

University of Reading

Transing the Narrative: Transgender Identities in Britain, 1870-1940s

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Abstract

This thesis provides a multi-faceted historical discussion of transgender identities in Britain in the period c.1870-1950. In doing so, it develops a distinct approach. Much of the extant historical research on transgender identities has either focused primarily on the United States, or treated Britain as but one example in a broader European transgender history. Much good work has resulted, but at the cost of losing elements of a specifically British cultural context, and subsuming the British experience within a very medicalised European discourse. This, combined with a tendency, when British sources are studied, to treat individuals in isolation, has encouraged a preoccupation with 'reclaiming' and categorising individuals as 'either/or', and privileging a 'wrong body' narrative. By moving the focus away from European medical discourse we are able to argue that British transgender identities, in all their diversity, can only be fully understood by supplementing medical discourse with nation-specific cultural sources. This thesis combines a re-examination through a transgender lens of key medical and cultural sources that have received academic attention as well as introducing previously overlooked sources of critical relevance to British discourse on gender non-conformity. The result is a richer, more robustly historical account.

Building on Jack Halberstam's and Kit Heyam's work, the more fluid, inclusive approach taken here reveals a theoretical hierarchy and privileging of certain transgender identities within British representations of gender non-conformity. More respect and validation were accorded those assigned female at birth (AFAB) and those following a linear, medical

transition narrative than those assigned male at birth (AMAB) and those whose gender identity was fluid. Non-binary identities meanwhile were almost erased. This thesis provides a small representation of the legacy of diverse, disruptive gender identities and that there is not and has never been one way to be trans.

Declaration of Original Authorship

Declaration

I confirm that this is my own work and the use of all material from other sources has been properly and fully acknowledged.

Amy Lesley Catherine Austin

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Contents

Glossary of Terms.....	8
Introduction.....	10

Section One: Medical Cases

Ch 1: Trans Britannia: Havelock Ellis' <i>Eonism</i> and the British sexological approach to gender non-conformity.....	62
Ch 2: A Passing Resemblance: Medical constructions of gender non-conformity in interwar Britain.....	116
Ch 3: Fitting the Body to the Mind: Michael Dillon, Roberta Cowell and the birth of sex-reassignment surgery in Britain.....	159

Section Two: Cultural Representations

Ch 4: 'I would have given my soul...to lead the life of a beautiful woman': <i>2835 Mayfair</i> and the importance of fictional accounts of gender non-conformity in early-twentieth-century British novels.....	234
Ch 5: '[M]any more people of my type do exist': The dual personality of Vita Sackville-West.....	290
Ch 6: 'There are no "men" or "women" in Urania': <i>Urania</i> and the quest for a genderless society.....	336
Conclusion.....	377
Bibliography.....	382

Glossary of Terms

This glossary is intended as a guide to clarify my use of terms within this thesis. Consequently, the definitions provided are by no means exhaustive or universally accepted, nor are they intended as such.

Acute hypospadias – A variation in foetal development where the opening of the urethra is not located at the head of the penis.

AFAB – Acronym for assigned female at birth, denoting the sex assigned to an infant usually based on biological or anatomical characteristics.

AMAB – Acronym for assigned male at birth, denoting the sex assigned to an infant usually based on biological or anatomical characteristics.

Cisgender – An individual whose gender identity aligns with the gender assigned to them at birth.

Double mastectomy – The surgical removal of both breasts.

Gender affirmation surgery – Various medical procedures used to alter the appearance and function of individuals' bodies to better align with their gender identity. Such procedures are referred to by a number of terms such as gender confirmation surgery, gender reassignment surgery, sex affirmation surgery, and sex realignment surgery, as well as historical terms such as sexual reassignment surgery (SRS).

Gender fluid – An individual whose gender identity is not fixed and can change over time.

Gender non-conforming – An individual whose gender expression does not conform to their society's prescribed gender norms and/or gender roles for their gender identity. Gender nonconformity is a broad term that can include transgender as well as cisgender individuals.

Intersex – Individuals with sexual or reproductive anatomy that resists classification into normalized parameters of what is biologically male or female.

Non-binary – An umbrella term for individuals whose gender identity does not conform to the gender binary of male and female. This covers a diverse range of identities including – but not limited to – genderqueer, third gender and gender fluid.

Orchidectomy – The surgical removal of the testicles.

Queer – An umbrella term for sexual and gender minorities and/or individuals of non-normative identities and politics that eschews binaries and fixed definitions. Queer is often used to describe an individual's oppositional relationship to power or the dominant culture.

Transgender – Individuals 'who move away from the gender they were assigned at birth, people who cross over (*trans-*) the boundaries constructed by their culture to define and contain that gender.'

Trans man/trans woman – An individual who was assigned female at birth and identifies as male/ an individual who was assigned male at birth and identifies as female.

Introduction

On 28 April 1870, two individuals left the Strand Theatre. They were dressed in women's evening wear and were accompanied by their friends Cecil Thomas and Hugh Mundell. Moments after entering the street, the pair were arrested for disturbing the peace by Detective William Chamberlain. Chamberlain had encountered the duo many times and quickly transported them to Bow Street police station where both were subjected to a physical examination by the police surgeon.¹ The intention of the surgeon was to detect any signs of anal intercourse that would indicate homosexuality. Although no signs were found, the pair were both charged the following day in court with 'conspiring and inciting persons to commit an unnatural offence'.² However, the aspect of this court appearance that caused the most comment in press reports was the female clothing of the accused.

The pair in question were Thomas/Stella Boulton and Frederick/Fanny Park, actors who appeared as women in their performances. While their double act met with great success on the stage, issues arose from their presenting as female offstage at social engagements in public areas. Boulton and Park had elicited much attention on several occasions due to their female clothing and had been ejected from the Alhambra and the Burlington arcade numerous times. Boulton was also known to have lived with Sir Arthur Clinton as husband and wife.³ What followed the arrest of Boulton and Park was a sensational trial in 1871 that revealed the complex London counterculture in which drag, homosexuality and gender non-conformity merged.

¹ Anon., 'Police', *The Times*, 30 April 1870, 11.

² Simon Joyce, 'Two Women Walk into a Theatre Bathroom: The Fanny and Stella Trials as Trans Narrative', *Victorian Review*, 44 (2018), 83.

³ *Ibid.*, 89.

The Boulton and Park case has been the subject of much historical research, the dominant theme of which is the reframing of the case within different queer narratives. In *Nameless Offences*, Harry Cocks lays out what he describes as the ‘distinct phases’ of how the Boulton and Park case has been framed by historians.⁴ Yet, these phases all read Bolton and Park as homosexual men, with the debate centring on why their homosexuality was intentionally disregarded during the trial. The theatrical professions of the pair and the defence’s strategy of presenting the case in terms of masquerade situate Boulton and Park within histories of the theatre. Laurence Senelick has focused on the pair as drag performers in his essay ‘Boys and Girls Together’ (1993), while Judith Rowbotham considers the case in the wider context of concerns over deception and masquerade, but neither challenges the male gendering of Boulton and Park.⁵ Similarly, Charles Upchurch acknowledges Boulton and Park’s use of clothing as ‘self-expression’ but situates them within the history of London homosexual subcultures of crossdressing.⁶ Barry Reay too, describes the ‘male effeminacy’ of Boulton and Park in terms of its link with homosexuality and leaves the question of gender identity unexplored.⁷ Jeffrey Weeks is more explicit in reading the Boulton and Park case as homosexual by including them as an example in his essay on male prostitution and

⁴ H. G. Cocks, *Nameless Offences: Homosexual Desire in the 19th Century*, (London, 2003), 106.

⁵ See Laurence Senelick, ‘Boys and Girls Together’, in: Lesley Ferris (ed.), *Crossing the Stage: Controversies on Cross-dressing* (London, 1993), 80–95, and Judith Rowbotham, ‘A Deception on the Public: The Real Scandal of Boulton and Park’, *Liverpool Law Review*, 36 (2015), 123–145.

⁶ Charles Upchurch, ‘Forgetting the Unthinkable: Cross-Dressers and British Society in the Case of the Queen vs. Boulton and Others’, *Gender and History*, 12 (2000), 128.

⁷ Barry Reay, ‘Writing the Modern Histories of Homosexual England’, *The Historical Journal*, 52 (2009), 227–8.

homosexuality, noting that transcripts of the trial reveal that ‘neither the police nor the court were familiar with either male homosexuality or prostitution.’⁸

These works ignore the evidence of Boulton and Park’s correspondence which suggests their potential identification as female. As Simon Joyce asserts, ‘the defendants refer to themselves by female pronouns and to each other as sisters; there is evidence that one may have considered herself as married to a man [and the] mother of one of the defendants asserts that she has presented as female since the age of six’.⁹ Joyce explores the gender non-conformity of Boulton and Park in response to the dominant homosexual narrative.

Joyce argues:

It is far more common, and thus rather disturbing, to find commentators who essentially side with the prosecution by situating Fanny and Stella in the history of Victorian homosexuality as the missing link between the mollie-house culture of the Regency period and the forms of modern male homosexuality that we have come to see as emerging around the Oscar Wilde trial in 1895...In this essay, I will set out the evidence for why the story of Fanny and Stella makes more sense — both in its own historical terms and now — when read as a trans narrative[.]¹⁰

⁸ Jeffrey Weeks, ‘Inverts, Perverts, and Mary-Annes: Male Prostitution and the Regulation of Homosexuality in England in the Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries’, in: Martin Duberman, Martha Vicinus and George Chauncey Jr. (eds) *Hidden from History: Reclaiming the Gay and Lesbian Past* (London, 1989), 198.

⁹ Joyce, ‘Two Women Walk into a Theatre Bathroom’, 83.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 84-5.

These debates over the categorisation of Boulton and Park highlight the issues faced in transgender histories. Individuals who predate modern terminology and exist at the intersection of sexuality and gender identity are frequently subsumed into histories of sexuality and their trans potential is erased, rather than allowing for multiple readings. The criteria for 'authentication' in trans histories are far more unyielding than those applied to other facets of identity, resulting in a one-dimensional narrative of surgical transition. While such stories are a valid part of transgender histories, the diversity of trans identities needs recognition. This thesis seeks to represent this diversity by exploring the differing forms of transgender identities in Britain from the turn of the twentieth century until the 1940s. Through an examination of medical and cultural constructs, I will consider both individuals who expressed their gender non-conformity unequivocally as well as those whose inclusion in a history of transgender has been considered more ambiguous. Within the medical section, the constructions of gender non-conformity developed by the medical profession will be explored together with the evolving dynamic between patients and medical experts. The cultural section examines depictions of gender non-conformity within literature, the feminist journal *Urania* (1916-40) and the life and writings of Vita Sackville-West (1892-1962) to illustrate the variety of ways in which gender non-conformity was expressed and understood in the period, as well as the interactions between the medical and cultural discourses.

