

Djuna Barnes's *Nightwood* and Transgender Epistemologies in the Biopolitical State

by

Aleta Frances Gruenewald
B.A., Queen's University at Kingston, 2008

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Supervisory Committee

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Abstract

This thesis examines why contemporary transgender populations in democratic states fail to see the benefits of social rights legislation. I use Giorgio Agamben's *Homo Sacer* to explain how transgender people have become encamped in the margins of the contemporary biopolitical world in such a way as the rule of law does not apply to them. This encampment is especially severe for those who defy the current definition of transgender. I trace transgender back to its inter-war origins in order to establish how medicalized discourses have created the current narrow definition. I use Djuna Barnes's *Nightwood*, which details the lives of non-passing inverts in the "night-world" of interwar Europe, to trace the origins of transgender people who are not included in contemporary definitions. Linking Barnes's characterization of inverted figures to contemporary trans people who do not pass allows for the creation of alternate transgender epistemologies that undermine states of encampment.

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Dedication

I dedicate my work to my trans siblings everywhere. Keep fighting.

We are so much more than enough. We are worth the world.

Frontispiece

Gender attribution is compulsory; it codes and deploys our bodies in ways that materially affect us, yet we choose neither our marks nor the meanings they carry. This was the act accomplished between the beginning and the end of that short sentence in the delivery room: “It’s a girl.” This was the act that recalled all the anguish of my own struggles with gender. But this was also the act that enjoined my complicity in the non-consensual gendering of another. A gendering violence is the founding condition of human subjectivity; having a gender is the tribal tattoo that makes one’s personhood cognizable. I stood for a moment between the pains of two violations, the mark of gender and the unlivability of its absence. Could I say which one was worse? Or could I only say which one I felt could best be survived?

—Susan Stryker, from “My Words to Victor Frankenstein Above the Village of Chamounix”

Introduction

1. Transgender Lives, Transgender Epistemologies

Much has been written about the struggles the transgender community has faced in being accepted as full citizens in North American society. Even something as seemingly banal as the use of public bathrooms has become a critically important aspect of the debate surrounding transgendered people's entitlement to the use of public space. As I write this, transgender people are being violently attacked, denied basic medical care and adequate living conditions, and paying with their lives for their position as vulnerable workers in a myriad of unstable industries. Although scholars such as Isaac West note that steps have been taken in American cities at a municipal level to enshrine transgender people's rights, state law often overrides municipal legislation, forcing it to serve a largely symbolic purpose.¹ All of this amounts to a failure of social rights legislation to adequately secure full citizenship for the transgender community. I will discuss why such a failure has occurred, what the field of transgender theory and those discussing social citizenship generally have contributed to discussions about this failure, and what is at stake when this failure is situated against an unstable biopolitical reality as laid out by thinkers such as Giorgio Agamben. I wish to emphasize the importance of understanding transgender as a way of knowing or a set of epistemic relations in order to allow for the fullest realization of transgender people's citizenship. This epistemic model originates from and is addressed extensively in transgender literature and in theory on social and political rights for minority groups.²

¹ This is not to say that there has not been an incredible and very recent groundswell in both the acceptance of the transgender population, at least in an American context, and their inclusion in various forms of legislation. For instance, West notes that "as of this writing [2013], approximately 40 percent of Americans live in cities, counties, and/or states with some form of legal protections against gender identity discrimination" (West 15). Further, of the "61 cities and towns incorporating trans people into their anti-discrimination regimes between 2002 and 2009, city officials registered 558 votes in favor the measures, 64 votes against them, and 2 abstentions" (15).

² See Bernice Hausman's summary of transgender theory, "Recent Transgender Theory." *Feminist Studies* 27.2 (2001): 465-490.

Further, it may offer a solution to the conditions transgender people find themselves in as a result of being disadvantageously positioned in Agamben's biopolitical world. Transgender as epistemology in its simplest form is based on constructing and adapting a theory from lived experiences, specifically the experiences of transgender people whose identity defies all formal binaristic definitions; thus, as a framework, it may be useful in undermining some of the stricter ways transgender people are encamped at the margins of biopolitical society. Beyond this, developing unusual transgender epistemologies enables us to understand the real cost for transgender subjects of not fitting into a biopolitical realm that praises and upholds gender binaries at every cost. As I will discuss further, Agamben is uniquely positioned to highlight the complexities of this reality through focusing his analogy on the figure of the sovereign. Transgender people are not only bodies upon which the state acts, they are the people the state excludes in order to determine on what kind of gendered subjects will be included and why. Agamben emphasizes the necessity and importance of this exclusion in creating the conditions of the state.

It would be false to say that North American society is not rife with such transgender epistemologies already, yet transgender people continue to be viewed as second-class citizens.³ I believe this is partially due to a failure to translate transgender experience as it defies binaristic expectations that have been systematically naturalized into societal expectations. This is not a new line of argumentation, and it has permeated literature on transgender lives since Judith Butler's introduction of the concept of gender performativity. This argument is worth repeating now, however, even if only to highlight how alternative frameworks may need to be put in place to create space for transgender epistemologies to manifest in public consciousness. Such frameworks need to respond meaningfully to and to expand the dialogue created by medical and political histories of the term "transgender." Thus, I

³ My use of "second-class citizens" is loosely based on the framework set up by Iris Young in chapter six of *Intersecting Voices: Dilemmas of Gender, Political Philosophy, and Policy* (1997), titled "Mothers, Citizenship, and Independence: A Critique of Pure Family Values."

have chosen to focus my discussion on unusual manifestations of proto-transgender identity as they appear in Djuna Barnes' *Nightwood* (1936). *Nightwood* has a lot of power specifically as a novel. As Nancy Armstrong argues, by favouring the individual over other topics, the novel form has allowed for the reification of individualism and, with it, the naturalized binaristic gender expectations tied up in Western individualism. As the bearers of archetypal and privileged stories, novels have great subversive potential when their subjects of consideration are not prevalent in dominant narratives. This is specifically the case when fictional accounts create the space for identities that are not otherwise included in public discourse or society. For instance, *Nightwood* valorizes and details the lives of inverts⁴ whose existence would either be heavily critiqued or dismissed by dominant psychiatric discourses of the time. In this way, *Nightwood* as a novel offers a new way for readers to understand the political reality for proto-transgender subjects in interwar Europe. The value of *Nightwood*, both as a novel that by its very nature prizes individualist narratives over ones about society, and as a piece of fiction, becomes even more apparent when supported by interactionist views of metaphor put forward by Viviane Namaste through Max Black, that I use later to understand the nationalization of transgender identities more generally. Such a view of metaphor, and fiction as used metaphorically, is that it interacts with real-world concepts such that they draw certain aspects out of those concepts while diminishing the importance of others. For instance, *Nightwood* creates the metaphor of the night to explain the feelings of isolation and confusion felt by inverts. In this way it highlights the aspects of inversion that lead to such feelings and the personhood of the individuals feeling it. Conversely, it diminishes the importance of definitions of inversion put forward by eugenicists such as Havelock Ellis who believed in inversion as a natural medical kind that had its place in society but on its margins and in a non-reproductive role. *Nightwood's* subversive potential may be mobilized to validate and describe

⁴ “Inversion” is defined throughout the novel as a kind of protoqueer identity and is a label that is reckoned with by many characters in their struggles with its associations with mental illness and the occult. I shall provide a more detailed discussion of inversion in chapters two and three.

the experience of non-binaristic people, as many members of the transgender community define themselves.

Nightwood is not just important because it is written in the novel form, however. It participates in a biopolitical world like our own, albeit at a completely different moment in the history of capitalism. Through its focus on heterodoxy and documenting the lives of the invert⁵ of the interwar period in Europe, *Nightwood* provides an effective framework for understanding the political and social realities that inform transgender epistemologies today. I wish to extract from it a general, applicable framework to serve as a link between real discussions surrounding transgender lives and the large-scale failure to accept or to use such discussions to inform social policy about the treatment of transgender people in biopolitical states and liberal democracies such as Canada. *Nightwood* is not the first or only novel to engage in such a discussion, but its treatment of inversion in a nuanced biopolitical context makes it uniquely appealing for my project. In order to extract the most from it as a critical tool, I will first demonstrate what is at stake for transgender people in biopolitical terms, then create a roadmap for understanding the failure of social rights in relation to transgender people's status within biopolitical regimes, and finally conduct a historical survey of how medical discourses of inversion have developed into contemporary transgender identity.

2. A Note on Terminology

Before setting the stage, I wish to develop a common lexicon to clarify why I have chosen to use the word “transgender” to describe the community I discuss and the historical importance of such a term in the context of my discussion. To do so, I will filter my definition through the critical voice of Susan Stryker, whose position as a long-time transgender community activist—present for the inception of the term “transgender”—and whose status as one of the first academics to destabilize

binaristic and naturalistic discourses of identity make her an authority in the academic community of transgender theorists.

Stryker has written a brief history of the word “transgender” in the introduction to the first volume of *The Transgender Studies Reader* (2006). Prior to the invention of the term, the two popular and related terms in circulation were “transvestite” and “transsexual,” both of which were coined by medical doctors working in the area: the first by Dr. Magnus Hirschfeld, one of the first physicians to investigate the psychology of what he called “transsexual” individuals, and the second by Dr. Harry Benjamin, a pioneer of transsexual surgeries. Virginia Prince, “a Southern California advocate for freedom of gender expression,” found this terminology to be an inadequate expression of her lived experience and brought the term “transgender” into popular usage to fill the space created by its inadequacy (Stryker, “(De)Subjugated” 4). Prince acknowledged that there is a relevant identity space between transsexuals who identify with undergoing genital surgery to change their gender identity and transvestites who periodically wear the clothes of what Stryker calls “the so-called ‘other sex’” (4). Prince created the term “transgender” to refer to herself and those like her, allowing transgender people a self-described subjectivity for the first time, despite the ontological limitations of the term. Prince’s definition of “transgender” inevitably underwent further expansion as Leslie Feinberg modified it in what Stryker refers to as movement from noun to adjective status (4). This transformation centrally occurred in Feinberg’s influential pamphlet *Transgender Liberation: A Movement Whose Time has Come* (1992), in which she calls for an alliance between all those who “[are] marginalized or oppressed due to their difference from social norms of gendered embodiment” (qtd. in Stryker 4). Thinkers like Stryker continue to expand on what is involved in this experienced-based description of transgender identity.

Stryker notes that, in practical terms, keeping within Feinberg’s definition means that “transgender” is a way to refer to “transsexuals, drag queens, butches, hermaphrodites, cross-dressers,

masculine women, effeminate men, sissies, tomboys, and anybody else willing to be interpolated by that term” (4). Stryker’s encompassing of Feinberg’s expansion is potentially problematic, as it involves the inclusion of certain terms such as “butch” or “hermaphrodite” (perhaps more appropriately, “intersex”) that may represent groups who have strong political reasons not to identify with transgender ways of being; however, Stryker’s intent was to make the definition as expansive as possible.

I wish for my own use of the word “transgender” to be understood in the spirit of Feinberg’s definition and Stryker’s refinement. I believe this particular usage, especially due to its scope, will help articulate transgender epistemologies as a legitimate response to the failure to realize social rights for transgender people. The versatility of using the term “transgender” in the way I have chosen is highlighted by referencing the plight of the invert in *Nightwood*. In instances where it is historically significant to differentiate terminology from within the umbrella term of transgender, such as when discussing the rise of transsexualism as a phenomenon in medical discourses, I will do so. I will also do so in instances where individuals I am discussing chose to self-identify not as transgender but with some other term.

Finally, I would like to emphasize how transgender identity often sits at the nexus of many other marginalized groups, a reality highlighted in a current and salient example brought forward by West in *Transforming Citizenships: Transgender Articulations of the Law* (2013). His example surrounds recent events in Piedmont Park, the green space at the center of Midtown, a queer liberal district of the otherwise conservative Atlanta, Georgia. As of 2006, when West visited the location, Midtown had undergone a process of gentrification that led to a resurgence of desire for non-queer legibility and legitimacy among its community members. There was, however, one major obstacle to the process of gentrification in the minds of many of Midtown’s citizens: the existence of Piedmont Park as a space historically characterized as a hotspot for secretive gay meet-ups with sex workers.

Many, if not all, of these sex workers were transgender people of colour. West describes how, by the end of the summer of 2006, the Midtown Ponce Security Alliance (MPSA), a community-lead patrol, had amped up its surveillance of the activities of the Piedmont transgender sex workers in order to encourage the Atlanta Police Department (APD) to take action against them. Ever since, a strong divide has developed between “them,” the unwelcome non-resident sex workers of the Midtown area, and “us,” the so-called real residents of the Midtown area, largely middle class, white, and certainly for the most part not transgender. Despite the insistence of the MPSA and APD that the crackdown had nothing to do with the transgendered identity of the sex workers, merely with their activities, the APD declared its mission “the apprehension of ‘transgender individuals and the hustlers, the male prostitutes’” (qtd. in West 2). In the ensuing outcry against such discriminatory actions, West noticed a remarkable shortage of transgender voices. Indeed, even in attempts to realize social justice for transgender sex workers, the emphasis was continually on what the “LGBs [Lesbians, Gays, Bisexuals]” should do as citizens and owners of public space for this marginalized, supposedly second-class group (5). Ironically, and sadly, even a discussion of how to allow transgender people to live freely and move about in the world, a certain precondition of full citizenship, was already being determined for transgender people by those citizens who could already do so. What becomes obvious even from this small example is that, for social rights to be effective for transgendered communities, the conditions of basic legal citizenship for these communities must first be met. West’s insistence on creating transgender articulations of the law follows this premise, provided that we accept that the law is a discursive space that allows for the articulation of new citizenship positions. West’s suggestion of transgendering the law involves a process that takes place at many different legal junctions and emphasizes that transforming legal discourse through the entry point of social rights is necessarily incomplete. It is, however, useful for the purposes of understanding the limitations of the law in relation to transgender people as an excluded group, especially as such exclusion plays out in the

biopolitical realm of liberal democracies. It is from this discussion that I move to a practical analysis of what the failure to accord transgender people full citizenship through social rights looks like.

3. Transgender People as Liberal Democratic Citizens

Legally positive, non-specific rights, such as the right to life or the right to equality, are often inadequate in securing the interests of groups that continue to be unfairly treated. For this reason, social rights are developed to allow legal rights to be actualized. In Canada, we have legislation such as the *Human Rights Act* and the *Charter of Rights and Freedoms* to ensure neutrality and equality amongst citizens. Currently, social rights legislation has been aimed at formalizing legal justice for citizens who may suffer from discrimination based on such criteria as race, national or ethnic origin, colour, religion, sex, age, or mental and physical disability. The community of transgender people has been protected under no such legislative acts. Indeed, there is controversy over the Government of Canada's continuing failure to pass through the senate Bill C-279, a private member's bill that advocates amending social rights legislation to include the categories gender identity and gender expression as forbidden grounds for discrimination. The hope of the Canadian transgender community and its allies is that including these two categories as forbidden grounds will provide recourse to justice for acts committed against transgender people, acts that they will no longer have to prosecute as discriminations based on "sex." It will frame transgender people as the uniquely vulnerable heterodox community that they are and thus will lend legitimacy to transgender social and legal struggles.

With due deference to the potential practical power of such legislation in addressing crimes already committed and the ability of legislation to create new ontological categories of representation in political communities, even if such amendments were to be made, the effects of social rights legislation would not be felt as they should be. The routine discrimination still faced by every other community protected by legislation in a variety of public settings and institutions makes this clear.

Affirmative legislation aimed at achieving social justice does not seem to be enough to prevent instances of injustice, nor does it seem to meaningfully transform societal attitudes. In fact, it could be argued that this is not the real intent of legislation designed to uphold social rights; rather, such legislation exists as a protection against certain forms of violence going unpunished even if it does not have preventative effects. Regardless, I want to safeguard against assuming that the continuation of large-scale violence in states such as our own is solely a failure of legislative and state-based systems of thought. There are other reasons why social injustice and violence exist in liberal democratic societies formally designed to ensure equality and liberty under the law—something I believe I adequately address in discussing the need for transgender epistemologies. I will move now to an analysis of the challenges an increasingly biopolitical world imposes on the excepted transgender community, so that the benefit of viewing transgender identity as an epistemology may be better understood.

Ch.1: Biopolitics of Transgender

1. Transgender Identity at the Collapse of the Sovereign Exception into the Biopolitical Realm

In *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life* (1998), Agamben argues that liberal democracies, like many other kinds of governments, share a biopolitical reality and that, as zones of indistinction widen, and political life (from the Greek *bios*) and bare life (from the Greek *zoe*) blend, we inch ever closer to biopolitical disaster.⁶ Further, Agamben insists that states have in fact always been biopolitical, but with bare life previously determined by a legislative sovereign and confined to a narrow zone of indistinction that allowed the rule of the law to be established. If one accepts such a framework, it is easy to see how the transgender community has been historically maintained in the role of the sovereign exception, especially insofar as the community defies reified binaristic norms of gendered comprehensibility as a central aspect of the law. However, before expanding on the application of Agamben's theorization of the sovereign exception to the transgender community, I will justify why the totalitarian state and the democratic state are both susceptible to biopolitical disaster under Agamben's model. In fact, many aspects of democracy specifically predispose democratic states to biopolitical problems. It is through acknowledging this fact that readers are able to establish the importance of biopolitical concerns for states such as Canada.

