TRANS…MATTERS: MEDIEVAL AND MODERN BODIES IN CONVERSATION

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ABSTRACT

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Trans…Matters is a project that protests cementing binaries of gender and sexuality. It spotlights the marginalization of bodies who have transgressed, transformed, and transcended such socially constructed norms. Its focus enlightens moments within the medieval and modern era that enforce borders of systemic heteronormativity and patriarchal constraints. These bodies speak volumes in sync with each other and their actions dispute the thresholds as purely social constructs intent upon limiting, deleting, or erasing their very existence.

Despite playing with these ideas for many years, it was not until I read Butler's *Gender Trouble* that I fully realized gender is on a spectrum and its roles are purely societal constructs. We are claimed, named as female or male at birth, and a thousand steps within harassing boundaries of norms stated, hinted, and everywhere most often force us into a position of unconscious acquiescence. The majority of us who are cisgendered, white, and heterosexual may never question why we act and dress and perform in a certain way. I always have.

I always have such questions and wrote each chapter as a vantage point of one body from the medieval era in communication with another from the modern era. Tomoe and Kikuko are equally in bondage under a Samurai patriarchy despite existing over eight hundred years apart. Melusine's hybridity is shared by Maud, and both perform dominant male roles. Yde becomes corporeal male in a thousand steps, and the performers in *Paris*

is Burning create a real existence as female. Lucia and Susan Stryker exhibit such stark examples of fluidity they spark a light back to the sutures of each threshold. All exist in a dangerous and precarious placement. All naturally lighthouse to so many who are invisible.

DEDICATION

This project is dedicated to family. First, Frances Hughes, my mother, an avid reader and a night owl, took me to the Strand to buy whole series and collections every week, daily opening new worlds for discovery. Second, Frank Sallustro, my uncle, my lifelong editor, demanded reports, research papers, and frequent updates to ensure that all worlds would be open to me. Third, my sons: William, my fellow medievalist, who is truly interested in every idea that I have in the world; Anthony, who taught by constantly sharing his open and fair-minded outlook of the world. Fourth, Elissa Hughes Berry, my sister, has been by my side and advocating for me since she was born. Fifth, Anthony Arguelles, my husband, who recently took command of every worldly job of household adulting, so that all my time could be spent thinking, questioning, and writing.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

Like an antechamber, the term "Trans…Matters" echoes "Front Matter," where writers name their text, dedicate it to those who are most important to their work, and then express the fundamental reasons why this or that particular matter is important to their world and, by extension, the larger world. Trans…Matters have long been world matters and begin at the intersection of Feminism, Gender, Power, and Performativity theories. These theories all have people and their bodies at their core. Bodies who have been subjugated to a minority status and whose power is slighted or stolen by the majority. Bodies who are placed in peril.

A cisgendered woman who reads a book a day entered an all-female, Catholic College and learned traditional analysis of literature. This same woman still loves to analyze words, their etymology, their connotations, and she believes their placement is a strategy similar to a move in chess. This same time was one of fomenting women's rights. These professors added more female writers to the traditional canon and asked students to think deeply about theories of power imbalances and gender roles in society. I then thought that being a feminist and a scholar who played with words was enough, but soon learned that even within feminism, there were societal norms that mimicked the power structures of the patriarchal majority, so I began to realize that power imbalances were often replicated, even in identity politics of the oppressed. Furthermore, as a strong believer in equal rights, I questioned why some people have more rights in this country. And found that an expectation of inclusiveness and democracy, of equal rights and representation in this country, still holds a border drawn,

as Butler reports, "the demarcation is enacted that brings to the fore who "the people" are and that consigns to the background, to the margin, or to oblivion those people who do not count as "the people" (5). As I believed in equality, I searched for symbols in books that would display this, all the while questioning the roles of who had power and who did not.

Despite playing with these ideas for years, it was not until Butler's *Gender Trouble*, that I fully realized gender as a spectrum and gender roles as purely societal construct. We are claimed, named as female or male at birth, and then a thousand steps within harassing boundaries can force us into unconscious acquiescence, the norm stated, hinted, and everywhere enforced. Some of us who are cisgendered, white, heterosexual such as me may never question why we act and dress and perform in a certain way. I always have.

I grew up in a large house and lived with extended family in a small town. My earliest childhood was idyllic. It was shocking when the AIDs crisis hit my home, but even more so when it seemed as if the entire town hated us, were not even whispering behind our backs, and there was no hope. I started to visit LGBTQ+ places, and although I seemingly had no similarities in sexual orientation, I became a staunch Ally. What happened to my family profoundly changed me. When Larry Kramer shut down Wall Street with ACT UP, I felt a kinship as strong as any other. This may be surprising as he had a reputation that seemed to be as much against women as politicians. But the strange thing is that his work helped more than just his immediate circle. His activism planted a fertile seed and I grew to hate what I call the circle of cemented gender roles and enforced heteronormativity.

By extension, and perhaps because I was a dual major in psychology, I had serious issues with the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual by the APA. It is this manual that can only be used to diagnose mental health issues, therefore necessary for any treatment. It listed homosexuality as a disease until 1987 only to replace it with Gender Dysphoria. Even though I hold psychiatrists in high esteem, it was clear to me that many of them held a personal bias that bled through much of their work. Despite the strong work of Feminists, Transgender, and Queer Activism in the 90s to prohibit discrimination, it was not until 2015 that same-sex marriage became legal. To every action there is a reaction and today the rights of women, same sex couples, and transgender people are under attack as the Conservative Right, especially the Supreme Court, steamrolls its agenda throughout the nation. This backlash and its accompanying hate speech place everyone outside their circle of right in danger.

The texts that I use and the questions that I ask my students are meant to probe the precarities that exist through societal constructs throughout history and around the globe. It is often more natural for me to ask questions about gender roles, and it is where I spend a lot of my time, and all my students are fascinated by Butler and Performativity Theory.

So, why "Trans…Matters"? It is a simple enough question. The most popular use of this word today is Transgender. But this project is more than that and hopefully it calls to attention issues of power imbalances while seeking to explain the created hierarchy of one gender over another and its refusal to accept a spectrum where fluidity of gender is natural. And I remind you that I like to play with words. Yes. I firmly believe that as Judith Butler finds, we perform our existence, and we are who we perform. I instinctively knew that this did not mean, as her early critics said, that we play dress up and therefore

become a pilot or doctor or some such. There is a strong pull to acquiesce to societal norms, but becoming ourselves is thousands of miniscule steps, steps, when in sync, lead to an authentic existence. Therefore, biology cannot fully form gender and certainly not its expression. I have never questioned whether I am a woman. This may hold true for close to 98% of the population, but that does not cement it for all. Further, this number only accounts for those who openly identify as nongender conforming. Biology certainly does not form sexual orientation and up to 20% of the population identifies as LGBTQ+. Again, this is only counting those who identify as such. Finally, women and men who are heterosexual and sex conforming can also be unhappy in the restrictions of gender roles; they have not even been counted.

The problem with being in a majority is that others in the same group will demand allegiance and that allegiance, if one believes that there exists a spectrum, may be too harsh to overlook. In addition, this demand automatically outcasts those who are not in the majority. This out casting will push people out of society at the very least and often leads to violence at its worst. Unfortunately, this happened before and is happening again. Another happening is the reaction of those to the right, for every time a group identifies itself and protests for equal rights that they do not currently have, the majority will attempt to cement borders more strongly and foster their own belief system as the one truth.

So, the reason why I use the word "Trans…" as a stem, a prefix and to offer connotations is that my primary concern is for the overwhelming number of people who, to live truly, are always in transgression of the majority. Theirs is a precarity of existence which is still unresolved. The ellipsis between "Trans" and "Matters" stands for them on

one hand. On the other, it stands for words such as transgression, transformation, and transcendence. Transgression in this work is used to express the placement of a Female Samurai warrior who was performing perfection on the battlefield in 1185, 700 years before female samurai existed. As I read the *Heike,* I can only puzzle as to why this beacon was placed within. She is such an anomaly. The role of women was created and cemented to serve men in this culture. As I read "Family Supper," I immediately think that Kikuko in 1990, 805 years later, is still hostage to Samurai patriarchy. But away from her house, whether in the garden or at university, she too transgresses her role. In this transgression, she is calling back to Tomoe a temporally as if the action of transgression supersedes time, as if works can be read in conversation with each other. It is another belief that I hold dear.

The ellipsis between "Trans" and "Matters" is rich when we read Melusine, for she is the most transformational. A hybrid being, her body transfigures into mermaid, serpent every week. Interestingly, in literature, she is one of the few transformational beings who is a devout Christian, attending church every day, a position always withheld from fairies, serpents, and mermaids. In addition to the changes in her body, her role is mostly male for she builds kingdoms. This puzzling entity has been lauded and used by queens who came after her, queens who also wanted to conquer the world – despite being women. Forever calling out since 1394, she disrupts the seniority of male and the very centeredness of human supremacy. And this matter, this question of the power of a woman, speaks directly to Maud in *Possession,* for Maud exists within a female academic power structure that wins against the male antagonists. It is no wonder A.S. Byatt created

a character for the 90s feminist movement who ascends from Melusine. Melusine has then given birth to a line of new female conquerors.

If ever there were a female conqueror, it would be Yde. Yde exists in every aspect and meaning of Trans…Matters. Forced to flee the sexual demands of her father, she puts on male clothing and step by step becomes a male. One of perhaps three stories of the transcendence from female to corporeal male, Yde is transexual in 1200. This is a poem that when I teach my students, they always ask how their Christian God could do this. I am never surprised as, today, the Christian right has so outcasted transgender people, that my students are shocked by the plot. I remind them that readers felt the same way in 1200 and this text is banned and forbidden ever since. So, then it becomes more important to read it for it forces us to acknowledge that there has always been a population of people who transcend the sex they are born with, and, in this case, one who goes on to rule the Roman Empire and another kingdom. This epitome of all that should matter is matched to *Paris is Burning* (1990). There are many clues in both texts that force us to question what is real and when does it become real. In both, the real is created by performance, and I often think that Butler speaks to both texts a historically and a temporally. Butler questions the constancy and irrefutability of the Freudian and then Lacanian heterosexual identification "What is then outside the law, before the law, has been relegated there by and through a heterosexist economy that disempowers consecratory possibilities by rendering them culturally unthinkable and unviable from the start." I argue that it is through doing male that Yde becomes male. He "passed" in the empire, is saved by an angel, and now stands to contest being unthinkable and unviable, a true consecratory possibility.

Dante's *Commedia* is also a highlight of Trans…Matters. One of the reasons is the character Lucia, for in transporting Dante, her body transforms to male and animal and god. This moment signifies the start of *Trasumanar* [passing beyond human], a word created by Dante to explain what it means to exist beyond the normal and living human existence (and perhaps human supremacy). Just as significant, is the rapture of the moment, "rapture" referring to the transportation to the gods and the pain that is assumed to happen during the transport. "Rapture" also connotes a harsh sexual experience, for Dante, in the dream, refers to himself as Ganymede, one who was swooped up by Jove, and sexually assaulted. "Rapture" also connotes a new and painful configuration of the body or what it would mean to be post-body.

The moment which best speaks to the *Trasumanar* of Lucia is Susan Stryker's performance at a California State Academic Conference, "Rage Across the Disciplines" in 1993. Stryker belonged to Transgender Nation – "a militantly queer direct action transexual advocacy group" (244) and wanted to perform the intense emotions cursing through "replicating our abrupt often jarring transitions between genders" (245). Stryker has come to "lay claim to my monstrous identity" (246). These similarities speak to each other, and the shock and awe shows how painful it is to change and how fear of change may be the cause of cementing societal prohibitions.

The essence of the project is that Trans… does matter and this project is looking to spotlight several examples where the matters of Trans are shown from those who transgress to those who transform and some who will transcend. All these characters are placed outside of the circle of right. The power of the majority can punish them or erase them, and that fear is exhibited in every story. That fear and danger exists today.

A character's actions and exhibition of the body can elasticize and forge Trans qualities that may as Derrida claims, deconstruct, but also reconstruct those qualities in liminality, the forever meaning making that Heidegger refers to. Can we see pieces of this replicated within contemporary texts and, if so, what borders does this open to Trans…Matters? What borders does this open for our world?

So, it is not enough to imagine the author as consistently absent from the text or to imagine that a transgression within the text forces the deconstruction of everything within. Instead, it is an attempt to see the character performing an action or in a transition that pulls the body and meanings associated with that body past an acceptable or normalized threshold in history and in the present. It is a moment of pulling forward and calling backward, a discourse of characters. This conversation between bodies is meaningful and powerful, for it is the elusive transitions and transformations that not only defy distinct binary characterizations but allow for performance in unexpected places a historically, a temporally. This is what I refer to as conversing between bodies.

My claim is that any body from any text can be in continuous conversation, playing linguistically and meaningfully with any other body and always dependent on transformational movement signifiers that indicate transgression or transcendence. To that end, I am playing with time, cultural norms, and place. Trans…Matters takes on the place of conversation within the borders themselves and an examination of the bodies who speak to transcendence of those borders or who are exiled into liminality by their transgressions. The selections for each chapter are those deemed most illustrative of the signification and meaning making of bodies in transgression, transformation, and at times transcending. Their play accepts illustrations that are either graphic or word analogies.

The materials used contain a combination of fictional genres: written texts and fragments of moving screen. The method is to take a body deemed significant from a Medieval work and to see how it speaks to a Modern body. This signification is based on how well the particular body represents performance of transgression, transformation, transcendence and can converse with aspects of theories that address these concepts. The hope is that you can see that the matters of Trans…makes meaningful and sound connections across time, history, fiction, reality. That it recognizes the power of individuals and independent theories yet seeks commonality to add to the conversation toward equality and inclusion for all.

CHAPTER ONE

SOCIETAL CONSTRUCTS OF SAMURAI MASCULINITY TRANSGRESSED BY TOMOE AND ECHOED BY KIKUKO

Gionshōja no kane no koe, Shogyōmujō no hibiki ari. Sarasōju no hana no iro, Jōshahissui nokotowari wo arawasu. Ogoreru mono mo hisashikarazu, tada haru no yo no yume no gotoshi. Takeki mono mo tsui ni wa horobin(u), hitoeni kaze no mae no chiri ni onaji.

The sound of the Gion Shōja bells echoes the impermanence of all things; the color of the sāla flowers reveals the truth that the prosperous must decline. The proud do not endure, they are like a dream on a spring night; the mighty fall at last, they are as dust before the wind. Opening lines of *Tale of the Heike*

Tomoe, known today as Tomoe Gozen, exalted, often displaced in literature and misplaced in history, remains a cultural legend. The most information about her that can be found is within the Japanese tales of battle, usually called Monogatari's, of which *Heike Monogatari* or the westernized *Tale of the Heike*, tells the epic battle of the family Minimoto against the Taira. It is told from the winning perspective of what the Minamoto think led to the downfall of the Taira Family. After winning, the leader of the Minamoto was given rule over Japan by the emperor, beginning the rule of Samurai. It is seen as a masterpiece of Japanese culture, is still told, and has influenced art, literature, and drama. While its truths are exploitive of the Minimoto, many battle facts are duplicated in historical records kept by commanders of the time (1180 to 1185); it is also suffused with dazzling artistry, poetry, and dramatic prose. Although there are numerous texts and translations, the most accepted version, and the one I will use, is the *Kakuichi-bon*, told to a disciple scribe in 1371 by one of the head blind Heike performers, Akasha no Kakuichi.

Kenneth Butler in "The Heike Monogatari and The Japanese Warrior Ethic," finds that the Heiki variant written by Shibu Kassenjoin in 1218 is the most straightforward battle history, and that may make it the most fact filled (96). But the later Kakuichi (1371) is the most artistic and begins to depict "a perfect blending of the variants as it holds to the original battles, but offers new depictions of individual warriors in human terms that show the glorious nature of samurai" (96). But make no doubt, Butler also finds that because all individual tales are told at the later date and serve to develop the true code of samurai, "there should be little doubt. … the texts are entirely fictional" (103). In addition, the striking effects of "naming one's name" and "dressing the hero" are actually proof of the formulaic language in all oral tales such as the Iliad and the Odyssey (105). Oral tales from history tend to use similar key structures in helping the teller remember and to embellish the text with lavish detail so that it appears more authentic to the listener. This does not seem to concern most other writers as they continue to write articles about the prowess of Tomoe as fact.

In this Kakuiche variant, still performed in oral telling today, and found readily on YouTube, Tomoe is lauded as the most famous, ferocious, beautiful, talented, and first female Samurai warrior. The problem is that there are no historical records of Tomoe, and that is one crux of this study: Why would someone so famous in a tale not be found in historical documents? Another focal point is that Tomoe will disappear in the middle of the battle, and there is no way a man or woman of this statue would leave the battlefield. But leave she does and no historical document can fully account for what happens next to her, which is clearly against the code of the Samurai. If she was on that battlefield, then why does she not die a warrior as her accomplices do?

From the Kakuiche Tale of the Heiki, Tomoe is first seen in Book Nine:

> Lord Kiso had brought with him from Shinano two beauties: Tomoe and Yamabuki… With her lovely white skin and long hair, Tomoe had enchanting looks. An archer of rare strength, a powerful warrior, and on foot or on horseback a swordsman to face any demon or god, she was a fighter to stand alone against a thousand . … She won such repeated glory that none could stand beside her. (463)

One of the greatest samurai, Kiso no Yoshinaka is facing an impossible battle against thousands, and it is Tomoe whom he outfitted "in the finest armor, equipped her with a great sword and a mighty bow, and charged her with the attack on the opposing commander (463). It is this moment, on the battlefield, that Tomoe is a true warrior in a command position. Steven Brown finds that while this moment could have "a little hyperbole" (184), there is extant support from other warrior historical sources that account for Tomoe as a woman in battle. The Yomibon and Kataribon versions report that Tomoe began at the battle of Yokotagawara and defeated seven mounted warriors. From this moment in 1181, she then led one thousand cavalrymen to victory at Tonamiyama (184). She then distinguished herself again at Uchide no Hama where Yoshinaka's army was then split and reduced to three hundred against six thousand at Awazu, where her disappearance occurs at can be presumed to be the height of her glory (184).