This thesis argues firstly that the domination of British sexology by literary scholars rather than medical professionals meant that the evolving medical discourse on gender non-conformity was more heavily informed by a de-medicalised, cultural reading of gender non-

conformity than its European counterparts. Secondly, it holds that all forms of gender non-conformity are relevant to transgender history and should be given equal consideration in order to avoid the perpetuation of a single narrative. Refuting a rigid, single approach to transgender history allows for greater inclusion and diversity. It is the importance of this diversity that is the crux of my approach to researching historical transgender identities.

Susan Stryker has stated that ‘it is essential to acknowledge that how each of us experiences and understands our gender identity – our sense of being a man or a woman or something that resists those terms – really is a very idiosyncratic personal matter.’¹¹ Such an idiosyncratic matter requires an equally idiosyncratic approach. In the chapters that follow, I argue that a fluid, case-by-case consideration of transgender history is essential if a more comprehensive and representative study is to be achieved. In writing this thesis, I seek to shift the current focus of research on the U.S. towards Britain and provide a collective British history of transgender identities that combines medical and cultural discourses as well as various forms of gender non-conformity – including cross-dressing as well as physical transitions – specifically examined through the lens of gender identity. Existing research on Britain has yet to explore transgender identities in a single, dedicated work. Instead, gender identity has either been incorporated as one aspect in a wider discussion of sexology or medical history for example, or the sources that are included here have been discussed in terms of histories of sexuality and feminism. This thesis will re-examine these sources from a gender identity perspective alongside texts that have previously been largely ignored or are absent entirely from historiographical research.

¹¹ Susan Stryker, *Transgender History* (Berkeley, 2008), 3.

Current transgender historiography

The history of gender identity is an area heavily informed by activism and the constantly evolving categories of self-identification that are slowly replacing the often-pejorative medicalised terms previously used by academics. Mike Thelwall et al's study of academic LGBTQ+ terminology from 1900 to 2021 reveals there is as yet no single approach to discussing transgender identities even among researchers within the same discipline.¹² While this lack of uniformity leads to difficulties when selecting search terms for the subject, there are also benefits. A consideration of current gender identity debates, for example, helps to limit the use of inappropriate categorisations and to some extent refocuses the discussion on the marginalised group in question. On the other hand, concerns over segregating histories of sexualities and those of gender can lead to the erasure of the nuances of different identities and the intersections between the two areas. Since Gayle Rubin proclaimed it 'essential to separate gender and sexuality analytically to reflect more accurately their separate social existence' in her essay 'Thinking Sex: Notes Toward a Radical Theory of the Politics of Sexuality' (1998), attempts have been made by historians to segregate the two categories with varying degrees of success.¹³ While the consensus is that sexuality and gender are indeed different and need to be treated as such, the challenges presented by the entanglement of the two has meant they often remain interconnected.¹⁴ This has implications for the visibility of transgender history. As Alan Sinfield states,

¹² Mike Thelwall, et al., 'Academic LGBTQ+ Terminology 1900-2021: Increasing Variety, Increasing Inclusivity?', *Journal of Homosexuality*, (2022), 1-25.

¹³ Gayle Rubin, 'Thinking Sex: Notes Toward a Radical Theory of the Politics of Sexuality', in: Peter M. Nardi and Beth E. Schneider (eds) *Social Perspectives in Lesbian and Gay Studies: A Reader*, (London, 1998), 308, cited in

Kevin P. Murphy and Jennifer M. Spear. 'Historicising Sexuality and Gender', *Gender and History*, 22, 3 (2010), 527.

¹⁴ Alison Oram, 'Cross-Dressing and Transgender', in: H. G. Cocks and Matt Houlbrook (eds) *Palgrave Advances in the Modern History of Sexuality* (London, 2006), 281.

‘transgender has often been incorporated as a subcategory of sexual identity, rather than recognised as a kind of gender identity...we have found it hard to see transgender clearly because we have tried to read it as a subcategory of les/bi/gay identities.’¹⁵ Transgender historian Jay Prosser cites Gert Hekma’s work as an example of this failure to distinguish between sex and gender. He asserts that despite intending to ‘read gender inversion back into sexual inversion...Hekma manages to write an entire essay on sexual inversion without once mentioning transgender, without upsetting in the slightest the equation of the invert with homosexual.’¹⁶

The merging of sexuality and gender can often lead to the erasure of a gendered reading of archival material. K. J. Rawson’s essay on the power of archival descriptions and categorisations that impose meaning on historical sources notes the inclusion of postcards depicting cross-dressers in Cornell University’s Human Sexuality Collection (HSC) and asks: ‘When postcards of cross-dressed people are included in a sexuality collection, is there a presumption that cross-dressing can or should be treated as a sexual identity?’¹⁷ These examples serve to show the importance in demarcating gender from sexuality as separate facets of identity if transgender identities are to receive recognition. However, considering these facets in isolation is equally problematic, particularly in periods where such distinctions were absent in contemporary definitions. Particularly in terms of approach,

¹⁵ Alan Sinfield, ‘Transgender and les/bi/gay identities’, in: David Alderson and Linda Anderson (eds) *Territories of desire in queer culture* (Manchester, 2000), 153-4, 157.

¹⁶ Jay Prosser, ‘Transsexuals and the Transsexologists: Inversion and the Emergence of Transsexual Subjectivity’, in: Lucy Bland and Laura Doan (eds) *Sexology in Culture: Labelling Bodies and Desires* (Cambridge, 1998), 117.

¹⁷ K. J. Rawson, ‘The Rhetorical Power of Archival Description: Classifying Images of Gender Transgression’, *Rhetoric Society Quarterly*, 48, 4 (2018), 335.

histories of sexualities have to some extent informed those of gender identities. Rebecca Jennings, in her work *A Lesbian History of Britain: Love and Sex Between Women Since 1500* (2007) has shown how the history of sexuality has followed either an essentialist approach – the theory that characteristics such as sexuality or gender are pre-existing in all individuals and awaiting discovery by researchers – or a constructionist approach. The latter, in which sexuality is held to be a social construct influenced by the culture and time period in which it was developed, has as Jennings states come to dominate academic research.¹⁸

From the 1990s, the emergence of queer theory further impacted the history of sexuality, making it more inclusive. Jennings argues that queer theory's 'emphasis on a sense of marginality from mainstream heterosexuality has enabled queer groups to appeal to all people who experience themselves as sexually deviant, from gay men and lesbians to transvestites, transsexuals and indeed even 'straight' people who consider themselves different from the norm.'¹⁹ The formulation of queer histories has expanded the discussion to include queer gender identities and has led to many parallels in both approach and source material between histories of gender and histories of sexuality. In her study of male same-sex desire in working-class men located outside of London, Helen Smith argues that '[s]exuality should not be a separate category of study but, rather, a complementary facet of social and cultural experience that, when considered, presents a fuller and more nuanced reading of the past.'²⁰ Smith also discusses how the leading historians of British queer history – Matt Houlbrook, Matt Cook and Harry Cocks – 'have looked less at the medical and

¹⁸ Rebecca Jennings, *A Lesbian History of Britain: Love and Sex Between Women Since 1500* (Oxford, 2007), pp.xiii-xv.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p.xvi.

²⁰ Helen Smith, *Masculinity, Class and Same-sex Desire in Industrial England, 1895-1957* (New York, 2015), 4.

legal theories of the past in isolation and more at the actual experiences of the men involved...[and] emphasise the point that if a researcher attempts to locate a coherent and uniform sexual identity in the past, they will be disappointed[.]’²¹ These arguments are equally applicable to gender identities and the intersection of sexuality and gender identity suggests that they should not be segregated within historical research. Matt Houlbrook has illustrated this in his discussion of the different forms of male same-sex desire in London:

Cyril, for example, located his queerness in an ineffably womanlike character, constructing an “effeminate” public persona consistent with what he assumed to be his inner nature...For others, particularly middle- and upper-class men, by contrast, their choice of sexual partner was the *only* thing that made them different. Conventionally masculine and discreet, they neither looked nor behaved “differently” and remained invisible to passersby.²²

The gendering of same-sex desire in Britain during the late nineteenth to mid-twentieth century highlights just how interconnected gender and sexuality were in this period and the impracticality of attempting to separate the topics. Jack Halberstam’s work has bridged the gap between histories of sexuality and gender identity and informs the approach taken in this thesis. His book *Female Masculinity* (1998) reconsiders the link between men and masculinity and examines the differing forms of masculinity performed by those assigned female at birth. Halberstam’s work on the liminal stage of transition and the shared territories of trans men and butch lesbians has provided a framework for discussing queer

²¹ Smith, *Masculinity, Class and Same-sex Desire*, 6-7.

²² Matt Houlbrook, *Queer London: Perils and Pleasures in the Sexual Metropolis, 1918-1957* (London, 2005), 7.

identities without relying on rigid, limiting categories, as Halberstam argues ‘all kinds of identities...are simply not accounted for in the taxonomies we live with.’²³ Particularly in early-twentieth-century Britain, gender identity and sexuality were often interrelated in a way that parallels Halberstam’s comments on ‘the fiction of clear distinctions’ in the ‘border wars’ between trans men and certain butch lesbian identities.²⁴ He argues:

There are real and physical differences between female-born men who take hormones, have surgery, and live as men and female-born butches who live some version of gender ambiguity. But there are also many situations in which those differences are less clear than one might expect, and there are many butches who pass as men and many transsexuals who present as gender ambiguous and many bodies that cannot be classified by the options transsexual and butch.²⁵

This acknowledgement of the ways in which certain gender and sexuality categories interact and overlap is particularly valuable in examining historical constructions of LGBTQ+ identities without diminishing the distinctions between the two facets.

The constructionist theory of sexuality and gender has become the prevailing framework for academic research.²⁶ The most influential proponent of this approach is arguably philosopher Michel Foucault. Foucault’s concept of discourse as it relates to the power dynamic between doctor and patient is particularly relevant for medical histories of gender non-conformity. Foucault’s premise in *The History of Sexuality, Volume 1* (1978) that sex in

²³ Jack Halberstam, ‘F2M: The Making of Female Masculinity’, in: Laura Doan (ed.), *The Lesbian Postmodern* (New York, 1994), 211.