As Agamben makes clear, a state may be totalizing in its biopolitical objectives regardless of its ideological underpinnings. Although Agamben carefully avoids claims that would level the historical and ideological differences between totalitarian and democratic regimes, he argues that it would be disingenuous not to acknowledge a crucial point of similarity between the two: a totalizing state-based ideology. Ironically, he accredits this ideology in the instance of liberal democracies to the very thing that once differentiated them from totalitarian states, the "emancipation of the third estate, the

⁶ This "disaster," as Agamben frames it, centres on the eventual establishment of camps in modern states where all life becomes bare life (166).

formation of bourgeois democracy and its transformation into mass industrial democracy” (71).⁷

Agamben argues that it is the erasure through emancipation of significant difference between individuals living in democratic biopolitical states that has allowed for a postponement in thought about how to comprehend various people as citizens. The desire to overcome such an erasure eventually gave rise to an increase in the politicization of neutral domains of life, totalizing the expansion of state powers. Agamben cites Karl Löwith’s assertion that anywhere the third estate has been liberated, states tend to lapse into totalitarian ideology (72). Löwith describes how the Marxist worker state established in Russia became intensively state oriented, even as compared to an absolute monarchy. Similarly, in Mussolini’s Italy, ordinary work life and after-work activities were brought into the realm of the corporate state. These may seem like bizarre examples to relate to a liberal democracy; however, state involvement in non-state life seems to occur in every instance where the third estate is recognized, regardless of the extremity of its ideological claims.

Agamben contends that Löwith’s claims, albeit correct, are too drastic in relation to liberal democracies. Agamben highlights instead how the movement towards totalitarianism is a gradual process tied up in the rhetoric of individualism and rights that has seeped into the liberal democratic process. In other words, what troubles Agamben is his belief that even individual rights won in the context of a totalitarian state structure simply contribute to the inscription of individual lives within the state order. He argues, “[it] is almost as if, starting from a certain point, every decisive political event were double-sided [...] the rights won by individuals in [...] [conflict] with central powers [...] prepared a tacit but increasing inscription of individual’s lives within the state order” (121). This inscription, for Agamben, includes the concept of rights generally. He supports Michel Foucault’s argument that the idea of rights is a “political response to all these new procedures of power” and that

⁷ The third estate, as Agamben uses the term, broadly refers to a state’s population whether seen as its citizens or denizens.

they would be incomprehensible in a more traditional legislative system (qtd. in Agamben 121).

Therefore, from the broad standpoint of seeing states as fundamentally totalitarian, biopolitical regimes, Agamben situates his second point, that bare life, or biological non-political existence, is incorrectly managed in a modern state setting. I will examine later how this mismanagement is an aspect of the misuse of the sovereign ban in removing the sovereign exception and through it, bare life, to a space of included exclusion. For now, I would like to discuss what modern biopolitical democracies do to bare life in Agamben's terms. For Agamben, it is not that bare life is eradicated in modern democracies but rather that it is broken up and reconstituted in every individual, and reframed within the language of individualism and social rights I discuss above. In Agamben's terms, "this is modern democracy's strength and, at the same time, its inner contradiction: modern democracy does not abolish sacred life but rather shatters it and disseminates it into every individual body, making it into what is at stake in political conflict" (73). Insofar as Agamben believes the law must have a body upon which it acts, each individual body becomes capable of being fully acted upon, especially where each body is now simultaneously imminently political and also fully in the realm of bare life. This process above all else shows how the efficacy of the sovereign ban as a means of establishing what is deemed normal has been compromised. The ban may now act upon any body, and every body may be reconstituted as an exception, even those bodies that formerly fell in line with the sovereign's rule. The power of democracy to bring about this change in the sovereign's rule is in keeping with the historical fact that the infamous concentration camp originated not with Nazi German but during the second Boer War as a means for British forces to control local Boer populations. As democracy focuses so heavily on embodied reality and representing those bodies in a public forum, it makes sense that in many ways the entire history of liberal democratic discourse has been defined by widening the scope of which bodies are recognized as political and therefore able to be acted upon.

It is necessary at this point to define the sovereign ban. Agamben is primarily interested in a

political “ban,” which he argues is the “original political relation” created through the development of a zone of indistinction that is occupied by “excepted beings” (181). Agamben sees these excepted beings as the *homo sacer* (lit. “sacred man”), subsisting as a form of *zoe* (or bare life) that have always existed in human society and who by being included in the juridical and political state merely through exclusion have come to occupy a space between life and death, where they are capable of being killed but not sacrificed. Indeed, the very unsacrificability of the *homo sacer* is the most important aspect of the sovereign ban. It is only through the *homo sacer* occupying the threshold between *zoe* and *bios* as killable life that the sovereign is able to decide on life in general, and therefore on the *nomos*, or rule of law, of the state. This biopolitical situation is, for Agamben, the original position, and political existence is therefore always already biopolitical.

For Agamben, the crisis of the modern age is not the transformation from a properly political to biopolitical world (as thinkers like Carl Schmitt suggest in their critiques of democracy) but an excessive broadening of the zone of indistinction to which the sovereign has already resigned the *homo sacer* in order to determine the rule of law. Agamben’s fear of “an unprecedented biopolitical catastrophe” is based not on the fear of biological life overtaking political life but on the fundamental mismanagement of the role of the biological as central to the political through the development of an ever-increasing horizon of life that the sovereign has resigned to a state of *zoe* (188). In other words, what concerns Agamben is not the interaction between *zoe* and *bios* but how the relegation of *bios* to *zoe* in the biopolitical realm functions. For this reason, Agamben declares that the camp, and most extremely the concentration camp, to be the *nomos* of the modern.

It is important to emphasize that for Agamben, both bare life and the sovereign, or the life that is banned and the person who decides on that ban, determine the horizon of the zone of indistinction between the worlds of *zoe* and *bios*. Although it is the sovereign who decides on *zoe*, everything the sovereign does is predicated on *zoe*’s existence as the exception. Based on this description, it becomes

clear that transgender people have historically been conceived of as sovereign exception, or as zoe. Transgender people are the means by which the institution of a normatively gendered binary is possible. In support of this claim, Vivianne Namaste justifies how in both the realm of fiction and non-fiction transsexuality is used metaphorically to represent something bad about nations and people, as well as something “impoverished, corrupt, debauched, and cheap” (109). Namaste’s claims regarding transsexuality revolve around the interactionist view of metaphor put forward by Black, which holds that “metaphor connects two subjects, one principal and one subsidiary, through what Black calls a ‘system of associated commonplaces’” (97). The example Namaste cites him as giving is “[m]an is a wolf” (97). Black emphasizes how in this use of metaphor, all wolf-like human qualities come to the fore in our understanding of man, whereas all un-wolf-like human qualities are de-emphasized. In other words, Black holds that metaphor does not simply create an analogy or replace one term for another; it actually helps us order reality such that certain things appear to more accurately depict others. Namaste cites multiple examples of literary texts that respond to real world nationalisms and political struggles, all of which feature transsexual people in symbolic contexts in relation to these struggles. She argues that, if it is interactional metaphor that orders reality, then fictional representations, especially those that speak to political realities and real world events, have great power to order them. On this basis, many of the ideas we have of contemporary MTF transsexuality are played out and emphasized in tropes and clichés from cultural representations such as the film *Priscilla, Queen of the Desert* (1994), Monique Proulx’s *Le sexe des étoiles* (1987) and Paule Baillargeon’s 1993 adaptation of it, and Michel Tremblay’s *Hosanna* (1973). All three works situate transsexuality against real-world national backdrops, whether in *Priscilla*, it’s the rugged hyper-masculine normativity of the Australian outback, or in *Le sexe des étoiles* or *Hosanna* it’s the backdrop is a confused and tumultuous Quebec, that craves sovereignty yet is unable to achieve it in a way that respects Quebec’s diversity and integrity. Symbolic transsexuality in all of these works of fiction re-emphasizes the importance of certain visions of

normativity as ways of retaining the so-called cultural or moral dignity of nations, whether they be represented by the dominance of binaristic gender norms in the Australian outback or the expression of “authentic” and binary genders in works of fiction concerning Quebec. Indeed, without the use of symbolic transsexual figures in all three works of fiction, salient political points about what nations should be or what kinds of genders are acceptable in them would be impossible to make. Namaste emphasizes how this is not just true as it pertains to fictional works. Symbolic representations of and metaphors for identity are used even by transgender scholars such as Stryker. Namaste argues that Stryker’s idealization of the cultural community comprised of transsexual artists and activists living in the San Francisco Bay Area relies on nationalised notions of gender (i.e., that transgender people are able to express their unique identities without material constraint within America as a cultural site of “freedom” that can accommodate transsexuals (131). The idea that those transsexuals who do not inscribe themselves within nationally sanctified binaristic norms are able to resist such systems by using the freedom that is denied to them through US nationalism seems very paradoxical, and not at all dissimilar from the status of the sovereign exception. In short, it is precisely through erasing the materially contingent aspects of transgender identity that transgender is developed as a symbol for the sovereign to use in order to determine on which gender-normative subjects are to be included within the state.

Agamben’s writing in *Homo Sacer* is exceptional in its ability to address how this material erasure of transgender people takes place. Foucault’s biopolitics, for instance, would emphasize the ways in which institutions have been formulated in the modern capitalist state to control and politicize bodies, but it would fail to explain as fully the way certain bodies have not just been pushed to the margins of public and political society, but how their very exclusion creates the conditions that justify the workings of the rest of the state. This is a claim that will be better justified through an understanding of the traditions Agamben is responding to in his work. Indeed, Agamben’s definition of

the biopolitical realm is as I have mentioned unique, especially in his insistence on how political society has always constituted a biopolitical force through the sovereign exception. Agamben has, however, borrowed meaningfully from other thinkers in cautioning against a new biopolitical age and in how he understands the embodied nature of bare life and the status of the sovereign. He acknowledges, for instance, his debt to Foucault's *Discipline and Punish* (1975). For Foucault, the biopolitical emerges at the point where the body is made irrevocably a political locus of power and, as such, becomes central to the development of institutions and systems of modernity designed to contain or control it. Evidently, Agamben could not fully conceptualize "bare life" or "camps" in the modern sense without Foucault's interpretation of bare life as an embodied concept fit to be removed to physical spaces of containment. Agamben also references Martin Heidegger's famous confrontation with the modern biopolitical age that uses the idea that there are two forms of being, which although not the same as political and non-political life, mirror metaphysically the necessary division between zoe (as Heidegger's being) and bios (as Heidegger's Being). Agamben quotes Heidegger's description of the metaphysics of being from *Beitrag zur Philosophie* (1989): "what is abandoned by whom? The being by Being, which does and does not belong to it. The being then appears thus, it appears as object and as available Being, as if Being were not." (qtd. 59). Heidegger highlights, through the two concepts of "being" how what Foucault calls the biological being of the body is cast aside by the political which ultimately leads to the body coming back as an alternative form of the political. It is, Being, or bios, inappropriately seeing being, or zoe, as its proper object, that allows for this process of separation and transference of bios onto zoe to occur. Indeed, Being's unequivocal status as capital-B Being is now forever in question. This is the nature of the biopolitical, where the realm of zoe has blended with bios to create political bodies subject to states of encampment. It is this reality that, for Agamben, constitutes a permanent state of emergency created by a sovereign power expanding the zone of indistinction between zoe and bios. Bare life not only becomes a quality of political life, but is now

political life itself, and the autonomous existence of bios has disappeared, and with it the sovereign's ability to develop a nomos that doesn't involve the camp.

Finally, to understand how the sovereign's role adapts to this new blended biopolitical reality, Agamben draws on Hannah Arendt's work on sovereignty, specifically noting that the "absolute principle capable of founding the legislative act of constituting power" gives way to constituted power that itself is subject to the will of the people (41). Further, he draws on Schmitt's understanding of the absolute status of constituting power, conflated with the will of the people in the figure of the sovereign. To Agamben, whose work follows that of both Arendt and Schmitt, violence is integral to the formation and maintenance of states generally and requires the will of an entire people, instead of being a trait monopolized by the sovereign. It is wielding the power of this collective violence that allows the sovereign to decide on the fate of the exception while not justifying that decision in any normal legal framework. In fact, any so-called normal legal framework is itself created through the violence of such a set of actions. When this framework is applied to a state where a broadening zone of indistinction relegates many to the realm of *zoe*, the results will be catastrophic, Agamben warns. For instance, one consequence of Agamben's 'blended' state is the development of encamped spaces. I argue that transgender people have become entrenched in just such spaces, disallowing them from benefitting from social rights. This necessitates a discussion of the camp as an important aspect of biopolitical exception.

It is important at this juncture to emphasize that Agamben's analysis of the twentieth century as an era of biopolitical disaster also shines a light on the troubling reality that, as transgender has developed as a term, it has participated in this reality. Transgender people have experienced a far more complete and embodied exclusion than those proto-transgender people who came before them. In many ways it seems that mere identification with the term "transgender" itself is often a justification for encampment unless those who self-identify as such are justified according to the rhetoric of psychiatry

or medical systems seeking to reinforce binaristic norms. Proto-transgender subjects certainly were not afforded full citizenship and were furthermore kept at the margins of various societies, but they were allowed to exist and subsist as outsiders within them to some extent or, at minimum, were simply unrecognized as legitimate citizens and subjects. It is hard to imagine a reality worse than Agamben's description of the life of a sacred subject, who in existing neither in the realm of the law or nature could be killed but never sacrificed to anything. It is a fruitless life without recognition, respect or inclusion; however, at minimum there was not the requirement of such subjects to first justify themselves in terms of normative medical or psychiatric discourses in order to legitimize themselves. An excellent example of such a proto-transgender subject is the Indian *trithiya panthi (hijra)*, whose traditional ceremonial roles are extremely important and who are who are yet unable to define themselves as belonging to Indian society: "In ancient times, hijra were associated with the goddess Bahuchara Mata and bestowed ceremonial blessings. In modern times, *trithiya panthi/hijra* live at the margins of society without access to resources or civil rights [...] The levels of violence committed against them are similar to those committed against transwomen of colour and trans sex-workers in North America, and they are discriminated against as unfit for marriage and reproduction" (Gruenewald).

Agamben's central claim regarding "camps" is that they are "a hybrid of law and fact in which the two terms have become indistinguishable" (170). The identification of the biological body is the rule of the camp, and the rule applied in the camp pertains only to the body. Interestingly, this encampment also affects the sovereign, because the body of zoe has been fully absorbed into the bios of the sovereign's existence. It is therefore as much the sovereign's bodily existence as the law of the biopolitical state itself in the biopolitical state as it is the bodies of the zoe living in the camp that maintain the modern biopolitical sphere. In the particular instance of transgender encampment, it is as much the cisgendered body of the sovereign as a representation of an acceptable binaristic and "natural" gender form, as it is society's obsession with the apparent "monstrosity" (cf. Stryker) of

transgender bodies that maintains the biopolitical divide. With the advent of the term transgender however, came the ability for trans people to understand and control their own image. Thus, even if they are reduced to zoe or bare life by the biopolitical state, transgender people are able to reinscribe their own existences with political meaning as a response to such an exclusion. This, I argue, is best achieved through engaging in public initiatives that favour transgender epistemologies: initiatives that make public the way transgender people know the world, their own bodies, and their political realities. Part of such an initiative will of course involve favouring those who have been written out of white medicalized and historical discourses. It is through mobilizing their own identities that transgender people will be able break out of not only material states of encampment but also epistemic ones, and hopefully begin to soften the stark divide between zoe and bios that define the biopolitical state.