Despite the fact that Samurai women were trained for battle, they only took on an actual fight when their men were gone and when their homes were attacked. Many women did die in these battles, but there are simply no other tales or records that place a woman as a real battle commander fighting directly in the field until 1886 (Onne Bugeisha were a female Samurai warrior troop). This upends the strict male code of Japanese medieval battle culture. Furthermore, the fact that Tomoe is not dressed as a traditional male warrior, instead, in this first story of her battles, she is performing a male

role in female dress.. The only difference is that due to her prior honorable warrior experience, she will fight with the long naginata as opposed to the short dagger she may have been trained with as a girl. This gives every indication that despite being a woman, she is performing a clear male role and is accepted as such on the battlefield.

It is a well-documented fact that men and women of Medieval Japan were raised strictly within gender specific protocols. While this was solidified at the beginning of the Samurai code about 1185, it was not always like this in Japan. Just a few centuries before, there was a female emperor and records indicate that female power was common until right after this reign. The thirtieth Emperor Bidatsu was married to his half-sister. Her mother was of the Emperor Soga family. Upon his death, Bidatsu's widow sister became Empress Suiko. During her reign from 592 to 628 CE, peace reigned and her nephew-regent Prince Shōtoku would create a constitution which is still referred to today. In it, he establishes the Heavenly rule of Emperor line from the first emperor to Suiko. It also creates a male-female equality of rule where Shotoku can negotiate treaties under his empress, whose stamp of approval goes back to the first gods and creators of Japan. (Clements, 58) With the extreme hyperbole attached to Prince Shōtoku, Empress Suiko may have been more of a figurehead, but clearly she enjoyed power and took the opportunity "to remind her subjects of the country's ancient collaboration between male and female powers" (Clements, 62).

There are many factors that may have changed Japan culture to one which oppresses women, Buddhism acceptance and the constant relationship and then adoption of Chinese gods and writing could have strongly influenced a patriarchal culture. For example, Buddhist monks first welcomed and then shunned women as nuns. Just a few of

the ways that Japan grew decidedly patriarchal can be found in early records. For example, when a boy was born, he makes his first temple visit at the thirty-second day of his life, the girl on the thirty-third. A boy of ten will wear bangs and can be seen outside while pictures of females are harder to find (Hiroko). There are also very specific coming of age ceremonies where young men get a loincloth and young women begin to wear an underskirt. While both attend school, they are separated by the age of seven. The strongest change occurs about the age of fifteen, for young men then begin to join all male social groups that assist in the running of the province (and can last for twenty years of service). At this time men begin accepting strict and distinct rules of clothing, accessories, and behavior. The older members conduct observance and discipline for any infraction.

Overall, all women realize very young that they follow patriarchal rules and follow men. Young women about to marry also blacken their teeth as a sign of subservience to the man they are engaged to (Hiroko). It is important to notice that only assumptions due to strict codes can be made about Tomoe as there are not biographical early records of her. What comes to mind is that the history is often hidden if it is not in service to glorify the leader. It is often written into history the Samurai meeting at a chosen location, the leader announcing that the fight will begin with jousts from their most experienced men before full contact. The Victor would receive the heads of the enemy and then the scribe would write the glorious side of the winning leader including much detail which could be considered glorification. One distinct difference to the

famous tales of the Genji and Heike, is a listing of atrocities by a Buddhist monk Keinan in the Chosen Nichinichiki, that was kept in secret archives of all ceding governments until 1965 (Lopez-Vera).

Why do we not know more about Tomoe's life outside of the Heike battles? Perhaps because there was something extraordinary about her during her earliest years. What else could explain a woman so accomplished, so well trained, that she is the only one accepted into battle as a female? "She won such repeated glory that none could stand beside her. And that is why, when so many had already been cut down in their flight, Tomoe remained among the last seven" (*Tale of the Haike*). Rebecca Corbitt gives an intriguing example of women cut out from history on purpose so that a post medieval period could be seen as a time of women's liberation. Women in art, literature, tea ceremonies, has "been conveniently forgotten in order to invent the notion of women's liberation in modern Japan (13). While Corbitt is speaking directly about tea ceremonies and the tea schools that do not show women as registered, she is referring to the same thought that women have been cut from historical record to create a patriarchal system. It in nearly impossible to find historical records of women in Medieval Japan Culture in any form, unless they are married to an emperor or show some distinction under and attached to the patronage of an elite man. "examining writing on tea culture for women is another avenue for exploring women's learning and literacy. The link such writings reveal between tea culture and heightening one's status … suggests that women had a significant role to play in the blurring of status boundaries (14). One such writing by Corbett suggests that women use a silk handkerchief to touch the lid, while men should always do so barehanded, and therefore indicates that women were involved in tea

ceremonies (13). It is assumed by Corbett that women would have been at the age to be trained at home and so while never a part of an official record, always taught and possibly at ceremonies themselves (13). In addition, schools of etiquette included discussions of the proper way to do things "including holding the body. This was true for martial arts, poetry gatherings, musical pursuits, and dining at formal banquets (15). Instead of accepting "neat stories. … the more complicated stories are harder to sell because they do not romanticize the past or serve a particular ideological or political purpose" (16). Finally, Corbett elaborates that the writing or recording of history is always political as it "plays a role in the creation and retention of power among a small elite to which they belong (17). Following this line of logic, Tomoe could not have sprung fully ready to fight on a battlefield without extensive warrior and bodily comport training. At Awazu, she knew exactly how to hold herself and how to behave.

What is also rarely discussed is that females born into any province and any family position of samurai culture are trained to fight. This makes sense as men often needed to travel for battles, leaving behind women and children who may be forced to defend the home. There are two fairly common instances: females are fully trained with smaller daggers and armored if needed, in order to defend. The other option is that they kill themselves before the enemy enters the home. This death is rewarded in the afterlife as without it, there may be dishonor through kidnapping or rape. In Japanese Samurai culture, it is always more honorable to die by one's own hand than to allow oneself to be killed or dishonored by the enemy. In *Tale of Heike*, the most important Samurai protocols were incorporated: loyalty to one's leader, bravery in battle, austere codes of

conduct, and honorable death. “The Samurai would devote themselves to those talks which are inherent to warrior aristocracy, such as archery, swordsmanship, equestrianism, and classic literature” (Lopez-Vera). Tomoe is found to be “exceptionally strong, a skilled rider, and an unparalleled archer” (Hannah). In her first battle, she defeats seven mounted warriors and by 1184 she is in command of one hundred thousand cavalry (Hannah).

There are many females in the epic that are deemed heroic. They show tremendous loyalty to their husband and leader, they show bravery, and they live by austere codes of conduct. Young girls therefore, were trained to repress their feelings, to indurate their nerves, to manipulate weapons,— especially the long-handled sword called naginata, so as to be able to hold their own against unexpected odds. Yet the primary motive for exercises of this martial character was not for use in the field; it was twofold—personal and domestic (Nitobe, 122). This means that the total control of the body was of importance in every area of Japanese culture.

Fencing and similar exercises, if rarely of practical use, were a wholesome counterbalance to the otherwise sedentary habits of woman. But these exercises were not followed only for hygienic purposes. Repeatedly, girls are trained and given weapons in the event that the house is threatened while the men are away. Nitobe in *the Soul of Japan* advises that “Girls, when they reached womanhood, were presented with dirks (kai-ken, pocket poniards), which might be directed to the bosom of their assailants, or, if advisable, to their own” (123). Again and Again, there are women who courageously fight in the *Tale of the Heike*, the difference always is that it is only Tomoe who is given a place, a command in the actual battlefield, all of the other women in this tale fight only

to protect the home or are allowed, by an elite male, to seek vengeance. One such story is of --- who gathers all the women when the enemy is at the gate. They run outside finally to take part in the battle, but the men refuse to fight them, they are killed by arrows, and the ones who escape back inside the castle kill themselves. Despite the fact that the women were armed for close combat, clearly, the men would kill, but not openly joust with a female.

The fighting, as all else in *The Tale of Heike* is ceremonial with strict codes, and has key aspects to adhere to. Jonathan Lopez-Vera details their idiosyncrasy:

> a ritual meal could be celebrated, eating some food items that were supposedly more propitious for victory. After the fight, if they had been victorious, they would bathe in hot springs, which were good both for curing tiredness and for healing wounds as well as symbolizing purification of the soul. Then came more practical matters, like the drawing up of dispatches in which individual actions carried out during battle were recounted, and the handing over of the heads of the enemies vanquished in combat, a requirement. (44)

Lopez-Vera also finds truth instead of fiction in the *Tale of Heike* so that in addition to the pre and post battle duties, the phasing of fighting was strict in the naming the hero and dressing the hero portions. First there would be a hail of arrows, then several duels, "each would be preceded by the shouting of the proponents name, origin, heroic past deeds" (Lopez, 44). After bows and arrows and individual duels, swords and daggers and general close combat would ensue. *The Tale of Heike* relates the last battle in 1185.

After a year of leading fifty thousand, Yoshinaka continues to lose men. He has sent Imai Kanehira to hold another pass. They are both trying to return to each other. Lopez reports that Kanehira is Tomoe's brother and Yoshinaka's best friend and adopted brother (45). *The Tale of Heike* reports that during a fierce battle, Yoshinaka, Kanehira and Tomo leading first three hundred against six thousand and "slashed left, right, up,

down, everywhere" (465) and then down to seven. He is riding his famous horse "Demon Roan" with a gilt edged saddle and a "dauntingly long sword" (464). He hails to the enemy:

> You will have long heard of me: the man from Kiso. … also the governor of Iyo, famed as Asahi Shogun, Minamoto no Yoshinaka! … Take my head and show it off to Yoritomo. (465)

It is interesting that Tomoe is silent. They are both trying to return to each other. Lopez reports that Kanehira is Tomoe's brother and Yoshinaka's best friend (45). The Tale of Heike reports that during a fierce battle, Yoshinaka, Kanehira and Tomo leading first three hundred against six thousand and "slashed left, right, up, down, everywhere" (465) and then down to seven. It is at this point, after living through the battle, Yoshinaka turns to Tomoe and says "Go, woman, go quickly, anywhere, far away. For myself, I shall die in battle or, if wounded, take my own life, and it must not be said that at the end I had a woman with me." She responds, "All I want is a worthy opponent, so that he can watch fight my last fight." (465) With this, she silently rides up to one of the most famous men on the battlefield, "caught him in an iron grip, forced his head down to her pommel, kept it pinned there, twisted it around, cut if off, and tossed it away" (466). She abandons her armor and leaves silently. Imai and Yoshinaka are now two and decide to die alone. Yoshinaka tries to commit Hari Kari, but he is stopped and his head is cut off and impaled as a display (467). Imai "took the sword in his mouth, hurled himself headlong from his horse, and died transfixed (468). There is so much to unravel with these three endings.

To start, Imai Kanehiraa (possibly Tomoe's brother and adopted brother to Yoshinaka) lives on as a samurai hero to this day; his death is glorious and in complete

conjunction with the ideals of battle. Lopez reports that Yoshinaka was surprised on his way back to his territories and "accompanied by his wife"(51). One who "took part in battles just as any other soldier did (51). It is clear that in this perception, Tomoe is his wife whom he must send to safety before he is ambushed. Stephen Turnbull agrees in The Samurai: A Military History "beside him rode his wife Tomoe Gozen noted for her bravery (64). Steven T. Brown sums up a serious scholarly quandary, whether or not Tomoe was Yoshinakaa's wife, why must she leave the battlefield?:

> Since Yoshinaka has obviously not just arrived at the realization that Tomoe is a woman, why does Tomoe's gender become such an issue for him at this late date? Does Yoshinaka fear that the woman warrior Tomoe, who is equal to a thousand men, may die a more glorious death than himself? Or is it simply that he wants to ensure that someone from his faction will survive to retell the story of his life and death from a sympathetic perspective? (188)

Why does Yoshinaka want to die with his adopted brother and disallow a glorious death for Tomoe? She has notably and repeatedly proven herself in battle. Brown offers another version in medieval plays that are about Tomoe; in them, Yoshinaka gives her the job of delivering his robe and talisman to his home in Kiso "If you disobey my orders, our karmic bond of three lives as master and servant will cease to exist (194). According to Brown, she leaves the battlefield in time for Yoshinaka to successfully commit Hari Kari, pulls off her armor, exchanges it for "her lord's Kosode robe and short sword worn up to the time of death" (197) to tell the tale "rescuing his proper name from infamy and oblivion (198). In this instance, there must be a survivor to create the legacy of Yoshinaka and Kenahira, her husband and brother, heroes who take their own lives in order not to be humiliated by the enemy, and to ensure "a place for both Yoshinaka and Tomoe in the archives of cultural memory (198). Brown continues to question if the teller is truly Tomoe because it was common in medieval and early modern eras for performers

to pretend to be from the battlefield in order to create a historical accuracy for themselves. Either way these “pretenders” “adopting the name of the most famous woman warrior in Japanese history would have not only contributed to the dissemination of the Yoshinaka narrative, but also to the elevation of Tomoe’s stature in the medieval cultural imaginary (199).

On the other hand, Eiko Ikegami in “Shame and the Samurai: Institutions, Trustworthiness, and Autonomy in the Elite Honor Culture” defines that behavior of the Samurai is built to protect dignity through the fear of shame: "The samurai who knows shame {haji) should not do anything untoward even though he is being beheaded. . . . In this and similar statements, the image of a trustworthy samurai combining inner integrity and outward sociability” (12. In addition, the ruling elite places shame and honor at the center of their collective identity to create the core of the Samurai: service to the emperor as the highest status of honor and differentiation from all other classes in society. (2) The samurai committed suicide by seppuku on the battlefield when they perceived that they were losing the battle. Rather than incurring the shame of being taken as captives by the enemy, the samurai could testify to their autonomy through their complete control of the body in the final moments of life. They had a highly developed sense of honor and glory, combined with self-esteem, dignity, and moral autonomy demonstrated through violence. Although this custom of self-willed death may appear to be little more than an exotic ritual from a non-Western culture, Ikegami does not want the reader to overlook the aspiration for dignity and autonomy behind it (11). In this concept, Tomoe is forced to live to create an honorable story for her master,

Yoshinaka, and her brother. Her living then presents a power of discourse despite the fact that by all other definitions, if male, she should have been allowed to commit seppuku.

Inazo Nitobe in The Soul of Japan would seem to not only agree with this concept but also add or remind that Bushido had a standard of its own and it was binomial. It tried to gauge the value of woman on the battle-field and by the hearth:

> There she counted for very little; here for all. The treatment accorded her corresponded to this double measurement;—as a social-political unit not much, while as wife and mother she received highest respect and deepest affection. (132)

To this end, Tomoe is reminded on the battlefield that she must return home to sing the praises of her man. A woman's surrender of herself and self-sacrifice was "thoroughly imbued" (128) and she would be trained in many arts, including music which was the "purification of heart, since it was said that no harmony of sound was attainable without the player's heart being in harmony with herself" (125). Her agreement to leave, after beheading the strongest of the approaching enemy, would gain two positives: She is leaving at the height of her power and she redirects her life to ensure that her husband and brother are remembered correctly. While this does appear to be a blend of contradictory subservience and Amazonian traits, (122) it prevails as the full concept of the Bushido code. To shun shame or win a name, samurai boys would submit to any privations and undergo severest ordeals of bodily or mental suffering. They knew that honor won in youth grows with age (74). Tomoe grows in honor by this severest test of mental suffering. She cannot commit seppuku; she must live so that society can hear of the honor of others.

Elizabeth Oyler in "Gio: Women and Performance" seems to agree with this as she finds the women in the Heike to be the most complex and important (341). They are

abandoned as the men leave for war "and their loss and longing are among the tale's most moving. Yet they are the one who remain the tell the tales, to pray for the dead and to make sense of a world that has been turned upside down" (341). It is they who will "turn event into history" (341). Therefore, Tomoe's most important role is to live to tell the tale.

The commanding presence yet acquiecence of Tomoe on the battlefield reminds one of the character Kikuko in "A Family Supper" by Kazuo Ishiguru. In this 1983 short story, Kikuko has returned to Kamakura from her studies in Osaka. She has come to see her father and brother and is about to have dinner with them. The story begins with voice of the brother narrating "Fugu is a fish caught off the Pacific shores of Japan. The fish has held a special significance for me ever since my mother died through eating one" (1). The narrator is unnamed and has been studying in America for two years; during this time his mother died after eating fugu at a neighbor's house. This type of death is agonizing, especially to the stomach area, so bodily it reminds one of seppuku. As he is picked up at the airport, the story's first dialogue occurs immediately following the strange appeal of Fugu among the Japanese:

> 'Did you eat on the plane?' my father asked.
> 'They gave me a light snack.'
> We were sitting on the tatami floor of his tea-room.
> 'You must be hungry. We'll eat as soon as Kikuko arrives.' (1)

This imperative of the father should be noted for two reasons: First, the father is indicating that he has cooked a meal and will serve them. Secondly, Kikuko must be there for this event. In typical Ishiguru fashion, the stark contrast between the agony of dying of Fugu poisoning and the leap to the brevity of the son and father's conversation indicates that there is much here that is unsaid. It is in the lacunae's of unsaying where

meaning lies in “Family Supper.” Further, the reader adds meaning by the associations implied not said.

In “Kazuo Ishiguro’s “A Family Supper” – the Hermeneutics of Familiarity and Strangeness” author Małgorzata Hołda finds this

> invites the reader to scrutinize the philosophical and the linguistic texture of the irresolvable rupture between what is commonly understood as the exterior, alien, isolated, strange and unfamiliar, and the interior, intimate, domestic, deep-rooted and familiar. (14)

Fugu eating is a dangerous game popular in Japan after the second world war. It has a strong appeal for those interested in adrenaline urges and, in its agonizing death, it hints of the ties to the cultural icon, seppuku, of the samurai. This tie is strange, deep-rooted, and familiar. In addition, this family is one of Samurai blood; the father is

> My father was a formidable-looking man with a large stony jaw and furious Black eyebrows. His general presence was not one which encouraged relaxed conversation; neither were things helped much by his odd way of stating each remark as if it were the concluding one. In fact, as I sat opposite him that afternoon, a boyhood memory came back to me of the time he had struck me several times around the head for ‘chattering like an old woman.’ Inevitably, our conversation since my arrival at the airport had been punctuated by long pauses. (1)

The son’s fear of his father, the father’s imperative tone is expressed with brief dialogue and the “furious black eyebrows” is expressive of the physicality of the samurai; the father is extremely proud of his heritage. It should also be noted that the family home is in Kamakura, the district where Samurai code began.

