the identity of homeless people through selective depictions of begging, theft, and sex work.³⁴⁶ As well as portrayals of homeless people as thieves, beggars and sex workers, physically the homeless person is a dirty, dishevelled white cisgender man, typifying the “homeless identity.” This has implications for who is seen as homeless – and in turn who is not seen. This is a discursive construction which contrasts sharply against the romanticisation of homelessness found in film and literature - for example road movies or the flâneur.

The homeless transgender youth has been exiled from their home and begins a journey, not only separated literally from the notion of “home” but conceptually by feelings of alienation.³⁴⁷ Bodies themselves can be a site of travel in literature. The

344. Sanna J. Thompson, Andrew W. Safyer and David E. Pollio, “Differences and predictors of family reunification among subgroups of runaway youths using shelter services,” *Social Work Research* 25, no. 3 (2001): 163.

345. David Farrugia, “The Symbolic Burden of Homelessness: Towards a Theory of Youth Homelessness as Embodied Subjectivity,” *Journal of Society* 47, no.1 (2010): 72.

346. Darrin Hodgetts, Andrea Hodgetts and Alan Radly, “Life in the Shadow of the Media: Imaging Street Homelessness in London,” *European Journal of Cultural Studies* 9, no.4 (2006): 497–498.

347. Feroza Basu, “The Transgendered Individual as Exilic Travelling Subject,” in *Cultures of Exile: Images of Displacement*, eds. Wendy Everett and Peter Wagstaff (New York: Berghahn Books, 2004), 125–136.

physical body does not have to be changed for the gender non-conforming trans youth to travel, which I would argue leads to viewing the non-binary youth as having no fixed destination as well as no home. Traditionally the travel associated with exile is presented as a negative consequence.³⁴⁸ Traveling by choice however, is often romanticised in literature and the arts, and I will now discuss how Click and Kid, whose homelessness is positioned tentatively between choice and exile, are stuck in a limbo that represents their journey as one with no destination. I will briefly explore concepts of the stranger and wandering nomads from cultural geography, then move on to the idea of transcendental homelessness and the flâneur. To end this section I will discuss discourses of blame and choice.

Spatial and Spectral Geography

The ideas of spatial and spectral geography are helpful in assessing the tension between the romanticisation of a cisgendered, masculine homelessness and the familial rejection which haunts Click and Kid as they become stuck in cycles of unstable living situations. I use what Georg Simmel calls a “spatial circle” in this section as it relates to the position of outsiders, or strangers, within society. The spectral is what Jon May describes as a cycle of returning to familiar places in hope of finding resolution, which Click and Kid do when they try to reunite with family. Instead what they find are ghosts of the past which continue to haunt them even when they go to different places in the city.

Georg Simmel’s concept of the “stranger” can help us understand Click’s and Kid’s dilemmas. Simmel’s stranger is more than just a wanderer who is here one day and gone the next. The stranger is someone who arrives and stays, but the position they hold within a group, which Simmel calls a spatial circle, is tentative due to being initially an outsider and also bringing qualities to that spatial circle which are different to the qualities of those already within it. The stranger owns no land (in Simmel’s essay the stranger is always a trader), which would be needed in order to occupy a fixed

348. Basu, “Transgendered Individual as Exilic Travelling Subject,” 131.

space both physically and socially. The stranger who moves on experiences something different to the one who stays— they can be privy to the secrets and revelations usually hidden within close relationships. In Simmel’s essay this objectivity equals freedom.³⁴⁹ In previous chapters I have shown an inverted version of this in the narratives of the gender-conforming trans person, the strange new kid at school, who moves away at the end of the novel, to university or another town far away once their “secret” has been revealed. Instead of being the one who is confided in, they have their confidence broken. They do not have the same freedom of objectivity but instead become the object, and moving on does not always feel like their own choice. Kid and Click, who are homeless and own no land, are the stranger who stays - geographically as they drift around their home cities and metaphorically in society. They do not have the objective “freedom” (which is not always freedom at all) to move on because their gender is non-conforming and thus in narrative terms cannot be resolved with surgery in a different city (even if they were to have surgery or take hormones their identity would still not be “fixed”) or appearing at a new university fully aligned with a binary gender.

There has been a tendency in both cultural geography and western literature and arts to romanticize the “open road.”³⁵⁰ Jon May explores the idea of “home as place” and also the differing degrees to which movement is involved in homelessness. May found, in interviews with homeless men, that many of them were actually somewhat immobile and not constantly on the move as might be the case in Western literature’s romanticised nomadic wanderers. “Men of the road” in May’s study were those who moved in a cyclical way between sets of hostels or shelters. The identity of “the travelling man” takes on a mythical status for a man May interviewed named Don. However, it becomes clear that Don returns to familiar cities time and time again in an attempt to find old acquaintances. May calls this a spectral geography as the places

349. Georg Simmel, “The Stranger,” in *On Individuality and Social Forms: Selected Writings* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1971), 143–149.

350. Timothy S. Oakes and Patricia L. Price, “Editor’s Introduction,” in *Cultural Geography Reader* (Oxon: Routledge, 2008), 334.

Don returns to hold only ghosts of the past.³⁵¹ In this case the decision to go on the road is not always an attempt to stay constantly on the move, but rather a reaction to the frustrations of constantly thwarted attempts at finding homes that are alternative to societal norm – such as the squat – or to the restrictive rules of hostels that offer little freedom.³⁵² Kid and Click do not go as far as new cities, but they are the stranger in mainstream society without even having to travel. Once they do travel (to temporary housing, to hang-outs like the youth centre or local bar) they become cyclical as they return to their homes (or family members) on several occasions. They occupy a spectral geography, but rather than merely finding the ghosts of the past when they return to what was home, they are also haunted by these ghosts in the rest of their geography. In *Brooklyn Burning* Felix is introduced as a ghostly figure “walking into the night” as though haunting Kid’s vision of Brooklyn. (BB, 2)

Transcendental Homelessness and the Flâneur

Lukács described “transcendental homelessness,” as the process by which an author or artist breaks away from the stability of a small society and become independent to truly flourish, “transcending” place and home.³⁵³ We cannot be creative when we simply accept structures that are already around us and must *choose* to break away from society in order to create new things, rather than being forced to leave it.³⁵⁴

Click and Kid are creative and do not accept the structures that are around them, while also not really choosing to leave their families. They do manage to create though - successful zines, new songs, and drawings. Creativity allows Click and Kid to at least momentarily transcend, or escape from the unstable structures that surround them. Usually subject to scrutiny and careful observation, by hiding they can be free

351. Jon May, “Of Nomads and Vagrants: Single Homelessness and Narratives of Home and Place,” in *Cultural Geography Reader* eds. Timothy S. Oakes and Patricia L. Price (Oxon: Routledge, 2008), 335–342.

352. May, “Of Nomads and Vagrants,” 341.

353. Georg Lukács, *The Theory of the Novel*, trans. Anna Bostock (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1971. First published 1920), 41.