For Agamben, nowhere is this divide more startling than in the figures of the *Führer* and *der Muselmann* of the German concentration camps. With the *Führer* there is absolutely no difference between the law and the embodiment of the law as everything the *Führer* does is always already law. Agamben notes how this overturns the public/private distinction seen since antiquity in the sovereign's own body, because the *Führer* has no private existence, and is synonymous with the sovereign function itself. He contrasts this to the *Muselmann* (lit. "Muslim"), a nickname given by Primo Levi to describe Jewish people who had lost themselves because of the unthinkable suffering they endured in concentration camps. Agamben acknowledges that the idea of the *Muselmann* is in keeping with Friedrich Hölderlin's claim that "at the extreme limit of pain, nothing remains but the conditions of time and space" (qtd. in Agamben 185). This disturbing description provides a justification for how the *Muselmann* is the *führer's* absolute foil, as the *Muselmann* sits at an extreme limit of existence, bereft of everything but the time and space she or he occupies. The *Muselmann* has become the indistinguishable body that is its own law but never makes the law. Although I have already applied this model to transgender subjects, it is nonetheless hard to see from this example how camps have

surfaced in less ideologically extreme conditions or what the camp looks like if it is not a concentration camp. It is important to remember that such an analogy between the often very different material realities of the Nazi camp and the encamped spaces transgender people find themselves resigned to also hinges on the fact that the Third Reich did in fact encamp those it referred to as sexual deviants, who would be more commonly known at the time as inverts. However, the real key to understanding how a contemporary democratic state could have something significantly in common with an dictatorial one is understanding how the interactional metaphor of the “nation,” as I have discussed earlier, has been deployed to reify certain socially acceptable gender categories while associating being transgender with anti-nationalist concepts. Therefore, a deeper understanding of the ways in which the exclusion of transgender people in the role of homo sacer has operated requires not just an understanding of the state, but of the ideas of nationhood that have been overlaid on it. Indeed, one of the oddities of Agamben’s account is his insistence on discussing “states” only, despite the fact that the rhetoric of the “nation” has in many societies, including liberal democratic ones, replaced that of the state, and has massively assisted in the development of zones of encampment. Michael Ignatieff provides a compelling account of how nationalized rhetorics, which he terms “ethnonationalisms,” for their often ethnic focus, allow for the reification of systemic norms that all but force those not metaphorically encompassed by them out of existence. Nationalistic rhetoric may be deployed in non-ethnic directions, as has been evidenced by Namaste’s accounts of how transgender people have been used as symbols of a nationalism that seeks to highlight the decay the nation has undergone (with a healthy nation being represented by normative binary genders). However, in almost every instance where the state deploys images of romanticized ethnic homogeneity, it also deploys images of nationalized binary genders, and vice versa (the Australian outback in *Priscilla*, is as well as normatively gendered, white). Not only do the two occur together, but the very same rhetoric used to justify ethnonationalist kitsch is used in relation to nationalised gender. It is for this reason that I will spend some time expanding Ignatieff’s

account.

2. Ethnonationalism as the Justifier of Encampment in Biopolitical States

Michael Ignatieff in *Blood and Belonging* (1993) documents the crucial difference between the state and the nation in his descriptions of his journeys through many of the newly formed post-revolutionary liberal states of the former Soviet bloc. For Ignatieff, as for Agamben, the state is the formal political structure governed by a law-determining sovereign that demarcates itself territorially. Conversely, Ignatieff sees the nation as being the cultural and social reality of a people, encapsulated in shared history and continued via narratives through people's connection with each other over time. However, in many of the post-revolutionary states Ignatieff visits, the nation is nothing more than a glorified form of "kitsch,"⁸ that allows states to justify their existence by glorifying invented common culture or politically inflected works of art. Ignatieff remarks, "Nationalists are supremely sentimental. Kitsch is the natural aesthetic of the ethnic cleanser [...] The latent purpose of such sentimentality is to imply that one is in the grip of a love greater than reason, stronger than the will, a love akin to fate or destiny" (10). Kitsch, in short, is the quintessential ethnonationalist art form. If in other forms of nationalism kitsch is prevalent as a unifying cultural and social theme, in an ethnonationalist context, the art of kitsch becomes inseparable from the state itself. In many ways, this parallels Agamben's state-centred idea of bare life being utterly political.

One may begin to draw parallels between contemporary ethnonationalist ideals and the biopolitical state; however, this requires concrete examples. As we've seen, for Agamben, the primary work of the sovereign is to determine the nature of the exception and to produce the "threshold of articulation between nature and culture, *zoe* and *bios*" (181). In the modern biopolitical state, the zone of exception has become so wide that all life may be cast aside as bare life, and the *nomos* of the state

⁸ "Kitsch" originated as a nineteenth century German romantic concept used originally as a cultural term but is now used to encapsulate any hyperbolized aesthetic of mythological identity.

is thrown into a permanently urgent suspension. The ethnonationalist ideal of kitsch seems to be a natural accompaniment to and result of the creation of the camp when examined in this light, as false narratives are needed to justify the camp's existence and the arbitrary decisions made to cast many different forms of life into the camp.

Before continuing, I would like to investigate the roots of ethnonationalism as an ideal and how it manifests in "kitsch" culture. As Ignatieff notes, ethnonationalism originated in the seventeenth-century German Romantic ideal of the *volk*. Ignatieff describes the ethnonationalism that led to such an ideal as "[an] invention of the German Romantic intelligentsia during the period of the Napoleonic invasion of the German princedoms, between 1792 and 1813" (85). In short, Germany was the first Western proto-nation to frame itself in emotional and communal terms against what it saw to be the rational civic nationalism of France occasioned by the French Revolution. The German elite worked hard to develop German identity after the revolution through the idea of the *volk*, or a community of joyful, simple-minded communitarian citizens who work together for the common good. Ignatieff finds it remarkable how German ethnonationalist ideals of the *volk* superseded all other competing nationalisms, including a more civic-minded form of state-nationalism that privileged institutional attachment to the regime over other nationalistic engagements. Ignatieff believes the dominance of the "volk" is largely the result of Hitler's efficacy in joining *volksnational* and *reichsnational* philosophies. Of course, it was *volksnational* philosophies that allowed for German citizens to have faith in *reichsnational* institutions in the first place. It was not until the *volksnational* became the *reichsnational*, however, that spaces such as concentration camps became possible. The camp became the space most responsive to and informed by *volksnational* ideals. However, more generally, the kitsch concept of the *volk* became the driving force everywhere behind the creation of nationalisms that blended *zoe* and *bios*.

Many questions arise surrounding the important role of the *volk* in forming the biopolitical

realm. Are the *volk* mere extensions of the *Führer*, always immediately political and yet simultaneously ready to be resigned to the realm of bare life if needed? How does the idea of the “*volk*” justify the existence of “ordinary” German citizens, neither belonging to the camp nor embodying institutional power through direct connection with the sovereign *Führer*? To answer this question is to answer how certain bodies are able to have ethnonationalist ideals inscribed on them in the first place. I argue that, through the language of “*kitsch*,” the *volk* are metaphorically framed as ideal subjects despite their embodied realities. They take on a symbolic function, much like the one transgender people take on in order to justify nationalist rhetorics in Namaste’s account. The confusing separation of subjects into their material bodies and their symbolic functions occurs in both the instance of German citizens and transgender people. German citizens, on the one hand, are reduced to their bodies which may become bare life at the time of the *Führer*’s choosing (but are not already bare life like transgender people’s), and, on the other, always already represent the *kitsch* histories of the *volksnation* as political subjects. As transgender people’s bodies are what exclude them from the political world, they are discredited both as bodies and political beings. They are therefore often recognized in symbolic terms as representative of some other discourse, as being *zoe* prevents their bodies from mattering and being excluded from the world of *bios* means they are only able to stand in symbolically for other political discourses.

Kitsch ideals, as much as they further the divisions created by the biopolitical state in totalitarian contexts, seem untranslatable to a liberal democratic model. However, as Agamben notes, many thinkers starting with Schmitt have emphasized how liberal democratic systems potentially encourage totalitarian ideals, especially with regard to how they make everything the proper object of the political and most importantly, in how they make the social the political. Such an attitude surely allows for a translatability of biopolitical *kitsch* ideals to a liberal democratic model. Indeed, *volksnational kitsch*, as much as it became synonymous with seventeenth-century German Romantic

ideals, may be found centrally in ethnonationalist contexts everywhere. The metaphors inherent in the kitsch aesthetic allow for the reification and validation of the sovereign's power to decide on the exception. Stories are told about non-encamped spaces but not encamped ones, such that the biopolitical camp and its sacred subjects are not considered in ethnonationalist narratives. *Nightwood* does a great deal of work to counter this. It tells the "untellable" stories of inverts whose lives are not easily translated into binaristic or psychiatric categories and, in doing so, opens up space for encamped subjects and new ways of knowing.

In Canada, both Namaste and Ignatieff find nationalist kitsch and its incumbent gendering in Quebec. Ignatieff's account of Quebec, albeit written in the early 1990s, is stunningly contemporary. He describes how, following Quebec's "nationalization of its hydroelectric resources in 1962" (149), it reached total economic and cultural independence to the point that it viewed English Canada as a relic of its unfortunate and subordinate past. The irony of the fact that Quebec nationalism has increased right as it has become less relevant for Quebec's economic, cultural and political success, is not lost on Ignatieff. However, he paraphrases Isaiah Berlin, who "likened nationalism to a bent twig, which if held down, will snap back with redoubled force once released" (153). In Quebec, nowhere is this concept of "la survivance" (154) more important than in how it pertains to language. As Quebec has modernized, it has rightfully developed fears about loss of language, culture, and original purpose. It is for this reason that despite frantic desires to maintain the French language at all cost, Quebecois nationalists insist that rather than existing as an oppressive response to modernity, they are the cause of it. For instance, they take great pride in developing Quebec as a reforming, secular and educated state. Ignatieff remembers being continually told "what other society...funds a public-school system in a language other than the majority?" (169) However, there is one thing missing from this state, and that is a respect for pluralism. Even though Ignatieff cites arguments that Quebec should be the national state of all who choose to live there "regardless of their ethnic origins" (173) a very different picture

emerges when First Nations land claims come into play or indeed any cultural or religious idea that would break Quebec's hegemonic uniformity is pursued. Namaste challenges the simplicity of claims made by cultural critics such as Robert Schwartzwald that plays such as *Hosanna* reveal the homophobic nature of Quebec nationalism and not much else. Schwartzwald sees *Hosanna*'s final emergence not as a transgender woman or drag queen but simply as the man Claude as representing a coming of age for Quebec as a nation, in that it has finally accepted homosexuality (and therefore new ideas) while simultaneously asserting its identity. Namaste remarks that Schwartzwald merely nods respectfully at drag culture, while simultaneously failing to understand the ways in which transgender identity was used as a representation of false national consciousness in the Quebec kitsch narrative: indeed, it was constructed as a mere hindrance to a queer-positive Quebec.

The fact that ethno- and gendered nationalisms chose which identities fit their narratives and in what way, and discard the rest is no more apparent than in the recent controversy over the Parti Québécois's proposed secular charter,⁹ which would amend the *Quebec Charter of Human Rights and Freedoms* to curtail what it calls the showcasing of ostentatious religious symbols by any citizens involved in the public sector. The PQ insists, however, that Catholic imagery, as long as it is not too showy, remains acceptable because it is an important historical component of Quebec culture, and thus crosses may still be displayed in courtrooms and public places. This is a bizarre exception considering that the charter is supposed to secure the neutrality of public spaces and, thereby, a civic culture in which anyone may participate. Regardless, the proposed changes have gained the support of many purported non-radicals who hold the Rawlsian view that religious displays are manifestly partial and cannot contribute value to public spaces, or worse, that they crush public neutrality. However, alongside the rhetoric of securing public space, is the rhetoric of unity and cohesion. The PQ argues

⁹ This component was written in early 2014, when the PQ still held office as the elected government of Quebec. The proposed legislation being referred to is Bill 60, *The Quebec Charter of Values*.

that bringing religious symbols into public space divides state-directed goals encouraging equality among citizens. All of this rhetoric, however, appears only to apply to non-Catholic imagery, despite claims that the Québécois state is somehow value and culture neutral.

What surfaces in the expression of kitsch narratives in two instances as diverse as the Third Reich and Québécois nationalist struggles is that such narratives enable an ideological dogmatism that simply refuses the existence of groups outside of that dogma. Catholic imagery, for instance, is acceptable while Muslim imagery is not; in fact, the display of Catholic imagery is not a religious display. The kitsch ideology of the PQ does not permit the othering of the Catholic religion along with all other religious identities. In Namaste's discussion of *Hosanna*, the titular character arrives at a drag ball held in a bar on Montreal's Saint-Laurent Boulevard, dressed as Liz Taylor playing Cleopatra (as the theme of the ball was "great women.") She soon discovers, to her dismay, that every other drag queen is also dressed as Liz Taylor and she is cruelly mocked for not passing by comparison. Their presentation is acceptable as they pass in binaristic terms while hers is not. Finally, during the atrocity of the holocaust, who the Fuhrer decided to move to the concentration camp and so exclude from public space depended on that subject's variation from ideals of ethnonationalist kitsch. I am not paralleling these diverse examples to ignore the important material differences between them; rather, it is my belief that nationalistic ideals, wherever they are found, provide the justifying rhetoric for expanding and deepening states of encampment. Camps do not have to identically resemble the atrocities of the holocaust in order to be materially real and deeply concerning. I have described this in my discussion of Piedmont Park, but Quebec continues to provide salient examples. Namaste discusses in "Genderbashing: Sexuality, Gender, and the Regulation of Public Space" (2000) how transgender people are regularly "bashed" at alarming rates in public in a style similar to gaybashing, despite the

relative dearth of formal statistics.¹⁰ She remarks that there were very few spaces in, for instance, Montreal, where transsexual and transgender people were accepted and expected to exist. She notes that transgender people are primarily confined to a high-violence area forming around six blocks bordered by “Saint-Laurent, Amherst, Ontario, and René-Lévesque” (151). This reality is later verified by *Nightwood*’s inverted hack-doctor, Matthew O’Connor’s exclamation “And what am I? I’m damned, and carefully public!” (Barnes 173). I have demonstrated thus far how the biopolitical encampment of transgender people has been facilitated and worsened by nationalistic narratives that themselves are inevitably gendered in binaristic terms. I have also highlighted how the extent to which trans people do or do not pass within such narratives determines their ability to function politically within a society. This is due in part to a long history that begins with ideas of medicalized inversion and moves through notions of transsexuality to arrive at the contemporary transgender subject.

In the following chapter, I will go into a detailed history of transgender as a term. I shall moreover delineate how this history has led to the use of transgender either symbolically in queer discourses or to promote falsely naturalized gender binaries, in a way that excludes certain transgender people. Novels such as *Nightwood* help build a powerful and alternate history of transgender based in unusual forms of inversion that contemporary discussions, rooted in medical discourse, do not. In biopolitical terms, highlighting how unusual forms of inversion have been excluded from the discourses that create the contemporary transgender subject allows one to understand the form and shape of a transgender subject as the sovereign exception. In other words, *Nightwood* helps develop an understanding of which transgender voices and epistemologies are currently being excluded from public discourse and why. By focusing on the alternate historical path created by following atypical

¹⁰ Namaste cites one 1992 study that “showed 52 percent of MTF transsexuals and 43 percent of FTM transsexuals surveyed in London, England, had been physically assaulted” (145). This statistic is at this point very outdated and contemporary statistics only verify the great extent to which transgender people are attacked, a fact that is quite alarming considering nearly 25 years have passed.

inversion and movement in *Nightwood*, we may open up the biopolitical space of encampment to which transgender people have been resigned. Through emphasizing new ways of knowing as transgender through the idea of movement, I will offer alternate suggestions of how transgender people may benefit from social rights.

I turn to Stryker, who insists that transgender studies responds to falsely naturalized binaristic identity claims, to begin my discussion of how our understanding of “transgender” as a category and, more recently, as an academic field, has evolved in relation to both binaristic norms and queer discourses. Next, I will pursue Stryker’s reclaiming of discourses of unnaturalness or monstrosity to create a transgender subject position in “My Words to Victor Frankenstein Above the Village of Chamounix” (1994). Stryker’s reclaiming engages the idea of movement and explains the emergence of certain kinds of transgender subjects as sovereign exceptions; it is thus useful for my analysis of *Nightwood*’s inverted characters.

Finally, I wish to include a note about how to understand my descriptions of binaristic norms. I have already explained how nationalist claims justify biopolitical systems where the zones of indistinction are widening enough to create states of encampment. I believe that the myth of binaristic naturalness is a nationalist one that is especially visible in times of crisis when it is used to justify acts of violence against transgender subjects. Similarly, queer and naturalistic narratives utilize and consume transgender subjects, whether their bodies are consumed as fatalities in queer dialogues about the value of subversiveness or whether well-intentioned medical professionals, with or without understanding the complexity of transgender people’s embodied desires, seek to make their bodies comprehensible in a binaristic context through surgery. In both instances, transgender subjects disappear politically and present no challenge to ethnonationalist narratives of naturalness. This is true whether or not such narratives are based in heteronormative binaries or, as I will explore, in the inalienability of gay desire in creating subject positions. Thus, straight and queer people often find a

citizen position in the state while transgender people disappear into states of encampment. It is further important to add before continuing that nationalist narratives of gendered “naturalness” also rely on states focussing on and practicing ideas of fixity, manifesting, for instance, in how space is considered legitimate only if it serves a single, legally sanctioned purpose.