After this brief exchange, the son mentions the failing of the father’s business and he replies: “In fact the story didn’t end there,” he said. “After the firms collapse, Watanabe killed himself. He didn’t wish to live with the disgrace. … A Man of Principle” (2). While his father is seemingly connecting suicide to having principles, they

are sitting in the tea room of the house, reminiscent of the solid code of etiquette followed by samurai. The son is looking out to the garden at an ancient well that he thought was haunted (2). At this strange, uncomfortable moment, Kikuko arrives. Seeing her brother and father, she is "excessively excited. … she did nothing but giggle nervously" (2). The father appears to place her into an accustomed state by asking her questions of her studies in Osaka. Her formal short replies show that she is used to this type of formulaic conversation. Her father then goes to the kitchen to finish making dinner with another imperative: "Kikuko will look after you" (2).

The other side of Kikuko appears as they walk into the garden. She is smoking, talking of her boyfriend and their plans to travel to America, clearly something that would not be discussed with the father. She then reveals that Watanabe also killed his wife and two daughters before committing suicide in seppuku style, a knife into the stomach. In a haunted garden, the ghost suddenly appears to the son, she is in a white kimono. This moment can be interpreted as a haunting of the cultural background they come from, the samurai. In this way, the danger of the evening is hinted by a visual not discursive connection.

This moment can also be interpreted as the ghost of the mother as the son recognizes the image when he looks at a photo of his mother right before they are going to eat. The father might be explaining this when he tells the son shortly before,

> I hadn't meant to tell you this, but perhaps its best that I do. Its my belief that your mothers death was no accident. She had many worries. And some disappointment. … You don't see how it is for some parents. Not only must they lose their children, they must lose them to things they don't understand. (3)

It is a strange statement filled with familiar tensions within the family. The father is a business man who does not like "foreigners" (3) and the father and mother did not want

their son, let alone their daughter to go to America. This hint that the mother killed herself as Watanabe did which the father seems to agree with, creates a link between seppuku, samurai honor, and the need to act with honor when one fails. Coupled with the moment in the garden, when Kikuko reveals to her brother that she will go to America, but is soon called by her father a "good girl," (2) all of the tensions and distance and linking of one image to another cultural call back echoes the strength of the samurai code that lives in the father and may be played out for the family.

The body of Kikuko is commanded to watch the brother as if she can influence him and yet it is this moment that Kikuko reveals that she is acting in a number of ways that conflict with what would be the standard samurai definition of a "good girl" by her father's code. One could wonder if this dinner will be their last. And the dinner begins with the father serving an unidentified fish with several imperatives to eat. Kikuko is nervous but composed; enough so that she steers the conversation away from any mentions of the brother's stay in America or of his possible return there. After dinner, she is commanded to serve tea and both men retire to the tea room. Inazo Nitobe sums the propriety of Japan's elaborate system of etiquette that is found in Tomoe and Kikuko correct social behavior.

> How one must bow in accosting others, how he must walk and sit, were taught and learned with utmost care. Table manners grew to be a science. Tea serving and drinking were raised to a ceremony. A man of education is, of course, expected to be master of all these (52). … that by constant exercise in correct manners, one brings all the parts and faculties of his body into perfect order and into such harmony with itself and its environment as to express the mastery of spirit over the flesh… Fine manners, therefore, mean power in repose. (54)

Kikuko in the garden, alone with her brother, is free spirited and free moving. Kikuko in the house and with her father, is in perfect order of samurai etiquette. She acquiesces immediately to every command of her father; she is careful in her voice and body movements around him.

There is a ceremonious aspect to both Tomoe and Kikuko around the men in their lives. It is through this control of the body that samurai showed their utmost power. Tomoe will hold herself in perfect repose while contemplating her actions. Her acquiescence therefore shows complete control and power. Kikuko will do the same with her father, she will eat the unidentified fish at dinner and then create a tea ceremony while unsure of herself and her future. "it is a fine art; it is poetry, with articulate gestures for rhythm: it is a modus operandi of soul discipline (Nitobe, 56).

It is also no coincidence that this ceremony is held in the family home in Kamakura. When Yoritomo successfully drove both the Taira out and killed his brother Yoshitsune and cousin Yoshinaka (Tomoe's commander and possibly husband) he creates the samurai empire in Kamakura. Kikuko is in the exact place where she and Tomoe will act in similar ways.

An important revelation by Gadamer, often explained in *Truth and Being* is that literature, like other forms of art, is always contemporary as it throws its message, its truth to the reader; this facilitates my argument in that if art is always throwing itself forward to be interpreted by the reader, then the comparison of two bodies are in stasis awaiting to be revealed, to be seen, to begin moving and always replying to one another.

> The spectator does not hold himself aloof at the distance characteristic of an aesthetic consciousness enjoying the art with which something is represented, but rather participates in the communion of being present. The real emphasis of the tragic phenomenon lies ultimately on what is presented and recognized,

> and to participate in it is not a matter of choice. (26)

So then, what are Tomoe and Kikuko saying? Tomoe is denied seppuku, yet is obedient to Samurai code; Kikuko may be killed due to her seeming obedience to her father or may live on dutifully making Samurai ceremonial tea for her father. Jean Grondin and Kathryn Plant in *Philosophy of Gadamer* explain that

> Gadamer was less directly involved in theological considerations, but he retained the idea of a demand or an address which he applied to the experience of art. He thus opposed the Kierkegaardian notion of contemporaneity to historical simultaneity of works of art for aesthetic knowledge. Simultaneity means here that works from different periods can be the object of one and the same aesthetic experience as it is only a case of reliving the lived and the expressive. (47)

If historical simultaneity does exist, then when knowledge is thrown, the reader applies all that they know to understand. Simply put, when they wear the robe of samurai culture, Tomoe and Kikuko depict a lived and expressive truth. They also call back and forth to each other in this one moment.

> An analysis of the phenomenon in question is substantiated by Gadamer's assertion that distance, the in-between can be viewed as something productive, as something which facilitates understanding. Ishiguro conjures up fiction which conveys not only the universality Kazuo Ishiguro's "A Family Supper" – the Hermeneutics of Familiarity and Strangeness of human experience, but raises queries as for its fundaments. (15)

Ishiguro purposefully leaves gaps in understanding for the reader to fill. For different reasons, the history of Tomoe is gap-filled. But she springs fully into existence on the battlefield. While it is easier to see Tomoe's body and message, what might Kikuko be saying or replying to Tomoe? The placement of both their bodies is important, in similar geographic spaces, they must comport themselves in exterior and interior battles. Tomoe defies the male dominance of a samurai in battle Kikuko defies the samurai code when

she is in the privacy of the garden. Kikuko is smoking and telling tales of public digression and aspirations from the "good girl" she is expected to be by her samurai father. Yet, as soon as she returns to the home, her body is in tight comportment with family expectations. What her father can see and hear pleases him as she not only acts on every command, but can defuse the tension of the family, protecting both her brother and father in every conversation.

In addition, reading this way, allows Kikuko to respond to the "rightness" of Tomoe's acquiescence. She will also acquiesce and obeys the father by eating this unknown, unidentified fish while hints of seppuku are all around her. If this is the last battle for her too, it ends with the hint that by eating the fish, she will perform what is expected of her. This is in direct contrast to her behavior in public, out of the house, and away from her father.

The lack of clarity as to what really happens to Kikuko is also a response to Tomoe's story. There are plays of Tomoe becoming a nun and honoring the story of Yoshinaka until she dies at the age of ninety-one. In the modern "Family Supper" we are left in a space between knowing and never knowing the outcome. In both cases, the reader is forced to reckon with this fuzzy unknowability. Much like current scholars of *Tale of Heike*, the reader will bring all that they know to the moments of uncertainty and make their own arguments as to what the "real" endings and meanings are.

CHAPTER TWO

MELUSINE: BIFORMED, BI-GENDERED, AND BI-SPIRITED.

Melusines have existed in various forms globally and textually as far back as a 7th century BCE mosaic in Pesaro, Italy (Calabrase). There are also references in the Bible, the Koran, and other ancient texts. They are often part animal, with bodies frequently designated as evil and always othered supernatural forms. Frederika Baine "The Tail of Melusine: Hybridity, Mutability, and the Accessible Other" comments upon an eighth century Melusine-like siren of the scaly fish tail found in the Libere Monstrorum, a compendium of fantastical yet, at the time, believable beasts. The scales indicate an additional layer of complexity: both piscine and reptilian. In this instance Baines also notes that in the medieval era, biformity was depicted in women far more often than men. Further, she indicates "at the same time, hybridity is frequently used in the medieval misogynist tradition to figure human women's negative traits: duplicity, mutability, and the unequal yoking of rationality or control to the lack thereof (17). It was therefore common to use biformity and especially monstrous forms to persecute women as unable to control their bodies or their souls. In addition, this symbolized women as anxiety or disaster provoking to men. All in all, nothing good seemed to come from women with tails.

In the *Odyssey*, a Melusine-like creature of the sea, sometimes pictured as half mermaid or half bird, always female above the waist, sings an irresistible song to lure sailors to their death. An interesting Melusine is found in medieval Chinese literature as

the legend of Madame White, cursed to live as a biformed white snake imprisoned underground in the temple. Zifeng Zhao finds in "Metamorphoses of Snake Women: Melusine and Madam White" that

> the comparison of Melusine and Madam White demonstrates that the serpentine metamorphosis of women in both European and Chinese literature reflects how women of both cultures were influenced by masculine authority in premodern times. Their similar tales display the ambiguity of female power and patriarchal constraint, which increases over time under the pressure of political and religious ideologies. (283)

In all of these tales, a female biform is identified as representing an evil influence over men. In addition, when the tale represents a more serpentine form, a new hybridity usually exists as a phallic symbol. Thus, depending on the tale and the version of biformity, Melusines offer an ambiguous depiction as a threat to males and their masculinity. In these versions, Melusines must be constrained, destroyed, or imprisoned.

In rare instances, Melusines can offer prosperity and positive supernatural skills to the men in their lives. In the Jean d'Arras text, *Melusine; or, the Noble History of Lusignan*, written in 1393, the main character, Raymondin, finds an extraordinarily beautiful woman in the forest after a tragic wild boar hunting accident in which he mistakenly spears and kills his uncle. Wandering aimlessly and in agony, "so distraught that he was entirely unaware of where he was going" (32) he rides, without seeing, past Melusine.

> She states: What, sir simpleton?
> She commands: I shall make him speak
> She comforts: Fair Lord, I am on your side! (32)
> She invokes: besides God Himself it is I who can best advance your cause….and transform your misfortune into prosperity….I am on God's side. (33)

What is fascinating in the d'arras text is that in all of the above statements by Melusine, she relates herself as a wonder of God who can create everything Raymondin needs in life. He is the passive one, while she takes on the manly roles of building and guiding. It is through her superpowers that he becomes an exquisite warrior and secures his family's homestead.

In the d'Arras text Angela Weisl finds in "Half Lady, Half Serpent: Melusine's Monstrous Body and the Discourse of Romance" that Melusine is a

> hybrid body that deconstructs a series of binaries—between the animal and the human, the courtly and the erotic, the feminine and the masculine—ultimately putting forward a series of anxieties about identities that serve to define the woman in narrative practice and medieval life… (225). There is nothing new in saying that women in power make men anxious; this could be said now just as easily in the Middle Ages, but the notion of power in the text is as ambivalent as Melusine herself, anxious and celebratory. (225)

Once Raymondin and Melusine have promised to marry, in the same conversation, she immediately decrees that she will bring him great honor, personal worth, and estate (34). There is one exception, "never on a Saturday shall you seek to look upon me" (34). The anxiety introduced and discussed by Weisl is clear at the beginning, Melusine cannot be seen on Saturday for, as the legend goes, it is the one day that she appears in full biformity: half woman (top) and half serpentine bottom. The serpentine bottom may appear mermaidlike or siren like to some and always speaks to a fear of sexual or, in general, the lower side or genitalia of women. In addition, the serpentine form is often portrayed as satanic, and yet a full ambiguity exists here as Melusine never missed morning mass or communion, something other satanic beings would not be able to endure and, therefore, could not cultivate. So unlike all others of this type of Melusine, she is truly bonded with and for God's power.

Another ambiguous feature is the ways in which this Melusine creates all of the castles and royal domains for Raymondin. As she sends him off on one errand or another, a huge cotillion of workers magically appear to build: "she summoned a very large number of men skilled in working the earth and the forest" (cleared the land). Next, she "summoned many masons and stonecutters….no one ever knew who these workers were or where they came from". The fortress was completed in no time with "impenetrable barriers" of "sheer cliffs" and "sturdy, machicolated towers" (47). This delineates a fully masculine building of extreme power – while Raymondin is away. So, when he returns, he is gifted this masterpiece created by a woman. It is easy to see Raymondin's passivity as a demasculinization. Yet his jousting and warrior skills increase until he is at the highest level, and he does rule this kingdom. Clearly, this is an extremely powerful woman creating a kingdom for a male, and yet the anxiety is just as clear, for he is at his lowest point when he finds her, and he would be nothing without her. Melusine is clever by asking the Count of Potiers to name the castle dwelling. He defers to her and she decides upon Lusignan. He responds that Melusine means "marvel or marvelous. … and this place has been marvelously founded, and I do believe that marvelous things will never cease to occur here" (48). Raymondin is the leader in the place, but the creation is by Melusine, the marvel of God.

Another point of power and anxiety is the creation of heirs of Raymondin and Lusignan, and this is something that Melusine is also a marvel at. Immediately she bears a son, Urian, "well formed in every respect" but that he has two different colored eyes and oversized ears (48). Nearly every time Raymondin travels and returns, another son is born: Eudes, with one very large ear. Guyon, with one eye higher than another, follows

after she builds the village, the towers, the abbey while doing "many good deeds for the poor" (70). Antoine, with a lion's paw birthmark on his cheek while Melusine developed so much land "that there was no prince in Brittany, Gueyenne, or Gascony …who did not stand in fear of arousing his anger (70). While she was "founding many churches" (70) Renaud, with one eye, was born. Geoffroy, with a great big tooth follows, a courageous and cruel child. Fromont, with a spot of hair on his nose, is then born and becomes the most devout monk. Finally Horrible is born "monstrously large, had three eyes, one of them on his forehead, so wicked and cruel that before the age of four he had killed two of his nurses (71). Eight in all, all with birthmarks, all born during her masculine building and Christian good deeds and daily church visits.

Christine Morgan in "Melusine: the Myth that built Europe" notes that Melusine, the daughter of the King of Scotland and a powerful fairy, transforms rock formations into the most powerful kingdom and is quite masculine, yet countered by her image as a beloved Christian woman and nurturing mother (4). In addition, she transforms once per week in water and later queens who funded ambitious maritime expeditions or attempted to colonize new lands overseas (4) found a way to place or trace themselves in her lineage. Urion and Guyon, Melusine's sons did defend Cyprus in the Crusades and were given the princesses and then kingdoms of Cyprus and Armenia, all while "destroying God's enemies and upholding the Catholic faith" (95). So, it is not surprising that within this noble history of Lusignan contains the proper colonialization techniques that future queens would mimic in the wake of Melusine's tale, tail.

In d'arras story, Melusine is a birthing and true Christian marvel. She soon endows Notre Dame of Lusignan and arranges for her son Eudes to marry the Count of

Marches' daughter. Then Antoine conquers and becomes a Duchy of Luxemberg and Renaud becomes King of Bohemia with Knights and riches from mother to aid all the journeys, with one stipulation: to follow and honor God. These four sons are nurtured and instructed by their beautiful, noble mother to attend church every day and act in God's image. Interestingly, this beauty and faith gives them the ability to perform extreme violence, vengeance, and all of the conquering in God's name. This polyvalence is seen by Frederica Bain in "The Tail of Melusine: Hybridity, Mutability, and the Accessible Other" as another complication and ambivalence.

> In Jean d'Arras, Coudrette, Ringoltingen, and others, her appearance accords with the medieval commonplace that physical loveliness, particularly in women, is an outward and visible sign of inward, invisible grace and truthfully signals her essentially devout and beneficent nature. Thus her fully human female beauty is as unstable and multivalent as her various hybrid forms. (22)

So captivating beauty on the outside indicates beneficence and a beautiful soul on the inside, but the weekly transformation to the biformity creates an instability and uncomfortability. The d'Arras text goes out of its way to de-emphasize Melusine's biformity, for when her husband breaks his promise and carves a peephole into the door, he is immediately overcome by despair due to his own weakness and refusal to obey her. When she returns to him that night in full human form, he pretends that he has never seen her tail, this long-term acquiescence to the secret once again seems to de-stabilize both their very beings. The reader is reminded that Melusine has been cursed by her mother to this weekly transformation:

> Which functions as a useful narrative device whereby the author can maintain a certain fidelity with other supernatural-bride legends without implying any diabolical origins. This recuperation of Melusine's character and of her snake form is also achieved by Raymondin's reaction to her secret shape. Immediately after seeing her, he makes no mention of her physical body but instead mourns his projected loss of her in a lament. (Prudhomme, 60)

Indeed, he immediately covers the hole in the door and then states "Alas sweet beloved, I am the vile and cruel asp and you the precious unicorn. I have betrayed you with my wretched venom (182). Somehow, despite the serpentine tail in the water, Raymondin has become the evil snake and Melusine remains God's marvel. Surprisingly, she does not leave or ruin him and continues to construct more fortresses. One interpretation could be that his utterances construct himself as the biformed creature. In taking on the blame and the curse from her mother, he both contains the situation, albeit passively, and bows to the marvels of Melusine. Again, nothing but positivity comes from this.