354. Georg Lukács, *The Theory of the Novel*, 32–34.

momentarily of the identities and crowds of the city through a kind of elevation. Michel De Certeau writes in his essay “Walking in the City” of being “lifted out of the city’s grasp” by being at the top of an extremely high building, the World Trade Center.³⁵⁵ He is literally watching from a great height, having created distance between himself as voyeur and the city below. The buildings of Brooklyn feature prominently in *Brooklyn Burning* and the warehouse is described at the start of the novel as “looming over the river, stout and ancient.” Kid describes Felix and their “mothers and fathers” as the skyscrapers which look down on them with “protection (imaginary) and authority (meaningless).” (BB, 2) Although the skyscrapers are the mothers and fathers, the description of the warehouse as looming, stout and ancient, also sounds like a stand-in for a teenager’s idea of a stern parent, perhaps one who offers real protection and meaningful authority when mothers and fathers do not. Felix wants to leave Brooklyn, both loving and hating it at the same time. He describes it in relation to its architecture: “I also hate it. Three stories, one lot, a square block, rows upon rows of square blocks, rows upon rows of three-story buildings – just brick walls around fenced-off gardens, tiny hidden sanctuaries, filled with little patio sets and self-standing hammocks and hipsters with ironic beers.” (BB, 73) This description is claustrophobic, as though Felix is trapped in the city. When Kid stays at their parents’ home again they sneak in Scout, another non-binary character, to spend the night. Scout then leaves through the fire escape which is attached to the bedroom. (BB, 79) The fire escape in Felix’s room at the warehouse gives a connection to home and security in a place that is very insecure. Although not as tall as a skyscraper, Kid’s old bedroom was once an elevated place of safety, as was Felix’s room in spite of how dangerous the stairs leading to it were. Kid and Felix are not out of the city’s grasp though like De Certeau, and no matter how high they go they are still feel subject to the gaze of mothers and fathers who we can read as institutions of power. When they

355. Michel De Certeau, “Walking in the City,” in *The Cultural Studies Reader 2nd Edition*, ed. Simon During (London: Routledge, 1993), 126–133.

are hidden in places and spaces considered unstable or deviant they can at least temporarily avoid the gaze of those who would watch from above.³⁵⁶

When we first meet Click in *Roving Pack* ze is staying with hir friend Buck who ze refers to as hir brother. Click, Buck, and Buck's girlfriend are sharing one room with just a cloth separating their sleeping areas. There is little privacy for anyone in the situation and Click quickly feels like ze might wear out hir welcome. Click's next residence is a ground-floor apartment and Click is afraid that queerbashers or hir mom might break in. The bed is a mattress on the floor with a sleeping bag. This ground floor space is certainly not elevated. Being private (or invisible) and being able to view the public comes at the cost of being unseen and unheard. For some trans youth living in hostels, which may at first seem preferable to the kind of housing Click and Kid live in, the trade-off of their privacy is too great.³⁵⁷ Exile again comes down to choices about identity and the places in which the trans youth can be themselves. With choice comes the potential to fail as an individual. Click and Kid's chance to look at society while hidden is attached to being invisible and hence subject to systemic hardships. Surprisingly, however, Click and Kid share some traits with the literary flâneur, who was traditionally an upper middle-class man. The flâneur began appearing in literature around the mid nineteenth century as a man making sense of post-industrial cities and emerging modernist society, characterised by Baudelaire and Poe.³⁵⁸ Baudelaire positioned the flâneur as heroic, a man with an active imagination who can find the poetic in anything he observes.³⁵⁹ The link between poetic imagination and vagrancy is

356. Lindsey McCarthy, "Homelessness and Identity: A Critical Review of the Literature and Theory," *People, Place and Policy Online* 7, no.1 (2013), 46-58, <https://extra.shu.ac.uk/ppp-online/homelessness-and-identity-a-critical-review-of-the-literature-and-theory/>.

357. Emma Jackson, *Young Homeless People and Urban Space: Fixed in Mobility* (New York: Routledge, 2015), 121.

358. Parvin Ghasemi and Masoud Ghafoori, "Holden in Search of Identity: Recreating the Picture of the Flâneur," *English Studies* 91, no.1 (2010): 82.

359. Charles Baudelaire, *The Painter of Modern Life and Other Essays*, 2nd ed. (London: Phaidon, 1995), 12.

one that associates the literal state of being homeless with having a free, or “vagabond imagination.”³⁶⁰

The idea of the flâneur can be extended to the 20th century teenage protagonist in books such as *Catcher in the Rye*, where Holden Caulfield searches for his identity in the city, observing society and people. The flâneur is linked to the novelistic hero because both experience transcendental homelessness; Holden Caulfield embodies this in his tireless pursuit of individuality.³⁶¹ Holden’s red hunting hat is a symbol of his identity in the same way that Click’s tattoos, particularly a paw print, are a symbol of his. But the striking difference between Holden’s hat and Click’s tattoos is what they represent. Ghasemi and Ghafoori note that Holden’s hat has a double meaning because it is a hunting hat which he remarks is for shooting people but also his hat for hunting people in crowds.³⁶² Click’s tattoos are not about hunting people in the large crowd, instead they represent Click’s attachment to his dogs and animals, “the pack,” precisely because “the crowd” which the flâneur might wander in or observe is not one that Click would feel safe in. Click is certainly poetic in Baudelaire’s sense of the flâneur as he is a writer, but unlike Holden, Click cannot *afford* to be a flâneur. This is on the one hand financial as Holden can afford to be careless with his money and Click cannot, but also of course in social currency – Holden can wear a red hat which would be visible in the crowd to show his identity, but Click’s tattoos can be made invisible by covering them with clothing if needed, allowing Click to hide. So as much as Click and Kid seem similar flâneurs – they are poetic (Kid a musician, Click a writer), they drift through the city and observe people in great detail, and they are tirelessly dedicated to the pursuit of identity – they are denied the choice that the flâneur has to float carelessly about with no worries about how the rest of society might see them. Now I will discuss how the “choice” to drift around the city can be seen as an individual failing rather than the result of systemic inequality.

360. Anthony Vidler, *The Architectural Uncanny: Essays in the Modern Unhomely* (1992; repr., Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1992), 209.

361. Ghasemi and Ghafoori, “Holden in Search of Identity,” 83.

362. Ghasemi and Ghafoori, 86.

Blame and Choice

Sassafras Lowrey, author of *Roving Pack* and LGBTQ youth homelessness activist states in an article for *The Advocate* hir feelings about being asked whether ze has reconnected with hir family: “In being public about this work, I carry a lot of fear that my story — my choice to permanently sever all contact with my mother — will not only be judged but will also be used to discredit me as an advocate.”³⁶³ It is as though there is an expectation that reconnecting with family is natural part of a neoliberal “overcoming” of homelessness. Ze says that they are “alive today because I ran away.”³⁶⁴ Click and Kid are both expected to reconnect with their families, despite the abuses they have suffered, which are their own “fault” for pursuing their own identity. In their analysis of YA memoirs about homelessness Marshall and Rogers note that a neoliberal discourse of blame is reproduced in YA texts such as *The Glass Castle*, and this discourse implies that homelessness is due to a failing of the individual.³⁶⁵ In *The Glass Castle* Wall writes about her childhood, where she moves home frequently and experiences poverty and family dysfunction.³⁶⁶ Marshall and Rogers describe how *The Glass Castle*: “opens up the idea of homelessness as resistance to ‘the system’ only to close down these larger structural critiques through a return to discourses of individual choice.”³⁶⁷ “Overcoming” homelessness is central to this discourse of blame, and in the case of *The Glass Castle* Jeanette knows she will not repeat the mistakes of her parents, making homelessness a personal choice they made and one that she can avoid.³⁶⁸ Texts produced by actual homeless youth, such as zines, counter this neoliberal blaming with criticism of an enabling system. This binary, they say, is not

363. Lowrey and Shelton, “Meet the LGBT Leaders who used to be Homeless,” *Advocate*, access May 29, 2018, <https://www.advocate.com/youth/2014/06/06/meet-lgbt-leaders-who-used-be-homeless>.