²⁴ Jack Halberstam, *Female Masculinity*, (North Carolina, 1998), 153.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Jennings, *A Lesbian History of Britain*, p.xv.

western society had increasingly moved from the realm of religion and the confessional to become an object of science or *scientia sexualis* can be continued into early twentieth-century sexology.²⁷ Following consultations with patients, sexologists and medical professionals defined what could be said about gender identity and sexuality, and consequently what could be known about these topics. They constructed the discourse on sex and gender, thereby deriving power through a monopoly on the construction of new categories of identity. For Foucault though, this power dynamic was more complex than simply being repressive and operated within all interactions and in multiple rather than one direction. Foucault's theory has relevance to the doctor/patient dynamic in early-twentieth-century Britain, where patient testimonies sometimes co-opted sexological terminology in defining their own experiences and asserting their legitimacy. As Foucault argues:

The appearance in nineteenth-century psychiatry, jurisprudence, and literature of a whole series of discourses on the species and subspecies of homosexuality, inversion, pederasty, and "psychic hermaphroditism" made possible a strong advance of social controls into this area of "perversity"; but it also made possible the formation of a "reverse" discourse: homosexuality began to speak in its own behalf, to demand that its legitimacy or "naturalness" be acknowledged, often in the same vocabulary, using the same categories by which it was medically disqualified.²⁸

²⁷ Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality, Volume 1: An Introduction*, trans. Robert Hurley (New York, 1978), 58.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 101.

This premise of 'reverse discourse' was particularly true of German sexologist Karl Heinrich Ulrichs' phrase 'female soul in a male body', originally intended to describe a form of male homosexuality but often deployed to articulate experiences of gender non-conformity.²⁹

However, Foucault's theories are not without problems. For example, the neglect of gender in his work is limiting. Heike Bauer states that 'Foucault's approach has rightly been criticized for marginalizing issues of gender, as queer and feminist critics have turned attention to the complex intersections between concepts of sexual behaviour and ideas of gender.'³⁰ Despite the lack of a gendered focus in Foucault's work, it is possible to apply his theories to studies of gender. Aayesha Siddiqui has defended Foucault's continued relevance:

Though Foucault does not address gender, he indeed confronts the issue of the body...His focus on the body as simply a body is not meant to devalue gender, but to deductively say that gender performance is an extension of use and manufacture of the subject and his/her body by the power/knowledge scheme.³¹

Similarly, the importance of Foucault's thinking to the development of queer theory continues to be relevant. As Tamsin Spargo has noted, Foucault's 'analysis of the interrelationships of knowledge, power and sexuality was the most important intellectual catalyst of queer theory.'³² Spargo also notes his influence on theorists such as Judith Butler who 'adopts Foucault's argument that 'sexuality' is discursively produced, and extends it to

²⁹ Karl Heinrich Ulrichs, *The Riddle of "Man-Manly" Love: The Pioneering Work on Male Homosexuality Vol. 1*, trans. Michael A. Lombardi-Nash (New York, 1994 reprint of original 1864-1880), 90.

³⁰ Heike Bauer, 'Theorizing Female Inversion: Sexology, Discipline, and Gender at the Fin de Siècle', *Journal of the History of Sexuality*, 18 (2009), 84.

³¹ Aayesha Siddiqui, 'Gendered performance and systems of knowledge/power: A Foucauldian analysis', [website], 2006, <https://stuff.mit.edu/afs/athena.mit.edu/org/w/wgs/prize/past.html>.

³² Tamsin Spargo, *Foucault and Queer Theory* (Cambridge, 1999), 8.

include gender.’³³ Butler’s theory of the social construction of gender and its performativity is pivotal to discussions of gender non-conformity, particularly in terms of Kit Heyam’s argument regarding historical trans possibility. Butler argues:

If gender is the cultural meanings that the sexed body assumes, then a gender cannot be said to follow from a sex in any one way...Assuming for the moment the stability of binary sex, it does not follow that the construction of “men” will accrue exclusively to the bodies of males or that “women” will interpret only female bodies.³⁴

Butler’s assertion that *all* gender is performative and not reliant on the physical body, allows for histories in which gender non-conformity can be explored rather than dismissed as somehow less authentic than cisgender identities.³⁵ This notion of all gender being socially constructed had already informed sociology. Prior to Butler, Suzanne Kessler and Wendy McKenna employed the constructionist theory of gender in their book *Gender: An Ethnomethodological Approach* (1985), in which they explored what they termed at the time ‘transsexualism’. Kessler and McKenna assert that ‘the question of what it means to *be* a male or a female is merely another way of asking how one *decides* whether another is male or female.’³⁶ Their research demonstrates that while genitals are often cited as the main distinguishing factor, ‘since in initial interactions genitals are rarely available for inspection, this clearly is not the evidence actually used’ in making a gender attribution.³⁷ Instead, a combination of visual cues and socially ascribed roles and traits contribute to the attribution

³³ Spargo, *Foucault and Queer Theory*, 53.

³⁴ Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (London, 1990), 6.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 17.

³⁶ Suzanne Kessler and Wendy McKenna, *Gender: An Ethnomethodological Approach* (Chicago, 1985), 3.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, p.viii.

of a gender. Kessler and McKenna's work is equally relevant to historical cases of gender non-conformity where an individual's gender identity was sometimes accepted based on their occupation, habits and clothing. The gender non-conforming bankrupt and habitual criminal Colonel Barker (1895-1960), who adopted different identities throughout their life, is a case in point. Historian James Vernon has shown that due to the publicity surrounding Barker's crimes, the press and public made vacillating gender attributions based on a variety of factors including their appearance, current job and whether or not they were aware of Barker's past identities.³⁸ Thus, an analysis of the criteria used to make gender attributions from the turn of the twentieth century to the mid-twentieth century is an important aspect of this thesis.

Within the current historical research on prescribed gender norms and those who deviate from them, relatively little has been written with a focus on transgender. Discourses on men transgressing prescribed gender norms are largely centred around homosexuality, as demonstrated by the body of work on the Boulton and Park case. Likewise, studies of the New Woman and masculine-presenting individuals assigned female at birth have provided lengthy discussions of clothing and the fashions such individuals adopted that contradicted the traditional feminine ideal. Anna Kisby's article covering the life of Vera Jack Holme includes several photographs of Holme with a short haircut and masculine clothing, although Holme often tempers the masculine jackets with a skirt.³⁹ In Carroll Smith-Rosenberg's discussion of the first and second generations of New Women, she explains the

³⁸ James Vernon, "'For Some Queer Reason': The Trials and Tribulations of Colonel Barker's Masquerade in Interwar Britain", *Signs*, 26 (2000), 37-62.

³⁹ Anna Kisby, 'Vera 'Jack' Holme: cross-dressing actress, suffragette and chauffeur', *Women's History Review*, 23 (2014), 120-36.

connection sexologists made between women who wore male clothing and adopted masculine mannerisms with sexual inversion. She comments that Richard von Krafft-Ebing 'linked lesbianism to the rejection of conventional female roles, to cross-dressing, and to "masculine" physiological traits.'⁴⁰

These works tend to categorise the individuals in question as lesbians and refute any possibility that they sought to identify as male. Smith-Rosenberg argues that for the second generation of New Women in the 1920s and 1930s '[a]ndrogyny was their ideal.'⁴¹ Although these New Women 'insisted that society's most fundamental organisational category, gender, was artificial...as changeable as dress,' there is no attempt by Smith-Rosenberg to engage with the notion that female-bodied individuals who assumed masculine or male attire could potentially have been expressing their identification as men.⁴² She credits the equation of New Women with terms like 'mannish lesbian' and 'sexual invert' as an attempt by male commentators to undermine feminist modernists' efforts to achieve greater freedoms and equality and again interprets 'invert' as a reference to lesbianism.⁴³ Similarly, Kisby's analysis of Vera Jack Holme uses female pronouns, and attributes Holme's masculine clothing to a form of 'political and social protest,' 'her sexuality' and work 'as a driver and mechanic.'⁴⁴ There is no suggestion from Kisby that Holme could potentially have been expressing a gender non-conforming identity, despite Holme's preference for the male name

⁴⁰ Carroll Smith-Rosenberg, 'Discourses of Sexuality and Subjectivity: The New Woman, 1870-1936', in: Martin Duberman, Martha Vicinus and George Chauncey Jr. (eds) *Hidden from History: Reclaiming the Gay and Lesbian Past* (London, 1989), 269.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 276.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 277.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 271-5.

⁴⁴ Kisby, 'Vera 'Jack' Holme', 127, 121.

'Jack' and the acknowledgement that many of Holme's fellow suffragettes 'wore conventional feminine dress, as encouraged and following the example set by Emmeline and Christabel Pankhurst.'⁴⁵ Holme's 'masculine-style dress...was 'excused' by their roles as horsewoman and driver.'⁴⁶ The fact that Holme's behaviour wasn't shared by other feminists and required an excuse suggests there may have been another dimension to it outside of protest and employment. This is not to say that Kirby is wrong in arguing that Holme's masculinity was attributable to work, sexuality and protest against societal norms, especially given Holme never recorded a desire to live as a man and continued to wear a skirt and a masculine female wardrobe rather than definitively male attire. Nor is there only one explanation for gender-crossing behaviour, as Laura Doan's study of 1920's female fashions makes clear. Doan rejects the theory that the 'most pervasive image of lesbianism in these years is of women who appear at first glance to be male,' a famous example being Radclyffe Hall.⁴⁷ Rather, she contends that 'fashion-conscious women of all sexual persuasions were obliged to "cross-dress" by donning boyish or mannish attire and by cutting their hair short' to follow the dictates of popular styles.⁴⁸ Consequently, Doan warns 'we need to be careful in reading "masculine" as synonymous with lesbian.'⁴⁹ Building on Doan's warning, I argue that it is important to avoid erasing trans possibility from individuals who transgressed gender norms for multiple reasons. Indeed, what is lacking in the literature surrounding gender perceptions is a thorough consideration of the role that trans identities might play in rejections of gender norms in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries in Britain.

⁴⁵ Kisby, 'Vera 'Jack' Holme', 127.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Laura Doan, 'Passing Fashions: Reading Female Masculinities in the 1920s', *Feminist Studies*, 24, 3 (1998), 665.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 667.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 692.

The majority of the existing transgender historiography has either focused on the US or provided a biographical account of a particular individual or featured as an aspect of research on sexology, same-sex desire or cross-dressing. C. Riley Snorton has provided a much-needed examination of the intersectionality between race and gender identity in *Black on Both Sides: A Racial History of Trans Identity* (2017). Cross-dressing in nineteenth-century America has also been explored from a transgender perspective by Peter Boag and Clare Sears, as well as the difficulties involved in studying this subject in a historical context.⁵⁰ Susan Stryker has pioneered the work on gender identities in her *Transgender History* (2008). The book provides an account of the 'collective political history of transgender social change activism' in the US from the nineteenth to the twenty-first century.⁵¹ Stryker's use of transgender to mean 'the movement across a socially imposed boundary away from an unchosen starting place – rather than any particular destination or mode of transition' allows for a far more diverse representation of gender identities than the dominant medical construction.⁵²

Bernice Hausman takes the medical narrative to its extreme by focusing solely on those she refers to as transsexuals, who undergo gender affirmation surgery and claims that prior to the availability of such surgeries, transgender identities could not exist.⁵³ Hausman's

⁵⁰ Peter Boag, 'The Trouble with Cross-Dressers: Researching and Writing the History of Sexual and Gender Transgressiveness in the Nineteenth-Century American West', *Oregon Historical Quarterly*, 112 (2011), 322-39. Clare Sears, 'Electric Brilliance: Cross-Dressing Law and Freak Show Displays in Nineteenth-Century San Francisco', *Women's Studies Quarterly*, 36 (2008), 170-87.