In the next few years, the three older sons would further establish dynasties with beautiful queens who quietly birthed noble sons. Melusine would grow the kingdom to such lengths that two sons would inherit great riches and nobility just from their kingdom alone. Unfortunately, two sons would create havoc that causes Raymondin to stir wrath and venom to ruin both his and Melusine's life. Geofroy, jealous of Fromont the monk, burned the monastery with everyone in it. At this point Raymondin devolves and destroys his marvel. The curse put upon her by her mother could only be lifted if Raymondin stayed quiet. If so, Melusine would die fully human and fully souled as a Christian. In a position of instability and weakness, Raymondin instead curses Melusine in front of all the nobles: "Ah! You deceitful serpent, by God, you and your deeds are nothing but phantoms, nor will any heir you have borne ever come to a good end!" (191). Melusine falls and has not human breathe or pulse for a half hour. His anger abates but it is too late. Melusine positions the blame on Raymondin:

> You have so perfidiously betrayed me. …alas! …I would have been redeemed, exempted from pain and torment (191), and I would have lived out the full course

> of a mortal woman's lifetime and died naturally. …Now you cast me back. …And now I must endure and suffer it until Judgement Day. (192)

She is still dictating the future as she tells Raymondin to forgive Geoffroy and to place him as executive of the estate, to which the two young sons will inherit. She tells the people they must kill Horrible, before he does more evil things. She gives Raymondin two intertwined rings to seal goodness into their children's future. She explains to her people that she has always done what God desired (despite the cursed punishment of biformity on Saturdays). She reminds her people that she is the daughter of

> King Elinas of Scotland and Queen Presine, his wife. I am one of three sisters who were condemned to a cruel destiny and to grievous penance. About that I cannot – nor do I wish to – tell you more. (194)

Her people are mourning and puzzled as the reader and Raymondin are the only ones who know what this penance is. Not many critics have spoken of the intertwined rings, but it is curious that, despite her curse, despite Raymondine's betrayal, Melusine will create a continuity of power and goodness for her family.

This particular Melusine ends the tale with another ambiguity: she had given Raymondin five rings of power at the start and this new gift of intertwining rings would seem to indicate that he and her children will receive continual goodwill and positive power from her. The five rings are never mentioned again and yet there is much written in the world of symbolism of rings and power. Often associated with perfection and totality, the rings can be seen here depicting both the male and female power of Melusine. Despite the fact that she will not return to a human form at all, her power will continue to influence her lineage. – finds that circular items to represent duality at once signifying absence powerlessness and power and totality (15) In many ways, this sums Melusine, for she will now transform to a dragon figure, leave her people forever. She is

powerless against her curse, and yet returns to nurture her children frequently, leaving the rings of power to aid and continue to be a presence. As she "metamorphosed into a dragon some fifteen feet in length," "circles the fortress three times," and lets out "rueful shrieking" (194).

In addition, both the circular movement and rings illustrate her bi-spiritedness. Lest the reader forget her marvels of God, the mighty and the humble and the clergy continuously mourn and "devoutly said prayers" (195). Further, her magical powers indicated by the rings, which she does not speak of, come from being a half-fairy. d'arras chooses to downplay these superpowers in order to stress her human-ness, of course to prepare for her noble descendants in Lusignan in his day and the future. This fairy power is usually depicted in literature as capricious or even evil, yet with this Melusine, it is always referred to as God's work. From the magical buildings and the magical inheritance, there is a consistent using of fairyness to forge a positive and powerful future. Finally, this power is inherent to her body and presumably without end, another circular feature, especially as her end cannot come until Judgement Day.

Returning to that circling of three times around the castle. In Numerology according to Jive Lubbungo, three is a "moving forward number" (283) which expresses a circular and never-ending "beginning middle end" – The fact that Melusine continues her power and support by frequently returning to the castle, indicates that while she is cursed for eternity, her human and nurturing psyche will continue. In addition, "When the initiating force 1 unites with the germinating energy of 2, there is a fruitfulness which is 3 (284). As d'arras depicts Melusine as a marvel of God, the number three holds great power in the Bible. First, there is the trinity, then there is the crucifixion with three nails,

and the resurrection of Jesus on day three. Jesus also asks Peter three times whether he loved him. To this end, one could say that Melusine depicts the suffering with three trips round the castle and serves God the Trinity and is fruitful in her unending determination to guard her children. At the end of the story, Melusine reappears at the castle and three days before the death of Raymondin and circles it three times. Because three is seen as the sign of God, it can be said that Melusine is still God's marvel and the tri circular motion depicts his will and acceptance of Raymondin.

In a reminder that three can also mean fruition or a boundary break past two/duality. Melusine biformity is changing at the end of the story. She is reconciled to her penance or curse and has spiritually gone beyond it creating a new form that brings to fruition her full power. Her tail is now blue and silver, the colors of her son's banner as the join altogether to conquer another enemy thereby both saving and enlarging their home base. As Lubbungo indicates that the number three also symbolizes male gentalia (284), at once the reader is reminded of her dual gendering and the coupling of Raymondin and Melusine resulting in the creation of a male line. Afterall, this is a violent male tale inspired by a hybrid, polyvalent body, a marvel of God. D'arras seals his argument, ending with a reminder that it only the intelligent who can understand the hidden things that occur by "the secret workings of God" (229). In other words, those who do not believe the marvels and legacy of Melusine are simply too senseless to do so.

The modern body who calls back to Melusine lives within *Possession* by A.S. Byatt written in 1990. In this multilayered story, two young literary researchers Roland Mitchell and Maud Bailey band together to discover the mysterious correspondence of two Victorian poets Randolph Henry Ash and Christabel LaMott. Roland finds and steals

two letters from Randolph Ash and, beginning this quest, is guided to Maud who is related to and an expert on Christabel LaMotte. One of Christabel's poems is an epic on the fairy Melusine, and Christabel's family is from Brittany; Brittany contains Poitou and Lusignan, so both the familial tie and the scholarship calls Melusine into the story upfront. Like Raymondin, Roland is an extremely passive male, living in misery with a woman who pays his way to be a scholar of Randolph Ash, with failed attempts to get a professorship. The meeting is the first callback:

> She was tall…dressed with unusual coherence for an academic (44). Green tunic, green skirt, while silk and stockings…blonde with super white and creamy skin "She did not smile …smelled ferny and sharp. (44)

He is immediately drawn to her and she is intrigued by him enough to offer him help, completing the analogy of Raymondin and Melusine's first meet.

Maud allows him to research in her space and he misses his train. She invites him to stay for the night and lives in a tower. As they ride the lift, she is above and he trips. As she feeds him and shows him where he will sleep on "a high white divan…{with} emerald green cotton cases (62) after he uses the bathroom "a chill green glassy place…a shimmering shower curtain like a glass waterfall (63), "The beautiful thing in the room was Maud Bailey herself (44). The green and the white and the tower all reminisce Melusine in the forest at the first meeting and then her masculine creation, formation, and building. She is above him in all things and is in full control of his future.

She is an extremely removed, strong woman with a correlation to water and forest. This simulates Raymondin finding Melusine in the forest and her own association with water. "She was a most untouchable woman. Roland discerned in Maud a rigorous sense of correctness or justice (55). Because of this rigorous righteousness, and spell

binding appeal, Roland can tell her about the stolen letters and get advice about what they should do without fear of reprisal. Maud clearly holds the upper hand in this relationship not only because of strict attitude, but also because she is already an accomplished professor. In this world, he is the acolyte and will be guided by her. And like Melusine, this proves to be true and also proves that she will continue to be the masculine builder or shaper of his quest, for it is through her and her expertise that his profits come to fruition.

The writer of *Possession,* A.S.Byatt purposefully ties both Christabel and her descendant Maud back to Melusine. She satirizes the academic arena in comparison to Raymondin's jousting and nobility. Mira Stout of the New York Times in "What Possessed A.S. Byatt" finds "The book offers a winning combination of snob appeal and genuine accessibility, presenting a familiar 'Masterpiece Theater' of Britain of dusty libraries, fumbling academics and fiendish baronets (np). "In it, a mismatched pair of contemporary British academics discover a tragic, hidden love story between their respective Victorian poets (np). Byatt agrees, "Now we have charismatic leaders, ferocious literary theories. …We need certainties in these fluid, shifting times (np). One of the reasons asserted that d'arras promoted a strong, beautiful, Christian mostly human cursed is that he was under commission to the Duke of Berry, son of King John II of France to attribute to her the origin of Lusignan and place through consistent 'truth claims" her descendants into the rightful rule of France (3). It should also be noted that France, at this time, was both recovering from political upheaval and "flourishing in the domain of arts and letters (1). In this way, this building of charismatic and ferocious theories is similar to the 1990s and Byatt's timeframe. The two fictional characters, Roland and Maud have something that "might change the face of scholarship (23). And

Maud is the link to owning it all through Christabel to Melusine. At the start, as Roland is already an expert in Ash's poetry, he has that graduate student fear and intimidation, and he cannot find a job, Maud is already working and known for her scholarship "Melusina, Builder of Cities: A Subversive Female Cosmogony'" (43). Maud finds him "a gentle and unthreatening being….Meek (156).

They take a trip to the home of Christabel, meeting a surly cousin of Maud's, one who is in possession of the estate and the personal belongings. As he finally agrees to show them Christabel's room, Maud uncannily finds the love letters between Christabel and Ash. Roland and Maud are forced to stay in this unpleasant, cold place due to a snowstorm. Roland eyes the keyhole of the bathroom, and Maud suddenly appears. She is surprised and holds onto his shoulder. "And there it was, what Randolph Henry Ash had called the kick galvanic, the stunning blow like that emitted by the Moray eel (162). They are fully shocked when their bodies touch for the first time. She has come from the water, her flowing and beautiful golden hair is damp, and so too is her translucent white skin covered in a dragon kimono (163). Byatt forces this mimicked key hole incident, but Roland can only see the beauty of Maud, pale and blue dragon or not. This also reflects Melusine's blue tale and white skin. The epic poetry of Christabel's Melusine guarantees the connection:

> How lovely-white her skin her Lord well knew,
> The tracery of blue veins across the snow
> But could not see the beauty in the sheen
> Of argent scale and slate-blue coiling finn. (135)

Their late night touch is electric and possibly terrifying for both of them, and the only difference is that Roland is sure of Maud's unearthly beauty.

It is not long after this that Roland, while being driven by Maud, reminisces on Randolph Henry Ash's Ragnarök poetry. Within, the three sons of the Norse God Odin create the first human male and female from trees in water. She is "crowned with curls of glossy golden hair (263) and one son, the trickster Loki, "Then he saw that she was like himself, yet other; then she saw His smiling face, and by it, knew her own (263). At first, one sees the circular traces of beginning without end as a patriarchal scene, and yet the fact that it is Loki, the trickster of bi-sexuality, and bigendered body, a body that transforms itself repeatedly may undue this patriarchal creation, instead engendering a female whose very existence mimics Loki. Byatt often criticizes Women's Studies, and perhaps she is championing something else entirely here. By creating the first woman resembling Loki, and described similarly to Maud, Christabel and Melusine in circular water by three gods, she is packing a tremendous amount of informational links that, when untangled, may find more in common with an overarching theme of biformed, bigendered human studies than a simple criticism of patriarchy or Women's Studies.

Another similarity to Melusine in d'arras' text is her daily Christian devotions. Maud, in her daily devotion to Women's Studies and renowned scholar, in this small devotional world of ideas that shaped the Academy in the 1980's and 90's, is as fixated on a Big Idea as Melusine would be in her world. Further, Maud is known for her study of Christabel Le Mott from a post- Freudian perspective, this shift to a female-centered world, is iconic for its time, for its questioning of Freud. In addition, it is her daily reading that constitutes its own devotion. Possession is a book intertwined with a near unlimited stash of other books and ideas. Maud speaks to Roland about the daily reading,

> I study – literature because all these connections seem both endlessly exciting and then in some sense dangerously powerful – as though we held a clue to the true

> nature of things?...In every age there must be truths people can't fight – whether or not they want to, whether or not they will go on being truths in the future. We live in the truth of what Freud discovered. Whether or not we like it. However we've modified it. We aren't really free to suppose- to imagine- he could possibly have been wrong about human nature. In particulars surely – but not in the larger plan. (276)

It is important to note that Byatt wrote this book while working as a professor in college. This was a time, twenty years into the making of Feminism and feminist literary theory. By 1983, Joanna Russ published "How to Suppress Women's Writing" that Kolodny discusses as "codified the ways in which historically women's ideas and women's writing had been routinely suppressed, misattributed, misrepresented, and appropriated" (460) - further, Kolodny reports that by the early 80s, "the anxieties that laid the minefield in the seventies and still with us…the male fear of sharing power and significance with women (460). To this end, there is also a need for feminist theorists to step out of "Women's Studies" and become power brokers in the university at large, to live the life instead of just contemplating the theories (462).

For Maud, a true reader and examiner of literature, reading not only connects one to the world of thought, it has the ability for one to fall into a rapture of explanations of the entire world one exists within. This is as addicting as Melusine going to mass every day, and in their world, it is as highly thought of. While it can be read as a straightforward detection and budding romance, Byatt infuses so much nuance, that it is a love story of literature also. It can be read as Maud's direct call back to Melusine in surely upending the purely male superiority in the world of academic scholarship and the university. Maud's incremental steps toward a real end is layered with elongations of circular and winding stories of origins and returns. This spirit of power and freedom does take steps throughout the novel, but it is clear by the end that Maud is stepping out of just

a Women's Studies department and theory to a more powerful place in the university itself.

Although Roland and Maud are electrified at the start for each other, they do not have sex during their detective work. Although they sleep separately, they both dive into the beds in a similar sexual fashion. In addition to the key-hole viewing of Maud and seeing, for a moment, her as dragon, he sees her brooch as another key to Melusine. The brooch is of a mermaid (283). Soon after, a quote by Ash is given "They way that women change: 'tis so:/but you are ever-constant in your changefulness (285). Each physical step of the book mirrors Maud and Melusine. Each step is often followed by a quote matched by Christabel's Melusine poetry "And where the water moved and shook itself/Like rippling serpent-scales(289). The repetition of Maud's movements to the poetry exist to place her as Melusine and place them together, despite their insistence that they just want to be alone: "How good it would be to have nothing. How good it would be to desire nothing (291) is quickly followed by Roland asking Maud to unpin her hair while simultaneously protesting that he is not making a pass (296). She does and "Roland felt as though something had been loosed in himself" (296). She agrees with this feeling. Ash feels the same when he and Christabel decide to be together

> She had been distant and closed away, a princess in a tower, and his imagination's work had been all to make her present…the quickness of her and the mystery, the whiteness of her, which was part of her extreme magnetism, and the green look of those piercing or occluded eyes. (301)

At the moment before they are together, he brings up selkies, "Women from the sea, who come for a time and then must leave". Christabel is a virgin, and, after she becomes pregnant, she will leave and return to Brittany, the home of Melusine, another selkie.

The reader is quickly reminded of Melusine, who comes and then must leave. Roland is physically close to Maud, but she separates from him at each turn. She is also exiled from her true connection to family.

> What are they
> Who haunt our dreams and weaken our desires
> And turn us from the solid face of things?
> Sisters of Horror, or Heav'n's exiled queens (316)…
> She wore a shift of whitest silk. …
> Her living hair was brighter than chill gold
> With shoots of brightness running down its mass. …
> It was a face
> Queenly and calm, a carved face and strong
> Nor curious, nor kindly nor aloof,
> But self-contained and singing to itself. (321)

At this point in the story, Maud is also self-contained and wishes to be alone, yet when she shakes her hair, the proximity to Roland makes her feel sexually attracted to him. As they trace the letters and begin to understand the romance between Ash and Christabel, their proximity arranges for brief touches that consistently set off sparks. At the same time, Roland, while continuing in passive mode and following Maud's guidance is always reading the poetry of his literary leader and seems to be identifying with – and also finds a clarification through the poetry of both to articulate, however slowly, the magnetism of Maud.

As they plan their own getaway: Roland from his live-in lover Val, Maud from Leonora and both from the duo Blackadder and Cropper (the two highest scholars and purchasers of an English and American allotment of Ash's and Christabel's work respectively), they, of course, go to Brittany, following the path that Christabel ran to when she was pregnant and Melusine started. Maud reminds him that "All scholars are a bit mad. And bad. (360). She also has the funds to take them there. She jokingly states

that she will take the top bunk in the stateroom of the ship (361). This playful joke of her being on top is a clear sexual innuendo, but it is also the repetition of her taking charge and her being the guide to his quest. Because he stole the letters, she is also reminding him that they are in this together. In addition, by a reference to Adam forcing Lilith out of Eden when she wanted the top position, Maud is weaving a mythological and literary analysis into their story. For example, is Lilith introduced as a powerful, bi-gendered recall or is Lilith spoken of as a feminist leader? Is Maud's Women's Studies excising patriarchal scholarship or is it another beginning and return or re-reading of scholarship?

When they arrive in Brittany, Maud is given a journal of Christabel's cousin, Sabine. She stayed there while hiding her pregnancy. Sabine is very angry when she realizes that Christabel is pregnant but unwilling to discuss it. Instead they are sitting in the garden and discussing the creation of Melusina of which she was attempting not a historical truth but an imaginative one that will see women differently (404). "she said men see women as double beings, enchantresses or demons or innocent angels – "Are all women double" asks Sabine "I did not say that" Christabel quickly sparks, "I said all men see women as double" (404) The patriarchal structure and history or texts position women as bi-formed and bispirited creatures and this duality always presents an explanation of women as partially evil.

When they return home, Roland feels marginalized because Maud has been paying for everything. He takes a moment to go to his old apartment seemingly to wrap himself in failure once again. Instead he finds several letters outlining promises of great employment. This indicates another link between Maud and Melusine, as these letters indicate that powerful greatness is Roland's due to his time spent with Maud. "Roland

was so used to the pervasive sense of failure that he was unprepared for the blood-rush of success (508). This boosts his confidence and he jokes to himself that one cannot feel successful until someone else thinks they are successful (509). Now that he has been offered true success, he can return to Maud and begin a more balanced love life. When he returns to her, he explains his male anxiety:

> You have your certainties. Literary theory. Feminism. A sort of social ease, it comes out with Euan, a world in which you belong in. I haven't got anything. Or hadn't. And I grew – attached to you. I know male pride is out of date and unimportant, but it mattered. (549)

He also admits that he loves her and despite the fact that they both analyze poetry, neither believes in a dreamy obsession with another – yet, there it is in front of them, "When I see you, you look alive and everything else – fades (550). It is as if they are living their studies and their work theories are keeping them apart. As a feminist, Maud responds that she has built walls, "thresholds. Bastions. Fortresses." (549). So, to come together is difficult and most awkward and yet they continue to circle around each other possessively until they finally wind up in bed.

As to the ideas of circles, Maud has been chasing a confirmation of a romance between Christabel and Ash, and while that is true, has also found her family origins. During the trip, they find out that Christabel had left everything to her sister and daughter. A writer's unpublished work – including letters – would belong to Maud's side of the family as the daughter of Christabel is her great, great, great grandmother (520). Maud will now continue her success as both the scholar of Christabel and fund the library with her family's work.