364. Cray, Miller and Durso, “Seeking Shelter,” 17.

365. Elizabeth Marshall and Theresa Rogers, “On the Road: Examining Self-Representation and Discourses of Homelessness in Young Adult Texts,” *Journal of Adolescent and Adult Literacy* 55, no. 8 (2012): 727.

366. Jeanette Wall, *The Glass Castle* (New York: Scribner, 2005).

367. Marshall and Rogers, 727.

368. Marshall and Rogers, 728.

meant to romanticize the texts made by youths but is used to “tease out the complicated ways in which ‘homelessness’ is used in relationship to the construction of street youths in a variety of cultural texts.”³⁶⁹ For Kid the choice is an ultimatum. Kid’s father kicked them out, but after Kid is taken into the police station for questioning about the fire Kid’s father then demands that Kid spend one night at home. Kid asks their father to make up his mind about whether he wants Kid at home or on the street, to which he responds: “As soon as you make up your mind, we’ll make up ours.” (BB, 31) It is implied that if kid “chooses” both a gender and sexuality, and if that is the “right” natural gender and the “right” sexuality this will be the only way kid’s father can reinstate a stable living arrangement. When Kid asks what that is supposed to mean their father replies: “I think you know.” (BB, 31) Kid’s father in *Brooklyn Burning* positions Kid’s homelessness an “individual choice” because Kid can either conform and stay at home or leave. Shelter is dependent on making the “right” choice. Kid has already drawn comparisons between their friend Konny’s reasons for being evicted from home and their own, noting that for Konny it was just a way for her parents to say she couldn’t have sex with people in their home, but it wasn’t a way of them saying she couldn’t do it somewhere else. Fish, the owner of the bar which the street kids hang out in, suggests that Kid could go home, which Kid refuses because they don’t want to have to “fake it.” (BB, 68) No one is pleased that Kid chooses to stay at the warehouse, even though it is not much of a choice. Fish and Konny both seems surprised and annoyed by Kid’s new place to stay, and act as though Kid should make up with their parents and be closeted despite Kid calling them out on their own familial relationships. Fish had not pretended she was not a lesbian and Konny had not given up her sexual relationship with a boy called Ace. Yet Kid, who does not fit into a neat box, is expected to compromise. (BB, 70 – 71) Throughout much of the novel Kid denies starting the fire, and at other times doesn’t deny it but does not admit to it either. Kid sees a social worker at the police station who says that the whole city is dying to know whether Kid burned down the warehouse. This has a double meaning for Kid’s character, who feels like everyone wants them to decide who they are and label it. *Brooklyn Burning* portrays the difficulties of negotiating blame and choice, and

369. Marshall and Rogers, “On the Road,” 727.

the undecidability of what kind of architecture might provide stability for trans identity.

For Click there is not even the choice to come home, regardless of what “choices” ze makes about hir identity. Click has a strained relationship with hir father, who begins sending child support checks directly to Click as hir mother has been taking the money even though Click is no longer at home. Click’s mother has a history of abusive behaviour including lying to Click about hir father to cause Click to dislike him. Click eventually finds out that hir father knew nothing about the abuse but is not interested in taking Click in, telling the court he never wanted a child anyway. (BB, 71) These checks bring conflicting feelings of shame and relief. Click does not want money from someone who never wanted hir, but also does not want to go back to: “[N]ot having a key in my pocket.” (BB, 72) Even this extra money is not a certainty though as Click does not know how long it will be coming for and focuses on the stability it can offer in the now. The choice that Click has to make to barely “overcome” homelessness by taking the money means ze has to lie to hir immediate friends circle because this money, even though it is a small amount, might make them think Click is somehow privileged and no longer part of the pack.

Click is caught between shame and blame in this situation – if ze does not take the money then ze would not be able to overcome homelessness making it hir own fault. If ze does take the money then ze has not overcome homelessness by hir own merit.

Roving Pack shows how the trans youth is stuck between two states, with no destination. This portrayal of non-binary identities as stuck between two destinations in society is not just shown by these types of choices but is also reflected in the architecture of the abandoned or unstable places Click and Kid live in, which I will now discuss.

Abjection and the Uncanny home

The uncanny, as Freud describes it is, is not just the eerie but the *unheimlich*, which

Freud links etymologically with “unhomely” or even “haunted.”³⁷⁰ For Freud the uncanny was a puzzle or riddle to be solved (the “puzzle of the uncanny”) and for Freud those answers can be found by looking back into childhood.³⁷¹ The uncanny is seen as a return, giving it the qualities of a haunting, something which comes back (or one comes back to) over and over again.³⁷² When Kid and Click think about gender or try to communicate it with their parents the return of the their “biological sex” haunts them even when they are away from the home.

Homelessness, exile and strangeness are linked via the idea of the uncanny to the unstable notion of the home. Houses, and their architecture, have long been used as literary representations of horror and anxiety, particularly in romanticism, but also as a metaphor for situations that are unliveable.³⁷³ I have already discussed the trans body as uncanny and freakish in Chapter 2, and will now further explore this idea by looking specifically at how homelessness and unstable living spaces, particularly unclean ones, render non-binary trans identities as unfinished or even in limbo like a supernatural entity caught between two worlds. When taken out of context, the descriptions of architecture in *Roving Pack* and *Brooklyn Burning* could easily be descriptions of haunted houses, for example, the entrance to the warehouse in *Brooklyn Burning* is lined with weeds and rubble, the steps described as decaying. The building is clearly derelict with “walls of pocked cement, the reinforcement bars visible through scars.” (BB, 54) The windows are cracked and dirty, paint is peeling off and even the light is described as hanging in “dusty pockets.” The stairs inside which had been surprisingly stable at first are now cracked and crumbling and turn out to be the wrong set of stairs altogether. They lead to a room filled with garbage, stained mattresses and other clutter. The smell is described as gasoline, piss and alcohol. The room Felix lives in has “rusty cots” in it. (BB, 55) These unhomely homes also recall Kristeva's "abject" as one might apply it to marginalized groups, extending upon the literal meaning of abjection

370. Sigmund Freud, *The Uncanny*, trans. David McIntock (1919. London: Penguin Books, 2003) 124; Vidler, *The Architectural Uncanny*, 18.