Ch. 2: Histories of Transgender

1. The Birth of the Field of Transgender Studies

In an introduction to the first volume of *The Transgender Studies Reader* (2006) Stryker emphasizes how attention has been paid to transgender issues for a long time but largely within the framework of “abnormal psychology” (“(De)Subjugated” 2), wherein it was seen as a symptom of a variety of mental illnesses or as an unusual biological state. Stryker emphasizes that, when the topic was not approached from a medical standpoint, it was referenced in literary criticism and in other academic texts as a symbol for queerness. Even if binaristic and heteronormative approaches have characterized the study of transgender subjects, transgender studies as a field does not always respond to this characterization, and in many ways transcends it. Stryker highlights how, in the early 1990s, the anthropological study of transgender phenomena set the stage for transgender studies as a revolutionary rethinking of the field from the standpoint of transgender people, even as queer theory was developing somewhat separately. Stryker recounts her participation in 1995 at a conference called “Lesbian and Gay History,” organized by the Center for Lesbian and Gay Studies (CLAGS) (1). She remarks that, despite the diversity of topics covered, the group was not “taken collectively, [as] a very gender diverse lot” (1).¹¹ She was shocked that despite a new wave of scholarship emerging on transgender issues at the time, no transgender topics were being covered at this event. While waiting in line for a microphone to voice this concern, she encountered Jim Fouratt, who reached the other microphone before her. Fouratt, “a veteran of the 1969 gay rights riots at Stonewall Inn, a founding member of the Gay Liberation Front, and a fixture on the fading New Left fringe of New York progressive politics” (1), voiced his disdain for transgender individuals infiltrating queer movements with so-called

¹¹ Stryker recounts, “I had heard a great many interesting things about fairies and berdaches (as two-spirit Native Americans were still being called), Corn Mothers and molly-houses, passionate female friendships, butch-femme dyads, and the Southeast Asian gay diaspora, but I was nevertheless standing in line to register a protest” (1)

outmoded, pathological views, even proclaiming that transgender people “believed in oppressive gender stereotypes” (1). Stryker eventually interrupted him to say, “I’m not sick. I’m transsexual and I’m not sick. And I’m not going to listen to you say that about me, or people like me, anymore” (1). Ten years later in 2005, Stryker found herself in the same auditorium to showcase “*Screaming Queens*, [her] recently completed public television documentary on the 1966 Compton’s Cafeteria riot, a transgender revolt that took place in San Francisco three years before Stonewall” (2). Fouratt appeared again at this showcase to complain that transgender people had rewritten the civil rights and sexual revolution of the 1960s, thus marginalizing his existence. This time, the audience booed him. Stryker describes this ten-year period, during which transgender studies came of age as a field, as the subject of *The Transgender Studies Reader*, which she co-edited. She describes the field of transgender studies as anything that responds to the “dominant binary sex/gender ideology of Eurocentric modernity” (3) and highlights transgender studies’ inherently postmodern character. Insofar as transgender studies disrupts the normal connection we establish between sex and gender, the discipline bases itself off of the seminal work of Foucault and Butler, even if its response to such work is often to contest it.

The focus of transgender studies on the political reality of transgender subjects has furthered the need to articulate the biopolitical terms of such a reality. In Agamben’s terms, the biopolitical happens when a body is fixated on by institutions in power and thus, influences the development of such institutions’ capacity to contain it. Both Agamben and Foucault, despite the stark contrast in emphasis between their works, assert that bare life can be embodied life and can therefore be encamped just as trans people are. Stryker picks up on the Foucauldian principles also seen in Agamben’s account. She believes that transgender studies helps demonstrate the interpenetrability of the concepts of *soma* or “the body as a culturally intelligible construct,” and *techne* or “the techniques in and through which bodies are transformed and positioned” (12). In other words, as Stryker later highlights, transgender studies allows the body to become more than a mere referent of another dialogue or the object of

constative claims. The body, instead, is one of the only meaningful ways of actively breaking down the object status transgender people maintain as the exception around which ethnonationalist myths of binary identity are maintained. . In Stryker's terms, the field of transgender studies rescues what Foucault calls "subjugated knowledges" from normative discourses by emphasizing transgender bodies as privileged sites of knowing (12). Stryker highlights how, by enabling the "insurrection of subjugated knowledges" through formal institutional systems, transgender studies uncovers transgender epistemology as a key building block in the establishment of institutional systems (12). In short, Stryker insists that transgender studies has fulfilled Foucault's mandate to combine "insufficiently elaborated knowledges, naïve knowledges, hierarchically inferior knowledges" with academic erudition to create new spaces where new critical and theoretical possibilities may blossom (13). Such knowledges, for Stryker, must necessarily and immediately follow from institutionalized ethnonationalist narratives that promote binaristic ideas of gender as arising from sex. If we accept that transgender identities constitute "subjugated knowledges" that assist in building yet also mask "functional and systemic ensembles" (12), then constative statements regarding how gender identity is masked must also be re-examined more closely. The claims "he is a man" or "she is a woman" no longer become absolute declarations of being. A person is doing womanhood, not being a woman. It becomes apparent that transgender studies is in fact undoing all the problematic nationalist myths about gender those like Fouratt believe the field and its subjects are upholding.

Meanwhile, as comparatively privileged transgender individuals battle for the ability to live non-stereotyped, materially robust lives in European colonial frameworks, the anthropological, racist gaze collects what Stryker ruefully calls "gender exotics" such as the "India[n] *hirja*, Polynesian *mahu*, Thai *kathoey*, Brazilian *travesty*, Arabian *xanith* [...] and Native American *berdache*" (14; Stryker's emphasis). The only revelation for antiracist and anticolonial audiences to gain from such an anthropological set of "exotic" identities is the desperate need within transgender discourses for the

voices of those who self-identify within such definitions, or who wish to rewrite them, to come forward from a variety of cultural contexts in different languages to discuss their gender identity. Whether such a discussion could properly be deemed to focus on transgender issues is fraught. As Stryker states,

transgender is, without a doubt, a category of First World origin [...] recently, however, engagements between a “transgender theory” that circulates globally with Eurocentric privilege, and various non-European, colonized, and diasporic communities whose members configure gender in ways that are marginalized within Eurocentric context, have begun to produce entirely new genres of analysis. (14)

Central to such an analysis should be an understanding that other cultural contexts may or may not enforce binaristic gender normativity as Eurocentric cultures do. One effect of such a revelation may be the influx of new information that changes how non-binaristic transgender people are able to respond to Eurocentric ideals and dominant gender narratives. Transgender subjects must respond to such narratives much in the way that marginalized groups in Quebec are forced respond to francophone nationalist’s claims. The unfortunate reality is that the directly oppositional stance transgender people must take in demanding equivalent rights, freedom, and personal recognition as a singular ontologically fixed group redoubles the fervor of heteronormative narratives, just as any kitsch ideal becomes ever more important in the fact of opposition. Such fervor, especially as it comes from a dominant group, does not always seem alarming. Ignatieff remembers interviewing Claude Beland, a powerful bilingual, but francophone banker in Quebec who had emerged as part of Quebec’s independent economic modernity. When Ignatieff pushes him on what difference maintaining the Quebecois ethnonationalist dream could possibly make to him at this point he declares, “well because a state is the only way to protect the identity of a people, you know. Identity I define as ...[knowing]

who you are and...[wanting] to protect that and be recognized for that” (151).¹² Transgender epistemology is a direct threat to people being able to self-identify within the myth of having natural and fixed gender identities, and being respected for that identification. It is therefore only through massively diversifying epistemic frameworks of transgender and gender more generally that such nationalist myths will dissolve into a new array of gendered possibilities. How to do that is the challenge.

It is Susan Stryker, among others, who boldly and effectively responds to this challenge. She recognizes that previous frameworks attempting to correctly situate transgender subjects have failed, and have instead often taken transgender identity to be a symbol of some other discourse or a perverse representation of binaristic norms. This response comes through her re-appropriation of discourses of naturalness/unnaturalness in “My Words to Victor Frankenstein above the Village of Chamounix.” In it, she details how taking back the idea of monstrosity finally allowed her to create a transgender subject position for herself.

Stryker’s discourse of unnaturalness is beneficial to my project in its implicit association with the idea of movement and unfixing ontologically established categories. Understanding transgender identity as implicitly containing the need for movement hitherto not allowed (for instance, in public space) allows for the articulation of a powerful new kind of epistemology that prevents transgender people from becoming literally and metaphorically consigned to a state of biopolitical encampment. Agamben’s camp is a place of permanent yet incomprehensible fixity, as I have discussed. Further, biopolitical states that themselves are focused on ideas and practices of fixity enable the camp. In this sense, transgender movement is powerful insofar as it challenges not just the camp but systemic fixity.

¹² It is important to clarify the difference between Quebecois nationalists and the genuinely dominant group of cisgendered people in this instance, as the former have historically been marginalized, denied their culture, identity, and recognition, whereas the latter have always maintained a privileged and powerful position. There are nonetheless sentiments that are reframable across the groups.

Stryker's "My Words to Victor Frankenstein Above the Village of Chamounix" was originally a performance piece presented at "RAGE! Across the Disciplines," an interdisciplinary conference held at California State University, San Marcos in 1993. A desire to describe the political effects of transgender rage inspired her to write the piece. She opens with a discussion of how the transsexual body is unnatural because "it is the product of medical science. It is a technological construction. It is flesh torn apart and sewn together again in a shape other than that in which it was born" (245). She claims her body is seen as less than fully human because it is a created thing, paralleling it to the meaning of the word "creature" in Frankenstein. She decries heteronormative men's insistence that they are "lords of creation" responsible for her as a marvelous, monstrous creature, when, in reality, all gender is constructed in Butler's sense (246). Stryker ultimately wishes for those who have lulled themselves into the myth of possessing a naturalized gender to adopt the introspective gaze she turns on her own gender formulation, even if it means "risking abjection" (247). In this vein, she parallels what drove the hateful rhetoric leveled at transsexual people by the gay and lesbian community in the early 1990s with Victor Frankenstein's rejection of his creation. Stryker highlights how, just as lesbian activist Janice Raymond declared "the problem of transsexuality would be best served by morally mandating it out of existence" (qtd. in "My Words" 245), Frankenstein commands, "begone, vile insect, or rather, stay, that I may trample you to dust. You reproach me with your creation" (qtd. 245). Many literary critics believe that Frankenstein sees the creature as his own dark double; Stryker accordingly wonders if Raymond sees the same in transsexual people.

Reappropriating unnaturalness for Stryker in some ways originates in a desire to overcome the public opinion that transgender people, in wanting to express a so-called true self, are in material terms "war[ring] with nature" (qtd. 245). She re-appropriates unnaturalness not only through developing an understanding of the medical and technological interventions that make transsexual existence possible, but also through analyzing the dialogues that depict transgender people as monstrous, abject, or on a

lower order of being. Binaristic discourses of naturalness run through many discussions about trans people whether they pertain to mental health, the need to align transsexual identity with certain medical standards of behavior, or trans people's status within queer communities as subversive or insufficiently queer. Stryker's response of rescuing the concept of monstrosity to combat binaristic discourses works best when it is situated around the idea of monstrous movement. No text provides a better example of this than Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1818).

Stryker reminds us that *Frankenstein* responds to dominant scientific discourses that privilege visual knowledge over other ways of knowing. For Frankenstein's creature, this means that his body is perceived as not worth knowing due to its ugliness and is therefore cast out of society. As Stryker highlights, it is the "unnaturalness" of the creature's appearance that makes him seem ugly or monstrous. She emphasizes how he is not only the product of man's inventiveness and hubristic desire to recreate nature's works but is also no longer under man's jurisdiction. Indeed, by failing to measure up visually, he has been rejected by and therefore rejects incorporation into a sensible human system at all. I will add that he is therefore not only repulsive but also dangerous. He is barred from having any attachment to the system Frankenstein has implicated him in and eventually does violence to those closest to Frankenstein to express his sorrow and rejection. The creature performs this violence via his movement through and around spaces that he never fully accesses. He must hide himself for many years in a confined space to learn about human beings and their responses to him. Such physical encampment is required of him, because his life elsewhere among humans is incomprehensible to them; he is forced into a state of total exception in Agamben's sense. He, like the *homo sacer*, is rejected by the state, because it contains no concept of him and therefore no ability to make space for him. It is only when he realizes this that he is able to mobilize himself out of his state of encampment and proceed on a monstrous rampage. Frankenstein constructs his creature to be a visually perfect, pliant, and natural looking human being, fit for acceptance and even admiration in public space. When

instead, the creature appears to be anything but this, Frankenstein removes his birthrights and forces him to hide from the world. When the creature refuses to do this, his ferocious movements ultimately terrify Frankenstein so much that the doctor agrees to meet him above the village of Chamounix. In short, the creature cannot be incorporated in society yet refuses to leave it, so Frankenstein must move to meet him and hear his voice. This power of the creature for Stryker represents the great subversive and intersectional potential of transgender studies. Just as Frankenstein's creature, taken as an emblem of the transgender subject, forces Frankenstein to come to him and face both their positionalities, so transgender studies offers the same potential for other discursive disciplines such as queer theory. If transgender studies is "anything that disrupts, denaturalizes, rearticulates, and makes visible the normative linkages we generally assume to exist between the biological specificity of the sexually differentiated human body, and the social roles and statuses that a particular form of body is expected to occupy" ("(De)Subjugated" 3), then it is a field where radical change may occur for any and all bodies. My goal is to stretch transgender studies' limits to include those who are not benefiting from the social rights that supposedly protect transgender subjects. To do so, I will first expand on all the traditions that have taken in transgender subjects as a topic of analysis, starting with queer discourses and moving backwards to the original discourses of inversion that were used to establish the contemporary transgender subject.

I will highlight how both queer and inverted discourses are built around approving of, or responding to the language of naturalness. As a broad category, ideas of naturalness inform transgender discourses as a form of nationalist kitsch that supports the development of biopolitical states in their regulatory and exclusionary functions. Ideas of naturalness allow for the continued disavowal of transgender people's rights regardless of the narratives built around them. Queer discourses allow for transgender as a category to be resigned to the realm of the merely symbolic. Discourses of inversion have led us to a means of describing transgender identity that denies the existence of certain

ontological subjectivities, narrowing the realm of what is properly transgender. Through the ignorance occasioned by ideas of naturalness and the disavowal occasioned by discourses of queerness and inversion, biopolitical states have effectively resigned transgender subjects to zones of encampment.

2. An Introduction to Queer Theory and its Use of Transgender

Tracing a history of transgender theory must highlight its inclusion in and battles against queer theory. Any discussion of transgender citizenship will require at least a cursory knowledge of queer theory in order to understand how the application of social rights is contingent on the development of transgender discourses that respond to queer norms. In “Queer Feminism, Transgender, and the Transubstantiation of Sex,” a chapter of *Second Skins* (1998), Jay Prosser provides a biting critique of queer theory’s sublimation of transsexual embodiment into the realm of the symbolic. Prosser makes it clear that the casualty of queering transgender in a way that destabilizes the falsely naturalized heterosexual order is often the transsexual body itself. If transgender become symbols of queerness, where sex is a representation of Butler’s heterosexual melancholia,¹³ then transgender bodies are only useful in so far as they support such a representation. Regardless of this reality, Prosser notes how many of those interested in transgender theory have tried to impose the spectre of transgender identity onto Butler’s *Gender Trouble* (1990), with limited success, as it appears to be a text more interested in performativity than in articulating any kind of transgender reality.

At stake in understanding transgender identity is queer theory’s intermingling of sex, gender, and sexuality. Central to the structure of *Gender Trouble* is what Prosser describes as the idea of “sex [being] gender all along” (266). This idea is based on the notion that cultural prohibitions of all forms

¹³ Heterosexual melancholia is based on the more general Freudian notion of melancholia. Prosser writes that melancholia “differs from mourning on all counts” (267). He states that for Freud, the melancholic’s loss of the object, not known to the person consciously, becomes “encrypt[ed] [...] as an identification” (267). Prosser discusses how Butler believes that gender formation operates on similar principles and that the lost object is “[the] homosexual love object” and heterosexual identity is created as the identification that incorporates this loss (267).

create embodied realities that themselves appear to generate cultural categories as their natural ontological effect. Indeed, Butler highlights that we repeatedly cite sex in order to perform gender.¹⁴ Prosser shows the problematic nature of Butler's assertion for self-identified transsexual people. He focuses on how Butler's claim juxtaposes the ideas that there is a fixed way of becoming a man or woman and that gender is a project that can be worked at. In other words, Prosser interprets Butler as claiming that no development narrative overlays the act of citation. He claims instead that she sees citation as a series of discreet references that produce performative habits over time. This is a very different performativity than the theatrical trying on of gender identities that Butler is accused of advocating. Butler herself cites this accusation as a "[failure] to [...] refer the theatricality of drag back to the psychoanalytic discussions that preceded it, for psychoanalysis insists that the opacity of the unconscious sets limits to the exteriorizations of the psyche" (qtd. in Prosser 265). Prosser emphasizes how Butler seeks to clarify the potentially opaque link she draws between heterosexual melancholia and performativity by approaching the topic in more detail in *Bodies That Matter* (1993), where the word "performativity" is replaced with "citationality."