The ending of the novel is another circle, this time for Ash to meet his daughter, the daughter of two poets and one who does not like poetry. He makes her a crown and

asks her to give her mother (whom she thinks is her aunt) a message, that he will not disturb her. She forgets. He tells her poetry of Greek gods, and positions her as the princess. In this way, as Maud circles her family and circles Melusine, the hint is that both are royalty and both spring from human and nonhuman sources.

TO BE REAL: YDE ET OLIVE

Yde et Olive presents itself as the third in a four-part medieval romance about a young woman who is forced to flee her father, the king of Aragon. In typical quests, the hero must face many challenges, show strength and beauty of character and body, and ultimately win the day. Yde is the granddaughter of Huron, the original king and hero of the series. The series is matrilineal, and each daughter forges her power a step further. In her quest, Yde crosses such inexplicable societal boundaries that many demanded this part of the series to be deleted. At the end of the major conflict, Yde becomes a corporeal male. While many critics see this as a *Deux ex Machina* moment to invoke the seemingly natural demand of the time for heteronormativity, it is just as plausible to see the rupture as a protest or at least a query that there is more to the story than to end Yde's adventures by forcibly setting the sexuality and gender straight. there is more to the story than to end Yde's adventures by forcibly setting the sexuality and gender straight.

There is a lot of confusion and conflict regarding *Yde et Olive*. One is the female homoerotic relationship between the two main characters and the fact that Yde is cross dressing and behaving as a man. There is a dirth of information in ancient and medieval writing about the possibility of bifurcated sexuality. For example, Greek writers such as Aristotle referred to a wide spectrum of those who were called active or passive, in other words, one enters the body of the passive. In this situation, a man might be passive to another man, but all women were always passive, so there were not many articulations of female sexuality other than those deemed active. Those in an active role would be acting in a masculine manner which automatically put them into the monstrous category, so a woman who is acting like a man or, worse, dressing and behaving as a man would, if

caught, be put to death. In this context, only women privileged to be born to a free man could even begin to imagine a more active role in life. And there is little to say about active women in these periods other than the possibility that it could occur.

Regarding the term, "Lesbian," Bernadette Brooten finds that phrases indicating female homosexuality were so rare – Not because women did not engage in eroticism with other women she points out, just that the term itself was rarely used. In Love Between Women, Brooten finds "In the same vein, a medieval commentator on the second-century Christian writer Clement of Alexandria equates tribades, hetairistriai, and Lesbiai (plurals of hetairistria and Lesbia) (9), which is the earliest known attestation of "Lesbian" (literally "a female inhabitant of Lesbos") for a woman erotically oriented toward other women. Latin authors use tribas as a loanword (5). Brooten further argues that it is the overall placement of passivity onto women that blurs the stories that she believes tells of lesbian affairs. It is the subjugation of women during this time that seems less concerned with loving another woman and more concerned with keeping women passively in their place. This conflates any act of active or that which is defined as masculine behavior to be a threat to masculine dominion. Quite frankly, as long as a woman was married to an active male, anything she did on the side was dismissed. But a woman who took on an active role would be abhorrently challenging the male dominion and continuity of heirs. Therefore, she would be acting "Monstrous, lawless, licentious, unnatural, and shameful" (29). Brooten finds that male authors throughout the Roman Empire used these terms to articulate disgust for hints of sexual love between women, not because it didn't exist, but that it challenged a patriarchal hold. One thing that is clear from the start is that Yde's father, the King of Aragon's incestuous desire is worse than

any of Yde's adventures. This foil of wanting to have sex with his daughter versus Yde's escape and actions as a male highlight the former as far more lawless and monstrous an action.

The adventure of Yde begins with two major conflicts at home, her mother dies giving birth to her and, because she grows so closely to resemble the mother, her father, King Florent of Aragon is unnaturally attracted to her. In her developing body, Florent sees his wife and knows that he cannot have another woman.

> Florent said, By my father's soul
> Many high-born men have asked for my daughter's hand
> And I do not know a better man for her to marry
> I will marry her before the month is out.
> I will take her for the love of her mother." 173-177

The court, his followers, are horrified and swear that he will be damned to hell. But "King Florent would stop for nothing" (216) and he has her dressed in her best to see him. Yde is "well formed in every way" (298) with white skin and red mouth and the only thing missing is that her breasts had not formed yet. She cries out that her soul will be damned, but he will not listen to her or to his people, instead he places her into a bath to await his summons. This naked, vulnerable, subjugation ends when Florent is distracted, giving Yde the time to run off in male clothing on the kingdom's best horse.

Yde soon finds herself friends with the German army,

> She was well disguised as a boy
> And had bought hose and hood
> And the finest linen breeches.
> She wore her sword at her side, and also carried a rod. (365-68)

The Germans are on their way to fight the Spanish who are trying to take over the Roman Empire from King Oton. She signs on to serve a commander, "God, the king who created the world, preserve her! She will suffer greatly if she is found out" (409-10). She has

successfully passed her first test: being seen as a real man. She is independent, a free agent in a world that naturally cannot conceive, cannot see a woman in this role. When it is time to fight, surprisingly, a young royal lady will strike with such ferocity that several Spanish of the seven thousand men are dead.

> She had no shield, but she took up her lance
> One Spaniard came forward. She clashed with him
> Shattering his shield
> And tearing his hauberk off his back
> She drove the lance through him
> And struck him down; he would never get up again. (432-37)

This is from someone without any formal training in combat at all. Far removed from the story of Tomoe who was trained to fight since birth and always fought as a woman, Yde is blessed by the Germans this day only because she is seen as a man. It is as if the battle has transformed her into a knight. She is more real, fiercer than the other men. She winds up as the only one on the emperor's side to live and hopes to fight her way to Rome to impress and seek help with Oton against her father.

Yde continues her journey to Rome and is attacked by a band of thieves in the forest. It is clear that she has grown in confidence and strength during the prior battle, as she takes on the leader and manages to pin him within her arms, lift him off the ground and throw him onto a boulder, "nearly splitting his head in two (565). Again, this is a reminder that she has assumed full power and strength, not just as a male, but as a warrior. As she jumps onto her horse, another thief grabs the reins. She whispers to herself, "I must be strong and bold. For I am the daughter of the great King Florent" (580). This is also peculiar, as she is at this moment clearly aligned with the prowess of her father, despite his evil incestuous ways. It appears as if in the forest, with male acquiescence to her realness, each peril will only make her more formidable, more male.

While each sequence of her family's story is led by a female who has a degree of agency, Yde will surpass her mother and grandmother.

Interestingly and despite the amazing power Yde shows in running from her father and winning on the battlefield despite being a woman, this does not necessarily make her in an early feminist. Instead, in her preface to *Gender Trouble*, Judith Butler seems to speak to Yde's transformational growth,

> It seems to me, and continues to seem, that feminism ought to be careful not to idealize certain expressions of gender that, in turn, produce new forms of hierarchy and exclusion. … the aim of the text was to open up the field to the possibility of gender without dictating which kinds of possibilities ought to be realized" (viii)

Butler is clearly concerned that so many hold the ideal of feminism for only certain types of females. Some may read this as Yde's expressions not allowing her to be welcomed as a feminist, especially after her transformation of seemingly becoming male both on and off the battlefield. If she is performing as male, as real as it is, then she is also adopting and continuing a patriarchal agenda. On the other hand, performing as male is both gaining access and showing the rupture points of the patriarchal agenda of her world. In the moments of realness, she can be seen as a possibility in gender expression, the potential of fluidity as both questioning and changing a solely male power structure.

After escaping as the lone survivor of the Germans and the band of thieves, she travels straight to King Oton of Rome. She tells him of the coming Spanish army and seeks refuge. The King stares at her and finds her to be an exemplary male, using male pronouns,

> The king of Rome regarded Yde;
> He saw that he was big, brawny, and well built.
> For this reason, he immediately grew to like him. (623-625)

It would now appear that Yde is not only a hero in battle, but her body has already been fully transformed into a male warrior. This is a most significant moment as it has only been a few months since a young girl turned into a daunting knight. It is not only prowess with a horse and a sword that creates this vision of male splendor, but Yde's body has changed as well, or, at the very least, everyone's perception of this body grants her formidable malehood. Marie Draz understands and articulates in "Realness as Resistance: Queer Feminism, Neoliberalism, and Early Trans Critiques of Butler" that it can then be seen that the emphasis on gender as doing, rather than being, has understandably been influential for those who have sought to undo exclusive gender ontologies that are structured in such a way that membership is taken to simply be a matter of being (Draz). Further, within a Butlerian queer feminist framework, unsettling the stable ontological foundation of gender has been a core tenet. In this framework, taking something that often seems intractable – that is, what gender is, how real it feels – and demonstrating how the appearance is built up over time has been a powerful play to disrupt forms of power that depend precisely on such normalization. (Draz). For Yde, this has worked extremely well on a battlefield. Yde has passed every test of "realness" which unsettles the binary ontology of gender for she not only behaves extraordinarily male but is now looked upon as a real male. It is also through her doing male that creates her new sex in Rome. She has "passed" in the empire.

The plot moves quickly to reveal that the King of Spain is outside Rome and has come to behead Oton and rape his beautiful daughter Olive, because Oton, Like Yde's father will not allow his daughter to marry, and the King of Spain has been greatly insulted by being turned down from an auspicious royal connection. Oton asks Yde to

lead ten thousand men to fight the Spanish. Still using male pronouns, Yde is described as piercing his lance through one of the commanders, "You are vanquished, scoundrel! May God damn you!" she whispers to herself, "Oh, true God, help this poor wretch, who became a man to preserve her honor" speaking of her father's abuse. Again, she travels through the line, cutting off one head of the enemy after another, and another leader comments:

> This is the doing of that blond knight with the unbroken shield
> And the brilliant blazing sword.
> If I had known there was such a knight in Rome,
> I would never for the life of me have come here.
> He has single-handedly won the battle. (795-99)

Not only has Yde's body fully transformed, he appears to be without a scratch despite fighting thousands of trained men. With all of Yde's prayers, which start every conflict, this can also be read as a supernatural interventional moment, for she returns to the kingdom much "beheld and admired" (803). Most of my students are befuddled by this because they center the prayers or requests allowed as diverting from today's Christian outlook against transgender success. They usually ask, why would God intervene and want to turn a woman into a man? They are often confused by the Butlerian concept of doing a gender creates a gender. Further, Olive has now fallen in love with the conquering hero and Yde seems to return this love, thereby seemingly disrupting the typical Christian of today who may be locked into a heteronormative perception of both sexuality and sex.

Joan Ferrante, in *Woman as Image in Medieval Literature*, describes the high Middle Ages as a time when a conflicting image of women was often created. In other words, for a short period of time, women were seen as receiving special attention and

power from their God, a power that would soon be reverted to men. Ferrante writes of Abelard, who takes the cliches of bad women and turns them around. For example, it is women who first see Jesus leaving the cave. Ferrante interprets Abelard when he discussed the prayers of women wiping out the sins of man as their virtuous moments pleasing God more than the prayers of men (24). Furthermore, it was Elizabeth who recognized God in the womb of Mary while her son had to wait until after the birth. In many such examples, women can see through to the truth more quickly and more miracles are therefore displayed to women, even before they happen. In this reading, Yde, who is acting as a real man, may be given the superpower of becoming a man because she prays so intently and, interestingly, because she is a woman, and this miracle would save her life. At the same time, perhaps Olive perceives the corporeal man who will become Yde and not just the perception of maleness. "The woman [Olive] is usually the first to feel love, the first to express it, and the instigator of the action that leads to its consummation" (74). It is important to note that Ferrante is only discussing texts and writers of this story's century, by the mid-thirteenth century, women return to a much more negative image. It is interesting to take the lens of the twelfth and early thirteenth century and place it over today's Christian right wing's negative imaging of women and all behavior that is not strictly of a binary and heteronormative action. In that case, Olive may be loving a pre-male and Yde may be experiencing the strength of female prayers for intersession. In addition, it assigns power to both women, and, therefore, strongly protests the seemingly male hierarchy and heteronormativity expected of a passive female.

The next power turn of Yde is to be given to Olive, accepted as a son now of Oton. Upon the return of Yde to Oton's castle, the knights dramatically relate the success story to the King:

> He had proven himself within a single year
> And delivered the whole country.
> He had killed some men and wounded others,
> That he had ensured the safety of the land and the kingdom. (820-24)

This is a man to whom King Oton owes everything and thereby commands Yde to marry Olive and bequests his kingdom to him as future king. Thus, the final climax begins as Yde realizes that she cannot get away again; she is still a prisoner in a man's world, and "she had no member which would allow her to dwell with Olive" (883). So, the story naturally arrives to the crux of the matter: despite the "realness" of manliness in Yde, she cannot consummate the marriage and might be killed because of it.

Another way of reading this climax is found in *Bodies That Matter*. Butler questions the constancy and irrefutable of the Freudian and then Lacanian heterosexual identification "What is then outside the law, before the law, has been relegated there by and through a heterosexist economy that disempowers contestatory possibilities by rendering them culturally unthinkable and unviable from the start." While Yde cannot imagine having active sex with Olive, the interesting following fifteen wedding nights are where Olive learns the truth and swears her loyalty to Yde and to this marriage, despite the fact that both will die if this fact is found out. Their relationship is physical but remains hidden. So, their physical relationship is a contestatory possibility, extremely viable within their bedroom. Olive comforts Yde, kisses Yde, "swears to the holy Virgin," and expresses her true loyalty:

> I will not tell my father, King Oton,
> My Lord who gave me to you.
> Take Comfort,
> For you are safe in loyalty.
> I will face my destiny together with you. (998-1002)

These declarative sentences are forceful utterances of love. In fact, Robins finds that "the history of female homoeroticism" is "largely inconceivable" and this category are "practically non-existent" (44). This invisibility will not end the story because, at this time in history, female homoeroticism is too "embedded in a social framework of male dominance and heterosexual normativity that is stubbornly persistent" (46). Further, until their speeches are public and understood, they are both restricted in this tale to private or altered speech. "Altering forms of communication might enable women, especially lesbians to cast off discursive categories" that are male dominated and always gendered. On the other hand, these fifteen nights allow authenticity and "sets the conditions for a clandestine community" where Yde "can utter the truth of her identity" as "coherence of identity is always tied to the capacity to speak overtly" (53). This moment, like others in the story, has strong implications of coherence and authenticity, Yde is "real" in all of these moments. Their love and loyalty expressed to each other is real while Yde is not a corporeal male yet.

And what exactly is real? For Yde, it is a thousand repetitions of behaviors during the two years since she first put on male clothing. Both in the reading of Butler and similar to the Balls which created a sense of the Real in their contests of female to male and male to female presentations.

> Thus, realness names a specific theatrical gender-bending methodology performers deploy at a ball to unmark their bodies as sexually queer and/or "gender nonconforming or as transgender" and visually present themselves within a racially and socioeconomically specific form of heteronormativity they do not

personally embody. (Bailey 59; 55)

In the same way that heteronormativity of Freud and Lacan is cemented through the utterance, naming, and fear of the Father, Yde's opposition to her father is taken in over a thousand small steps all leading to a separate gender performance that is becoming real throughout the poem. In addition, her marriage and sexual performance with Olive contests the domination of the normative in each utterance and stroke.

Unfortunately, while Yde and Olive are finding each other in private, they are overheard. The King is told, and, in public, we are reminded of the fear of the symbolic and actual father as he calls Yde to the court:

> "You will remove all your clothes.
> If what I was told is true,
> will have you both burned at the stake."
> Yde trembled, and Olive gasped. (1029-32)

Yde is forced to undress, and the courtiers want her and Olive burned at the stake. As the final conflict reveals, at this moment the power of discourse is surprisingly seen higher than a king, for an angel of God appears and commands Oton to allow Yde to bathe and she will arise as a real man. "This morning she was a woman, but now he is a man incarnate. For God has power and might over everything" (1051-52). This is the most complicated moment. One might think of Oton as the epitome of rule and law, for he is the highest power on earth and the laws are clear that woman who dress and act as men will burn. One might also think of *Deux ex Machina*, as the convenient angel has set Yde to rights in the patriarchal world, and it is a quick fix. On the other hand, the building up in small ways as Yde as male throughout the story certainly allows for another interpretation. Has she been rewarded from God for her valor and honor? She appears much more honorable than both fathers. As in the death of Joan of Arc, another cross

dresser, it would appear to be the most sensible thing to do. Allowing her to live and becoming male incarnate is a rare find in any medieval text. This complication, albeit from an angel, does seem to indicate a gate within the patriarchal circle of right. One can say that her crossing indicates a suture point in that same circle. Not only does she live, but Olive bears a male child to inherit both kingdoms. So, the next series, Croissant, the baby, will have all power, but has been conceived by two women in love, another rarity in medieval texts, and a cross dressing woman who truly becomes a male. If Yde has been passing in the Real, he has now passed right through that suture point. It is impossible to accept this purely as a return to the norm of the gender and sexuality system of the Middle Ages as the angel has used language as command to stop Oton from doing what would have been the natural: the killing of an active woman, the killing of a monstrous woman. Turning Yde into the corporeal male begins questions of discourse and protests of the culture. This series ends with more questions than expected for, in many ways, Yde has been becoming a male long before the edict of the Angel.

As Marlon Bailey discusses in "Theorizing the Gender System in Ballroom Culture": What ballroom members refer to as "realness" has remained the basis for the fundamental performance criteria in the culture throughout the several decades that it has been in existence. It is a set of performance criteria, a strategy, and, as I argue, a useful analytic concept that emerges from the ballroom community. Realness requires adherence to certain performances, self-presentations, and embodiments that are believed to capture the authenticity of particular gender and sexual identity (377).

In *Paris is Burning* there is a clear call back to the sense of "realness" that exists in *Yde et Olive*. The 1970s through present Latin balls were the first to create a space

where one would be awarded with trophies and more importantly safety and prestige for the ability to pass into the Real of the opposite sex. There were many categories to place into, but the one that fits most closely is the concept of Real. Striving for awards became a weekly endeavor and created families of LGBTQ members. Most were street kids adopted by a mother who ruled the house.