371. Freud, *The Uncanny*, 152.

372. Vidler, xlix.

373. Vidler ix – x; 18.

as “to cast out.” Kristeva’s theory extends this casting out to include the boundaries between the self and other.³⁷⁴ This is especially relevant to the transgendered body, which does not adhere to the borders of defined gender, an ambiguity which causes societal unease.³⁷⁵ The warehouse still stands after the Twin Towers have fallen even though it is empty, a point Kid thinks about. This is a powerful connection, showing that that even through the centre of power and money has fallen the marginal buildings (identities) on the periphery still stand. Kid is surprised that the stairs inside are stable, again suggesting inner strength despite so much that is broken. The first time Kid goes with Felix to the warehouse Felix shoots up heroin as soon as they get in, setting a precedent for the abject surroundings. After Fish refuses to let Kid stay, Kid has to find their way back to the warehouse alone, outcast when a similar young person, Konny, who had been in a more acceptable relationship had been taken in. Kid finds it easy enough to make it to the warehouse, but once inside the building it seems to be much harder to navigate alone. Daylight has gone and the light that does come in through the cracks has the effect of disorienting Kid. Kid sees a landmark they recognise which is just as dilapidated as everything else in the warehouse, a broken window covered with some wood. (BB, 61) As Kid accidentally goes to the wrong room, an older man grabs them and throws glass jugs at them. Felix appears from the original set of stairs, taking Kid to the safety of his room which although still derelict is a far cry from the state of the other room. (BB, 64) Rejected by their parents, Fish, and even by a part of the warehouse Kid only feels safe in Felix’s room, where their body is not subject to harm.

Anthony Vidler, in *The Architectural Uncanny: Essays in the Modern Unhomely*, discusses bodily analogy in architecture and literature. Vidler explains that there are three important stages of architectural bodily projection: “(1) the notion that building is a body of some kind; (2) the idea that the building embodies states of the body or, more importantly, states of mind based on bodily sensation; and (3) the sense that the

374. Julie Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982), 4.

375. Robert Philips, “Abjection,” *Transgender Studies Quarterly* 1, no. 1–2 (2014): 21.

environment as a whole is endowed with bodily or at least organic characteristics.”³⁷⁶ All three of these stages are evident in *Brooklyn Burning* and *Roving Pack*. The building as a metaphor for the non-binary body encompasses the first stage while the state of the building and its plumbing represent both states of mind and bodily sensation. In *Roving Pack* the faulty plumbing reflects this, while in *Brooklyn Burning* it is the chaotic and derelict structures within the building which are the embodiment of Kid’s state of mind. For stage 3 it is again the plumbing in *Roving Pack* which seems to have organic characteristics, appearing alive and responsive to the surroundings. In *Brooklyn Burning* the buildings of the city as a whole seem to loom above the homeless youth as though they are parents and gatekeepers. Vidler describes what he calls “dismembered architecture” seen in the work of architects such as Coop Himmelblau in which the body used as inspiration and metaphor is one that is in pieces or even mutilated. The most obvious example of a body in pieces in literature is Frankenstein’s monster, made of mutilated parts.³⁷⁷ “The “unnaturalness” of the trans body makes them like a kind of Frankenstein’s monster or “dismembered” architecture. This body made of parts is recognisably a human form, but also represents the horrific, and, by virtue of what it is made of, death. The dead bodies which form the monster’s body have links to the past, the present and the future but are also unable to reproduce, drawing analogies in queer theory to bodies outside of heteronormative society, but also to a number of physically harmful acts upon queer bodies such as “corrective” surgery on intersexed bodies or queerbashing.”³⁷⁸ Susan Stryker acknowledges her body as monstrous, finding an affinity between her own body as a trans woman and Frankenstein’s monster. She addresses transphobic writing by Mary Daly in which the trans body is part of a “necrophilic invasion’ of female space.” Janice Raymond also casts out the trans body as abject by wishing it to no longer exist.³⁷⁹ Stryker makes note of the medical interventions used to make the transsexual body, which will still be

376. Vidler, *The Architectural Uncanny*, 70.

377. Vidler, 78.

378. Elizabeth Freeman, *Time Binds: Queer Temporalities, Queer Histories* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010), 60–61.

379. Susan Stryker, “My Words to Victor Frankenstein above the Village of Chamounix: Performing Transgender Rage,” *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* 1, no.3 (1994): 238.

other regardless of how it physically appears. She says of this body: “It is flesh torn apart and sewn together again in a shape other than that in which it was born.”³⁸⁰ The assemblage of parts and the return of the dead, such as Frankenstein’s monster, is uncanny because, according to Freud, although our ancestors thought the dead returning was possible, Freud claims that modern people do not. However, we have not overcome these fears entirely, leaving us on the lookout for anything that might confirm the return of these ideas.³⁸¹ This type of uncanny experience is related to real experiences and our judgement of them. If we take the trans post-surgery body (of a trans person who desires surgery) to be something monstrous as Stryker does, it is clear how this becomes uncanny.

In *Roving Pack* there is not just a sense of abjection between queer and non-queer, but also between the queer/trans homeless (the street punks), and the queer/trans who are housed who Click calls GSA (Gay-Straight Alliance) kids - those who live with parents and are financially stable. Click considers the Queer Youth Resource Centre (QYRC) “home” for the street punks, but for the GSA kids it is merely a place to hang out.³⁸² The QYR building is:

[A]ll concrete and spray-paint. To my left was floor-to-ceiling fencing that separated the hangout spot from the basketball area – though no one plays ball there since all the silk-screening supplies are spread across the tiny court. Across the room to my right was the TV alcove, and towards the middle the pool table; both full of butches like Saucer, Grace, Johnny, Buck and Billy. There were queens doing these crazy dips and spins on the pallet board stage right next to my couch, and a makeshift wall separated the kitchen from the rest of the space. On the kitchen side it was just exposed studs, and facing my couch it was plasterboard turned into a memorial wall for kids who had died. (RP, 59)

380. Stryker, “My Words to Victor Frankenstein,” 238.

381. Freud, 152.

382. Sassafras Lowrey, *Roving Pack* (Brooklyn: PoMo Freakshow Press, 2012), 22.

There is a DIY and makeshift feel to the QYRC, but it has more of the trappings of “home” than Click’s apartment which seems to only have a mattress on the floor. The inclusion of a memorial wall suggests that more than just one of two queer street youth from the QYRC have died. A memorial wall does not feel like something you would necessarily see in a more general youth club, especially one that is not considered “home” for its members. When a friend of Billy’s called Scummy dies, Scummy’s name is added to the wall. Even clothing can be procured from the QYRC, with the “free box” yielding finds like a mesh vest top and rainbow knee socks, showing that it provides something more than just shelter. The QYRC building, like Frankenstein’s monster, is made up of fragments and even death which the street kids can’t escape in the way that the GSA kids can when they go back to their stable houses. Click’s boss at the dog grooming parlour says Click will: “die in the gutter like all of [hir] fucked up dyke friends,” showing the homophobia and presence of death that Click lives with. (RP, 62) In the words of Kristeva: “It is death infecting life.”³⁸³

It is important to Click that the QYRC stays clean, something the GSA kids don’t respect as they do not value and rely on it like Click. Kristeva’s idea that what is clean is ordered, and in turn acceptable, and what is dirty is disordered and unacceptable in society has obvious associations with the homeless (or disordered) person. This person may be seen as dirty in a literal sense if they lack access to amenities, but also their disordered dwellings such as those in *Brooklyn Burning* and *Roving Pack* are “dirty.” Organising a life in a way considered disordered by the Western world, for example portrayals of indigenous minorities as being connected to nature and thus disconnected from civilization, dehumanizes these minorities and renders them unclean in the Western gaze.³⁸⁴ These “unclean” constructs of minority ethnicities have also been applied to minority cultures such as Roma travelling communities, mental illness, and learning difficulties, all lumped together as “deviant.”³⁸⁵ The romantic image of traveller communities is that of a nomadic people who are again “at

383. Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*, 4.