Even if Butler's account is made subtler by the psychoanalytic claim that the range of gender expressions available to a person is not theatrically limitless, but is limited by unconscious restraint, the idea of gender being non-developmental is problematic for Prosser. He describes in a subsection entitled "Venus is Burning: The Transubstantiation of the Transsexual" how discrete citational identity formation contradicts many transsexual narratives that involve authentically becoming the other gender and/or sex. In fact, Prosser notices how Butler devalues and resubsumes noncitational transsexual

¹⁴ Prosser writes that "citationality" is a term Butler generates in *Bodies That Matter* as a way of responding to criticisms about the potential for misuse of "performativity." He writes "the later term, 'citationality,' comes to displace the former of *Gender Trouble*, 'performativity.' Butler's refiguring of sex as citational law in *Bodies That Matter* is designed to derail the understanding of gender as a free theatricality that constituted the misreading of *Gender Trouble*, to clarify how gender is compelled through symbolic prohibitions" (262).

narratives into heteronormative ones. He writes, “Butler’s pre-supposition is twofold here: first that inherent to *doing* realness [i.e., citing sex in order to perform gender] is an agency resistant to and transformative of hegemonic constraint that the desire to *be* real lacks; and following this, that the transsexual’s crossing signifies a failure to be subversive and transgressive of hegemonic constraint where it *ought* to be” (Prosser 274; emphasis his). As Prosser traces these claims through Butler’s critique about the topic of transgender and transsexual embodiment in Jennie Livingston’s film *Paris is Burning* (1991), Butler’s own positionality and privilege become apparent. Prosser maintains that Butler’s interpretation of *Paris is Burning* views pre-operative transsexual Venus Xtravaganza’s journey to finalize her surgery in New York as a set of complex interactive symbols. Livingston, a white feminist lesbian, films and filters this whole process, interpreting Venus’s journey from a privileged gender and racial position, as Venus is Latina. Butler’s claim, in Prosser’s view, is that, insofar as Livingston holds the camera, she has enacted the role of phallus-bearer, ironically accepting possession and control of the very phallus Venus is hoping to rid herself of to become “fully” a woman. Prosser sees this as problematic on many levels, not least because someone with a tremendous amount of racial and normative power reduces Venus’s real penis, as embodied flesh, to a symbol. The reader is left questioning why Butler would be complicit in such a violent transphobic gesture. Prosser suggests that Butler’s treatment of Venus’s material struggle as merely symbolic arises from her sympathies for Livingston as a fellow white lesbian. Prosser is successful in emphasizing how Butler’s failure to focus on the material circumstances of Venus’s life by reframing Venus’ story using symbolic queer discourses represents a form of violence similar to what occasioned Venus’ death.

I do not wish to underplay how transgender identity as queer may be liberating for certain transgendered people. As is apparent in Butler’s reduction of transsexual identity to the symbolic in *Paris is Burning*, the potential destructiveness of queering transgender identity seems to stem as much from the privilege required engage in an act of queering as it does from the queering itself. I believe it

is important to establish what this privilege is to see more clearly which identities have been removed from the arena of queer transgender altogether.

Prosser highlights how citationality, which underpins the concept of queer transgender for those like Butler, requires agency. I agree and further believe that to be aware of one's act of using a formerly ontologically fixed (and essential) category as a reference point usually requires a certain cognizance only social stability affords. This stability allows for a self-conscious parodying of fixed gender categories to occur when gender is queered. The person may not be aware of how their psychological interiority inhibits the full expression of queer identity, but the intent to queer is there and is often accompanied by a willingness to forego the comforts of existing in a falsely naturalized binary. The desire to queer one's identity is, of course, not absolutely based on social stability, nor is it always expressed consciously. It is difficult to say whether it is possible for someone to queer gender without knowing it, for although there are certainly instances of people who know that they exist as some kind of gendered exception, they have no way of making this sensible without mobilizing this knowledge into self-awareness. Such cases often leave people vulnerable to the worst forms of exclusion and insecurity, as they have no ability to articulate which resources they need and are being denied. Regardless, dismissing such a "constative" state of gender, as Butler would frame it, is not only often untenable for many who are in precarious socioeconomic positions and are being policed by those in more stable roles but also potentially unattractive (Butler qtd. in Prosser 264). Haunted by the specter of transgender identity as Prosser believes *Gender Trouble* and Butler's later work to be, such a haunting works in service of the privileged queer positions Butler focuses on. For Butler, the entire notion of heterosexual "melancholic identification" bases itself in a desire for those of the same sex that converts itself into a mask of heteronormative gender expression (Prosser 266). It is for this reason that queer transgender as a citational practice paradoxically relies on an essential justification of identity as heteronormative melancholia that stakes a claim in the innate naturalness and universality of

the desire for same-sex relations. At its worst, transgender identity in Butler becomes nothing more than an awareness of the pre-eminence of homosexual craving manifested in a desire to destroy binaristic thinking. Further, if transgender is merely the gender style of homosexual identification, it ceases to exist as anything real outside of this referent. This problematic reality underlies a text used extensively to position transgender people as both real and queer and instead reduces transgender identity to its symbolic origins.

The divide between a materially specific transsexual body that wishes to “pass” authentically as another sex and transgender-as-queer performativity extends farther than Butler. In fact, performativity versus ontological constantivity pervades historical and cultural discussions of transsexual and transgender identity generally. The rejection of ontological fixity as it pertains to transgender people complicates itself with Agamben’s biopolitical reality in that it allows for the more convenient dissolution of transgender (although more frequently transsexual) sovereign exception into the realm of queerness. The broadening purview of queer theory blurs the edges of transgender identities so that not only is fixity sacrificed but the meaning of transgender is confused and conflated with subversive acts of queerness in a way that makes allocating social rights to transgender people very difficult. As I have explored in the previous chapter, the modern biopolitical state has allowed the zone of exception to broaden so completely that all life has simultaneously become bare life and the camp has become the *nomos* of the state. It is easy to see how the queering of transgender has assisted in the process of emptying transgender subjects of political meaning by removing their subjectivities from their bodies and placing them in a symbolic realm governed by the very same kitsch myth that justifies normative gender expressions. In this way, not only does transgender identity become symbolic for binary homosexuality, but it is also dismissed as monstrous if it doesn’t serve this purpose. Prosser’s comment on the implicit equivalence *Gender Trouble* draws between queer and transgender identities highlights this. He states, “transgender [in *Gender Trouble*] appears as the sign of homosexuality,

homosexuality's definitive *gender* style. [Butler states] "parodic and subversive convergences" are said to "*characterize* gay and lesbian cultures" [...] This characterization encodes transgender as homosexual gender difference, a type of archetypal queer gender" (263; emphasis his). With transgender standing in as the archetypal (or symbolic) gender object proper to queer homosexual identity, just as man or woman is proper to heteronormative identities, transgender experience is obfuscated enough that it loses much of its subversive potential. This is not because transgender-as-queer performance is an illegitimate and unimportant reconfiguring of normative framing but because the emphasis placed on what Prosser calls "doing" rather than "being" gender delegitimizes other ways of conceptualizing transgender. Losing the potential to put words to "alternative" transgender epistemologies makes delineating the boundaries of an increasingly opaque, queer category in states with broadening zones of indistinction almost impossible. This occurs against a biopolitical backdrop that seeks to increase that opacity not clarify it as it pertains to non-queer, non-passing transgender identities.

Having addressed the relationship between queer discourses and transgender, I will turn to queer identity's predecessor, inversion. Judith Halberstam's investigation of female inversion in *Female Masculinity* (1998) as a type of proto-homosexual, proto-transgender identity develops a more detailed history of the category. Halberstam highlights the strict boundaries separating those people who fit the category of medically appropriate inverts from those who wished to pass as biological men or whose motivations for inverted behaviour were considered inappropriate. Exposing the gaps in the discourse of medical inversion and, through them complicating the trajectory that enabled the creation of "transsexual" and finally "transgender" as categories of identification will allow us to develop a clearer vision as to why contemporary debates surrounding transgender focus on either queering or upholding societally sanctioned kitsch binaries.

3. Tracing Transgender History through the Figure of the Invert

Locating transgender identity within queer discourses, especially considering the Butlerian emphasis on performativity central to such discourses, not only denies, as Prosser emphasizes, the subjectivity of certain transsexual subjects but also de-emphasizes important aspects of the formation of “transgender” and “transsexual” as historically contingent categories. I propose that tracing a history of transgender through the invert and other nonconforming figures adds depth and nuance to our understanding of it as a category. This, in turn, will help provide grounds for enriching political conceptions of transgender subjectivity and fortify transgender subjects against normative thinking or queer symbolism.

In *Female Masculinity*, Halberstam furthers the ideological tradition pursued by transgender theorists such as Namaste that concedes that although transgender identities may or may not be constructed as queer identities, they are linked into gay and lesbian history. Both thinkers observe how gay, lesbian, and transgender histories have been ideologically disconnected in the latter half of the twentieth century, either consciously or unconsciously. Halberstam maintains that this disconnect resulted from a misunderstanding of the evolution of social terminology describing various gender- and sexuality-based subject positions. Namaste places additional emphasis on how separating dialogues of lesbian and gay identity from those of transgender identity, often as part of nationalistic practices, allows for a continued invisibilization of transgender people in public and queer spaces. This is all the more true for Namaste when transgender subjects are people of colour or sex workers and share similar public space as non-transgender queer communities, or even non-transgender sex workers. Although Namaste focuses on the vibrant queer and red-light district between Saint-Laurent and Papineau in Montreal, her analysis seems almost endlessly translatable across contexts and across the past few

decades.¹⁵ What she describes in Montreal is a universal experience specific to the dissolution of inversion into the categories of gay and lesbian on the one hand, and “transsexual” and finally “transgender” on the other. I shall now provide a history selected by Halberstam that details what existed before this dissolution. Importantly, medical discourses not only assisted in the creation of the invert but also eventually allowed for the creation of the transsexual and, following and contrasting it, the transgender subject.

In a chapter on John Radclyffe Hall and inversion, Halberstam describes how the interwar period was one of great social reform and medicalization, where sexuality and gender were not yet separated in common parlance. “Inversion” was a term used in the first half of the twentieth century to describe anyone whose gender, sexuality, or sexual identity did not apparently conform to a heteronormative binary. Halberstam acknowledges this definition of the invert but chooses to define inversion more narrowly as “[a] medical term used in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries to explain the phenomenon of homosexuality as Anne Lister¹⁶ may have experienced it” (76).¹⁷ Halberstam explains that she chose this definition because many individuals self-locating within discourses of inversion appealed to medical rhetoric regarding their ‘homosexuality’ to justify their identities. She highlights how, for Hall, a female invert and the author of *The Well of Loneliness* (1928), the idea of inverted identity was centrally informed by Havelock Ellis’s understanding of

¹⁵ Note also Isaac West’s discussion of Piedmont Park and the Midtown Ponce Security Alliance (MPSA) that targeted transgender sex workers in the green space.

¹⁶ Anne Lister (b. 1791) was the daughter of a Captain who became the sole heir to an estate. Halberstam writes that Lister took an active interest in especially feminine women and insisted on the naturalness of such an interest, denying that it derived in any way from what was called “sapphic regard” or a kind of obsession between women, dismissed by Lister. Although she wore women’s clothing her overtly masculine appearance and gait as well as her economic empowerment garnered her much disdain. Halberstam describes her as having “an active and functional but pre-identitarian female masculinity embedded within a highly ritualized marriage culture” (75).

¹⁷ I define “inversion” in this way not only because of the variety and cases of people, both fictional and real, living around this period to whom this term could appropriately apply (including, but not limited to figures such as Dr. Matthew O’Connor in *Nightwood*) but also because to reduce inversion to homosexuality is to make a mistake I believe Halberstam wishes to avoid in her account.

female inversion, specifically in the loneliness and displacement it supposedly occasioned. Halberstam writes “that *The Well of Loneliness* closely resembles Havelock Ellis’s model of female inversion,” even if immediately following that she notes the extraordinary difference between Hall’s life and the lonely, detached life to which she resigns her character Stephen Gordon (96). Halberstam highlights how Hall and her partner Una Vincenzo, Lady Troubridge had a robust community of self-proclaimed inverts in their acquaintance. Halberstam presents this range of people, as well as the people Ellis interviewed, to the reader for the sake of complicating the potential to conflate female inversion from this period with lesbian identity or Ellis’s more straightforward model. Central to Halberstam’s discussion of a female’s ability to function as an invert during this time period is the issue of class. She notes that one of the main ways women had access to more masculine roles and dress in society was through aristocratic privilege, or, if middle class, through the uniforms associated with public service. Halberstam remarks how Hall and Troubridge had one upper-class friend named Toupie Lowther who had received a Croix de guerre for her military career. Indeed, there seems to have been some celebrity surrounding Lowther, which “suggests that the masculine woman, at least briefly in the postwar years was not always reduced to being a misfit or a figure of abject loneliness” (Halberstam 85). Contrasting this with the character of Stephen Gordon, who is also high born but feels alienated and displaced in domestic environments and spends a great deal of time drifting, might be Halberstam’s most powerful juxtaposition between medicalized and enacted inversion. Such a contrast helps to establish an even more powerful contemporary argument that medicalized discourses of inversion have displaced certain types of transgender subjects while championing others. It is important to remember that both Lowther and Stephen could be seen as possessing proto-transsexual identities in contemporary terms.

Despite this, Halberstam remarks on how Hall herself appears to actively disdain a certain type of “passing woman” (91). Hall’s judgment is in keeping with the pathologization of inversion that accompanied medical definitions of the time, whereby “severe” inversion or proto-transsexuality was

considered to be categorically different from masculine female identity. Hall also makes this distinction despite the fact that Ellis's model tries to recuperate the supposed naturalness of inversion, even if such an inclusion serves Ellis's eugenic purposes. With what Halberstam takes to be an overtly liberal agenda in mind, Ellis modified Richard von Krafft-Ebing's more strict taxonomical system from *Psychopathia Sexualis* (1886) to describe forms of female inversion. The difference between the two thinkers, as Halberstam sees it, is that whereas Krafft-Ebing saw inversion as a sliding scale from "women who were available to the attention of masculine inverts but not masculine themselves, [to] cross-dressers, [to] fully developed inverts who looked masculine and took a masculine role, [to] and degenerative homosexuals who were practically male" (76), Ellis saw a stark distinction between masculine and feminine inversion and is interested in what he called the "congenital invert" who was female but possessed a natural and totalizing masculinity (76).¹⁸

Although the focus of Halberstam's book is squarely on female subjects, inversion as conceived of by Krafft-Ebing also centers on females despite his using males as a default subject elsewhere. There are a number of possible reasons for this. Regardless, Barnes' *Nightwood* plays an important role in recovering a range of inverts across gender identities. To introduce *Nightwood* however we must begin with the man who invented the term invert, Richard von Krafft-Ebing.

Krafft-Ebing, through *Psychopathia Sexualis*,¹⁹ provides the central framework for understanding medicalized discourses of inversion in the interwar period in Europe that appear in such texts as *Nightwood*. The greater portion of *Psychopathia Sexualis* is about sexual abnormality in males,

¹⁸ Halberstam's insistence that Ellis was a liberal thinker but that Krafft-Ebing was not seems to stem from Ellis's desire to "simplify the sprawling taxonomy in *Psychopathia Sexualis*" (Halberstam 76). Halberstam believes such a culling was intended to generate sexual tolerance by creating an argument for the sexual naturalness of masculine female inverts. Of course, Halberstam reminds the reader that such a "naturalness" is reductive and reinstates binaristic norms.

¹⁹ The impact of *Psychopathia Sexualis* should not be underestimated in its contribution to contemporary medical and identity discourses more generally. In fact, Krafft-Ebing's account introduces the ideas of hetero- and homosexuality, sadism, and masochism.

in keeping with psychoanalytic discourses that take the male as a supposedly neutral subject. As a result, Krafft-Ebing has no single section discussing male inversion the way he does for females. He does, however, refer to the gamut of sexual and gendered behaviours that could be taken collectively as the male correlate of female inversion. These behaviours range from “psychical hermaphroditism” to “absolute contrary sexuality” and “neurasthenia” (Krafft-Ebing 230, 231, 231). As was typical of the time, sexual behaviour was considered appropriate if and only if it lead to heterosexual reproduction, and gender identity and sexuality were linked in binary schemes to achieve this goal. For example, Krafft-Ebing describes “psychical hermaphroditism” as a stage of inversion in males where “a desire towards the opposite sex is present; but the latter is [weak] and is manifested episodically only, while the homosexuality is primary, and, in time and intensity, forms the most striking feature of the *vita sexualis*” (230, 231). Krafft-Ebing’s fear, regarding inverted male states, was that the subject would eventually become fully homosexual, thus “lead[ing] to enduring and exclusive contrary sexual instinct” (231). Krafft-Ebing believed that such behaviours could only be curtailed through various forms of therapy and by limiting masturbation in youth.

In placing Krafft-Ebing’s detailed and heavily empirical account of abnormal sexual and gender expressions in males against the far more rigidly structured and less extensive account of female behaviours, it becomes evident why Hall felt pressured to create strict boundaries around her depiction of Stephen—boundaries that centre on narrowly defined psychological symptoms of distress. Indeed, as I have briefly discussed, not only does Hall distance Stephen from real-world figures of a similarly inverted type who do not display similar characteristics but she also actively disdains something Halberstam calls the “passing” woman (91). For instance, Halberstam describes how Hall’s dislike of Colonel Barker, who frequented her social circle, was largely derived from her hatred of Barker’s passing as a man. Whereas Hall saw her own clothing, as masculine as it became over time, not as a costume but as an active rejection of the notion of “a true sex” (qtd. 90), she saw Barker as using the

same clothing to masquerade as a male. Dressing in a masculine fashion was not a masquerade for Hall but rather the revelation of some essential truth that would otherwise be hidden by her body. Barker, conversely, had spent time passing as a man for a myriad of reasons, some of them situational and others intensely personal. Relatedly, Hall disdained Barker not only for trying to pass as a man but most importantly for using her passing to gain social power. Such a disdain seems familiar as it closely parallels the disdain those who see transgender as performative queerness feel for those who wish effectively to pass in a transsexual context. This disdain takes the form, for instance, of questioning whether the transsexual person's desire to pass is legitimate.