⁵¹ Stryker, *Transgender History*, 2.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 1.

⁵³ Bernice Hausman, *Changing Sex: Transsexualism, Technology, and the Idea of Gender* (London, 1995), 3.

argument however, is highly problematic in privileging the linear surgical transition narrative as the *only* valid transgender experience and has been widely discredited.⁵⁴ Jules Gill-Peterson's work on transgender children in the US on the other hand, stresses the importance of moving away from a singular, medicalised narrative of trans identities, as 'trans life had no causal reliance upon medicine during the twentieth century and...the trans people who did interact with doctors brought their own embodied knowledge of the social realities of their transness with them to the clinic.'⁵⁵ Similarly, Stryker echoes Houlbrook's point regarding male same-sex desire that 'men experienced, understood, and organised their desires very differently; understandings of sexual difference were multiple and contested.'⁵⁶ Stryker's argument informs the approach I have taken in this thesis and applied to a British context. The individuals included in the following chapters experienced and expressed their gender non-conformity in widely differing ways. By representing this diversity, I seek to broaden the narrative of British transgender history beyond the medical model of transition. Current British research has segregated those who underwent surgical transitions and those who used clothing or other means to express their gender identity. Here, I intend to provide a collective, gender-focused discussion of the various ways in which queer gender identities were constructed in Britain.

Kit Heyam has recently demonstrated this inclusive approach in their book *Before We Were Trans: A New History of Gender* (2022). The book covers a vast scope, exploring global

⁵⁴ Jules Gill-Peterson, *Histories of the Transgender Child* (London, 2018), 153-4.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 35-6.

⁵⁶ Houlbrook, *Queer London*, 7.

examples of gender non-conformity from antiquity to the present throughout which Heyam argues for a more expansive definition of transgender history. Heyam states:

Many, if not most, of the individuals whose stories I tell in this book can't be uncomplicatedly described as 'trans people'...But the history in this book is *trans history* nonetheless. It's history that shows us the *moveability* of gender. It's history that shows us that – notwithstanding the outraged claims of anti-trans commentators today – what constitutes a man, a woman, or gender itself has *continually* been defined, contested and redefined.⁵⁷

Building on Heyam's argument and taking Britain as my focus, I argue that linear medical transitions, periodic gender non-conformity and continuously fluid gender presentations are equally valid examples of historical transgender identities and are represented in my research.

Aside from Stryker, Joanne Meyerowitz has provided the most comprehensive history of transgender identities in the US in *How Sex Changed: A History of Transsexuality in the United States* (2004). Meyerowitz explores how American constructions of 'transsexuality' were formed during the twentieth century by disparate groups, resulting in a far from cohesive narrative. Meyerowitz stresses the importance of a multifaceted approach to transgender history that she herself adopts:

In the United States the discourse on transsexuals came from the people who hoped to change their sex, from the popular culture, and from the courts as well as from the

⁵⁷ Kit Heyam, *Before We Were Trans: A New History of Gender* (London, 2022), 28.

domains of medicine and science. Neither a traditional medical history...nor a critical analysis of the science of sex...would do justice to the complex interplay of social, cultural, legal, and medical histories.⁵⁸

Meyerowitz's argument also holds true for Britain, where the prevalence of writers instead of medical professionals in the discipline cemented the relationship between medical and cultural constructions of gender non-conformity and has informed my decision to include cultural as well as medical discourse in this thesis.

At the time of writing, a dedicated transgender history of Britain has yet to be produced. *Trans Britain: Our Journey from the Shadows* (2018), edited by Christine Burns provides a collection of essays written by members of the transgender community, doctors and activists which offers a compelling and multifaceted account of transgender experiences in Britain from the 1950s onward. Though not a strictly academic work, the book contains excellent source material and demonstrates the need for further historical research. Aside from *Trans Britain*, research on British gender non-conformity has been subsumed into wider discussions of sexology or cross-dressing, or on case studies of specific LGBTQ+ individuals. Lesley Hall's paper 'The English have Hot-Water Bottles': The Morganatic Marriage Between Sexology and Medicine in Britain since William Acton' (1994), for example, highlights the marginalisation of the study of sex in Britain as a whole by the medical profession and its efforts to dominate the discipline.⁵⁹ Bauer has also written extensively on British sexology as

⁵⁸ Joanne Meyerowitz, *How Sex Changed: A History of Transsexuality in the United States* (USA, 2004), 10-11.

⁵⁹ Lesley Hall, 'The English have Hot-Water Bottles': The Morganatic Marriage Between Sexology and Medicine in Britain since William Acton', in: Roy Porter (ed.) *Sexual Knowledge, Sexual Science: The History of Attitudes to Sexuality* (Cambridge, 1994), 350-66.

a discipline and examines the work of Havelock Ellis, Edward Carpenter and John Addington Symonds alongside that of European sexologists including Magnus Hirschfeld and Ulrichs.⁶⁰ Ellis occupied a unique position due to the distinct context of British sexology, not least because British sexologists were predominantly authors and poets as opposed to the medical professionals who prevailed in Europe.⁶¹ This allowed the sole medically qualified British sexologist, Havelock Ellis, to monopolise British sexological texts. Ellis' dominance was furthered by limited access to European sexological texts. For example, Bauer points out that the English translation of Krafft-Ebing's *Psychopathia Sexualis* (1886) failed to mention female 'inversion' at any point. This was a deliberate decision by the translator, Francis Joseph Rebman who chose to eliminate Richard von Krafft-Ebing's section on female homosexuals from the English edition. Bauer attributes this choice to growing British concerns over prostitution triggered by the Contagious Diseases Acts of the 1860s and 1870s and Rebman's own 'anti-sex attitude.'⁶² Rebman's omissions were followed by the banning in Britain of Ellis' *Sexual Inversion* (1900) and his decision to publish any future works in America. However, Bauer's focus is on sexology rather than medical discourse on gender identities and largely neglects *Eonism and Other Supplementary Studies* (1928) by Havelock Ellis, the main British sexological text on gender non-conformity.

⁶⁰ See in particular: Heike Bauer, *English Literary Sexology. Translations of Inversion, 1860-1930* (London, 2009), Heike Bauer, "'Not a Translation but a Mutilation': The Limits of Translation and the Discipline of Sexology", *The Yale Journal of Criticism*, 16, 2 (2003), 381-405, and Heike Bauer, 'Theorizing Female Inversion: Sexology, Discipline, and Gender at the Fin de Siècle', *Journal of the History of Sexuality*, 18, 1 (2009), 84-102.

⁶¹ Heike Bauer, *English Literary Sexology: Translations of Inversion, 1860-1930* (London, 2009).

⁶² *Ibid.*, 38-9.

Ivan Crozier has analysed *Eonism* as part of his work on the history of the case study and patient testimony, but again the emphasis is not on gender non-conformity.⁶³ Crozier argues that by examining how case studies were collected, classified and recorded scholars are able to grasp a fuller picture of 'how sexology was practised at the end of its 'first wave''.⁶⁴ Case studies reflect the power play between sexologists and patients and reveal who ultimately constructed the identity of the latter through the editing process. For example, Crozier cites Ellis' decision to exclusively include examples of heterosexual 'Eonism' (Ellis' term for gender non-conformity) as evidence of Ellis' manipulation of the discourse to support his theory that Eonism was 'a non-homosexual phenomenon in men.'⁶⁵ Clearly, at the most fundamental level, the contents of case studies are a mine of information on the complex interplay between sexologists and gender non-conforming individuals in the construction of the medical discourse. Ross Brooks uses Ulrichs' case studies to shed light on the prevailing concepts of 'dual-gendered categories' including intersex, discovering that 'classifications and rhetoric of hermaphroditism, and other dual-gendered categories (e.g., sexual dualism and anatomical bisexuality), were deployed in diverse contexts through the period, often with little or no reference to the occurrence of genital ambiguities.'⁶⁶ Beccalossi has also revealed the importance of Ellis' case studies as a commentary on sexual variance in 'ordinary members of society' as opposed to drawing on prison inmates or patients in asylums.⁶⁷ This methodology aided Ellis in his quest to disprove the notion that homosexuality was unnatural and thereby have it decriminalised. It also provides historians

⁶³ Ivan Crozier, 'Havelock Ellis, Eonism and the patient's discourse; or, writing a book about sex', *History of Psychiatry*, 11, 42 (2000), 125-54.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 127.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 143.

⁶⁶ Ross Brooks, 'Transforming Sexuality: The Medical Sources of Karl Heinrich Ulrichs (1825-95) and the Origins of the Theory of Bisexuality', *Journal of the History of Medicine & Allied Sciences*, 67, 2 (2012), 181, 177.

⁶⁷ Chiara Beccalossi, *Female Sexual Inversion: Same-sex desires in Italian and British sexology, c. 1870-1920* (United Kingdom, 2012). 178.

with a broader scope when analysing gender non-conformity that more fully reflects the experiences of 'everyday' citizens rather than being confined to individuals who were incarcerated.

The preoccupation with categorisation and collecting personal testimonies from patients originated in the nineteenth century and continued into the next, as evidenced by Ellis' inclusion of case studies in both *Sexual Inversion* and *Eonism*. Birgit Lang, Joy Damousi, and Alison Lewis' edited collection, *A History of the Case Study: Sexology, Psychoanalysis, Literature* (2017) brings together articles providing 'a more complex account of how the sexological case was differentiated and disseminated within and across different fields of knowledge'.⁶⁸ The book focuses on the latter half of the nineteenth century, and the editors argue that at this time case studies became more concerned with 'testimony and truth-finding' rather than just recording medical information about a patient, thus making the content appealing to disciplines outside of medicine.⁶⁹ The editors are influenced by Foucault's ideas surrounding the power relations within discourse and praise him for his 'mastery of the case study genre and its predisposition towards a truth.'⁷⁰ Crozier on the other hand, asserts that Foucault's ideas regarding how patients are interpreted in case studies 'do not go far enough in examining the uses of case histories by doctors, or the social processes that surround their collection and deployment.'⁷¹ Nevertheless, Foucault's concern with the power dynamic between medical authority and patient in sexual discourse

⁶⁸ Birgit Lang, Joy Damousi and Alison Lewis, *A History of the Case Study: Sexology, Psychoanalysis, Literature* (Manchester, 2017), 4.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 5.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 4.