384. David Sibley, “Outsiders in society and space” in *Cultural Geographies*, 2nd ed. eds. Kay Anderson and Fay Gale (1999; repr., Harlow: Longman, 1992), 135.

385. Sibley, “Outsiders,” 136.

one with nature” and have freedom. The deviant image of the travelling community is portrayed as those living on city waste grounds, blamed for theft and seen as violating the sense of order in the city. The deviant stereotype does not adhere to the countryside romantic vision of the traveller.³⁸⁶ These examples of the clean/unclean and ordered/disordered categorisation are also applied to the homeless trans person in similar ways. This time the dichotomy is between those who fit gender norms and those who are gender non-conforming. The gender normative trans person in the media can have a “success” story (to an extent), usually based on a realisation of being “in the wrong body” and fixing this wrongness to become at home in their body. For the gender non-conforming person who is seen by society as unfixable and thus disordered, the body can never be “home” leaving them homeless and “not real” or “not trans enough.”

Click is made to feel “not trans enough” by hir boyfriend Hunter, who pressures to take testosterone and fit in with the trans men ze hangs out with. The decision to take testosterone results in an abject situation when Click cannot find anyone to help administer hir shot. Ze asks Augustus who is a recovering addict but finds the needle too triggering. Click is left to do the shot alone in Augustus’ basement bedroom which is dark and damp. The bed is dirty, covered in dirty boxer shorts. Even Augustus’ pet snake is unhappy in the basement and “coiled and recoiled” as Click is preparing to shoot up. (RP, 246)

The motif of cleanliness and abjection extends into all areas of Click’s life and close relationships. Click often lets other homeless trans people stay with hir in whatever housing they are in, however unstable and dirty. When Click is finally out of an abusive relationship and living in a clean apartment, ze tries to maintain this by refusing to let anyone stay. (RP, 248) However, hir friend Sunny later needs somewhere to stay, resulting in noise complaints and eviction. (RP, 253) It is as though even when Click makes personal breakthroughs and feels stable in a “clean” environment their kind nature becomes an individual failing, linking abjection and choice. Cleanliness is not

386. Sibley, 137 – 138.

only related to Click's trans identity but also to other people in Click's life by whom ze feels betrayed. A girl Click dates called Phoenix has an extremely messy and dirty studio apartment with walls covered in nicotine stains. (RP, 300) Phoenix breaks up with Click because she likes Ethan, a roommate of Clicks, more and says it has been a long time since she dated anyone who wasn't a "fag," diminishing Click's identity. (RP, 312) Click feels betrayed by Ethan and once Ethan is no longer "cool" in Click's eye ze finds dirty plates under the bathroom sink that haven't been washed for weeks. (RP, 304) Click is also betrayed by Dean, whose apartment building has every single window broken and is described as "bombed out" and covered in graffiti. Inside is much worse, with piles of rubbish and a ratty mattress. (RP, 314) Dean implies that he would like to be Click's Daddy, but this is the last time Click sees Dean who leaves town. Click says: "I think I knew all along that this wouldn't work out the way Dean told me it could." (RP, 325) This continual string of unstable relationships is always accompanied by an unstable, dirty home and becomes part of Click's spectral geography in which hir feelings of rejection haunt every location. The next home Click finds is described as an "old shed that someone made into a sorta house at some point." There are meth labs nearby and people throw glass bottle at Click as hir walks home. (RP, 135) The walls inside are like cardboard and the house shakes if a door is closed hard. Click writes that the bathroom could be a space for someone to sleep if it gets cold outside, even though letting people stay got hir evicted from hir last apartment. The bathroom as bedroom is connected with the discourses surrounding the bathroom as transgender closet and also "plumbing" as a potentially gender-neutral term for genitals. Click feels like ze can never do enough to please people, especially sexually, and allowing people to sleep in the bathroom, a space associated with plumbing, when they are in need seems to have a metaphorical link to Click's complicated relationship to sex and what ze thinks is expected of hir in order to please people. So far I have discussed leaving the world "outside" and hiding in unstable architecture. Now I would like to go further inside the unstable architecture to discuss how faulty plumbing and the bathroom acts as the closet, represents uncanny returns, and become metaphors for the state of limbo the non-binary body remains in when it is not deemed fixed through surgery.

Faulty plumbing and the Trans Body

The term plumbing or “original plumbing” as a metaphor for trans body parts has, initially, a sense of optimism to it, as it provides a way of suggesting that genitals are “merely utilitarian material.”³⁸⁷ This allows for an explanation of gender not entirely focused on genitals. Crawford takes a balanced view of the term and notes that despite this optimistic use of the word there are two important points which should also be considered. Firstly that “plumbing” is often used to describe “our *sexual* capacities to others” and secondly that plumbing is not a gender-neutral term because the development of modern plumbing is associated with gender norms and fears about racial and class mixing from the era of bathroom segregation.³⁸⁸ The equation of “plumbing” with genitals creates a way: “to develop an architectonic of gender that is not genital-centric or determined by popular or medical definitions of body parts” which Crawford says is a positive, but also asks whether “plumbing” is really a gender-neutral term and whether attempts to create gender-neutral washrooms: “lodge such spaces firmly in multiple gendered histories of aesthetics.”³⁸⁹

For Crawford, plumbing as a term: “marks aesthetic desire - both a desire for architecture to literally *stand in* for the lacunae of gendered language, and also a desire to become certain kinds of desirable architectural bodies ourselves.”³⁹⁰ Crawford positions the bathroom as taking the place of the closet for transgender people. He also points out a crucial difference between closet and bathroom. The closet is an archive, filled with memory and queer things (clothes) that go on the body. The bathroom is anti-archive where an erasure or forgetting takes place as things (or waste) are removed from the body, and is also associated with shame.³⁹¹

387. Lucas Crawford, “Derivative Plumbing: Redesigning Washrooms, Bodies, and Trans Affects in ds+r’s Brasserie,” *Journal of Homosexuality* 61, no.5 (2014): 622.