> Many of my ballroom interlocutors expressed feeling particularly vulnerable to race, gender, and sexual violence because their queer gender and sexualities signal to a would-be assailant that queers can be robbed… queer people do not freely choose the neighborhoods or urban spaces in which they live and move; therefore, they must draw upon their creative resource and beaten, even murdered, with impunity. (Bailey, 366)

This point is similar to Yde's life as she needed to escape a house of violence and then was forced to live amongst violence, while, simultaneously always terrified of being found out and killed. This applies well to Bailey's point that it is crucial in both of these instances to "unmark" the body of the opposite gender when alone. This passing creates a moment of safety in a violent world, "a necessary strategy by which to avoid discrimination and violence in the urban space" (366). Yde as a would-be male could not freely choose her environment from the beginning to the end of the story and from beginning to end was subject to would be assailants and always vulnerable to gender and sexual violence.

Paris is Burning opens on the street to show two men on their way to the ball discussing how hard life is on the outside. Another opening clip is of two very young boys who idolize the older men, one, aged fifteen, is living on the street and hopes to perform and be taken in by a Ball family. It is not surprising to then see the repetition of the young boys hoping to find peace within adoption into a Ball family. The boy who is fifteen is the same age as Yde, when her flight begins. They are both in danger and seek

protection. Soon, we see another boy creating an outfit for a member of his family, "It helps when someone is in your corner" (Livingston, 1990). The young teenagers who are adopted serve to help the House and are rewarded with protection.

In these first scenes we meet Pepper LaBeija, Mother of the House of Lebeija "I've been around for decades, Reigning" (Livingston 1990) Labeija explains what a Mother is:

> Do you want me to say who I am and all of that?
> "I'm Pepper LaBeija, and.., Oh.
> I'm Pepper LaBeija, the legendary mother of the House of LaBeija.
> Not the founder. Crystal was the founder. I'm...
> I just rule it now, with a soft glove.
> And its important to me to be the mother, cause there's so many little kids that I have to look out for. (Livingston, 1990)

LaBeija, daughter of founder Crystal, ruled the House for thirty years until her death in 2003. This can be seen as an emotional Mother, one where the family does not necessarily live together but always helps each other out. In a world where many of the children are turned out of their biological houses and frequently live on the streets, these Houses serve as a safe place to be openly LGBTQ+ and to be accepted. This is the opposite of the outside world, where they can be killed or, at the very least, hurt for who they are. Mothers are frequently interviewed in *Paris is Burning*, either because they walk the ballroom floor and compete or are there to bring a new child to compete in the Ball. On this comparison, Yde is not safe with her biological father, who wishes to marry her, but is only safe with the German commander or the King of Rome when she enacts her realness as a man.

In this comparison, Yde is more akin to what is known as Banjee Realness. Banjee is a category of a walk in which the overtly lGBTQ+ person walks as seemingly straight person, an over-the-top expression of buff and tough straightness.

> And that is like a fulfillment
> To be able to blend.
> That's what realness is.
> If you can pass the untrained eye, or even the trained eye, and not give away the fact that you are gay, that's when it's realness. (Livingston, 1990)

Yde is blending and then not giving away to the untrained eye of everyone she comes across. After leaving her home and assuming male clothing, she is one unclothed step removed from being killed for passing. In the world outside of the ballroom, it is often a place where a person must blend and pass, again, often one step removed from hurt. This is especially true for males who are seen as queens.

> Poor or working-class Black queer people do not freely choose the neighborhoods or urban spaces in which they live and move; therefore, they must draw upon their creative resources to survive homophobic and transphobic violence." (Bailey,377)

In this sense, Yde, despite being a princess, may be seen as a marginalized female who is surviving homophobic and transphobic violence by passing as male. Violence surrounds her in this world that she did not choose. This violence will rain upon her if she fails to pass.

In the ballroom of *Paris is Burning*, despite an equal number of women who present themselves as male, Livingston chose to focus on a male body passing as fully female.

> When they're undetectable,
> when they can walk out of that ballroom into the sunlight
> and onto the subway and get home
> and still have all their clothes and no blood running off their bodies,
> those are the femme realness queens. (Livingston, 1990)

In this instance, it is important to note that this category is reserved for those who still have a penis, fully transgender would be a disqualification for this category in the ballroom. This constant interplay between the body seen as another gender has been and remains a constant of the term Real. Bailey finds that is an "embodiment" that captures authenticity (377).

In this case, having the Real can win awards and a level of fame while living the Real is often one step from danger. In *Paris is Burning*, the reader meets Venus Extravaganza. She introduces herself and discusses her dreams and her life:

> Some of them say that we're sick, we're crazy, and some of them think that we are the most gorgeous, special things on earth….
> I would like to be a spoiled, rich white girl.
> They get what they want whenever they want it, and they don't have to really struggle with finances and nice things, nice clothes, and they don't have to... have that as a problem….
> I don't feel that there's anything mannish about me, except maybe what I might have between me down there. (Livingston, 1990)

Venus expresses her desire to be seen as pure white, to marry, and to live in a house. She has a self-described extremely soft and petite body with manmade blonde hair and light skin. While the others state that balls open at 5:00 am because most of them survive through sex work, Venus denies this and puts forth that she has many male friends who give her money without sex "95% of the time" because they want to see her in pretty dresses.

> You know, they'd like feeling that they're with something perfect and little, and not someone that's bigger than them, because I guess that kind of disturbs them. But I don't have to go to bed with him or anything like that.
> At times they do expect sexual favors, but that is between myself and them, so I do not wish to further speak about that — if they do. (Livingston, 1990)

Venus explains a time that she had to jump out of a window to escape the angry person who had reached down and found her penis. But she is also described by her House

Mother as someone who is wild and takes extreme chances such as frequently going into stranger's cars. "Actually, they found her dead after four days, strangled under a bed in a sleazy hotel in New York City" (Livingston 1990). A lot has been spoken and criticized about the fact that *Paris is Burning* drops this into the end of the movie. However, it was handled for the movie, it can be seen as an example of just how high the stakes once were and remain today of enacting the Real in real life. As Butler explains in *Notes Toward a Performative Theory of Assembly*, the body "in its struggle with precarity and persistence" exhibits its "value" and "the political" (18). These people in this movie continue to exist to protest the heteronormative power structure which sometimes kills them.

Another transgender person, Octavia Saint Laurent, is seen on a magazine as she is a model. She is first interviewed amidst a camera shot in a tiny bikini:

> I want people to look at me as there's the model Octavia.
> There's the actress Octavia.
> There's Miss Supermodel of the World Octavia.
> Is this endless, this catalog of poses?
> I could keep going longer than you could. (Livingston, 1990)

Soon, she is seen at a huge modeling interview at the local mall given by Ford Models for Supermodel of the Year. There are women all around her, trying for their big break. Octavia is in and out of the stores and then waiting her turn, completely passing.

> I want to be a complete woman, and I want to be a professional model behind cameras in the high fashion world.
> I want so much more. I want...
> I want my name to be a household product.
>
> I want everybody to look at me and say, "There goes Octavia"
>
> I want this. This is what I want. (Livingston, 1990)

Octavia becomes an activist in her real life. She identifies as intersex and champions those who identify as such. The documentary had people recognizing her and wanting to meet her, and she used that to ensure that as she spoke up for others. The documentary also provoked wildly positive and negative reviews. It was created at the foreground of Queer and Transgender Studies, so a lot of what was pulled into the reviews focused less on the effect of the stars' struggles and more on what the reviewers' own lens happened to be.

One of the strongest criticisms was that Livingston, a white cisgendered lesbian, had no right to create a film with participants of color at best and a sense of sadistic voyeurism at worst. On the other hand, the very fact that a documentary was made spotlighting one portion of the LGBTQ+ community speaks to a right to visual representation and demonstration. Further, it can be seen as a protest to hegemonic heteronormativity and a celebration at the suture site of same. In this light, what might be the most important review is from an LGBTQ+ person,

> The film matters to many of its viewers, particularly those who have been starved for images of lives with which can they identify and that validate their right to exist and inspire alternative ways of being in the world. (Hildebrand)

Hildebrand also notes that the recent screening on the pier near Stonewall presents the documentary to the future community as a site of both celebration and recognition of the dangers that still exist today for this community. While Bell Hooks reviews seems lost in the identity of the creator and finding male drag as misogynistic, Butler examines and questions the idea of parodic performativity as its own protest to the societal demands for heteronormative and patriarchal systems.

> The law might not only be refused, but it might also be ruptured, forced into a rearticulation that calls into question the monotheistic force

of its own unilateral operation. (82)

If a thousand repetitions of the unwritten but always verbalized laws of "hegemonic heterosexuality" constitute the societal framework of what is demanded in a lens of two sexes, then drag and ballroom staging the Real show that "drag is not a secondary imitation that presupposes a prior and original gender, but that hegemonic heterosexuality is itself a constant and repeated effort to imitate its own idealizations" (85). Hegemonic heterosexuality is ultimately a performance of idealization not the real at all, but a cultural construct, not an originary point but a creation serving to create a boundary around itself. A boundary that can be lethal when crossing as seen in the brutal killing of Venus Extravaganza and the attempted murder of Yde and Olive.

It is in these two that one can find the brutal reality when one crosses the boundary of the powerful production of hegemonic heteronormativity. At the same time, Yde is given opportunities that Venus cannot achieve. Yde passes as male, performs as male, and is created a body of male. But Yde's entire performance and burgeoning male hood also, like Venus, questions the idealization of such unwritten laws and boundaries. One could surmise that if Venus also underwent surgery, she too would be more likely to survive with a corporeal body that matched her identity, as long as her Real continued to exist. For in the end of *Paris is Burning,* we find one successful transfer who is living as an actual woman as the Real has become real (Livingston 1990). Is ending the documentary this way, another view of racism and genderism or may it be that in achieving the impossible (as Yde does), it serves as both a celebration and protest of the prescribed normativity and social constructs of the medieval culture and the dominant culture of 1987?

LUCIA: TRANSPORTING, TRANSFORMING, AND DECENTERING

When Santa Lucia becomes an eagle and swoops in to transport Dante from the antechamber to Purgatory proper in Canto 9, her once human body is at first in animal transformation and then conjoins to supra-human powers. This silent moment speaks volumes of the full range of human expression and illustrates through metaphor the simultaneous ineffability of such transcendence. While the living Dante is mapping out a Catholic cosmic eternity and system of justice in 1315, he is also explaining the terror of change, as the character has dreamed himself into an ancient abduction by Jove, the god of all gods; conversely and simultaneously, Virgil, his comfort, his guide, is watching Santa Lucia gently holding Dante while simply walking up the flight of stairs, quite the foil.

So, what is the meaning of the transportation scene of Canto 9 Purgatory? Notably, this is the first dream in the Commedia, despite the frequent fainting in Hell. There are many Dante scholars who have attempted to explain this scene within their explanations of the Commedia. Many insist it mirrors a Paulinian conversion (as Saul was also knocked out) trip to Heaven, and Dante swears it is a real trip. Others such as Ferrante and Barolini attempt a theologizing moment to return to the mastery of the poetry to create the poet's vision. Auerbach explains the Medieval approach to veritas as one which focuses on the historical characters and events that speak to truths of the future, the literal prophecies from the Bible. He hints that the vision of the eagle is one not of Christ or God but of the soul transforming. The allusions to rape are trying to

explain the soul in transition, of humans giving up a historical land, and the stripping away of the corporeal self, thereby explaining all that is lost during your typical human rapture (72). In addition, he notes that central controversial passages in the Commedia such as this one can have a figure that serves to stand for a historical real life and a meaning in the ever-present kingdom of God that is veiled until one enters the kingdom (67). This additional thought creates the space where Lucia can be read historically as a real person, hagiographically as a patron of Dante, and additionally as analogies that are veiled, thereby always open to new interpretations and yet must be hinged to Dante's belief systems. Ginsberg focused more on the biblical implications – its symbolic manifestation of divine grace. Teodolinda Barolini finds that while Dante's conceptualization of sin, and thus ultimately of hell, is firmly embedded within orthodox theological tradition, his representation of hell — and thus implicitly his theology of hell — is frequently idiosyncratic to the point of being heterodox. Singleton strongly recommends that it is representative of mankind's restless soul trying to find truth. In this manner, Singleton would disagree with Barolini in finding that every word in the poem serves to create the whole and can be understood if one has a deep knowledge of theology.

> Thus the image of Satan has symbolic meaning not merely within the frame of a particular creature's punishment, but as part of the order and symmetry of the whole cosmic plan. (74)

Thomas Aquinas (Summa Theologica) puts forward – and may be one of most critics' biggest influence for many continue to repeat that all humans learn by grace and reason – the soul is moved obliquely – Dante's dream is one of grace followed by Virgil's explanation of reason; therefore, it is often taken as first base in the explanation. Mazzeo

(Structure and Thought in the Paradiso 1958) adds that the dream is one of intellectual understanding through the visual metaphor. Ginsberg (1982) adds that Lucia is the transporter but the vision of the eagle is the transportation device – in other words, Dante sees an eagle as his visual metaphor but he misunderstands his dream until Virgil, with reason, points out that Lucia is gently carrying him. Most of these scholars do agree in part with one another, especially as to the acknowledged fact that Dante was creating a vision, a way of explaining the world, and their ending contemplations do not overtly clash. But the meaning of the initial moment in Purgatory can be enriched with additional interpellations that question the basic two-gender and human centeredness. These questions do not challenge Dante's explanation of the world but hope to change the reflection of Lucia and add to her role of transporter, gentle mother, ferocious eagle, and ancient god.

In Canto Nine, Dante is asleep, and it is close to a new day in the antechamber of Purgatory. Sleep allows one to escape the body filled with reason and jump towards grace, and this then allows the mind or the soul to fully engage in an outside of body experiential and prophetic musing:

> And when our mind, far straying from the flesh
> Less tangled in the network of its thoughts
> Becomes somehow prophetic in its dreams. (Nine, 16-18)

Lucia will be seen as this transporter to grace for she is Dante's patron saint. Cassell points out both her and Dante's history:

> Santa Lucia bears more than one symbolic or allegorical meaning in the poem: like all virgin martyrs, she is an exemplum of steadfastness, or fortitudo, but, more particularly (and again not exclusively), she also symbolizes the light of grace. (72)

Every critic speaks to the polysemous and allegorical complexities of the *Commedia*; each with their own specific point. While little is known about her actual life, it is hardly surprising then to see the historical Lucia as one with strength and grace, enough fortitude to endure her torture in the early fourth century (Catholic.org). Her story becomes legend and soon after she becomes a saint; her name relates to light, and her hagiography relates to sight, therefore making here an excellent choice of the sign to illume the path to paradise from a Catholic reading.

But Lucia moves in the dark to take him to the light; Dante is asleep, and her placement in the antechamber of Purgatory is complex from the very start. In the same spirit, becoming Dante's transporter is a natural fit in his world; simultaneously, further complexity begins when her pronouns move to "it" and then "him" as her body changes to eagle and then a male god:

> Dreaming, I saw Him {that would be Santa Lucia} circle for a while,
> Then terrible as lightening, he struck down,
> Swooping me up, up to the sphere of fire. (Nine 28-30)

And

> I seemed to find myself in that same place
> Where Ganymede was forced to leave his friends
> Caught up to serve the conclave of the gods. (22-24)

One can't help but picture Dante held prone by the eagle, about to be abducted and swooped up into a ring of fire. Is this foreshadowing the fire that will purify and terrify him in later Purgatory? There may also be a prophetic vision here – as nearly everyone else has noted and Dante repeats throughout the Commedia, perhaps the painful Saul to Paul rapture, a physical lesson in a dream to connote the anguished path of the human journey to enlightenment. Can the transformational and transitional moment be akin to Jovian or Godlike Rapture? It can be a hint that one must leave pagan gods and beliefs

behind through a fiery journey as they are still in the antechamber, close to the fires of Hell, and not Purgatory proper. Although Dante supposedly cannot be hurt on this journey, he is brutalized in the dream, so much so that he still feels the effects upon awakening.

Dante is seeing in a dream his transportation on another level – from the ante chamber and through purgatory – ushered by Santa Lucia – and onto the fiery pain of those who willingly subject themselves: The Pilgrims mind has absorbed all the sensuousness and aimlessness of the Ante purgatory – consequently he translates his ascent to the gates of purgatory in Santa Lucia's arms…into the pagan tale of the beautiful young boy whom Jove, disguised as an eagle, and burning with desire, snatched up from the top of Mount Ida – because Dante sees this sexually, it is clear (at least to him) that he is still in great need of purification – a burning by fire. In addition to the sexuality, there is also the hint of what is to come, when Dante will be forced (and note that just as he is terrified in the dream, he remains fearful to the end of Purgatory) to enter the fire itself as a final step of cleansing the body.

Another complexity is that this moment in Canto 9 is actually the third reference to rape and the second reference to abduction and possibly rape and harm by a god. In the opening lines Tithonus is alluded to, and his story is a love affair with – in which she begs the gods for him to live eternally, but she forgets to mention that he should remain youthful. He winds up aging to such an extent that he is left with just a voice. The second allusion is to Philomela who is raped and then has her tongue cut out by her brother-in-law. At the moment of the rape, he swoops her as an eagle would. She manages to weave the truth onto a canvas. The final allusion is Dante to Ganymede. Spillenger finds that

Dante as Ganymede is snatched, because of the power and beauty of his art, into a new poetry, leaving his fellows and erstwhile peers far below; Dante's Philomela turns what cannot be spoken into something that yet may be read; and Dante's Tithonus, whose namesake is the deathless victim of divine caprice, lives on as a figure of alternative in a "sinister, Borgesian forking path, forever dissolving into words" (140). In this reading of the Canto, Dante the poet is piling allusion after allusion to form a puzzle that many will misunderstand. At the same time, he is also always aware that his art will reveal the truth of his plan. Like Philomela, he is violently taken and is speechless at first, and like her, his words are art.

But is there something more which is intimated with these vivid and complex words? Spillenger notes that it was common for Medieval writers to believe that prophecy comes in a dream at dawn – so the Canto serves to offer signs that Dante will be stripped of his human qualities, and painfully so, as he journeys to find the answers to life in this story. "Medieval allegorizers loved to find binary oppositions in the fictions they read because of their adaptability to the essential contraries of the Christian faith: sin and virtue, body and soul, God and man, truth and falsity, caritas and luxuria , etc." (130). There has long been an argument about whether this scene is happening at the rise of the moon or the rise of the sun, but the binary oppositions of this, while analyzed to this day, may speak more to the allusion to Dawn as the god that is at fault and faulty in her requests. Further, it does add something to questioning the binaries involved when a female god is abducting, raping and harming a human male, and a female saint becomes an animal and then becomes a male god abducting another male. While the discussion

and acceptance of binaries serving as symbols for Christians within the *Commedia* continues, there remains a caesura of discourse on the large space between such binaries.