⁷¹ Ivan Crozier, 'Pillow Talk: Credibility, Trust and the Sexological Case History', *History of Science*, 46, 4 (2008), 378.

is an important starting point in studies of gender non-conformity and, together with Butler, informs the medical section of this thesis.

The role of literature was vital in sexological case studies in Britain. Anna Katharina Schaffner's essay on the subject cites numerous examples of late nineteenth-century sexologists' use of literary terms in their classifications of 'inversion', and goes on to demonstrate that 'fictional representations are treated as case studies that are deemed just as valid as empirical observations.'⁷² This was true of early-twentieth-century medical discourse, though medical experts were represented as both the determiners and restorers of gender in the press as well as medical texts. Concerns over the blurring of boundaries between men and women, exacerbated by the experiences of World War I and women's suffrage, fuelled the portrayal of ambiguity over gender identity as disquieting as well as the need to reinforce clear categories. This reliance on literary references by sexologists also suggests that novels featuring gender non-conformity or same-sex desire such as *The Well of Loneliness* (1928) by Radclyffe Hall and Virginia Woolf's *Orlando* (1928) may be interpreted as more than just cultural portrayals of potentially transgendered individuals. They represent an intermediary between the layperson and the medical profession while simultaneously influencing the conception of sexological ideas and serving as evidence to support them.

Prosser has provided a starting point for a transgender reading of sexological and cultural texts in his works on *Sexual Inversion* by Havelock Ellis and John Addington Symonds (1897)

⁷² Anna Katharina Schaffner, 'Fiction as Evidence: On the Uses of Literature in Nineteenth-Century Sexological Discourse', *Comparative Literature studies*, 48, 2 (2011), 165.

and *The Well of Loneliness*. Prosser repositions *The Well* as ‘a body narrative that shows Stephen as a female-to-male transsexual, not woman or lesbian, undergoing progressive realisation of her wrong embodiment.’⁷³ Prosser asserts that Stephen’s childhood cross-dressing, her expression of her desire to be a man and loathing of her female body echo ‘transsexual’ narratives far more closely than lesbian experiences.⁷⁴ He concludes that ‘once the transsexual in *The Well* is read and diagnosed, this subject and this context provide a much better fit for this novel than lesbian.’⁷⁵ Prosser’s alternate reading of queer texts is valuable in restoring a consideration of gender identity. Yet, the insistence on unequivocal categories dilutes the complexities of these multifaceted identities. Prosser’s intention of reclaiming these sources as examples of transgender history rejects the relevance of same-sex desire rather than allowing for the multiple possible readings that reflect the complex interplay between gender and sexuality apparent in early-twentieth-century Britain. I would echo Heyam’s sentiments here that:

...[the] language of ‘reclaiming’ is used a lot...I can’t help but feel like this capitalist language of ownership is part of the problem...As trans historian and literary critic Gabrielle M. W. Bychowski pointed out to me...thinking in this capitalist way also leads us to see historical representation as a scarce resource we need to fight over, rather than as something we can expand, reshape and share.⁷⁶

⁷³ Jay Prosser, “‘Some Primitive Thing Conceived in a Turbulent Age of Transition’: The Transsexual Emerging from *The Well*”, in Laura Doan and Jay Prosser (eds) *Palatable Poison: Critical Perspectives on *The Well of Loneliness** (New York, 2001), 135.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 136-8.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 130.

⁷⁶ Heyam, *Before We Were Trans*, 27.

The issues surrounding reclaiming histories may explain the reticence to seriously consider cross-dressing within a specifically transgender historical work. As Heyam has argued:

The intersection between gender and social role is one of the biggest factors that leads to the dismissal and erasure of trans possibility in history...People who lived as a different gender as part of their job or social position are overwhelmingly characterised as 'disguised' or 'cross-dressing' men or women, the gender they lived as nothing more than a masquerade.⁷⁷

Consequently, despite the extensive research on cross-dressing, many historians privilege same-sex desire or economic motivations over gender presentation as 'explanations' for acts of cross-dressing. There are, however, some exceptions. Marjorie Garber's *Vested Interests: Cross-Dressing & Cultural Anxiety* (1993) explores cross-dressing as 'the disruptive element that intervenes, not just a category crisis of male and female, but the crisis of category itself'.⁷⁸ The book covers a vast range of international materials including a chapter on surgical transition, but it is not intended as a historical analysis of the cross-dresser. On the other hand, Vern and Bonnie Bullough's *Cross Dressing, Sex, and Gender* (1993) does provide a thorough discussion of forms of cross-dressing and the evolving interpretations of acts of gender-crossing throughout history, though with an emphasis on the West. Again however, the Bulloughs draw on international materials and predominantly reference the US in their chapters on twentieth-century cross-dressing. Jen Manion has also sought to remedy the lack of British research in her recently published book *Female Husbands: A Trans History* (2020) in which she examines eighteenth- and nineteenth-century British and American

⁷⁷ Heyam, *Before We Were Trans*, 35-6.

⁷⁸ Marjorie Garber, *Vested Interests: Cross-Dressing & Cultural Anxiety* (New York, 1993), 17.

individuals assigned female at birth who lived as men. Manion's book builds on Alison Oram's work which provides the most definitive examination of twentieth-century cross-dressing in Britain. Oram's book *Her Husband was a Woman!: Women's gender-crossing in modern British popular culture* (2007), examines British press accounts of female-to-male cross-dressing from 1900 to 1960s. Oram explores various motivations for cross-dressing as well as what constituted a successful gender presentation in the different periods under discussion. Yet, while Oram does consider gender identity in relation to cross-dressing, particularly in her chapter 'The 1930s 'sex change' story: Medical technology and physical transformation', in numerous cases Oram unquestioningly genders the individuals she discusses as female which undermines the possibility of gender non-conformity. Oram here demonstrates Heyam's point that '[w]e are expected to adhere to double standards of evidence, which encourage us to state with impunity that a historical figure was definitely cis, but to hedge with caveats the suggestion that they were maybe, possibly trans'.⁷⁹ There is then, a need for gender-identity-focused research on cross-dressing in the twentieth century.

Methodology

My intention is to reposition transgender identities as the focal point of my research and produce an examination of medical and cultural constructions of transgender identities in Britain from 1870 to the 1940s. In doing so, I hope to build on Prosser's work in contributing to the developing British counterpart to the existing American-centred research on transgender history. Before elaborating on my approach and arguments, it is important to

⁷⁹ Heyam, *Before We Were Trans*, 220.

address the use of terminology in this work and the debates surrounding the categorisation of transgender identities.

Terminology

The continuous re-evaluations of the language used to reference gender identities are vital in ensuring histories of gender remain relevant and representative. While Thelwall's substantial list of terms highlights the diversity of gender identities that exceed the traditional western binary gender model, attempts at a cohesive approach to terminology remain elusive. Stryker and Burns have both pointed out the differing definitions of various terms held by individuals and groups that further complicate their academic usage. Stryker demonstrates the abundance of these terms in an extensive but by no means exhaustive glossary in *Transgender History*. Terms such as transvestite, cross-dresser, transsexual, genderqueer and transgender are defined, and their origins explained. Stryker also stresses the varying constructions of some terms. 'Transgender,' for example, is defined by Stryker as an umbrella term for any and all 'gender-variant practices and identities' including those who seek surgical or hormonal treatment and those who do not, as well as those who commit fully to identifying as another gender and those who do so partially or only at certain times.⁸⁰ Yet she acknowledges that some prefer to use the narrower meaning that Burns describes of a person who identifies with a gender other than that assigned at birth.⁸¹ As well as these disagreements over definitions, there are further debates as to which terms are acceptable and should be adopted into mainstream use. One person's identity can be

⁸⁰ Stryker, *Transgender History*, 375-383.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 375.

another person's insult. For instance, 'transsexual' describes a person who 'specifically seek[s] to change their gender on a permanent basis.'⁸² It was developed partly by sexologist Magnus Hirschfeld in 1923, anglicised by surgeon David Cauldwell in 1950, and popularised by psychiatrist Harry Benjamin in the 1960s following his book *The Transsexual Phenomenon* (1966). These medical roots have caused some people to reject transsexual in favour of transgender, while others (particularly medical professionals) adopt the term to denote 'the permanence of their transition.'⁸³

To take another example, gender-neutral pronouns ('hir' or 's/he' among others) have recently been created to offer an alternative to the two-gender model of language. These pronouns have been embraced by many non-binary individuals who identify neither as male or female (or as both) and seek ways to express this.⁸⁴ On the other hand, some members of the transgender community are highly offended by the use of gender-neutral pronouns, seeing them as undermining the authenticity of their gender identity.⁸⁵ Acknowledging these disagreements, human rights campaigner Fox Fisher argues '[t]here is certainly no single way to be trans, and no single right way to understand being so' and indeed, the way in which a person chooses to express their gender identity and refer to it should surely be a matter for the individual to decide.⁸⁶ It appears self-evident that scholars should respect the terms each individual prefers to use. However, the historian is frequently faced with the problem

⁸² Christine Burns, (ed.). *Trans Britain: Our Journey from the Shadows* (London, 2018).

⁸³ *Ibid.*, p.xx.

⁸⁴ Meg-John Barker, Ben Vincent and Jos Twist 'Non-Binary Identity', in: Christine Burns, (ed.). *Trans Britain: Our Journey from the Shadows* (London, 2018), 292-6.

⁸⁵ Stryker, *Transgender History*, 416.

⁸⁶ Fox Fisher, 'Making History Today' in: Christine Burns, (ed.). *Trans Britain: Our Journey from the Shadows* (London, 2018), 336.

of being unable to ascertain the preferences of individuals covered in their research who also predate modern terminology. Peter Boag encapsulates the problem for historians in his article 'The Trouble with Cross-Dressers: Researching and Writing the History of Sexual and Gender Transgressiveness in the Nineteenth-Century American West'. Boag maintains that 'it is anachronistic to impose our present-day terms and concepts for and about gender and sexuality — such as transgender — onto the past,' but he also rejects nineteenth-century terms such as 'invert' and 'man-woman' due to their 'negative connotations.'⁸⁷ Boag's solution is to employ the term 'cross-dresser' with a lengthy codicil attached. 'Cross-dresser' is selected as a 'neutral term' that is 'convenient for its capaciousness but useful only to a point.'⁸⁸ As Boag explains, cross-dresser is not strictly a nineteenth-century term as phrases such as 'dressed in male attire' would have been used, although at a basic level the meaning is similar. It is also a recognisable term employed by many historians – for instance Vern and Bonnie Bullough – when describing the act of wearing the clothing of a different gender in past centuries.⁸⁹ A more central issue for Boag, however, is his dissatisfaction with the notion of 'crossing':

...cross-dressing implies...that person is attempting to cross...from one sex and gender to another. Still, it is clear that when one dresses as the sex with which one identifies...this is an act that confirms who one is. One is hardly *crossing* in that instance.⁹⁰

Boag goes on to discuss the issue of appropriate pronouns, and his attempt to apply those he believed the individuals under discussion would have preferred. He acknowledges this is

⁸⁷ Boag, 'The Trouble with Cross-Dressers', 323-4, 327.