388. Crawford, “Derivative Plumbing,” 622.

389. Crawford, *Transgender Architectonics*, 38.

390. Crawford, “Derivative Plumbing,” 623.

391. Crawford, “Derivative Plumbing,” 633.

The transgender bathroom debate is an obvious example of anxieties around “plumbing,” which Oren Gozlan approaches from a psychoanalytic perspective. He describes the transgender bathroom debate as having two sides - those fighting for rights and equity on one side, and on the other the mass hysteria which recalls stereotypes of trans people as paedophiles or sexual predators. Gozlan equates the bathroom stall with another stereotype, the trans person looking to deceive - or stall - people about their “real” identity. The safety of children in relation to transgender people in bathrooms has been introduced to manipulate concerns with this imaginary threat which Gozlan points out provokes more hysteria than actual threats such as gun crime.³⁹² Gozlan makes the distinction between two types of bathroom, the public and the psychic. The psychic bathroom in this case means the “phantasies, anxieties, and defences that animate libidinality.”³⁹³ Bodies becomes abject in the bathroom, and Gozlan links the confrontation with abject bodies - through waste, fluid and smells - to death through physical wasting. The bathroom is also a scene for the uncanny return, with mirrors returning the fragmented images of bodies. Gozlan links this to Lacan’s mirror stage because there is a desire to be recognised and accepted by the other who becomes the mirror. We cannot project our ideal self in the mirror, but face our abject self as well as the gaze of others which is filled with both longing and anxiety.³⁹⁴ The stalled discourse is situated between the imaginary and the symbolic, with the trans subject simultaneously assigned fictional characteristics which make them monstrous and also subject to the arbitrary “symbolic coordinates” as Gozlan calls them, of gender as something natural and permanent.³⁹⁵ The fantasised positioning of victim, bully and ally make up much of the public discourse for and against bathroom bills.³⁹⁶

We can turn again to Freud, as Gozlan does, when considering how fiction presents the uncanny experience compared to uncanny experiences in the real world. Freud argues that fiction should be considered separately from the uncanny of real experience and

392. Oren Gozlan, “Stalled on the Stall: Reflections on a Strained Discourse,” *Transgender Studies Quarterly* 4, no. 3–4 (2017): 452.

393. Gozlan, “Stalled on the Stall,” 454.

394. Gozlan, 454.

395. Gozlan, 455.

396. Gozlan, 457.

of childhood complexes. Fictional repression occupies an odd position in the uncanny because of the very fact that it is fictional. Freud explains this is a paradox because of fiction's ability to reasonably present the reader content that in real life situations would be uncanny but are not within the fictional world.³⁹⁷ However, this provides the author an opportunity to create uncanny events that we would be unlikely to ever see in real life, such as the uncanny coincidence Click experiences when plumbing goes wrong at the moments when life is unstable. The plumbing seems almost organic in its reactions to the world, linking it further to the body. When Click feels uncertain the state of the plumbing in the house is mentioned. An example of this is when someone answers Click's ad for a roommate, but when Click hangs up the phone ze realises that the sewer pipes have backed up into the house because the landlords do not care for the house very well. It has spread to the carpet in the bedrooms. Just before this phone call Click had been very anxious whether the potential housemate would be okay with hir being trans. The viewer says the place is dark and dirty and Click is left unable to cover the rent. Click has faced a lot of misunderstanding, especially from Hunter for identifying as a lesbian, so seems to feel more comfortable when Ethan, a trans man shows interest in the room. Ethan again makes Click feel that ze is not manly enough when he says that a real man would never be caught without their binder and packer on. (RP, 278) Another example of this uncanny plumbing is after Click hooks up with Sydney. Click gets a call that the basement of one of the punk houses has flooded. It is not just Click's own residence that is affected but hir spectral geography which is haunted with uncanny happenings. (RP, 346) Plumbing comes up multiple times in the novel when situations, particularly sexual ones, do not go well. (RP, 239) Sinks block, pipes leak and bad smells add to the already abject conditions which Click lives with. However, the plumbing metaphor is at its strongest and most obvious at the very end of the novel when Click realises that ze doesn't want to take T anymore and is accused by hir closest friend Buck of being untrustworthy because of it. Click feels confident enough to be genderqueer even though it means losing hir trans friends and finds that the taps in the bathroom are finally working and they are able to take a bath. (RP, 353)

397. Freud, 135.

Conclusion

At the beginning of this chapter I proposed that there are three architectural structures faced by homeless trans youth in fiction. The first was what is outside the unstable architecture, which consists of their family and the rest of society. The second was the inside of the unstable home, where the architecture becomes a metaphor for the trans body. The third is the plumbing of the unstable home which seems to “go wrong” and represents the essentialist view of gender and biological sex as gender. I linked these three structures to the themes of choice and exile, abjection and the uncanny home, and faulty plumbing. What comes through most strongly in all of these themes and structures is that Click and Kid are portrayed as stuck in limbo with no fixed destination. If their gender was binary this destination could be represented as the completion of transition, where, as we have seen in previous chapters, surgery becomes the goal and the marker of completion. Click and Kid are not “trans enough” and the architecture cannot be rebuilt or renovated to “complete” their transition in the eyes of others. This mirrors the current position of non-binary people and the TTP in the media, where only gender-normative transitions can become success stories.

Crawford points out that there is and always has been a spatial underpinning to transgender.³⁹⁸ Just as we saw before in the transgender relationship to temporality in the previous chapter, transness is something which moves in different directions and can change.³⁹⁹ The idea of a “stable state” is particularly interesting in relation to the non-binary trans youth who is homeless. Architecture can preserve the past in a lasting form but also builds toward the future, an unknown place that may bring new or experimental forms into an environment.⁴⁰⁰ They may not be able to completely fix unstable structures but they are able to gain some control over parts of the building, like Click whose plumbing works when ze finally becomes confident.

398. Crawford, *Transgender Architectonics*, 9.

399. Julian Carter, “Embracing Transition, or Dancing in the Fold of Time,” 130.

400. Crawford, 12.

Traditionally metaphor has been used to suggest identifications that are “taboo,” particularly in the horror genre, with its fictional monsters such as vampires, which have long been a metaphor for deviancy.⁴⁰¹ The vampire is an allegory for the queer subject and deviancy due to the double life it leads outside of societal norms.⁴⁰² The vampire also stands for what is abject through its links to disease and blood, and particularly from a queer perspective in the framing of HIV and AIDS as an illness arising from sexual deviance.⁴⁰³ At the beginning of this chapter I identified that homelessness is both a metaphor for trans identity in the novels but is also the reality of many trans youth in contemporary Anglo-American society. This is very different from the history of metaphors in fiction that represent “unsanctioned” gender and sexual identities. Frankenstein’s monster is often used as metaphor for the trans body, but unlike the vampire Frankenstein’s monster does not have the same freedoms attached to the vampire who can fly, morph into other forms, or influence people through its hypnotic powers. The vampire is also often sexually attractive and this helps it to blend in with human society when it needs to. The monster, however is stuck in his form, an array of mismatched parts and without any supernatural powers which he can use. In this way the monster is much closer to reality than the vampire.