Lucia has become a male eagle, terrible, fearsome, and awful as lightening striking – and Lucia has become Jove. It deserves additional examinations of the metaphor, for even if it is more about Dante, and his humanness, his I am barely out of the earth or hell-yet-ness, there is no need to make Lucia male, any gender transport would do. There is a dearth of information about this moment, let alone the pronouns and gender, perhaps because there is an assumption that making Lucia the gender that Dante would be likely to see in a god, as we always see angels as male (all angels are male in the Bible, but one of obscure androgyny). That does make some sense, but it is still not enough of an explanation.

> Swooping me up, up to the sphere of fire
> And there it seemed the bird and I both burned… (9, 30-31)

Dante has not yet broken his worldliness, The translator Mark Musa sees this moment as clearly portentous and wide (102): Dante is seeing in a dream his transportation on another level – from the ante chamber and through purgatory – ushered by Santa Lucia – and onto the fiery pain of those who willingly subject themselves: The Pilgrims mind has absorbed all the sensuousness and aimlessness of the Ante purgatory – consequently he translates his ascent to the gates of purgatory in Santa Lucia's arms…into the pagan tale of the beautiful young boy whom Jove, disguised as an eagle, and burning with desire, snatched up from the top of Mount Ida – because Dante sees this sexually it is clear that he is still in great need of purification – a burning by fire.

In addition to the sexuality, there is also the hint of what is to come, when Dante will be forced (and note that just as he is terrified in the dream, he remains fearful to the end of Purgatory) to enter the fire itself as a final step of cleansing the body.

Dante's sleep is broken and he startles –

I turned the deathly color of a man

Feeling the freezing grip of fright on him. (41-42)

Yet, upon seeing Virgil, his comfort and his reason – he also thinks of himself as Achilles being carried by his mother – "from where the Greeks would lure him finally" (Nine, 39) So, in this world, it is reasonable for Virgil to explain that Lucia was actually and gently carrying Dante up the steps to Purgatory proper while Dante was having a nightmare. Even the reasonable explanation details a mother dipping her son into what will make him stronger than others yet ending with a death due to his heel being uncovered (the one she held to dip him). Are Lucia and Virgil making Dante mostly impervious to pain while leaving a gap for change? Dante will feel pain mentally and physically in Purgatory as he moves upward towards the lessons of enlightenment. That does explain some of the complexity found here and places Lucia more firmly as the best to transition him.

While it is sensible to read Dante's transportation scene as just a Jovian abduction (he is leaving the pagans behind in Hell) or a true Heavenly rapture and conversion (he is on his way to Paradise), this particular type of pattern-making would curtail as opposed to honor the wider connotations at play; instead, reading the transportation as passing beyond human borders of gender (Lucia performs as male), sexuality (Dante thinking himself as Ganymede perplexingly intimates Jovian ravishment) and animal (Lucia

begins the swoop as eagle) may then elicit welcoming signals to all who are placed beyond boundaries. After all, polysemy is everywhere in the *Commedia*.

Finding the many ways in which this text has been examined allows one to find the caesura of questioning the meaning behind the change in gender and the passing of human expressed within the text. One such gap is the gap between binaries of female and male, for it is no doubt that Lucia performs as male. Another is answering why Lucia is an eagle and a god in the dream? Is it just an allegory to perform the transportation or does it take on nuance in the switch? The final gap is the premise of *Trasumanar,* for if the character Dante inhibits a world filled with the passing of human, then every step is one transgressing the notion of human.

To answer the first question, it is helpful to turn to Susan Stryker. At a California State Academic Conference, "Rage Across the Disciplines" in 1993, there were several heated discussions, especially between feminists, heteronormative thinkers, and transgender people. Stryker belonged to Transgender Nation – "a militantly queer direct action transexual advocacy group" (244) and wanted to perform the intense emotions cursing through "replicating our abrupt often jarring transitions between genders" (245). The activism of this intersection spotlights Stryker in warrior drag.

> I stood at the podium wearing genderfuck drag – combat boots, threadbare Levi 501s over a black lace bodysuit, a shredded Transgender Nation Tshirt with the neck and sleeves cutout, a pink triangle, quartz crystal pendant, grunge metal jewelry, and a six inch long marlin hook dangling around my neck on a heavy stainless steel chain I decorated the set by draping my black leather biker jacket over my chair.…stickers reading SEX CHANGE, DYKE, and FUCK YOUR TRANSPHOBIA. (245)

As a male to female, it is curious that her audience was not necessarily filled with

feminine advocates. From the second wave of feminism, 1963 – 1990, especially during the 1980s, many women were arguing for "a reevaluation of traditional gender roles in society and an end to sexist discrimination. That is where the curiosity begins, but a number of both female and male academics were discussing the idea of Transgender and frequently finding it an attack on women and a cementing of patriarchal notions as opposed to opening a spectrum between the male-female binary. Janice Raymond was one of the most vocal at this point in time and voiced that since 85% of operations are male to female, these "creations" did not belong as feminists:

> Ultimately transsexual surgery reinforces social conformity by encouraging the individual to become an agreeable participant in a role-defined society, substituting one sex role stereotype for the other. The medical solution becomes a. "social tranquilizer" reinforcing sexism and its foundation of sex-role conformity. (intro, xvii)

So, a vehement argument was voiced by feminists stating that men were coopting the most rigid stereotypes which further clarified a male dominant role:

> By repudiating the claim that men become women through transsexual treatment and surgery, I was charged with promoting gender essentialism instead of destroying it. (xix) They purport to be the real thing. And our suspension of disbelief in their synthetic nature is required as a moral imperative. (xxiii)

Finally, Raymond argues that it is morally imperative to refute the ability of a female to turn into a male by discussing the case of Leslie Feinberg who stops taking male hormones only to

> finally devolve into a long-suffering self-surrender to being other—not a woman who is a butch and not a woman who tries to pass as a man with the help of hormones and surgery, but a transgendered individual who identifies as simply other. (Xxxii)

It is this charge by Raymond and others which ignites the flame of Stryker. It is also an extreme case of the monsterization of males who have had surgery to become women or

females who have done the same to become male. This act of othering is a profoundly cruel intolerance of the seismic shift that transgender offers to the binary of sex. Stryker quotes Raymond "the problem of transgenderism would best be served by morally mandating it out of existence." In her performance, Stryker mentions that this intolerance is caused by fear,

> The attribution of monstrosity remains a palpable characteristic of most lesbian and gay representations of transsexuality. … Because transsexuality more than any other transgender practice or identity represents the prospect of destabilizing the foundational presupposition of fixed genders upon which a politics of personal identity depends. (245)

Raymond's identity as a woman, especially a gay feminist, cannot allow for a transgender woman to coexist. She and others are "panicked" in this moment according to Stryker and that is the root cause of their stigmatization of all transsexuals, monsterizing them as becoming Frankenstein's monster. It is this type of "pejorative labeling" that inspires hatred and the violence committed against transgender people. In addition, the displacement of them as real people cause such excruciating psychological pain that they are more prone to hurt themselves. Stryker gives the case of Filisa Vistima as an example of one who was pushed to death because of her exclusion by Seattle's gay community. Vistima, a transgender bisexual female, worked for The Lesbian Resource Center and she actually tabulated the member data who were voting her out for being male to female, and Stryker finds this intolerance the cause of her suicide (246).

Stryker, in 1993, has come to "lay claim to my monstrous identity" (246). In an act of reclamation of the pejorative, Stryker now owns its power, "By embracing and accepting them, even pilling them one on top oof another, we may dispel their ability to harm us" (246). In fact, using the Latin term for "monster" reveals the word to be a

"divine portent" and such serves to "announce impending revelation, saying in effect, 'pay attention: something of profound importance is happening' " (247). This insightful self-declaration throws "monster" back at the audience and simultaneously redefines those who are called monstrous as actually new beings on the spectrum of sex, a most portentous moment that develops the idea that a transgender person is only unwelcome because their very existence disrupts and potentially displaces binary normativity.

Stryker makes this very same point exactly when stating

> I call upon you to investigate your nature as I have been compelled to confront mine. I challenge you to risk abjection and flourish as well as have I. Heed my words, and you may well discover the seams and sutures in yourself. (247)

At the heart of the insults and misconceptions that monsterized these differences prior to and in the 1990s is a constructed model of presumed heteronormativity and patriarchal rules. For example, bodies that were "normal" were prescribed binaries of female and male with preset behavior that correlated. If a person were identified as male at birth, it would grow to perform as set constructs of what a male should look like and act like.

Stryker moves and links the dialogue toward the birth of her child by her wife.

> Birth rituals work to prepare the self for a profound opening, an opening as psychic as it is corporeal. Kim's body bought this ritual process to a dramatic resolution for her, culminating in a visceral cathartic experience. But my body left me hanging. (250)

Stryker compares this birth to her own son's, which occurred when her body was male. She mourns the loss of visibility, even though what was visible was not reality. It is important to remember that Stryker's transition occurred at a time when the American Psychiatric Association had only recently removed Homosexuality as an illness in the 1987 DSM and then replaced it with "Gender Dysphoria." Being in the medicalized

environment of birth, could only serve to remind Stryker of the prejudices of that institution, one which controls the ability to grant someone a new corporeal existence while simultaneously claiming that this person is ill. Being in this environment is also a reminder that it is doctors who proclaim the sex of child. Stryker's high price of self-representation included many stark moments of invisibility. Often misunderstood, often seen as not real would be "maddeningly difficult to bear" (251).

> To encounter the transexual body, to apprehend a transgendered consciousness articulating itself, is to risk the revelation of the constructedness of the natural order. (252)

Stryker is amplifying Judith Butler's claims of performativity in *Gender Trouble* of 1990 by redirecting monstrous claims back to all of the originators, as their "seams and sutures' hint of rupture at the margins of limitations, prescriptions, and prejudice. At the same time, it is a signification that a consciousness of the flexibility spanning the spectrum of gender is possible and possibly standing before the audience. And when Stryker ends with "we have done the hard work of constituting ourselves on our own terms, against the natural order" (254), it is an ending which pushes forward to this point that perhaps the problem is the "natural order" and this is what should be undergoing an interrogation.

So, is Lucia performing as male an indication that Dante could only see the male as an active transporter? That is a simple answer, and one that may explain the fact that this moment is rarely discussed, for it is an obvious choice seemingly to many who critique Dante. Obvious, but one that does not explain the nuance found in the act itself. Is she performing as male because he is dreaming of a Jovian abduction?

After all, don't many Catholics assume God is male as Jove was male? This assumption cannot work either because Dawn steals Tithonus in the first few lines of Canto 9. Gods acting poorly were equally male and female. The complexity stands, and with it, so too the portent.

It is made even more complicated when Dante arrives in Paradise and can only see the ultimate and divine light as reflected through the eyes of Beatrice. In the *Commedia,* God's love moves the world and Beatrice has often been identified as a God-like being (Hollander) for she is the ultimate transporter (mover and shaker) and yet she is also Dante's personal destination. It is Beatrice to whom he speaks and Beatrice who translates God's love and light and positioning. Hollander continues with the report that from Vito Nuova to Commedia, Dante is providing an enigma as a theologian, a new life and new vision:

> The "key" to that riddle is the Christological nature of Beatrice, a special creature, unlike all others, made so by God Himself. As a poetic object her reality is guaranteed by God Himself, not by her poet, who is mere witness to her miraculous nature. And in this sense the Vita Nuova, like the Commedia, should be seen as leaving behind the convention of the allegory of the poets and having entered the domain of an exegetical principle reserved for the Bible. (101)

Hollander creates such an argument to show not necessarily that Dante is writing a new Bible, but that he uses the template of previous writers of the Bible. This brings up several controversies, but one of the most serious is the conflation of Beatrice to Jesus. This is heterodoxic for conservative Dantists and heresy to understand Beatrice in this way for Catholics. To this end, Hollander reveals many instances of Dante playing with our minds and categories in the *Commedia* (106). Some find this to be an example of analogy to describe what is impossible to understand, while others note his puns are often

comical or serve other arguments. While Dante tells us frequently that he is trying to express this trip in words we will understand, I find these moments to be ones that open a portal to themselves as both complex and profound queries that serve to disrupt the binaries of what is assumed to be reality in the writings in the Medieval era and the writings of the 1990s.

They also serve to delve into the nature of the divine and the nature of being human. The actions surrounding the transportation scenes, empower descriptions of what we think it means to be human or beyond-the-human, transhuman; indeed, the very etymology of "transhuman" traces directly to Dante's creation of the action, of the verb, "*Trasumanar*' combining Tras [passing] with Umano [human]+ ar [verbing human] (Oxford Dictionary; Barolini, Digital Dante; Par. 1.70). What Dante actually says is, *Trasumanar significar per verba non si poria* (70). Mandelbaum's edition translates this as "Passing beyond the human cannot be worded" ; Jean and Robert Hollander read "To soar beyond the human cannot be described." Both Mandelbaum and the Hollanders emphasize the ineffability of life after death and the impossibility of describing what it would be like to transfer out of a human shape and our conception of time and space. In 1865 Longfellow is at once syntactically awkward yet more literal, thereby more faithful to Dante's original meaning, "To represent transhumanize in words/impossible were." Dante must do the impossible: To reach an understanding of what is the essence of a human, Dante must move, pass, and beam past the point of all humans. By expressing or even passing these outer limits, the women who transport Dante in these two moments stretch even the very boundaries of human. In this argument, it is easy to see Lucia as the earliest sign that what could be explained as Dante's typical understanding

of gender and heteronormativity is actually expanded in a way that he expresses *Trasumanar,* to go beyond human, to pass what is human. Women in the Commedia take on both discursive and performative roles of God, and therefore are important reminders that losing human is also losing the strict binary of sex.

Stryker's claims were later augmented in 2011 by Karl Steel's Critical Animal Theory which "stresses that the categories "human" and "animal," as well as the assumption of any absolute limit between human and animals, must be radically rethought." Steel writes of the story of *Bisclavret* by Marie, in which an animal is seen as a ferocious beast, yet the king finds love and intelligence within it. He reminds us not to fall into reading a text with such certainty that leads to condemnation but, like Derrida to letting analysis tumble resolutely into undecidable situations like these, all of which undo our illusions of sovereignty (16). In questioning the ways in which characters and critics respond to relationships with animals, Steel uses the Prioress in Chaucer's Tale. A character who, to this day, is made fun of for her frivolous actions regarding -- and selection of animals over humans.

> And the Prioress steps aside from her human companions, to risk being ridiculous by forming her community around loves that can have no human reason. Directed at mice that want her food, at dogs that offer nothing in return but play, loyalty, and their love, her charity earns her only contempt. And companionship. (37)

In this analysis, the human is stepping away from others and forming a relationship with animals. The passages quoted do many things, but one thing is clear: the de-centeredness of the human. What is most fascinating are the modern similar critiques of this foolish woman. To cry for a mouse is still seen as foppish. Steel is asking the reader to question

why this is so laughable, so impossible to see the natural kinship many have with animals.

The meeting point of these theories claim that while humans often find it necessary to perform distinct roles prescribed by cultural norms, these enactments can never express the entirety of human existence. We are only working to preserve illusions of sovereignty of our constructed norms and binaries. These norms also activate a presumed circle of right which repels all bodies marginalized (for better or worse) by difference. Stryker, utilizing Butlerian theories of performativity, and beside Steel, expands the circle by questioning what these borders mean and what do the bodies in transformation or transgression symbolize.

While Transgender, Queer theorists, and Critical Animal Studies continue to forge paths of recognition of the spectrum of gender, sexuality, and post humanist centrality, the transportation of Dante widens the space of analysis by examining medieval and modern bodies transcending what it means to be typically human, bodies existing between or outside of culturally normative binaries. These bodies are more often exiled, yet exalted, or denigrated and dehumanized for their transcendence or transgressions. At once highly attractive and repulsive, their very existence protests boundaries and the resulting exclusions, deemed monsters by the norms. In doing so, they create conversations that forge credence for a transcendent and Trans existence. Furthermore, placing the bodies of Lucia and Stryker in dialogue intimate significant linguistic and historic links. A closer examination of the transformational qualities of bodies Dante's *Commedia* also highlights the "sutures" and "seams" exhibitive of Trans Matters and normative borders.

By examining bodies in situ, in their moment, and amid increased polarization and politicization of the body, a new space opens for the additional rethinking of the imposed limits of human expression. Both Lucia and Stryker shine a light on the increased precarity and danger for all bodies who express transition and transformation. When a body performs or enacts change, it thereby forces a series of steps towards recognition of diversity. By placing bodies in conversation, they are allowed to speak with others and for others in similar moments. Moments that are dangerous: a "female" body who becomes a male figure, a body who takes on animal qualities, a body restricted to heteronormativity, a body imprisoned, a body who takes on god-like qualities; one commonalty of all these bodies is the restrictions or punishments suffered.

Stryker ends her performance with solidarity and hope for others:

> If this is your path, as it is mine, let me offer whatever solace you may find in this monstrous benediction: May you discover the enlivening power of darkness within yourself. May it nourish your rage. May your rage inform your actions, and your actions transform you as you struggle to transform your world. (254)

This portent can be interpreted as a transitional, transportational moment to change the dominant structures of the world. A world where socially constructed binaries are interrogated instead of bodies in transformation. Unfortunately, today, there are killings of transgender bodies and other bodies extant in variance such as race, religion, socioeconomic, or class structures. Further, when bodies assemble to demand political, social, and cultural reform, the reply is often dangerous and restrictive. There are constant reimprisonments and assaults of the female body and the current outlaw in the United States of Critical Race Theory is just another attempt to sew up any discussion of difference. The state rulings of refusing transgender people to use the right bathroom and

disallowing transgender people to be on their chosen teams in sports makes any discussions of the matters of trans imperative and Trans matters today as a most vital and relevant subject.