Hall's disdain is very useful to my project. Insofar as it is aligned with the medicalized discourses of inversion of the time, it marks a boundary around inverted identity, clarifying what identities are acceptable. I will analyze the complexities of Barker's tumultuous and often irresponsible life in male "masquerade" as it exemplifies a desire to break down such boundaries, paralleling as it does those contemporary transgender subjects who are incomprehensible within gendered norms. If inversion as we know it is the sum of medical definitions that legitimated inversion and allowed for contemporary sexual and gender identities to form, then I want to imagine what alternate histories of excepted cases such as Barker's could establish. Thus, I believe it is worth detailing Barker's life as an opening case study.

Barker's history is wide ranging. During the First World War, she²⁰ describes being treated as a man despite not attempting to pass, after which she was married briefly but ran away from her husband. She later became involved with another man, with whom she had two children, but ran away from him too to have a romantic relationship with her friend Freda. From this point, she continued her life as a man "to screen [her]self from all the tortures, miseries and difficulties of the past and work out

²⁰ Regardless of Barker heavily resembling a modern-day, self-defined, pre-operative transsexual, it is impossible to say which pronouns s/he would have chosen to define for him/herself. I have chosen to use feminine pronouns, as Halberstam seems to have found this appropriate.

[her] own salvation” (Barker qtd. in Halberstam 91). However, she also cites more unconscious reasons for moving towards manhood, claiming that she spent so long as a man during the war that she felt she had finally become one when she ran away from her male lover and children. She convinced Freda to marry her, explaining that she was a man who suffered from a war wound²¹ and had tried to live as a woman in her previous marriage but could not stand it. Following her appointment as Colonel Barker, she abandoned Freda and was “discovered” as a woman when she became bankrupt and underwent a medical examination in jail. Her trial was famous, and Halberstam recounts Hall remarking on it in a letter to her agent. Hall describes Barker as “a mad person of the most undesirable type [...] [H]er exposure at the moment is unfortunate indeed and will give a handle to endless people—the more so as what I ultimately long for is [...] marriage for the invert” (qtd. 92). Here is Hall’s ultimate condemnation of Barker’s lifestyle, which to Hall represented all the forms of perversion, cowardice, and self-interestedness that dissuaded people from legitimizing the invert and most importantly, “renaturalizing” her. Hall would be fiercely defensive of inversion as a medically substantiated, natural category of identification that was honest and consistent over time. Hall seems to have believed that even if one did not choose their inversion, they must honestly pursue it for its own sake. Barker’s history does not accord with this view. Barker describes being treated as a man before deciding to pass and mixes practical with psychological motivations for her masculinity, even using cross-dressing as a means to subversive or criminal ends. Finally, despite all of this, Barker decides that she is a man. In this sense, whereas Hall’s life seems to have been about revealing fixed truths and highlighting the naturalness of her identification, Barker’s was about transgressing boundaries in her personal life, in her interactions with social institutions, and even in her interactions with the law.

Barker’s story reveals what current expressions of transgender identity may be if we accept that

²¹ “War wound” was often used euphemistically after the First World War to refer to injuries or diseases that mutilated a male’s genitals or left him impotent. This would have been a way for Barker to keep Freda from uncovering her female genitals.

they are not merely a category to be claimed in the ever-expanding definition of “queer” or by re-establishing comfortable binary oppositions. Regardless of the power of such narratives, I urge caution in altogether overriding the histories of “transsexual” and “transgender” as terms. Any addition to new ways of thinking and knowing as transgender must necessarily retain the positive aspects of the discourses developed from medicalized inversion. For instance, as I have discussed previously, Benjamin invented the new category of “transsexualism” to manage those who were pathologized the most heavily for being what Krafft-Ebing calls “congenital inverts.” Through Benjamin’s act of allowing transsexualism to have its own space in medical discourses, resources were allocated to transsexual people and awareness developed around it as an identity. As I have discussed through Stryker, transgender identity has a similar history and was originally introduced into common parlance through Feinberg’s pamphlet that sought to encompass the diverse social and political realities that go into the category of “transgender.” Furthermore, new articulations of transgender identity must also be understood in relation to the expansion of the biopolitical realm that has allowed for a broadening of the zones of encampment to which the transgender subject has become resigned. As I have established, transgender and transsexual identities occupy a state of exception in Agamben’s terms, and this is only truer where non-canonical gender identities are concerned. It is therefore more important than ever to create a history that encompasses all transgender people: one, in short, that has the capacity to create new transgender epistemologies through investigating fluid or unusual subjects.

In light of this, I wish to return to Agamben to establish the status of excluded transgender subjects as *homines sacri* (or sacred men). I will do this by tying ideas of sacredness or taboo into the ideas of unnaturalness, movement, and the occult that Stryker believes are important in establishing alternative transgender epistemologies and to that end upending the discourses established above. *Nightwood* certainly works thematically to achieve this, especially through characters such as Dr. Matthew O’Connor, who are otherwise deemed incomprehensible as gendered beings, but who are

rescued through the novel's narrative.

I will therefore focus on how ideas surrounding medical definitions of inversion have led to an understanding of transgender identity that has notably silenced the voices of specific groups. As Halberstam's and Prosser's accounts make clear, people of colour, sex workers, First Nations people living under colonial frameworks, and those with non-normative ideological reference point are among such silenced groups, past and present. Thus, an expansion of transgender epistemology must take the material realities of such groups as its guide. I do not believe that a close reading of *Nightwood* is a substitute for this process. However, the novel does trace an alternate tradition of inversion that allows readers to re-imagine inverted identities and, by extension, contemporary transgender identities as fluid in ways that have not been adequately accounted for. Analyzing *Nightwood* may contribute to the process of diversifying and moving past the term "transgender" in ways certain groups require.

Ch.3: Epistemologies of Transgender

1. Defining the Sovereign Exception as *Sacratio*

As Agamben establishes, a contemporary biopolitical crisis has been generated around the widening zone of indistinction to which the sovereign exception has been relegated. Although certain groups continue to occupy their traditional role as sovereign exception, the zone of indistinction surrounding excepted identity has widened to such an extent that everyone is potentially in danger of being placed in it as bare life.²² It is important to Agamben's project to recover the meaning of the term "sacred" as it has been passed to us from antiquity in relation to the exception. Indeed, up until this point, I have mainly referenced the sovereign exception in relation to its status as bare life, but for Agamben, the exception's sacredness is an even more iconic aspect of its existence. I wish to demonstrate how the idea of the exception's sacredness whether it has been cast aside or retained historically will add further dimension to the biopolitical reality facing contemporary transgender subjects. Agamben describes how, through original sources such as Pompeius Festus, we may understand the word "*sacratio*" as "arising out of the conjunction of two traits: the unpunishability of killing and the exclusion from sacrifice" (Agamben 81). Agamben highlights how a lot has complicated this original, recuperated definition, including the scientific and psychological discourses of the twentieth century that have marked ambivalence as a primary trait of the sacred. For Agamben, this begins with William Robertson Smith's *Lectures on the Religion of the Semites* (1889), where the sacred is framed as taboo and ambivalent. Smith views such an ambivalence as meaningfully beginning with ancient Hebrew society. Smith emphasizes the many uses of the taboo in Hebrew cultures: firstly, there are taboos around holiness and that protect the "inviolability of idols and sanctuaries, priests and chiefs, and generally of all persons and things pertaining to the gods" (qtd. in Agamben 76). Following

this are taboos surrounding a wide range of things deemed unclean, and, lastly, there are taboos surrounding banned items. Agamben specifically highlights the importance of formulating ideas of the sacred taboo around banned items, as it is understanding how the banned is also sacred that assists in the creation of the sovereign ban so integral to the original political position. Agamben highlights Smith's eagerness to reveal an ancient Hebrew definition of the ban that would align it with the idea of taboo. Smith describes how Hebrew notions of the ban often centred on "consecrate[ing] or "devot[ing]" something to a deity by completely destroying it (qtd. 76).. In other words, Smith draws out the paradox of devoting something through destroying it, thus making it taboo. This is a paradox that is "enforced by fear of supernatural penalties" (76).

Agamben believes that Smith's "doctrine of ambiguity of the sacred" parallels his own argument that the ban is the original political position insofar as "the ambiguity of the ban, which excludes in including, implies the ambiguity of the sacred" (77). Such an exclusion through inclusion is achieved through the paradox of consecrating by destroying in the process of making a sacrifice. Agamben references Smith quoting Deuteronomy 13:6 and Joshua 6:26 to highlight this point: "even cattle were not sacrificed, but simply slain, and the devoted city must not be revealed" (Deuteronomy 13:6; Joshua 6:26; qtd. in Agamben 76). However, Agamben believes that Smith, through emphasizing the notion of sacred ambiguity and ignoring the ancient Roman concept of *sacratio*, focuses wrongly on what is at stake in the ancient Hebrew ban. Rather than highlighting the ambiguity of the Hebrew ban's potential to spare or destroy, Agamben argues that Smith should emphasize the ban's particular ability to remove something from the realm of both *nomos* (the realm of law) and *physis* (the realm of nature and the divine). The remarkable quality of the banned thing for Agamben is its potential to be slaughtered without being sacrificed or sentenced within the political order, which, in turn, creates the sovereign exception and the original position he deems so important to the creation of the state.

It is not merely Smith's interpretation of sacredness as ambivalent but rather the entire tradition

that it spawned that Agamben believes has to be fought in order to recover the original understanding of sacredness as *sacratio*. Agamben notes how the tradition of sacred ambiguity, although begun by social anthropologists such as Smith, was not brought into the popular sphere until Sigmund Freud wrote *Totem and Taboo* (1913). Agamben argues that once sacredness was made formally ambivalent through Freud's interpretation of the device of taboo, it became impossible for definitions of sacredness outside of the idea of the taboo to emerge. To overcome this entrenched Freudian tendency to interpret sacredness as ambivalent and taboo, Agamben seeks out older more precise definitions of sacredness. He turns first to two strains of thinking on *sacratio* both of which he only partially agrees with. The first view, promoted by thinkers such as Theodor Mommsen and James Leigh Strachan-Davidson, holds that the concept of *sacratio* is based in a previous historical period where penal and religious law were not yet separated and death sentences were sacrifices to the gods. The second view, held by those like W. Warde Fowler, highlights the archetypal nature of *sacratio* understood as "consecration to the gods of the underworld—which is analogous to the ethnological notion of taboo: august and damned, worthy of veneration and provoking horror" (Agamben 73). Agamben emphasizes that the first group is unable to explain the ban on sacrifice that accompanies the idea of the *homo sacer* and the second group wrongly holds that killing the *homo sacer* is a great offense. Both definitions defy Festus's original definition of "*sacratio*" as both an unpunishable killing and an exclusion from sacrifice. Agamben therefore defines sacredness as an undermining of historical trends that seek either to subsume it into psychoanalytic discourses or the doctrine of the ambiguity of the divine.

Understanding the full exclusion of *sacratio* from both the realm of *nomos* and *physis* allows us to access Agamben's urgent claim that widening the zone of indistinction surrounding those people who may be banned as bare life has altered the circumstances surrounding the original political position and has opened the door for unprecedented disaster in the form of *sacratio* becoming a new norm and standard for existence via the device of the camp.

There are clear parallels between the psychoanalytic discourses associated with inversion and those associated with sacredness. Just as *sacratio* became the ambiguous sacred and was stripped of its original position outside both civil and religious society, the invert was forced to either conform to psychoanalytic explanations of identity rooted in discourses of naturalness or queer them. In both instances it appears ethnonationalist style norms of comprehensibility have forced these terms into discourses that limit their scopes or redefine them in substantial ways. In the instance of inversion, it is Ellis's desire to legitimize inverted subjects within discourses of naturalness that creates the category of congenital inversion, which later becomes transsexuality. The invert as sovereign exception, through the device of psychiatry, is recuperated into civil society just as sacredness becomes a psychological category justifying the exclusion of trans people as sovereign exceptions.

From Krafft-Ebing to Ellis, inversion is seen on a sliding scale of severity and is expressed correspondingly as increased or decreased illness or naturalness. However, there is very little in practical terms that differentiates Ellis's description of the congenital invert from Krafft-Ebing's idea of "degenerative homosexuals who were practically male" despite Ellis's attempts to recuperate full inversion into naturalistic discourses (Halberstam 76). The doubleness of the idea of the invert as being, on the one hand, a fully liberated subject such as Toupie Lowther and, on the other, a figure such as Stephen Gordon, testifies to the ambivalence of a medicalized classification system. There seemed to be no way of fully realizing inverted identity for whoever self-consciously embodied it outside of the categories of psychosexual degeneration or binary naturalness. In the reality of many people's lives, however, it occupied a middle ground that could only be defined as monstrous or unnatural in Stryker's sense. Functioning outside of the stipulated discourses of its ambivalent or double nature brings inverted identity back to its original state as sovereign exception much as sacredness, the proper

function of the sovereign exception, exceeds and muddles the notion of ambiguous taboo.²³ In other words, inversion appears to assume its true function as an excepted state outside the ambiguity inherent in a system that posits its subjectivity as simultaneously positively fixed naturalness and negatively volatile mental illness. Inversion differs in unique ways from other states of exception, however, in that it may not be properly seen as a state of suspension, as other exceptions are typically framed. In fact, inversion, honestly expressed, retains all the qualities of movement not easily captured in most accounts of the sovereign exception. I hope to delineate the boundaries and potential of such inverted movement through an examination of the various kinds of inversion present in *Nightwood*, beginning with an examination of Robin Vote, a character who in form and function wholly embodies Agamben's sacred subject. I will then analyze the novel's central storyteller, the hack doctor and night watchman, Matthew O'Connor, who is cast aside as a homo sacer but retains a sense of individuated personhood and hope regardless of the extraordinary state of encampment to which he has been resigned.

2. Robin's Sacred Movement in *Nightwood*

The helplessness of Robin's unpremeditated movement is no more apparent than when she is with Felix Volkbein. If Nora's description of Robin's wandering through the novel elucidates the psychological underpinnings motivating Robin's movement, then Felix's gaze highlights Robin's incapacity to function as an invert in a social context. Felix's displacement and obsessive search for his own history highlights the apparently ahistorical, dislocated nature of Robin's movement. Robin's apparent lack of volition persistently distresses Felix, and he is never sure that she has awakened from

²³ It is important to remember that both discourses of sacred ambiguity and inversion arise from the birth of psychoanalysis. If one follows Agamben's logic regarding this period, it becomes apparent that focusing on ambiguity as a psychoanalytic trend, as applied both to people and things, may have predisposed many to assume that anyone who expressed a tendency at one end of any psychological spectrum may express a tendency at the other (ie. that someone who seemed to be a 'healthy' invert may become spontaneously ill, and this was somehow monstrous or out of control).

a somnambulant unthinking state.²⁴

Robin's movement seems to represent some form of non-historical inhuman intent, whereas Felix's is defined by the search for a legacy he feels he has inherited yet cannot realize. The narrator allows readers to see the details of the legacy Felix has inherited more clearly than he can, creating a sense of pathos and ironic detachment from Felix's experiences. The narrator does no such thing for Robin and forces readers to feel the same apprehension that Felix has in relation to her. Tracing Felix's history therefore helps establish not only why his life and wandering are fruitless but also sheds light on what makes Robin exceptional even beyond Felix in Agamben's sense and, perhaps, on where her redemption as a character may lie.

Felix has inherited the characteristic wandering of his father, Guido Volkbein, a Jewish man of Italian decent, whose whole life was defined by a single handkerchief he possessed. This handkerchief, coloured "exquisite yellow and black [...] cried aloud the ordinance of 1468, issued by one Pietro Barbo, demanding that, with a rope about its neck Guido's race should run the Corso for the amusement of the Christian populace" (Barnes 4). This single traumatic event summarized for Guido the history of pain and degradation experienced by his people, forever resigned to wandering in lands they could never claim. This is the event that encapsulates entirely Felix's obsession with aristocracy and claiming a title for himself, even if he doesn't know it. Felix, like his father Guido, is held in a tradition of being subject to the sovereign ban that his status as Jewish unconsciously forces him into. Just as his ancestors were forced to run the Corso, he is forced to wander to seek out his noble destiny. Just like his ancestors, Felix's movement is constricted by his status. He is not able to seek out the noble company he legitimately wants, but is compelled instead to approximate it with a compulsion to take part in theatre and circus, where the titles are parodic. Indeed, "[The] Princess Nadja [...] Baron von Tink, Princeipessa Stasera y Stasero", all of these inverted figures create in Felix a "longing and

²⁴ Indeed, the chapter title "La Somnambule" would seem to indicate otherwise.

disquiet” (49). This is indeed a less dramatic fate than that of Felix’s father Guido who could only move while feeling “hot, incautious and damned” but finally stops when he stumbles across a Viennese Christian woman, Hedvig, who bore his child—a child he did not live to see—under the false pretences of his Christianity and nobility (5). Guido wandered as a homo sacer until he died of a fever against the figurative wall of a pregnant Hedvig whose insistence, on, in this case, explicitly nationalist narratives, prevented Guido from ever being recognized. The narrator explains: “Hedvig, in spite of her agony, wept upon an outcast. Her body at that moment became the barrier and Guido died against that wall, troubled and alone” (5).