Jay Prosser’s idea of second skins gives a useful parallel to the architectural metaphor of trans body as home and architecture as trans body. Prosser says of transgender autobiography: “Transsexual subjects frequently articulate their bodily alienation as a discomfort with their skin or bodily encasing: being trapped in the wrong body is figured as being in the wrong, or an extra, or a second skin, and transsexuality is expressed as the desire to shed or to step out of this skin.”⁴⁰⁴ Prosser gives a specific example of trans bodily architecture from Raymond Thompson’s autobiography. For Thompson the tenuous wait for phalloplasty is mirrored by his desire to destroy his

401. Marty Fink, “AIDS Vampires: Reimagining Illness in Octavia Butler’s ‘Fledgling,’” *Science Fiction Studies* 37, no. 3 (2010) 416.

402. Barbara Caroline Mennel, *Queer Cinema: Schoolgirls, Vampires and Gay Cowboys* (London: Wallflower Press, 2012), 23 – 25.

403. Fink, “AIDS Vampires,” 417.

404. Prosser, *Second Skins*, 68.

home.⁴⁰⁵ Thompson lives among this damaged home which has a collapsed ceiling, letting in the snow and rain for several years and only rebuilding his home once the course of phalloplasty is underway.⁴⁰⁶ For trans youth whose displacement, both through homelessness and through the body, cannot be resolved or rebuilt through surgery the house remains in a state of flux. The blocked plumbing and broken-down houses portray both the real and metaphorical circumstances of trans youth in YA fiction. The invisible narratives of non-binary trans people remain ghostly, haunting their own spectral geography, trapped in a state of limbo.

405. Prosser, 74.

406. Prosser, 76.

Conclusion

The ghosts of queer children, as in Stockton's "fictions-with-a-gay-child-ghosted-in-them," which we may have had secret connections with in the past are made flesh and blood in the Young Adult novels and television representations I have explored in this thesis.⁴⁰⁷ However, as I identified in my introduction, finding yourself in a recognisable story and having the words to label yourself does not mean that growing up trans becomes any more straightforward. If for some binary trans people "growing up" might be equated with having surgery to achieve a "finished" gender, then this particular path forward is not available to non-binary trans people. However, Carter's "transitional time" which moves in multiple directions, Stockton's sideways twisting in time, and strategies such as subcultural belonging are ways the trans youth can imagine a future. Having a body and a name for your otherness rather than being merely a ghost seems at first glance a step towards making the trans youth real. But having a body means you have everything associated with it, and for the trans youth in fiction there seems to be no escaping what is on the inside.

When I first began researching this project I did not realise just how integral the issue of the bathroom and the focus on trans people's "plumbing" would be and, perhaps like many trans people, hoped that I would focus on something else for a change. But that soon proved impossible as the essentialist thread that ran through many of the texts I read was indeed all about the bathroom in one way or another, whether that was via the obsession with what "plumbing" someone had or whether it was literal in terms of bathroom access. Even those texts that were not essentialist had a sharp awareness of just how intrinsic bathroom access has become to the trans rights movement. Plumbing and the inner workings of architecture became key metaphors for the body and the dehumanization of trans people. In the introduction I mentioned Judge Marsha Pechman's ruling that transgender people are a protected class who lack the political power necessary to protect themselves.⁴⁰⁸ This came through in the

407. Stockton, *The Queer Child*, 4.

408 . "Karnoski vs. Trump."

themes of the trans person as freakish, inauthentic, invisible and deceptive that I read time and time again with even the most hopeful of trans YA novels, implying that trans people are considered less than human. With Trump's presidency only 15 months in at the time of writing, scholarly articles are beginning to appear which discuss Trump's treatment of LGBTQ+ people and his discriminatory policies. Trump promised in 2016 at his Nomination Acceptance Address that he would protect LGBTQ+ people and spoke about the Pulse nightclub shootings, a speech which Spencer and Sayre argue showed that Trump values LGBTQ+ deaths rather than lives.⁴⁰⁹ This political climate of discrimination bleeds into the recent portrayals of trans people on television, such as *Grey's Anatomy's* Casey who must commit a crime to be himself. Even in fictional worlds it is seemingly impossible to escape the real world.

With the line between fictional trans narratives and real world trans narratives blurred and at times seeming indistinguishable, this thesis has shown how every element of the "visible" trans narrative of binary genders, whether fictional or real is carefully presented to make the trans person a more sellable but still inhuman concept. I have also shown the need to make visible the lives and stories of non-binary identity, and the conflicts that brings. Working towards the aim of filling a gap in cultural studies on YA fiction and trans representations, most of what I have found has been full of paradoxes – that young trans people are here and real, invisible and uncanny, all at the same time. We can tell the stories we want to in our novels if we forego the benefits and reach of mainstream publishing.

In Chapter 1 I discussed how the privileging of specific versions of trans identity is part of this curating of trans identity into a marketable product. It is not only the plot, the setting, or the things described in the novels, but the physical (or digital) presence of the novel as an object that signifies its content to the reader before they have read a single word. There were clear visual differences between books with binary gendered characters and those with non-binary characters. I showed how most of the novels

409. Leland Spencer and Molly Malany, "From 'Wonderful Americans, to the AHCA: Contrasting Trump's Nomination Acceptance Address and his Administration's Actions on GLBTQ Health," *Journal of GLBT Family Studies* 14, no. 1-2 (2018): 2.

used tropes and stereotypes on their covers, such as splitting gender into two halves as well as using pink for female and blue for male. Some covers were comparable to horror or pulp novels, with the trans body posed as a threat, something that hides in the shadows. These potentially monstrous body are further made “other” by hypersexualising them, showing the headless body naked, pointing to sexual deviancy or promiscuity.

But most striking is the comparison between books published by mainstream presses versus those which are self-published by trans-identified authors. Self-published novels have what Elliott DeLine called “the freedom to be dangerous,” meaning they do not follow conventions of mainstream publishing.⁴¹⁰ The people portrayed on the covers of both DeLine’s novel *Refuse* and Lowrey’s *Roving Pack* have faces and also cultural signifiers such as tattoos, showing their connection to youth subcultures.

Chapter 2 focused on trans enfreakment, the process by which someone is made a freak, in literature. David Hevey uses the term “enfreakment” in relation to photographs which cast people with disabilities as symbols of otherness. This is achieved by placing the photographed subject into a situation that: “takes their non-integration as a natural by-product of their impairment.”⁴¹¹ All the trans characters in the novels I read felt like freaks or were placed in the way Hevey describes as freaks at some, or many, points of the story without exception. However, I showed that this freakishness was either completely unacceptable in the case of binary-identified characters whose goal was realness, or accepted but only by a subcultural group for non-binary identified characters. Versions of looking and staring were used to illustrate how the freak was made into a freak through the cis gaze. Over-exaggerated descriptions, such as the tall man who is labelled as a giant, is part of the marketing of someone as a freak.⁴¹² Just as novels are packaged products, the starrer also packages

410. ‘Self-publishing to destroy stereotypes: Elliott DeLine,’ *Arthur*, accessed April 20, 2017, <http://www.trentarthur.ca/self-publishing-to-destroy-stereotypes-elliott-deLine>.