⁸⁸ Ibid., 327.

⁸⁹ Vern L. Bullough and Bonnie Bullough, *Cross Dressing, Sex, and Gender* (Philadelphia, 1993), 145-73.

⁹⁰ Boag, 'The Trouble with Cross-Dressers', 327.

‘a highly suspect undertaking’ and resigns himself to ‘taking a leap of faith and hoping the evidence is there to support one’s landing.’⁹¹

Boag’s method of using an anachronism to describe the contemporary act of assuming the clothing of a gender other than the one assigned at birth, is one of three main approaches historians have broadly taken in discourses on gender non-conforming individuals of the past. The first is to use modern terminology such as ‘transgender’ and ‘transsexual’ to describe individuals in the past who display behaviours and characteristics that correspond with current definitions. Jay Prosser, for example, uses both ‘transgender’ and ‘transsexual’ in his article on sexological writings on ‘inversion’, where he argues that transgender identities were being defined before the term was coined.⁹² While Prosser notes the later development of ‘transsexual’ and ‘transgender’, he is confident that transgender identities are recognisable in sexological works, and thus justifies his usage of the terms. Jack Halberstam has also proposed the possible use of transgender in a general sense when discussing individuals who have transgressed the boundaries of gender norms.⁹³ Scholars who choose to employ ‘transgender’ for historical individuals, however, appear to be in the minority, and the approach is indeed fraught with problems. For Katie Hindmarch-Watson, transgender ‘relies on theoretical and actualized notions of being that simply did not exist one hundred or even fifty years ago. To apply the transgender label to all individuals who defied traditional gender roles in the past would therefore be historically misleading.’⁹⁴

⁹¹ Boag, ‘The Trouble with Cross-Dressers’, 327.

⁹² Prosser, ‘Transsexuals and the Transsexologists’, 116-31.

⁹³ Jack Halberstam, *In a Queer Time and Place: Transgender Bodies, Subcultural Lives* (New York, 2005), 48-56.

⁹⁴ Katie Hindmarch-Watson, ‘Lois Schwich, the Female Errand Boy: Narratives of Female Cross-Dressing in the Late-Victorian’, *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies*, 14 (2008), 71.

As previously stated, Bernice Hausman goes further, denying the existence of individuals who could be considered 'transsexual' before medical treatments were available. In her opinion, the 'emergence of transsexualism in the mid-twentieth century depended on developments in endocrinology and plastic surgery as technological and discursive practices,' thereby making it futile to seek transgender individuals before this period.⁹⁵ This position is too extreme and only relevant to Hausman's specific usage of 'transsexual'. Indeed, Genny Beemyn argues that although it is 'inappropriate to assume that people who are "transgender," as we currently understand the term, existed throughout history,' it is equally inaccurate to 'limit "transgender history" to people who lived at a time and place when the concept of "transgender" was available and used by them.'⁹⁶ Evidently then, while it may be possible to identify historical individuals who appear to fit our modern concepts of 'transgender', such terminology needs to be used cautiously and may not always be suitable.

A second approach that avoids the issue of imposing modern labels on the past is to adopt contemporary terminology for possible transgender individuals. Boag informs us that 'people in the nineteenth century had their own concepts and expressions for gender fluidity' and indeed throughout this period and the early twentieth century, a plethora of terms such as 'invert', 'passing woman', 'female husband' and 'man-woman' were utilised.⁹⁷ Hindmarch-Watson, in her discussion of Lois Schwich uses 'cross-dressing and passing

⁹⁵ Hausman, *Changing Sex*, 2.

⁹⁶ Genny Beemyn, 'A Presence in the Past: A Transgender Historiography', *Journal of Women's History*, 25 (2013), 113.

⁹⁷ Boag, 'The Trouble with Cross-Dressers', 325.

woman' which she feels 'convey a better sense of historic specificity than transgender.'⁹⁸ Esther Newton also justifies her use of the term 'mannish lesbian' in her article on *The Well*, in which gender or sexual variance – depending on the interpretation – is explored through the novel's protagonist, 'because it, rather than the contemporary "butch," belongs to the time period in question'.⁹⁹ Vern and Bonnie Bullough, by contrast, prefer the term cross-dressing.¹⁰⁰ Contemporary terms, however, can be just as limiting as modern concepts and are similarly prone to carrying negative connotations. While sexologists may have referred to 'inverts' and 'deviants', the derogatory overtones make their repetition inappropriate. The more neutral terms 'passing woman' and 'cross-dresser' carry their own problems. As Boag has asserted, cross-dresser was not technically a nineteenth-century term and Hindmarch-Watson admits her use of passing woman and cross-dresser 'feel limiting'.¹⁰¹ The deficiency of the concept of 'passing women' has equally been demonstrated by Jason Cromwell's research into the American history of trans men. One of Cromwell's interviewees, a trans man, expressed dissatisfaction with the label 'passing woman', arguing 'I'm a man who was born female, in this sense, I pass as a man not as a woman.'¹⁰² Clearly then, contemporary terms can fail to encapsulate the complex gender identities transgender historians are seeking to discuss.

⁹⁸ Hindmarch-Watson, 'Lois Schwich, the Female Errand Boy', 72.

⁹⁹ Esther Newton, 'The Mythic Mannish Lesbian: Radclyffe Hall and the New Woman', in: Martin Duberman, Martha Vicinus and George Chauncey Jr. (eds) *Hidden from History: Reclaiming the Gay and Lesbian Past* (London, 1989), 283.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

¹⁰¹ Hindmarch-Watson, 'Lois Schwich, the Female Errand Boy', 71.

¹⁰² Jason Cromwell, *Transmen and FTMs: Identities, Bodies, Genders, and Sexualities* (Illinois, 1999), 93.

Cromwell's work offers an example of the third approach to historical discourses about transgender, where historians create their own terms, either by redefining the meaning of a contemporary term, amalgamating past and present terms or creating a new term altogether. Cromwell uses the phrase 'female-bodied men' to describe potential trans men in periods before the advent of modern terminology.¹⁰³ He uses 'pronouns as well as names appropriate to the individual's role rather than ones determined by their presumed biology. Consequently, male markers will be used for those living as a man and female ones for those living as a woman.'¹⁰⁴

Cromwell also gives a detailed explanation of the differences between female husbands, passing women and cross-dressers, making it evident that these terms are not interchangeable. Cromwell's would appear to be a sound approach as individual differences are taken into consideration and the language he uses would be intelligible during the period under discussion, as well as being relevant and inoffensive today. 'Female', 'body' and 'man' would all be recognisable concepts to individuals in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, albeit not in the configuration Cromwell employs. Furthermore, the phrase 'female-bodied man' lends itself to a more transgendered interpretation of gender identity than words such as cross-dresser can convey. Beemyn praises Cromwell for providing this 'middle ground' approach.¹⁰⁵ However, Cromwell's phrasing is specific to the experience of individuals assigned female at birth who identify as men and roots the identity in the

¹⁰³ Cromwell, *Transmen and FTMs*, 74.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 64.

¹⁰⁵ Beemyn, 'A Presence in the Past', 116.

physical. Consequently, its usage would be limited and irrelevant for many transgender identities.

An alternative approach is offered by Heike Bauer who employs the term 'super-invert' in an analysis of Radclyffe Hall's gender non-conforming character Stephen Gordon. By doing so she reclaims the contemporary term 'invert' but removes the negative associations: 'I argue that the figure of Stephen is constructed as what I call a female super-invert whose sexual identity elevates her above others in a deliberate bid to counteract both sexological and socio-political stereotyping of women who love women.'¹⁰⁶ While this is an interesting notion, it can only be applied to very specific cases of lesbian masculinity akin to Stephen Gordon, and thus does not go very far in aiding a historical discussion of transgender identities.

What this brief review highlights is that debates surrounding terminology are complex and likely to be ongoing. Modern terminology carries the threat of imposing current categorisations on the past, while contemporary terms are often derogatory or inadequate. Yet some form of vocabulary is necessary in order to discuss potential transgender identities in periods predating modern terminology. Until a consensus is reached, it seems Beemyn's advice will have to suffice: 'The best that we as historians can do is to acknowledge individuals whose actions would seem to indicate that they might be what we would call "transgender" or "transsexual" today without necessarily referring to them as such'.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁶ Bauer, *English Literary Sexology*, 113.

¹⁰⁷ Beemyn, 'A Presence in the Past', 113.

In what follows, I have chosen to use terms that are the most respectful and representative of the individuals under discussion. Rather than attempting to construct or impose a language of my own, it is more in the spirit of the period to follow Beemyn's advice. My research considers individuals who chose to physically transition, those who identified as one gender regardless of their physicality and those who identified as different genders at different periods of their life. I include all of these individuals under the term 'transgender' using Stryker's definition:

...people who move away from the gender they were assigned at birth, people who cross over (*trans-*) the boundaries constructed by their culture to define and contain that gender...it is the movement across a socially imposed boundary away from an unchosen starting place – rather than any particular destination or mode of transition.¹⁰⁸

The movement described by Stryker is a unifying feature of the individuals discussed in this thesis and as such this is the most relevant term with which to collectively describe them. In doing so, I do not attempt to limit or homogenise the individual experiences. My justification is rather that these individuals can be considered trans in that some form of movement away from an assigned gender is perceptible in each case, making *transgender* a valid descriptor. That said, I am acutely conscious of the limitations of the term and more usually adopt the term 'gender non-conforming,' meaning an individual whose gender presentation does not conform to the prescribed gender norms. This term encompasses transgender, cisgender and non-binary individuals. Despite gender non-conforming also being an

¹⁰⁸ Stryker, *Transgender History*, 1.

anachronistic term, the concept of 'gender' and 'non-conformist' behaviour would have been recognisable in the period under discussion. As with Boag's use of cross-dressing, I argue that gender non-conforming provides a close approximation of the gender presentations discussed in my work, and its inclusivity helps limit incorrect categorisation. Contemporary terms such as 'invert' that carry derogatory connotations are only used in specific reference to contemporary writings. I have also chosen not to use 'transsexual' unless in reference to a specific text due to the pathologizing overtones of the term. This decision is supported by the general trend in academic research where 'transsexual' has been 'almost completely replac[ed]' by transgender.¹⁰⁹

With regards to pronouns, where possible I follow the individual's stated preference rather than those imposed by external sources such as doctors or journalists. When the individual's preferences are unclear, I have opted to use the gender-neutral pronouns 'they/them.' This is in no way intended to undermine the validity of the individual's gender identity but rather to avoid as far as possible making assumptions that could lead to misgendering individuals. My approach is by no means unproblematic, but I argue that it is one that most closely aligns with my intentions of providing a respectful and historically appropriate examination of twentieth-century British transgender identities.