However, even as Guido’s exclusion haunts him unconsciously, Felix is not the same. This is made evident when Felix is compared to genuinely excluded subjects. Whereas Doctor O’Connor is keenly aware of his social position, Felix is unaware. The former declares “I’m damned, and carefully public (173)” while the latter is convinced of his nobility. Where O’Connor speaks in cryptic ways out of the necessity of hiding his identity: “Why is it that whenever I hear music I think I’m a bride?” (36), Felix speaks plainly and is often dull “[Felix answers] [n]eurasthenia” (36). Finally, when Felix is compared to another more extreme exception, Robin Vote, the contrast is startling. For instance, while he flounders to understand her, she is very nearly comatose. Felix seems to serve two purposes. The first is to demonstrate that, although being in a state of exception is constitutive, it may be more or less severe. The second is his use as a link between the camp and the outside world, or the night and day of the novel. He is able to serve this function as his form of inversion is relatively mild compared to that of other characters.

Conversely, Barnes carefully depicts Robin as a wholly ahistorical being who should not be awakened in historic terms lest she bring calamity on other wanderers. Felix senses this, and makes constant attempts, spurred on by how she makes him feel “an unaccountable apprehension” (46), to re-contextualize her as part of his search for his own history. The dread he feels about her stems from

nothing she has done but seems naturally to accompany her body even when she apparently acquiesces to his wishes. He is attracted to her initially because he believes at some level that, in her seeming ancientness and mysteriousness, she might be a human representation of something he is attempting to discover in his own legacy. However, her inhumanness constantly challenges this belief. Felix describes her as “like an old statue in a garden, that symbolizes the weather [...] it has endured [...], [which] is not so much the work of man as the work of wind and rain [...] and *though formed in man’s image is a figure of doom*” (45, emphasis mine). This dread is no more apparent for Felix than when he tries to contemplate Robin in her entirety. He cannot remember her features, only the sensation of her facial expressions and the feeling that accompanied them: “when she smiled the smile was only in the mouth [...] the face of an incurable yet to be stricken with malady” (45). Robin’s power lies in the temporal confusion that surrounds her. She muddles time. She is an “infected carrier of the past” (41), “an image of forgotten experience” (41), but someone “yet to be stricken” (45). She seems to be a timeless harbinger of doom, sent from the past to fathom some evil future portent. She is beyond the historical order and, thus, is cast out from the world.

It becomes clear that Robin is not only removed from the realm of *nomos*, but is also cast out of the sacred realm. Once Robin becomes pregnant with Felix’s child, she takes a Catholic vow spontaneously and starts to wander in churches. She encounters nuns who, “feeling that they were looking at someone who would never be able to ask for, or receive, mercy” (50), bless her and move on. The most she can think of as she kneels down to pray is her height and whether she is growing taller. Everything about her prayer marks her as unfit for the sacred realm. The narrator describes how, when she prayed, “her prayer was *monstrous*” because in it there was no margin left for damnation or forgiveness, for praise or for blame—those who cannot conceive a bargain cannot be saved or damned” (51; emphasis mine). In this way, Robin transcends the doctrine of ambiguity of sacredness put forward in the anthropological and Freudian traditions, which declared that the scared or taboo thing was both

“august and damned, worthy of veneration and provoking horror” (Agamben 73). Robin is neither august nor damned: she is merely empty. It is potentially misleading to associate her inability to function in a religious institution with her inability to function within the sacred realm, because the sacred realm is tied to no particular institution. Traditions of religion merely access ideas of consecration, damnation, and salvation more generally. The narrator’s description of her experiences in the church is only productive insofar as it showcases that she cannot understand the very idea of faith or the, corresponding, need to strike a bargain to avoid damnation or resign herself to it. In other words, she is incapable of understanding the ambiguity of the sacred, because she does not understand the choice within which that ambiguity situates itself. For these reasons, she is the inverted figure I seek to utilize to understand the kinds of inversion that were not included in the narratives that have figured contemporary transgender identity. Her movement, and the movement of those like her, is the key to refiguring our contemporary ideas about transgender people.

From my analysis of the nature and form of Robin’s movements as both an invert and sovereign exception, I draw two conclusions: firstly, it is important to trace and figure the narrative voices that actually tell her story and the clues they provide for how to tell the stories of people whose existence is seemingly incomprehensible and unknowable in normative terms. Secondly, I want to analyze Robin as monstrous through her movements and tie this analysis into Stryker’s re-appropriation of monstrosity to build a new “unnatural” epistemology and power centre for transgender people.

Robin represents that something is very wrong with how we understand transgender identities that do not fit into the frameworks of naturalness or queerness. Keeping in mind that such frameworks are themselves derivative of discourses of inversion that single out certain individuals and ignore others, the implications of Robin being treated as a fully excepted being translate directly to how similar figures are treated in the present. Robin’s apparent monstrosity parallels transgender figures who are perceived as unnatural in Stryker’s sense. It is important to remember that Stryker’s

framework emphasizes how, as a result of binaristic discourses that disallow the existence of transgender figures, the imposition of a transgender person on such discourses becomes deeply alarming, especially when it is as monstrous and sudden as Robin's. In the simplest and most intuitive terms, Robin's presence plays out in the novel through her existence as a present absence that represents nothing but illuminates everything. Throughout *Nightwood*, there is something fundamentally socially and historically impoverished about the world of the novel. The narrator describes Robin as a completely incomprehensible being, beyond history and with only the capacity to take up space. In one scene, she is sitting at a *prie-dieu* "laugh[ing], out of some hidden capacity, some lost subterranean humour; as it ceased, she leaned further forward in a swoon, waking and yet heavy, like one in sleep" (51).

At the same time, Robin's counterpart, O'Connor, offers a portrait of an inverted person who fails to be read as an invert and who is resigned to a bleak fate as a result. Whereas Robin is absent in her presence, O'Connor stands in for everything but who he²⁵ really is. O'Connor becomes the universal narrator of *Nightwood*, another absent presence, and, fascinatingly, the only character who can form judgments regarding Robin. O'Connor's experience feels in some ways like a conscious queering of Robin's as he is acting as the gender style of the universally queer position in Butler's terms. O'Connor is heavily praised for his seemingly omniscient knowledge but is utterly ignored for what he wants to embody. When Nora comes to the doctor to discuss how she is broken over Robin, she utterly ignores any proclamation he makes about himself, including when it's to reassure her of his competency. Even though Nora does not pay attention, O'Connor's justification of why he knows who Robin is, is derived from what he believes he also physically embodies. He

²⁵ O'Connor's gendered subjectivity is immensely complex and would very likely be construed as transgendered or bi-gendered in a contemporary context. Because no such rhetoric was available to describe the invert of Barnes's time, and because it is impossible to say what pronoun O'Connor would use in self-description, I choose to refer to him by "he" as the novel does.

proclaims, “[d]o you think that I, the Old Woman who lives in the closet, do not know that every child, no matter what its day, is born prehistorically” (146). O’Connor’s material suffering mirrors the consequences for real transgender subjects who are reduced to plot devices or queer signifiers representing some other set of relationships.

How do these figures assist in developing new transgender epistemologies? I argue that what is important is what is at stake for O’Connor: the need to be a discrete material person. Likewise, Robin serves as a warning for characters such as O’Connor, because, being identified as incomprehensible, not only is she not understood as a discrete person but she has also lost the potential ever to become one. O’Connor’s interaction with Robin places him in an impossible dilemma. He is desperate to reveal his identity, but, even if he were to do so, its apparent inhumanness and “monstrosity” would force his newly material body to be unknowable once more. During many of the discussions he has with various characters in the novel, he nearly outright proclaims he is a woman. While speaking to Nora he exclaims, “women...were born on the knees; that’s why I’ve never been able to do anything about them; I’m on my own so much of the time” (160). If he isn’t doing this he at least reveals his identity through actions that he tries to keep secret, such as in a scene involving Felix I will describe shortly. In the former instance of his obtuse declarations about his gender, he is merely unknowable, and therefore ignored. In the latter, however, Felix must go to great pains to forget the monstrosity of the inversion he has witnessed. As a result of both of these situations, O’Connor is resigned to moving restlessly not only through physical space but also through universal narratives, driven by the need to reveal something he cannot. I argue that by tracing how O’Connor rediscovers himself through such narratives and how he thus carves space and time around him, it is possible to see how to develop new transgender epistemologies and how to overcome the transgender conundrum of being everything and nothing at once within normative systems.

3. Reading Transgender Epistemologies into the Word of the Night

When O'Connor first "reveals" himself to Felix while treating Robin, Felix's apprehension is apparent but takes a slightly different form than when it was directed at Robin. Felix perceives the doctor's movements in trying to wake Robin as similar to those of a magician feigning transparency in the process of setting up his most elaborate hoax. On the surface the hoax O'Connor is setting up is his ability to cure Robin or understand her condition medically, when he is in fact just a hack doctor. In reality, his interest in Robin's medical welfare is the real hoax, disguising O'Connor's wish to use her feminine possessions. Felix witnesses O'Connor dotting perfume on himself, putting foundation on his face, and applying lipstick behind a screen by Robin's bed. Felix immediately gets the sense that "the whole fabric of [O'Connor's] magic had begun to decompose, as if the mechanics of machination were indeed out of control and were simplifying themselves back to their origin" (40). It is only after this realization that O'Connor pockets a hundred-franc note. After O'Connor does so, Felix develops "a tension in his stomach, such as one suffers when watching an acrobat leaving [...] safety [...] in a mad unraveling whirl into probable death" (40). Felix, however, immediately dismisses this tension, proclaiming that he would "continue to like the doctor" (40) even if to do so would mean making what he must love into what he can love, a process that would "eventually be a part of [Felix's self] [...] brought on by no will of his own" (40). Felix knows that something about O'Connor is "wrong" as he is the wrong sort of invert and a criminal: as with like Colonel Barker the "wrong" kind of inversion and criminality seem to go hand-in-hand in certain people's imaginations.

What makes this passage interesting is that it is not entirely clear that O'Connor's theft brings on Felix's sense of dread. Indeed, Felix's horror makes itself known to readers immediately after O'Connor applies makeup to his face. This horror is based in Felix's sense that everything is unravelling and, beneath that, there is nothing. O'Connor's application of makeup, criminal deviancy, and the unavoidable feeling of nihilism Felix experiences in his presence all seem deeply linked in

Felix's mind. Because of this series of connections, Felix must simultaneously repress everything he knows about O'Connor. Felix decides that to do so will require he undergo "a long series of convulsions of the spirit" that would enable him to "continue to like the doctor" (40). The narrator acknowledges that implicit in such convulsions is Felix's need to make "what [he] must love into what we can love" (40), which in this case refers to the doctor's hidden "monstrosity", contextualized by his movements. Even though O'Connor and Felix are both in Robin's private room, O'Connor must move behind an additional veil, in order to practice his inverted behaviours. This occlusion assists Felix in developing an image of O'Connor as unravelling behind the veil in an extraordinary way back to his source. The futility of O'Connor's desire to confine his actions to a space only he is aware of becomes apparent in this moment, as Felix fully grasps the destructive and transformative potential of what O'Connor is doing, even if he immediately relocates this realization to his unconscious mind. The narrator warns that Felix's act of repression has its consequences. It changes Felix forever, because he must now carry the burden of the doublethink he participates in to cover O'Connor's inversion so that he can associate with him. This in turn enables him to interact more easily with inverts such as Robin who he dreads. It also, of course, occasions a great deal of pain in those such as O'Connor, who are "lucky" to be forgotten.

Felix's witnessing of O'Connor reveals that O'Connor is no longer the abstracted universal he thinks he is, but is instead real and active within the narrow confines of the nightworld. In order to survive, O'Connor must rescue himself from the abstracted world and force himself into coherence within the day realm that will never acknowledge him. That there is no space for him where he must have space and that any space he tries to create closes around him to exclude him again is O'Connor's paradox. This is also the paradox of Agamben's sacred being, who lives forever in an excepted state. Were O'Connor to attempt to reveal his true identity outside of the nightworld, he may simply unravel for the world to see just as he did in Felix's unconscious.

Nonetheless, O'Connor, in his roundabout and quixotic way, unveils his identity throughout the novel. The next concrete glimpse we gain of it is through Nora's eyes, when, heartbroken about Robin's departure, she seeks out O'Connor's advice. Upon approaching his apartment building, she notices how small his living quarters are and is struck by how poor he is. She climbs six flights of stairs and eventually comes across a room "so small that it was just possible to walk sideways up to the bed" (84). Despite its tiny size, to Nora's horror, the room is incredibly dirty. The combination is so affecting that she thinks, "it was as if being condemned to the grave the doctor had decided to occupy [the room] with the utmost abandon" (84). In this phrase, the pathos of O'Connor's struggle is revealed to us. O'Connor makes his living by being everything to everyone and nothing to himself. It is through this quality alone that he is permitted to subsist. However, the project he must undertake to reveal his identity requires time and resources that he cannot access. Further, this is a project of self-discovery and self-assertion and is therefore antithetical to the attitude that allows him to survive in the world. The result of these conflating circumstances is catastrophic. O'Connor must scrounge and collect whatever he can in the process of disavowing himself, in order to occupy a space barely large enough for him to exist in, where he hopes to never be discovered. Thus, all that he has gained from his inverted identity is the ability to lay himself in a grave with whatever he can collect to take with him. He narrates the world around him to others and to himself, then eventually tires and returns home to bury himself and mourn his own loss repeatedly. It is clear that this is not a properly spiritual funeral as O'Connor is exempted from *nomos* and *physis*, and lives like a true sacred being.

O'Connor's catastrophic failure to self-realize also reveals itself in the more explicitly gendered terms one might expect. Nora observes that the Doctor's room resembles "a cross between a *chambre à coucher* and a boxer's training camp" (85). His room evokes the world of the circus with which Felix becomes so entranced earlier in the novel. Even if the circus is more a world of inversion and thwarted expectations and O'Connor's room is more of a masculine space with feminine attributes breaking

through grotesquely and inappropriately, both share the urgency of confinement and the revelation of shocking or incongruous things. For instance, O'Connor's tiny quarters are both a belligerent space "in which a woman has never set foot ... [a space possessing] a metallic odour, as of beaten iron in a smithy" and a space brimming with women's toiletries and cosmetics in such a way "[that] g[ives] the impression that the feminine finery had suffered venery" (85). Conversely, the circus does not smell metallic but bestial. It is a sweaty, decaying space in which "the men [smell] weaker and the women stronger than their beasts" with the unusually gendered names to match such as Frau Mann and Principessa Stasera y Stasero (14). Despite the apparent similarities between the two, the difference between O'Connor's room and the circus is the difference between a space of inversion and a space of true encampment. The circus has successfully found a way to translate itself back to the world, outside from within it. The cost is a false blending of categories to create of a kind of coherence that non-inverted citizens see as monstrous. In this way, the circus is brought to Robin's level of monstrosity. Conversely, we see the doctor struggling merely to subsist, revealing both the thing he loathes (overt masculinity) and the thing he longs for (feminine existence) in the same enclosed space.

The interstices of O'Connor's space are not really revealed until Nora encounters him. She walks into the room, and he bolts up in bed "heavily rouged and his lashes painted" with his head framed in "the golden semi-circle of a wig" (85). Before either of them can experience embarrassment, he rips the wig off and insists that she ask him anything. The narrator notes, "he was extremely put out, having expected someone else, though his favourite topic, and one which he talked on whenever he had a chance, was the night" (86). Nora picks up on the patheticness of his excluded state in such a tiny space and thinks to herself "love, for him, can be only something special; in a room that giving back evidence of his occupancy, is as mauled as the last agony" (86). The movement in the novel between this thought and O'Connor's sudden statement "Have you thought of the night?" reveals to readers that O'Connor's small world and the nightworld are one and the same (86). In O'Connor's future

descriptions of the night, he repeatedly returns to the loss of external comprehensibility as a theme. The tininess of O'Connor's bedchamber and the expansiveness of the nightworld are identically repressive insofar as, in each, O'Connor is made comprehensible only to himself. In this sense, the nightworld is merely a large zone of indistinction and space of encampment. O'Connor urges Nora to listen to his description of "the night of nights—the night you want to know about the most of all—for even the greatest generality has a little particular" (95). "The night of nights" is a night that gives one the very thing they dread: it is a night that is used as a cover to escape the day but is suddenly ripped away to reveal it. In short, if it is the anonymity and non-reflexivity of the night that is valued, then eventually these values will serve the purpose of reflecting a person back to themselves and driving them mad. The analogy O'Connor gives is that of a holy sacrament. He exclaims, "we wash away our sense of sin, and what does that bath secure us? Sin, shining bright and hard. In what does a Latin bathe? True dust. We have made the literal error. We have used water, we are thus too sharply reminded" (96). His only available solution is to behave like the European who "get[s] out of bed with a disorder that holds the balance [...] *L'Echo de Paris* and his bed sheets were run off the same press. One may read in both the travail life has had with him—he reeks with the essential wit necessary to the 'sale' of both editions, night edition and day" (96). This stance of ironic detachment may serve those to whom it is available, but irony is impossible when universally understandable identity is impossible. The ironic wit of the European allows him to move seamlessly through many worlds, and this wit is the result of his possession of an identity that makes sense to some extent in the day. This European may be likened to the kind of invert, such as Hall, who is accepted into medical definitions and kitsch narratives and who conforms to societal definitions just enough to gain mobility and freedom.