In 2019, Stryker reflected upon her performance:

> It's the reformulation of something that is meant to be inhuman or as feared as representing an inhumanity, an unnaturalness, a monstrosity, and using that as the basis for imagining how people can be otherwise to how they are….It's like saying, 'This is possible. Look at me.' (2)

Her work is still the second-most-read article at Duke University's GLQ. When Stryker says, "look at me" it is also a call to see fissures of a restrictive presumed normative structure that exists to demarcate all bodies of difference. In addition, Stryker asks others to step forward and demand to be seen. Butler similarly states, "But perhaps a much more important insight is at stake here, namely that 'the people' are not just produced by their vocalized claims, but also by the conditions of the possibility of their appearance, and so as part of the visual field, and by their actions, and as by embodied performance'" (19). Although it can be read in many ways, one cannot unsee a mass of people who come together, even in silence, to protest a body's precarity, even if what they stand for is hidden or deemed disposable such as imprisoned bodies or bodies who are suffering in imposed silence. Butler continues by noting that the earlier work in 1990, *Gender Trouble,* still equates the need to relax coercive norms in order for a "livable life," and uses the same word operationally, "Precarity" to mean all who are "differentially exposed to injury, violence, and death" (33). Finally, "Which humans count as the human?" and which ones are discounted or disposable (36) makes political Steel's question of human superiority and adds another line of demarcation where select humans decide who is superior and normal and worthy of life.

And so, we return to Lucia, once human, now the superb strong arm of Mary, messenger for Beatrice and transporter of Dante at the metaphorical moment of animal and definitely cross gender. What could this mean? We know that Dante is writing an epic and capturing an entire civilization – his – the medieval European world. So, the first thought may be that he can only see the symbol of transport as the one powerful god of the past, but why Lucia? Why continue to make Beatrice as male bearing body also – Why Jesus her? Does he mean to rely on only male bodies in supreme moments of power? Is that all that can be? Or can it intimate more?

On the other hand, we can see Lucia, male and eagle as representative of the sutures and seams that hold together the medieval society of Dante. If the shade of the body follows to the afterlife, cannot the body then change to suit the purpose of the moment? It is true that only an eagle can do this job – so the supremacy of the human is challenged here. Cannot the analogy be thought of as questioning human superiority where the line of demarcation allows for an eagle to be stronger than a male? Can not the analogy be that same "look at me" moment of Stryker? A whole universe is created whereby the moments of transportation – at least some of the more important ones – become male oriented – perhaps to show the precarity of the female body in position of movement and power. And yet, in the reality of this world, it is soft Lucia carrying Dante as a mother would, this is more than a foil, this is a questioning of boundaries – both human and animal and human and gender. It questions Dante's knowledge of his own world and the world he imagines, the changes that would be in the afterlife and hopefully in this one. The possibilities represented by bodies outside of normative

borders begs further study and analysis and is just one step toward a rethinking of monstrosity exhibited by bodies in flux.

CONCLUSION

The concept of Trans…Matters begins and ends with bodies who transgress, transform, and transcend their place in societal constraints. This project is focused on moments of medieval bodies speaking to a modern body or the latter calling back to the medieval. It is most concerned with societal constrictions of gender and sexual conformity. It starts with the idea that bodies are forced to emulate or are pushed outside boundaries by a powerful majority's fearful and hateful reactions when these bodies do not or cannot conform. This project is based on the facts of lived experience of people in history who do not conform to gender roles or sexual orientation. It is reality but the societal constructs are not, they are simply an opinion.

It is an important distinction to end this project with stating how identity politics and activism can help an oppressed group, but without a coalescence, individuals can also undermine the group's efforts. The fact is that majority groups have socially constructed a regime of heteronormative binaries. This is an idealized version of the world and one that is not found today or historically. The fact is that humans have expressed themselves on a spectrum and will continue to do so. This reality contests and highlights the weakness of the borders constructed by the majority opinion.

While I am calling attention to a problem, the only answer I give is a coalition, a widening of perceptions that will validate a spectrum of gender and sexual orientation. It will need to be more than the individuals themselves, all who can perceive the true spectrum as not only real but worthy. As a woman, it is easy to see the constraints placed

against me. I need to protest all opinions against a binary of gender, against the cementing of gender roles, against the disbelief in the legitimacy of the full range of sexual orientation; therefore, it must include several intersections. This project is just the starting point.

Tomoe is the only Samurai female leader in battle, a woman who at once defies patriarchy, transgresses a social order, and then possibly acquiesces at the end of the war. Melusine is feared for her hybridity of bodily transformation and transcends the male border by building a kingdom while in a mostly female body. Yde transcends her body, is perceived Real in the doing, and achieves full male corporeality. Lucia transcends all human boundaries while performing as male and god and animal. Each chapter is a step of transformation, and each body serves to query or protest patriarchal coding and societal marginalization of those who exhibit fluidity of gender and sexuality as more of a spectrum than a binary. Each also serves to recognize gender as social constructions of the majority.

The reason for a perfect match to all the modern bodies occurring in the 1980s and 1990s is that there was an explosive expansion of theory during this time. As each marginalized group fought for their identity to be recognized and given equality in the twentieth century, overlaps bloomed, but the specificity of individual and identity concerns brought tensions between them to the forefront.

Feminism is one example. Bell Hooks, in looking back at the 1970s through 1990s, states:

> The hope of identity politics was that it would create a foundation for all of us To respect diversity. Unfortunately, identity politics gradually became more of A tool of separation and competitive one-upmanship. (296)

In striving to forge a place of equality, hooks and others note that feminists were often heterosexual, upper class white women who created a place for themselves within the racist patriarchy, while simultaneously allowing racism within their own group. Hooks is also the one who criticized Jennifer Livingston for the creation of *Paris is Burning* and questioned the right of a white, privileged woman to depict (and profit from) the lives of people marginalized by class, color, gender fluidity, and sexual orientation. Toni Morrison, discusses the distrust of black women during the second wave of Feminism:

> WHAT do black women feel about Women's Lib? Distrust. It is white, therefore suspect. In spite of the fact that liberating movements in the black world have been catalysts for white feminism, too many movements and organizations have made deliberate overtures to enroll blacks and have ended up by rolling them. They don't want to be used again to help somebody gain power—a power that is carefully kept out of their hands. They look at white women and see them as the enemy— (2)

This clearly states the opposition black women have felt from both men and women. Historically black women supported and worked for the first and second wave of Feminism, but often felt that their distinct needs were left out of movements, whether it was conferences where a white woman spoke for their needs, or whether it was all of the background lifting that they did while white women assumed power and then hired them to watch their children or clean their homes (243).

While this project idealistically hoped to end by finding social groups, activists, and theorists in the twenty-first century in a fusion of all Trans…Matters, it must start by recognizing that specific groups still feel many of the same tensions today. For example, the media hinted at a post-racist world in 2009 with President Obama (and there were times where he directly spoke of racism). Yet each time a horrific and portent event such as the killing of Trevon Martin and the freeing of George Zimmerman, President Obama

seemed to present a soothing presence when many felt that much more ire and confrontation was needed. Princeton Professor Keeanga-Yamahtta finds his discussion of this event during the turbulence that followed finding Zimmerman not guilty was disappointing at best,

> he also established the terms upon which he would engage race matters: with dubious even-handedness, even in response to events that required decisive action on behalf of the racially aggrieved. (2)

President Obama may have at certain times, disappointed activists, but his wife enraged quite a number of feminists. Bell Hooks states her outrage in a discussion with Cornell West:

> I've been far more critical of Michelle Obama than anyone else I know. She has basically become a covert spokesperson for antifeminism. Her constant insistence that her primary concern is to be a mom panders to sexist thinking about the role of women. … To have the most powerful black woman in our nation and the most visible globally using her power to focus on food diet and exercise, that definitely undermined feminist politic, not because issues like that are not important but
> to focus on them should not preclude emphasis on ending imperialism, racism, sexism, class elitism (xxiv)

Hooks is saying the same thing as Keeeanga-Yamahtta. Barack and Michelle Obama were the most visible sign of black, male, and female power yet they not truly fight aggressively against systemic racism or sexism. As a female in ultimate power, hooks finds Michelle Obama as purposefully avoiding any topic that could be deemed racially divisive; instead, focusing on mom issues, thereby reinforcing stereotypical female roles.

The anger against what is called White Feminism is not only an American rage. Feminist Francoise Verges discusses the problems of European women who decided that taking on a fight to ban the birkini in France somehow made sense. They claimed that it represented odious patriarchy that not only kept Muslin women hostage, but also was a

direct hit to their efforts toward equality of all women. Any woman who wore a burkini became a problem and a symbol of all who against such equality.

> One of the typical problems in this expression played out in 2017, the bikini/burkini war in France where the burkini was banned due to what was called anti-feminist reasons" and the bikini was headlined as the expression of saving women. (27)

Vergas notes that what was most colonialist and undermining about this is that European women and feminist leaders of France could not see how racist and Islamophobic this actually was (27). An example was given of a feminist in a group of bikini-wearing women who swore that they were not trying to hurt anyone's feelings and that the entire movement of ensuring the government would ban burkinis and hijabs was really about helping Muslim women get out of captivity from the males in their lives (28). This, of course, occurred without the bikini feminists ever speaking to a Muslim woman.

At the same time as interior problems such as this within feminism occurred, there were several questions as to whether there should even be an accepted cemented binary of female and male. In addition, the query of sexual orientation and how it fit into the dominant rising culture of what seemed to be a white, matriarchal (mimicking the patriarchal), upper class, heterosexual Feminism was also simultaneously occurring.

One of these philosophers was Judith Butler who started the query in Gender Trouble (1990). In her ten-year anniversary edition preface, she states that what began in 1980s as a feminist acceptance of Lesbianism as a substantiation that all biological females were on the same page, so to speak; instead Butler found that criticism revealed a pervasive heterosexual assumption in feminist literary theory:

> Gender Trouble sought to refuse the notion that lesbian practice instantiates feminist theory, and set up a more troubled relation between the two terms. Lesbianism in this text does not represent a return to what is most important about

> being a woman; it does not consecrate femininity or signal a gynocentric world….Instead, the text asks, how do non-normative sexual practices call into question the stability of gender as a category of analysis? (xi)

At that time, Butler began to iterate the idea of Performative Theory: that one becomes a gender in a thousand steps within societal constraints and commands: "If gender is no longer to be understood as consolidated through normative sexuality, then is there a crisis of gender that is specific to queer contexts?" (xi) One is proclaimed their gender at birth and assumed to be heterosexual, and yet if all gender is socially constructed and does not rely on biology alone, then this naming begins a performance instead of a cemented reality. The "policing of gender" shores up a gender hierarchy while the cement of normative sexuality shores up gender normativity. Therefore, looking at the performance of what societal norms are present queries the ways in which moving against those norms presents is trouble. Butler also adds that while views of Performativity have changed by 2010:

> The dogged effort to "denaturalize" gender in this text emerges, I think, From a strong desire both to counter the normative violence implied by ideal morphologies of sex and to uproot the pervasive assumptions about natural or presumptive heterosexuality that are informed by ordinary and academic discourses on sexuality….How must we rethink the ideal morphological constraints upon the human such that those who fail to approximate the norm are not condemned to a death within life? (xxi)

It is the prescription of a normed gender that is called into question every time one assumes by clothing or act that a person must be male or female, and certainly not anywhere in between. This can produce violence toward the person who stands representative as the opposite of societal normed perceptions demand. This rupture point is a place where the entire questioning of prescribed gender begins:

> If there is a positive normative task in Gender Trouble, it is to insist upon the extension of this legitimacy to bodies that have been regarded as false, unreal,

and unintelligible. (xxv)

Butler uses Drag as an example to prove that "reality is not as fixed as we generally assume it to be" (xxv). In this instance, Butler is offering a counter look at assumptions of norms that can become violent. Stryker's performance demands feminists, heterosexuals, and homosexuals see her body as a mirror to their own sutures, arrives at the same time as Butler and performs in such a way to demand legitimacy by querying the standards of gender normativity as unreal. It pulls the thread of the suture and opens a place of contestation of norms themselves. "Norms such as these both require and institute certain forms of corporeal vulnerability without which their operation would not be thinkable" (64). In every aspect of norming or protest there is the body which acts, is seen, and is presumed. And every time that body does not meet the norm it is in danger.

Larry Kramer was not a theorist but an activist. In the 1980s, during the beginning of the AIDs crisis, he founded the Gay Men's Health Crisis Center to help men who were dying. He became the scream of the violence directed toward gay men. What links him to this thesis is starting ACT UP, a radical protest group who, by their bodies (and media coverage) forced the president of the United States to begin to say the word "AIDs" as opposed to the use of "gay man's disease" and to force pharmaceutical companies to lower their exorbitant pricing on the drugs developing that would help. These bodies in ACT UP stopped Wall Street's opening bell for the first time in history and stopped all traffic for a day in protest by lying all around the street. His cantankerous voice added to the power of these marginalized bodies by threatening to stop the very world that existed if it continued to ignore this epidemic.

In New York Native he wrote:

> If this article doesn't rouse you to anger, fury, rage and action, gay men may have no future on this earth. …Our continued existence depends on just how angry you can get. (1)

So, when bodies join in protest in public, they can often get some of their demands met. And, at that time, there was no louder voice than ACT UP led by Larry Kramer, a white, privileged male. A recent historian of ACT UP spoke about Kramer's anti… rants

> Larry never evolved, he never evolved on anything. So it's not just that he never evolved on his sexism and his racism, and his class bias….However, what is interesting is that he was able to be very effective (1).

This speaks directly to the identity politics that Hooks refers to and the ability for singularity of identity to still achieve action for one group that indirectly helps other groups, even when they are at odds with one another. Looking at it this way, singular identity politics of the marginalized can not only project through a rupture to the system, but also effect and cause positive change for other marginalized groups. The work of Kramer started foundations that, today, help all people now living with AIDs. And the early protests by ACT UP and many lawsuits brought by the Gay Men's Health Crisis Center have come to help the entire LGBTQ+ community.

. An interesting trend in theory that absorbs these seemingly disparate social and identity groups is Glenn Burger and Steven Kruger's *Queering the Medieval*. These academic writers find things queer in a time seemingly held captive by heteronormativity as late as 2006, "allowing us to see the Middle Ages and its systems of sexuality in radically different, off-center, and revealing ways" (xiii). It is one revealing way to that is responsible for "bringing the medieval into proximity with the postmodern" (xiv). This disruption is one of temporality and social construct, for it is only a modern presumption that cements the medieval into a Judeo Christian time of heteronormativity. Finding the

gaps then present an idea that historians have looked back and created history and marked off time as sessions of linear reactions of one thing to another. If the past is disrupted and the queerness is found, then the linear remarkability is lost in our own postmodern sense of time. If something has existed as queer when there was no mention of queer, then how can difference be found today? And why can't a body of the medieval communicate a message of difference to a modern body? They both continue with the idea that the very presence of heteronormativity assumes of border past which queerness resides:

> At the same time, this continuing presence commanding attention (if only marginally) for what is supposedly beyond intelligibility, makes possible a disruption of the very entities created by its exclusion. (253)

Therefore, the very presence of heteronormativity automatically creates the border of which all that is beyond it. It is in passing these borders and rethinking the marginalized existence, that one begins to understand normative boundaries as an attempt to cement their fundamental and judgmental existence. In this same spirit, the past inhibits the present.

So, if one is to question the very temporality of the medieval, that it does not move in some reactionary way in linear time, than a summary would and should question whether or not humanity is central to every historical moment. This is answered by Karl Steel as he begins his discussion of Chaucer and the Prioress' love of her dogs:

> When the charity looks ridiculous, when it refuses to follow the rules or have the right objects, when it makes no sense to us so long as we stand outside its particular frame, this dynamic of withholding and expressing is immediately apparent to us. (Steel, 39)

Even though the Prioress is frequently made fun of for her contemptuous behavior in being a lover of dogs while ridiculing Jewish people, she stands to query the centeredness of the human. Perhaps the charity is real, despite the realization that dogs become more important than humans, even to a human who is racist.

When temporality, sexuality, gender, and the preeminence of human is questioned, Dante springs to mind. His concept of *Trasumanar*, passing human, offers a direct hit to societal norms and propositions and blends Trans…Matters to exceed temporal, human, and earthly concerns. First of all, despite his corporeal body, Dante is on a journey outside of time and place. All of the dead exist in this space together at the same time. While the physical climb is often referenced and described, there is no earthly paradise, only light inhabited by souls not bodies. Next, by placing pagans outside of Hell, he is either breaking tradition or at least beginning a good question. Finally, his advisors and transporters often defy the reality of what it is to be human. He is certainly trying to analogically connect an idea of what it means to go beyond human, but there is much to be queried in both *Vita Nuova* and the *Commedia*. These tiny points of rupture, while seemingly explained as analogy because he keeps insisting that he cannot find the right words, can just as easily point to lacunae within the very Catholic enterprise he is supposedly explaining. The instance of Lucia is one marked by a gap in time, a call back to pagan gods, and a transformation to animal. This stands as ultimate liminality crossing borders of stereotypical and normative boundaries of heteronormativity. A queering and querying moment exists as to why he frames the transportation in this light. Instead of seeing this as Dante being in the antechamber about to leave earthly concerns, it can just as likely be seen as a point of rupture of his stereotypical concerns. Then the

fiery rapture holds a place of strangeness, queerness, and brings the question of sexuality, humanity, and gender fluidity in. The dynamic of this expression is clearly polysemous. And to try to rule them back into a stereotypical expression is to disengage with his polysemes. But the query itself disrupts the very borders he seems to be explaining.

These examples are just a few. All exist to disrupt opinions of human supremacy, heteronormativity, and cemented binaries of gender and gender roles. As Shon Fay points out it is not the issue of trans people, it the issue people have with trans people (14). The issues that people have right now are stripping our democracy of rights, the recent overturning of Roe vs. Wade is one example. Dealing with the issues of conservative people is one which Tony Morrison calls a purposeful distraction to keep people busy and away from powerful work. So, now is the perfect time to address what Fay notes is "distorted and derailed" discourse (15). One way to address this is to find the mistakes of rigid thoughts made. Throughout Fay's work, she communicates with cis readers, readers who "will recognize inequalities often endured by trans people that they personally, or other minority groups they are familiar with, are also experiencing" (18). I agree with Fay, for it is only through this overlap and an increase in solidarity that we can build a more just and joyful world for all of us (18). It is time for our thoughts to broaden, to accept complexity, and to support each other.

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