An Unconventional Approach

¹⁰⁹ Thelwall, et al., 'Academic LGBTQ+ Terminology', 12.

The timeline and source material for this thesis may be considered unorthodox. This was a deliberate decision with several motivating factors. Firstly, the nature of gender non-conforming identities is to transcend rigid binary constructions of gender and to resist 'either/or' categorisations.¹¹⁰ Consequently, the time period selected for this project was not dictated by conventional divisions of 'epochs' or centuries. The start date of 1870 marks the arrest of Boulton and Park, while the end period of the 1940s signifies the decade in which the first gender-affirming surgeries were undertaken in Britain on Michael Dillon. These events were selected to represent the diversity of gender non-conforming and transgender identities that I seek to explore in this thesis. As mentioned at the start of this introduction, Boulton and Park have defied clear categorisation and have been represented as both homosexual figures and gender non-conforming. While Boulton and Park are not featured in the following chapters (due to the volume of existing work and the limitations of space), their case is symbolic of my intention to move away from a purely medicalised construction of transgender, as well as illustrating the sometimes-fluid boundaries between sexuality and gender identity. Dillon's case on the other hand, represents an individual whose gender identity was largely unchanging and who sought a physical transition to correlate with their male gender. Similarly, I selected cultural as well as medical source materials in order to demonstrate the range of transgender identities visible in this period that were not always dependant on a linear, medical transition.

The medical sources selected consist largely of the published works by British sexological and medical experts on gender non-conformity. In chapter three I also include the

¹¹⁰ Chris Coffman, 'Woolf's *Orlando* and the resonances of trans studies', *Genders*, 51 (2010), 25.

posthumously published autobiography of Michael Dillon, the first British trans man to undergo gender-affirming surgery as well as his own medical text discussing gender non-conformity. I have also drawn on the Wellcome Library's archive collection of Michael Dillon's medical files regarding his gender-affirming surgery and correspondence with his surgeon Sir Harold Gillies. The sources chosen best represent the complex, vacillating dynamic between doctor and patient that is a dominant theme throughout the medical section. While Ellis depathologised his construction of gender non-conformity and worked to some extent in collaboration with his participants, L. R. Broster and his colleagues positioned the patient as subject and themselves as the authorities on gender identity. Finally, Michael Dillon's position as both a doctor and patient permitted him a unique role within his own treatment and an almost pupil-mentor relationship with Gillies. This changing dynamic differed from Europe and America and resulted from the specific context of British sexology's less medical community, and the impact of the two World Wars that both undermined the immutability of gender and provided opportunities to develop new surgical procedures. These sources have also received limited attention from historians and have not been explored as a collective history of transgender identities.

Similarly, the sources examined in the cultural section include texts that have been discussed within the framework of lesbian and gay history alongside others that have been almost entirely overlooked. Novels such as *The Well of Loneliness* and *Orlando* have been examined frequently as part of historical analyses of the lesbian culture of the early twentieth century. On the other hand, *2835 Mayfair* (1907, reprinted in 1927) by Frank Richardson has been ignored despite two of Ellis' participants explicitly citing the book as a representation of their

desires and identity. Consequently, I have examined *2835 Mayfair* alongside *The Well* and *Orlando* to demonstrate the diverse representations of gender non-conformity in the early twentieth century. Following on I have chosen to discuss the life and works of Vita Sackville-West – the inspiration for the title character of *Orlando* – as a case study that illustrates my argument concerning the fluidity of the boundaries between gender identity and sexuality. Finally, I have examined LSE’s Women’s Library archival holdings of the feminist journal *Urania* and two of the works of its editor Irene Clyde, *Beatrice the Sixteenth* (1909) and *Eve’s Sour Apples* (1934). Existing discussions of *Urania* have largely centred on the journal’s feminist contributions aside from Sonja Tiernan’s work on the accounts of crossdressing and female-to-male surgical articles.¹¹¹ Building on Tiernan’s trans-centred research, I have resituated Clyde’s work and *Urania* within an exploration of gender non-conformity as early attempts at challenging the binary discourse through a genderless ideal. The lack of academic references for biographical information on some of the key individuals discussed in this thesis has also necessitated the use of unconventional sources in places. For example, university and archival blogs were the most viable sources of information on three of *Urania*’s editors, indicating the dearth of academic research on some figures in transgender history.

The majority of the sources discussed throughout are autobiographical in various forms.

These include correspondence, diary entries, patient testimonies, autobiographical novels as

¹¹¹ See Sonja Tiernan, “‘It should not be so easy to Construct a Man:’ A History of Female to Male Transsexuality”, in: Sonja Tiernan and Mary McAuliffe (eds) *Sapphists and Sexologists: Histories of Sexualities Volume 2* (Newcastle, 2009), 56-70, and Sonja Tiernan, ‘The Journal *Urania* (1916-40): An Alternative Archive of Radical Gender Masquerade’, in: Sharon Tighe-Mooney and Deirdre Quinn (eds) *Essays in Irish Literary Criticism: Themes of Gender, Sexuality, and Corporeality* (Wales, 2009), 55-70.

well as traditional autobiographies. The problems of bias, reliability, and locating corroborating evidence have resulted in a reluctance to incorporate such materials into historical research.¹¹² In recent decades however, the value of autobiographical sources has been recognised, particularly with regards to marginalised histories.¹¹³ As Marilyn Morris has shown in her work on the Chevalière d'Eon's private writings, gender non-conforming autobiographies not only provide a 'counter-narrative' to the prevailing discourse but also demonstrate 'the impact that language and culture have on what might seem possible in an individual's life.'¹¹⁴ Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson have also pointed out, 'the second wave of autobiography critics insist[ed] on [autobiography's] status as an act of creation rather than mere transcription of the past.'¹¹⁵ This view is relevant to this thesis which will follow Oliver Buckton's interpretation of 'autobiography as a discourse of the self in which the significant product is not a referential "truth" but a cultural effect' and each of the sources will be considered as modes of constructing rather than simply recording the individual's identity.¹¹⁶ Vita Sackville-West's framing of herself as a 'dual personality', Michael Dillon's use of the 'wrong embodiment' narrative and Roberta Cowell's reframing of her transition in terms of intersexuality each reveal their individual understandings of their gender identities and how they sought to convey them in a way that would be intelligible and palatable to their readers. The value of autobiographical sources lies not in their verifiable truth but in the decisions taken by the author in their portrayal of themselves. The different forms of

¹¹² Jaume Aurell, and Rocio G. Davis, 'History and Autobiography: The Logics of a Convergence', *Life Writing*, 16 (2019), 503.

¹¹³ Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson, *Reading Autobiography: A Guide for Interpreting Life Narratives* (Minneapolis, 2001), 134-5.

¹¹⁴ Marilyn Morris, 'The Chevalière d'Eon, Transgender Autobiography and Identity', *Gender & History*, 31 (2019), 78.

¹¹⁵ Smith and Watson, *Reading Autobiography*, 128.

¹¹⁶ Oliver S. Buckton, *Secret Selves: Confessions and Same-Sex Desire in Autobiography* (North Carolina, 1998), 1.

personal writings offer various advantages, particularly when it is possible to consider different sources by the same author, as with Dillon's letters to Sir Harold Gillies and his subsequent autobiography.¹¹⁷ The correspondence between Violet Trefusis and Sackville-West for example, has the benefit of closeness to the events being described, and the emotions experienced at the time the affair was taking place. Meanwhile, Dillon's autobiographical manuscript was written shortly before his death with the specific intention of explaining his transition from his perspective, thereby regaining control of the narrative from the press. Dillon was able to select the events he deemed pertinent to this story and to frame the individuals involved in relation to his purpose of seeking acceptance for gender-affirming surgery. The omissions, terminology and chosen events represent not only the motivations in writing but also the tensions between the author's experiences and the need to gain the support and understanding of the reader. They also reveal the diversity within gender non-conforming identities as the different accounts 'splinter monolithic categories that have culturally identified them'.¹¹⁸ As such, these materials form a crucial element of the research conducted here into how gender non-conformity was constructed in Britain in this period.

I have chosen not to include a discussion of the legal context due to the existence of a substantial body of work on the subject by historians, most notably on the Boulton and Park case as discussed above. While cross-dressing in and of itself was never a crime as it was in America, it was often perceived by police as an indication of homosexuality or fraud.¹¹⁹

¹¹⁷ Fritz Redlich, 'Autobiographies as Sources for Social History: A Research Program', *VSWG: Vierteljahrschrift für Sozial- und Wirtschaftsgeschichte*, 3 (1975), 380-1.

¹¹⁸ Smith and Watson, *Reading Autobiography*, 109.

¹¹⁹ Vernon, "'For Some Queer Reason'", 45.

Consequently, many of the court cases brought against gender non-conforming individuals were centred on charges of gross indecency or fraud and are situated in the borderlands between gender and sexuality. Aside from the Boulton and Park case, two of the most well-known legal cases involving cross-dressing have received much attention from historians. As previously mentioned, Colonel Barker, who was arrested on numerous occasions on various charges including two counts of perjury following their wedding to Elfrida Haward in 1923 after Barker was found to have been assigned female at birth, has been interpreted through a feminist, lesbian and cross-dressing lens by Laura Doan, Julie Wheelwright and Peter Gurney.¹²⁰ Angus McLaren has thoroughly explored the case of Augustine Hull (1910-?), a haulage hand who in 1931 was arrested wearing female clothing, charged with gross indecency and sentenced to eighteen months' imprisonment with hard labour.¹²¹ Finally, Houlbrook has also examined the policing of cross-dressing in London with regards to male homosexuality in *Queer London* (2005).

Chapter Breakdown

As previously stated, this thesis is composed of two sections. The first section examines medical constructions of transgender identities in Britain. Chapter one explores the work of sexologist Havelock Ellis and the development of his definition of gender non-conformity from a facet of homosexuality in *Sexual Inversion* (1900), to a category of identity in its own right with a distinct terminology and definition in *Eonism* (1928). I argue that Ellis' position

¹²⁰ See Laura Doan, 'Passing Fashions: Reading Female Masculinities in the 1920s', *Feminist Studies*, 24 (1998), 663-700, Julie Wheelwright, "'Colonel' Barker: A Case of Fascism', *The Politics of Marginality: Race, the Radical in Twentieth-Century Britain*, 8 (1989), 40-8, and Peter Gurney, "'Intersex' and 'Dirty Girls': Mass Observation and Working-Class Sexuality in England in the 1930s', *Journal of the History of Sexuality*, 8 (1997), 256-90.