For atypical inverts such as O'Connor, however, such conforming is impossible. When Nora asks him how he is able to live knowing that the night will eventually reflect him back to himself wherever he goes and drive him mad: "how do you live at all if this wisdom of yours is not only the

truth but also the price?” (96), his response is strangely simple. He continues to live because he must. Despite the fact that he currently occupies a position as a universal storyteller, he believes he has the memory of past lives lived as a woman. He proclaims “we go to our Houses by our nature—and our nature, no matter how it is, we all have to stand—as for me, so God has made me [...] Am I to blame if I’ve been summoned before and this my last and oddest call?” (97). This quote may be the key to O’Connor’s final downfall. In a moment of crisis, with the full scope and depth of the night revealed to him, O’Connor retreats to the comfort of knowing that his identity as a woman is somehow a natural thing that must ultimately express itself. What has been proven over and over, however, is that it is impossible for him to do so. Even as he actively attempts to express his identity, he is overridden by Felix’s confusion and distress and by Nora’s sorrow and desire to know more about the night. Nora’s discovery eventually whittles away and degrades him even in the intimacy of his tiny hiding place—the one remaining place he has within the nightworld where he could exhibit his identity, if only self-reflexively.

The process of being constantly confined and unable to reclaim an identity for himself eventually takes its toll in “Go Down, Matthew,” where O’Connor starts railing against those who have allowed him to disappear as a subject. He drunkenly asks, “What do they all come to me for? Why do they all tell me everything, then expect it to lie hushed in me, like a rabbit gone home to die?” (171). The answer to these questions is that O’Connor’s identity is undermined not because he has status as a “watchman” or universal narrator of the night but because he has not used his omniscient knowledge to speak about his inversion itself (84). His ability to speak about his inversion in the code of universal observations is the only remedy he has to being permanently excluded to a zone of indistinction. Indeed, doing so is the only chance O’Connor has, in Stryker’s terms, of consciously re-appropriating his unnaturalness. The closer O’Connor gets to his downfall in the final chapter, the more urgent speaking on this topic becomes for him. Towards the end of their dialogues, Nora, in one of her more

strongly philosophical moments, tells the doctor, “I, who want power, chose a girl who resembles a boy” (145). The doctor sees this as an inevitable assertion and describes how it speaks to the universal mythological power of the invert:

What is this love we have for the invert, boy or girl? It was they who were spoken of in every romance that we ever read. The girl lost, what is she but the Prince found? The Prince on the white horse that we have always been seeking. And the pretty lad who is a girl, what but the prince-princess in point lace—neither one and half the other, the painting on the fan! We were impaled in our childhood upon them as they rode through our primers, the sweetest lie of all, now come to be in boy or girl, for in the girl it is the prince, and in the boy it is the girl that makes a prince a prince—and not a man. (145)

By evoking but twisting the fairy tale formula, O’Connor shows how the mixing of gender is what achieves the fantastical. The phrase “for in the girl it is the prince, in the boy it is the girl that makes a prince a prince—and not a man” is especially telling, because it speaks to the violence inherent in binaristic systems of categorizing gender and to the great loss experienced when we do not realize that real, materially gendered bodies that push the boundaries of queer discourses have enormous potential to re-inform the kitsch narratives so often central to our lives. Within binary systems, a woman may validate a man's subjectivity and reinforce his dominant privileged position (i.e., his “princeliness”), but she cannot make him a man. This in turn would be reified as nationalistic rhetoric that encouraged the creation of certain public spaces over which ‘princeliness’ or hyper-normative masculinity would have exclusive power. Reinforcing gender reductivism precludes human subjects from accessing more subversive universal knowledge about gender that ironically would lead people to fuller gender expression (in other words, being the man instead of just the prince). Further, O’Connor’s speech

reminds us that developing and expressing a gender identity does not have to be an exercise in singling out a position for ourselves within nationalist narratives, and in fact engaging with such narratives paradoxically puts us all the more at risk for biopolitical exclusion, due our inability to understand it exists. O'Connor's ability to access the undercurrents in archetypal narratives informing Eurocentric ideals and make them monstrous employs Stryker's notion of reclaiming monstrosity to subversive ends in a way that exposes the evils of a supposedly benign binaristic gender system. O'Connor's process of making the archetypal gender narratives monstrous in Stryker's sense is a recursive one. He uncovers his own identity even as he uses it to access universal ideals of inversion. This identity loop is a powerful way for O'Connor to open up space when none is available to him. Regardless, throughout the course of the novel, his encampment and immobility are extreme enough that he is unable to gather the resources or strength to break free. Furthermore, he can express himself all he likes through universal narratives, but to do so he requires a receptive audience who actually understands him. He receives neither. He is therefore only able to open up enough space in *Nightwood* to allow himself mobility as a narrator, enabling him to remain alive, mentally and physically, in a state of encampment. The novel highlights how the onus needs to be on those who are not subject to the ban to create, at minimum, enough space for O'Connor to express himself. If those not treated as sacred subjects begin to understand who is, then the biopolitical realm may eventually expand to accept such a group into its nomos in some capacity. Creating such a space relies on citizens first having a concept of the kinds of nationalist discourses that blind them to other forms of identification. Until then, O'Connor's narration will fall on deaf ears.

O'Connor's desperate need to access the universal in order to determine on himself hits a crisis point in the Café de la Mairie du Vie. Immediately we see the Doctor displaced in a way he has not been yet in the novel. From the Doctor's initial introduction to Felix, to his resuscitation of Robin, to his counselling of Nora he has never had to face down the audience he now must confront. Among

these ‘nightfolks’ he was ignored or sidelined at worst, as evidenced by Felix’s repression of his criminal or inverted behaviours, or Nora’s incapacity to validate any of his narratives or pick up on his emotional state during her own ramblings. At best he was revered as a kind of deity of that realm, a reincarnation of motherly woman with “deep corn curls to my bum, with a womb as big as the king’s kettle, and a bosom as high as the bowsprit of a fishing schooner” (97), whose expertise of the night was unsurpassed. In the world of the Café de la Mairie, he’s a simply an incomprehensible madman. The language of those around him is more terse, dry, and prosaic than it has been at any point previously in the novel. O’Connor is brutally aware of the mocking laughter of the café’s “habitueés” (169), and eventually even the ex-priest’s supposedly friendly comments end up hurting him as badly as the most vicious of his persecutors, showing how he has been with equal measure rejected from the church and the state. O’Connor’s persecutor perfectly sums up the tyrannical nationalist stance that identifies those included as full citizens into the biopolitical order, and expectedly, it links O’Connor in with the (monstrous) beast, a connection made by the narrator previously only to refer to inversion. His prosecutor proclaims “Funny little man...Never stops talking—always getting everyone into trouble by excusing them because he can’t excuse himself—the Squatting Beast, coming out at night....”

O’Connor interrupts this interlocutor to proclaim “And what am I? I’m damned, and carefully public!” (173). In this way, O’Connor recognizes the recklessness of his choice to appear in the Mairie, a Café located near Saint Sulpice, a powerful Church and public institution, as well as near the French Senate. His reference to being carefully public is of course also a reference to the illegal medical procedures people rely on him to perform such as abortions, as he must be available and yet discreet. O’Connor is a holder of secrets in general, physical and emotional, those of inverts and of normal citizens. This is a direct result of the unique knowledge base and power he holds as an invert. In society’s terms, he knows too much and, although he is needed, he is excluded. His subsistence as an excepted being relies on this omniscience that also undoes him. There is no time for him to express an identity outside of that

of knowledge keeper, and indeed to do so would be dangerous for him, as his mind would be less full of the lives and secrets of others.

I have previously alluded to the ways in which Robin's incapacity to express herself combined with her inverted nature brings her to a level of societal exception even O'Connor can't reach because of his role as storyteller. I wish to discuss the unique role Robin's downfall has to play in foreshadowing O'Connor's ultimate collapse into despair once he is no longer able to contain his inverted identity, and therefore disavows his role of mere storyteller and secret-keeper. As I have discussed, Robin is a being entirely without utility. Utility is a quality that is required of the denizens of the nightworld, particularly the inverts, should they not want to be completely banned in an excepted state. Her only use is as a mirror that reflects other inverts worlds back to them in destructive ways. For instance, O'Connor describes how Robin only takes an interest in Nora because Nora has forgotten her the best. He believes this has made Nora's life a "prosecution" that she must withstand, and as a result she has "built back the amazing defense, [her] heart" (162). Such a destructive relationship only lasts so long, but it appears that the nighttime of Paris is especially capable of sustaining it. Something, however, about Nora's return to North America and her eventual encounter with Robin there brings things to an end, and occasions both her downfall and Robin's. I wish to investigate the catastrophic difference between the nightworld of Europe and North America and what such a difference portends for other inverts such as the Doctor.

Once Jenny takes Robin to New York, her wandering is finally decontextualized. In Paris, as in other European cities, Robin's emptiness was still contextually framed by the biopolitical world around her. She couldn't help but associate with the denizens of the nightworld, and whatever public space her body moved through seemed to come with its own predetermined meaning, such as the multitude of churches she inhabited or the bars and cafes that preyed on her youth and vulnerability. In short, Robin had the both the worlds of *nomos* and *physis* to move through. It was this very contrast between

Robin's emptiness and the history and power of the world around her that was so concerning to Nora. Nora recounts to the Doctor how she told Robin she wished she would just die in her arms so Robin wouldn't go into the nightworld of Paris again: "Die now, so you will be quiet, so you will not be touched again by dirty hands, so you will not take my heart and body and let them be nosed by dogs— die now, then you will be mine forever" (154). Such a plea of course fell on deaf ears, as Robin has no capacity to connect with other human beings or heed their warnings. Robin is incapable, as the Doctor says of "doing anything in relation to anyone but herself" (155). Regardless, European cities do not make Nora's suffering catastrophic, due both to the length and variety of histories they embody, and also because they aren't overly focussed on democratic ideals.

All this changes at the end of the novel once Nora returns to North America and encounters Robin. I have already discussed the unique role democracy has played in expanding the zone of encampment and who is subject to the sovereign ban. It would follow that societies heavily focused on democratic principles as they create free and individualized citizens would also create the largest and most robust spaces of encampment. There is no doubt that in *Nightwood* space has both an interior and exterior quality. In order for any character to express their identity they must both have the mental space to conceive of it, and the public space available in which to enact it. Despite Robin and O'Connor both being unacceptable kinds of inverts, due to space having this double form, only Robin is actually lost, as she is without the ability to self-actualize. However, she is still in some ways allowed to subsist in Europe by dint of there being public spaces that at least attempt to impose an identity on her (such as the circus, the churches she inhabits, and the nightworld more generally). These spaces prop her up, almost like a marionette. Even so, we are consistently reminded of her inhuman nature, perhaps the most strongly and often by O'Connor, who at one point refers to her as "outside the 'human-type'— a wild thing caught in a woman's skin, monstrously alone, monstrously vain" (155). She is referred to on many occasions as subhuman as well as inhuman and is notably

compared to a variety of wild animals.

Such a comparison quickly devolves into a statement of fact about Robin's wandering in North America. Shortly after arriving in New York the narrator proclaims that "Jenny could do nothing with her [...] it was as if the motive power which has directed Robin's life, her day as well as her night, had been crippled" (177). This presumably is a reference to the removal of the original biopolitical frame of the Parisian nightworld that allowed Robin to function. New York is its own biopolitical space too, but the sense the narrator gives is that it is hardly as tolerant, and almost immediately forces Robin to "[take] trains into different parts of the country, [wander] without design...[sit] in the darkest corner [of a Church]" (176). Eventually the narrator begins to focus on Robin's movements through "the open country" where she seeks out animals "straining their fur back until their eyes were narrowed and their teeth bare, her own teeth showing as if her hand were upon her own neck" (177). Jenny is now aware that Robin has moved way beyond her scope, and becomes "hysterical [...accusing] Robin of a 'sensuous communion with unclean spirits'" (177).

Conclusion

I began my discussion with an analysis of how social rights legislation in countries such as Canada may serve a more preventative than transformational purpose. This is not to say that legislation such as Bill C-279, that seeks to amend the *Human Rights Act* and *Charter of Rights and Freedoms* to include “gender identity” and “gender expression” could not serve the important purpose of giving transgender people recourse to the law when injustices are committed against them. The underlying conditions of Canada as a biopolitical state, bent on retaining transgender people in a zone of encampment as sovereign exceptions, prevents the baseline levels of inclusion and comprehensibility required within the state structure for social rights legislation to make sense in relation to transgender people. I have shown how nationalist paradigms, which insist on the universality and inevitability of a specific gender expression arising from a falsely naturalized sex, help maintain ambivalent attitudes towards the suffering of transgender people within zones of encampment. I have argued that normative discourses situate transgender people within specific frameworks that trace back to Benjamin's invention of the term “transsexual” as a means of legitimizing the formerly pathologized “congenital invert.” Accordingly, Canada and other liberal democratic states have only allocated spaces and resources to transgender people who make themselves comprehensible within medically sanctioned discourses of binary transitioning or within queer communities that regard transgender as a the gender style of queer sexuality.

The ability to formulate transgender identities within binaristic or queer discourses is of limited benefit to many transgender people who cannot force their identities into sensibility within such contexts. Stryker's definition of those who could self-identify within the term “transgender” includes those who “[are] marginalized or oppressed due to their difference from social norms of gendered embodiment” (“(De)Subjugated” 4). For Stryker, this includes “transsexuals, drag queens, butches, hermaphrodites, cross-dressers, masculine women, effeminate men, sissies, tomboys, and anybody else

willing to be interpolated by that term” (4). For those people whose gender identity is fluid or materially significant in nonbinaristic ways, immobilization within encamped spaces, whether metaphorical or literal, seems inevitable. Matthew O’Connor in Barnes’s *Nightwood* is one such figure whose identity is untranslatable or incomprehensible within normative frameworks. As my reading of *Nightwood* demonstrates, O’Connor meaningfully responds to dominant medicalized discourses of inversion. As such, his means of re-narrating inverted experience offers a powerful new lens through which we may understand not only how transgender subjects who have been forced out of the state and its identity discourses may reclaim their voices but also how to conceptualize transgender identity at all. In order to develop alternate conceptualizations, scholars and activists must uncover new histories and fictions about figures such as O’Connor and Colonel Barker and trace how the attitudes and biographies of these figures correlate with the attitudes and autobiographies of contemporary transgender people, such as bi-gender, third gender, and gender fluid people, who are excluded from mainstream nationalistic narratives of transgender comprehensibility. This project in many ways mirrors Agamben’s project to recuperate the idea of the *homo sacer* as a subject through referencing the ancient concept of *sacratio* and therefore will certainly affect the ways in which certain transgender subjects interact with the state in the future.

Finally, I established that until transgender people are given the space to voice their own epistemic views, any recommendation we may get from Stryker or an analysis of O’Connor about how to reclaim the terms “unnaturalness” and “monstrosity” to tell universal transgender narratives that open up subject positions will not be fully realized. This is true as well for those people whose gender does not fit into Eurocentric narratives.

At the outset of my writing, I discussed the Canadian federal government’s continued failure to pass Bill C-279 through the Senate. Since I wrote the introduction to this thesis, however, the bill has been amended to remove the phrase “gender expression” and exempt sex-specific facilities such as

washrooms, changing rooms, and correctional facilities, essentially undoing the effectiveness of the bill. I wish to assert that even if affirmative legislation is itself insufficient in upholding human rights and instead merely provides protection against certain kinds of violence going unpunished, the transgender rights bill, should it pass, holds a lot of power over transgender people in that courts may determine its application. The bill's current definition of "gender identity" is inclusive but general and revolves around "the individual's deeply felt internal and individual experience of gender, which may or may not correspond with the sex that the individual was assigned at birth" (Bill C-279 2). The interpretation of this description depends on the degree of epistemic sophistication the interpreter possesses regarding transgender issues. The importance of the inclusion of the "gender expression" clause for Canadian legislation was in its clarificatory function, and its notable removal from C-279 destroys this function. If a transgender person were able to come forward citing discrimination against them based on their own unique expression, a better balance would be created between the courts' interpretation of the "gender identity" clause and the transgender person's own epistemic views. In short, to deny transgender people the interpretive agency inherent in using the "gender expression" clause is to keep certain kinds of transgender people from participating in the state as citizens. My analysis therefore serves an important purpose not only in explaining how legislation like the transgender rights bill has been stalled in the senate as a result of nationalistic narratives about the inevitability of binaristic norms but also in how it describes what will happen if epistemic power is not returned to transgender people, specifically those whose heritage might be found in unusual forms of inversion. Until transgender people are able to move freely in epistemic space that they have been allowed to open, I fear the state's capacity to move transgender people out of zones of encampment is limited.

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