411. David Hevey, “The Enfreakment of Photography,” 367.

412. David Hevey, *The Creatures Time Forgot: Photography and Disability Imagery* (London: Routledge, 1992), 53.

the trans person as a freak by assigning them traits for all aspects of their being, be it physical, emotional or behavioural. Transition comes with a cost - you can do it but only if you pay by giving up your inclusion in heteronormative society.

In Chapter 3 I discussed how being a freak as a non-heterosexual, non-binary person alienates the trans characters even from what should be their own community. Belonging and otherness are at odds in *Refuse*, and despite being surrounded by the transgender community, Dean finds belonging in a subculture which is completely other to his present place and time as a fan of Morrissey and The Smiths. This fictional portrayal shows the very real invisibility of non-binary people at a time when trans visibility is supposed to be a mark of progress. Temporality for the trans subject means several things - a connection to the past of someone considered part of queer culture resembles the queer ghost described by Stockton. But also the connection to a queer past, or specifically a homosexual one in terms of Dean's love for Morrissey, shows a larger structure of history repeating itself; the representation of LGB people in the media in the past is repeated in the current representation of trans people. Just as the future for queer people has also been described as uncertain by critics such as Elizabeth Freeman in queer studies texts of the 1990s, the future for trans people is explored in the 2000s and 2010s as being uncertain. Horak's "hormone time" and Carter's "transition time" provide strategies for an imagining a living future. Being connected to the present and the future is vital for survival in *Refuse*. Narcissism for Dean was a defence mechanism as well as a way to discuss an aspect of the trans and queer community that he hates, which is their perceived obsession with their bodies. As a non-binary person Dean feels othered by the trans community, and his narcissism reflects his self-hatred and loathing of the community. Dean's conflicting desires - to be socially isolated yet also loved and part of the community - highlight the many conflicts in navigating life as a trans person where the "right" choice is never a choice and is never seen as right in society. Morrissey provides Dean with one model of how to be non-binary, and subculture becomes a space to negotiate freakiness but not always totally successfully.

In Chapter 4 I proposed three types of unstable architecture homeless non-binary youth face which combine to create a metaphor for their entire being. The first type sees family and society as outside of the unstable architecture they live in. The homeless non-binary youth must make the “right” choice with their gender or be exiled; but the “right” choice means they cannot be who they are, therefore leaving home becomes the only way to survive. The second sees the non-binary youth hiding inside unstable architecture that is unclean or abject, which becomes another, uncanny, metaphor for the non-binary body as unfinished or unreal. Finally, the plumbing of unstable architecture becomes an almost organic extension of the non-binary character which seems to be always waiting to cause problems no matter how much the outside or the inside of the home improves. I discussed how the unfixable body of the non-binary trans youth can never be “home” leaving them homeless and “not real” or “not trans enough.” Crawford put forward the idea that the bathroom has become the trans closet, but with a crucial difference. The closet is filled with queer things (clothes) that go on the body. The bathroom is where things (waste) are removed from the body, and has links to shame. Positive legislative change, such as legalising gay marriage in some countries, hides the problems faced by LGBTQ+ people as it creates an illusion of acceptance.⁴¹³ We might not immediately think that legalising gay marriage - a good thing - would have a direct effect in increasing numbers of homeless LGBTQ+ youth, but Sigworth and Gates described society’s inability to catch up to the courts. Numbers of trans youth in particular who are homeless have risen. In *Roving Pack* and *Brooklyn Burning* homelessness was presented as both a reality and a metaphor for trans youth, the unstable architecture representing society, the psyche and “plumbing.” Even when the metaphors for trans youth were uncanny they also remained close to reality or the perceived and privileged reality, without the need for an allegorical monster as the trans subject is monstrous

413. Josh Spero, “Down and Out: Why So Many Youths are LGBT,” *Financial Times*, May 12, 2017, <https://www.ft.com/content/1414f788-30e8-11e7-9555-23ef563ecf9a>; Adam Lusher and Matt Watts, “Gay Youngsters Being Forced from the Family Home in 'Dramatically Increasing' Numbers, Charities Warn,” December 18, 2016, <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/homelesshelpline/lgbt-gay-hate-crime-homophobia-homophobic-bullying-homeless-helpline-centrepoint-albert-kennedy-a7480326.html>.

enough. This is not the only paradox in trans narratives, and Crawford described how the trans body can be conservative and revolutionary at the same time.⁴¹⁴ It can be visible and invisible, accepted while at the same time unacceptable, and both a choice and not a choice all at once.

Beyond the Transgender Tipping Point and Future Research

When Dean says in *Refuse*: “it is my duty as a transgender writer to make you realise I am just like you,” he shows with sarcasm the expectations trans writers, or people who write trans characters, face to fit their stories to publishers’ preferences. The consciousness of publishing needs to expand to allow mainstream ideas of what a trans person is to change, and vice-versa. Questions for those studying trans youth fiction or authorship might be: whose “duty” is it to enact these changes, and how might they be achieved?

In this thesis I have explored trans youth identity and at times its intersection with sexuality. However, an area I have only briefly mentioned is race, and I did so mainly to say how few of the texts I read included characters who were people of colour. Some texts were “colourblind,” that is not naming or discussing the character’s racial identity or skin colour.⁴¹⁵ Most of the characters in the texts I read were white or what Vicky Smith, in *Kirkus* article “Unmaking the White Default”, calls “presumed white.”⁴¹⁶ Scholarship on the intersection of trans youth identities with race, particularly trans youth of colour, is mostly found in the social sciences, medicine and psychology, leaving much to explore for scholars of race, literature, trans studies, cultural studies or other related fields. The information in this thesis could also be useful when exploring young adult texts used as educational resources and what effect the privileging of visible narratives has on inclusion in public and school libraries which

414. Crawford, *Transgender Architectonics*.

415. Rebecca Rogers and June Christian, “What could I say?’ A Critical Discourse Analysis of the Construction of Race in Children’s Literature,” *Race Ethnicity and Education* 10, no. 1 (2007): 21–46.

416. Vicky Smith, “Unmaking the White Default,” *Kirkus*, May 4, 2016, <https://www.kirkusreviews.com/features/unmaking-white-default/>.

may lead to the further exclusion of non-binary texts. When books about trans youth are found only in the adult section of libraries the intended audience may never find it. I hope that this thesis may contribute to longitudinal studies in the future in a similar vein to Cart and Jenkins' *The Heart Has its Reasons*, which catalogued YA books with LGBTQ+ content from 1969 – 2004, providing insight into the evolution of these texts. The T of course was at that time barely there, and it would be interesting to chart the evolution of specifically trans content in a similar way as a useful resource to scholars. In this project I focused on a small number of texts in detail, but given the current rate of increase in available texts with trans content it will be exciting to see how many more there may be in 5 or 10 years. The same can be said of television and film as trans actors are slowly finding their way onto the screen.

While it may feel as though trans identities are being curated, even as fictions, like exhibits in the freak show, a new set of narratives is beginning to emerge. Rather than portraying trans as an issue, books like *Roving Pack* and *Refuse* and TV shows like *Grey's Anatomy* show transness as only one part of a whole person, a person who can imagine any number of possible futures.

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