¹²¹ Angus McLaren, *The Trials of Masculinity: Policing Sexual Boundaries, 1870-1930* (Chicago, 1997), 210-16.

as a theorist rather than practicing doctor altered the power dynamic between him and his participants and allowed for a more – though by no means completely – collaborative interaction. This, coupled with Ellis’ monopoly over British sexology, produced a different sexological narrative to those in Europe. Unlike Krafft-Ebing and other European theorists who based their research on patients under their care, Ellis’ case studies were drawn from volunteer interviewees recommended to him by acquaintances. This encouraged a depathologised discourse on gender non-conformity in which the interviewees contributed to shaping Ellis’ theories, though he retained ultimate control over the final narrative.

Chapter two discusses the importance of the concept of ‘passing’ – here meaning presenting as a gender without arousing comment or speculation from others – in the interwar period and beyond, and the role of the medical profession as the determiners of who could and could not pass as a particular gender. Doctors and psychologists subscribed to a division between mind and body in terms of treatment, with intersex individuals requiring surgery and gender non-conforming patients therapy in order to restore their ‘true’ gender as decided by the medical profession. Patients seeking physical transitions were thus obliged to pass as intersex, effectively erasing their transgender identities. Plastic surgeon Sir Harold Gillies’ pioneering techniques for facial reconstruction strove to enable wounded soldiers to pass as uninjured more effectively. His experiences would later inform his interactions with trans man Michael Dillon and trans woman Roberta Cowell. Successful passing was the goal of the medical profession and led to a complex depiction of gender as both essential and a construct. The work of surgeon L. R. Broster and his colleague psychiatrist Clifford Allen represented gender as an essentialist facet of identity that required the medical profession’s

intervention to re-establish, thereby erasing any ambiguity. Simultaneously, some branches of psychoanalysis acknowledged the constructed nature of gender and the importance of learned behaviour in maintaining gender categories. In both cases, medical definitions of gender were heavily informed by cultural norms.

In chapter three I focus on Michael Dillon and Roberta Cowell, the first individuals in Britain to physically transition. Through an analysis of their autobiographies and correspondence together with the published descriptions of their cases by surgeon Sir Harold Gillies, I argue that transgender individuals both destabilised and reaffirmed gender norms, and the medical discourse could be both repressive and liberating. Although ultimately both Cowell and Dillon were obliged to adopt erroneous intersex diagnoses, this was done with the full collusion of Gillies as a means of bypassing restrictions on access to surgery. Dillon's unique position as a qualified doctor altered the dynamic between Dillon and Gillies, allowing the former a tentative input regarding his treatment in the lengthy correspondence between the two. Dillon also produced his own medical text on gender non-conformity in which he sought to place the patient at the centre and prioritise their opinions on their treatment. Nevertheless, both Dillon and Cowell were subject to Gillies' construction of their identities in the main medical discourse and were confined to stereotypical gender norms in their gender presentations. Combined with their essentialist representations of their gender identity, Cowell and Dillon served to reinforce the perception of gender as innate and unchanging, as each conformed to the roles, appearance and attitudes medical and cultural discourses conferred on their different genders. This reciprocal interaction between cultural and medical narratives is apparent across the source materials examined in these medical

chapters, thereby reinforcing the need to take a multifaceted approach to histories of transgender identities.

The second section of this thesis examines cultural representations of transgender identities through some well-known and some more obscure examples. In chapter four I discuss three early-twentieth-century novels, *Orlando* by Virginia Woolf, *The Well of Loneliness* by Radclyffe Hall and *2835 Mayfair* by Frank Richardson. While the former two have received much attention from scholars, the preoccupation with categorising them as representations of sexuality *or* gender identity has led to the neglect of *2835 Mayfair*. I examine the three novels beside one another rather than in isolation, in alignment with Eve Sedgwick's and Chris Coffman's belief that 'thinking the "beside" is a particularly productive way of thinking'.¹²² I also take Coffman's position that 'it is more productive to take a "both/and" rather than an "either/or" approach', and maintain that the early-twentieth-century constructions of the overlapping between gender non-conformity and same-sex desire, are best represented by acknowledging the value of each work for histories of gender identity *and* sexuality.¹²³ Despite Richardson's intent to produce a detective thriller rather than a commentary on gender identity, *2835 Mayfair* was cited by two of Ellis' Eonists as a text that they identified with. The novel provides a valuable insight into early-twentieth-century constructions of gender norms and centres on the main character's transition through hypnosis from a male body to a female one. I argue that the fantastical transition of the protagonist in Richardson's novel was a closer representation of the wish fulfilment of Ellis'

¹²² Coffman, 'Woolf's *Orlando*', 25.

¹²³ *Ibid.*

Eonists who sought a full physical transition and acceptance as a woman. Consequently, *2835 Mayfair* has much to contribute to cultural histories of gender non-conformity.

In chapter five, I continue to implement this ‘both/and’ approach in my case study of Vita Sackville-West. Sackville-West provides a prime example of the problems inherent in attempting to strictly segregate histories of sexuality and histories of gender. Hugh Ryan illustrates the issues facing scholars:

Any line we might try to draw to separate lesbian/gay/bisexual history (LGB) from transgender history (trans) would be imprecise, blurry, and certainly not straight...just trying to find that line forces us to consider all of history through two modern categories – gender and sexuality – making it harder to understand the very thing we are researching.¹²⁴

Ryan’s article for the digital transgender archive stresses the changing concepts of terms such as ‘sexuality’ and ‘gender identity’ over time and the inextricability of sexual orientation and gender identity in nineteenth-century America. Similarly, in early-twentieth-century Britain, same-sex desire was frequently expressed through gender non-conformity. Sackville-West has largely been categorised as a lesbian figure due to her relationships with women, but I argue that this reading of her life is too limiting. At different points, Sackville-West was a wife, mother, bisexual, lesbian, masculine, feminine, male-presenting, while never completely conforming to any of these single categories. The fact that Sackville-West could not be clearly categorised allowed her the freedom to construct a discourse on her

¹²⁴ Hugh Ryan, ‘LGB and/or T History’, *Digital Transgender Archive*, [web blog], 2022, <https://www.digitaltransgenderarchive.net/learn/LGBTHistory>.

identity that incorporated what she described as her 'dual personality' without compromising her sexuality.¹²⁵

Rather than focusing on categorising Sackville-West as either a lesbian or gender non-conforming, I argue that it is valid to read her as identifying as male and experiencing same-sex desire, sometimes separately and sometimes concurrently. As Ryan states, 'we do not see "LGB" and "T" histories as discrete categories; rather, they are a collection of shared roots and overlapping fields of investigation. Many figures have a place in both histories, regardless of what terms they used to describe themselves.'¹²⁶ Consequently, despite collectively discussing individuals in this thesis under the terms 'gender non-conforming' or 'transgender', I adopt a case-specific approach regarding terminology, pronouns and the relevance – or lack thereof – of sexuality in their gender identity. By examining histories of sexuality in tandem with histories of diverse gender identities, it is possible to represent a far broader range of early-to-mid-twentieth-century experiences that resist modern classifications.

In the final chapter, a discussion of the feminist journal *Urania* (1916-1940) provides an opportunity to draw together my arguments concerning the power of discourse, the reciprocal influence between medical and cultural constructs of gender and the importance of recognising the diversity within transgender identities. It also demonstrates the difficulties in representing identities that move beyond the binary model of gender. Some individuals

¹²⁵ Vita Sackville-West, 'Part Three', in: Nicolson, Nigel (ed.), *Portrait of a Marriage* (London, 1992), 102.

¹²⁶ Ryan, 'LGB and/or T History'.

such as Sackville-West were able to articulate their gender through dual personalities that still situated them within the British two-gender model that was legible, even though it was subversive. Those individuals who sought to transcend the binary were rendered invisible due to the constraints of western terminology. *Urania's* stated aim was to abolish gender entirely and establish a genderless society in which true equality could be achieved. One of the journal's main editors, Irene Clyde – who also presented as male under the name Thomas Baty – published a novel and a collection of essays on the subject of non-binary identities. However, within *Urania* and Clyde's own work, the gender binary proved inescapable. *Urania* was preoccupied with proving the validity of their belief that 'sex is an accident', and consequently focused on presenting examples of individuals whose gender non-conformity supported this assertion rather than constructing their own non-binary discourse.¹²⁷ This decision allowed for the representation of diverse forms of gender non-conformity. However, the dearth of a non-binary discourse within *Urania* limited the journal's attempts to challenge the two-gender model and unintentionally subsumed the individuals cited within the gender binary. Gender non-conformity could be articulated, but only within the confines of a male to female spectrum.

Conclusion

The history of transgender identities is growing as an area of research, and though originally dominated by works on America, the focus is starting to broaden to include a more global discussion. My intention in what follows is to contribute to this expanding view by exploring British constructions of transgender and gender non-conformity. I collect diverse cultural

¹²⁷ 'Lightning!', *Urania*, 115 & 116, January – April 1936, (LSE Women's Library), 2.

and medical representations of gender non-conformity in one thesis and consider previously neglected sources alongside those currently dominated by a focus on sexuality through the lens of gender identity. In doing so I move beyond a discussion of transgender purely in terms of surgical transition to also incorporate individuals whose gender non-conformity was expressed through clothing and behaviour. The unique circumstances of British sexology in the early twentieth century, dominated as it was by writers and theorists rather than practicing doctors and psychiatrists, cemented the relationship between cultural and medical constructions of gender in Britain. Section one examines the complex dynamic between doctor and patient and charts the varying positionality of the gender non-conforming individual in medical discourse. I argue that there was no one single medical approach. Ellis' position as a theorist rather than practitioner permitted a level of collaboration with his interviewees that differed from European sexologists. Medical practitioners such as Broster however, maintained their positions as experts and placed their patients as the subjects rather than coproducers of the text. At the genesis of gender-affirming surgery, the patient/doctor collaboration was consolidated in Michael Dillon's distinct dual role. Gillies allowed Dillon some input into his treatment due to his position as a doctor himself, but ultimately privileged his own construction of Dillon's and Cowell's identities in his published case studies. Thus, I draw on Foucault's theory of the confessional aspect of the doctor/patient relationship, but I argue that the dynamic was not consistent and varied according to the individual medical professionals involved. I argue that while the concept of transition challenged the unassailability of gender, individuals such as Dillon whose gender identity remained constant and, in many ways, traditionally male, reaffirmed the binary and essentialist construction of gender.

Section two demonstrates that scholarly debates over claiming texts and individuals as either part of transgender history or histories of sexuality are limiting and ignore the contemporary amalgamation of gender and sexual identity. My approach here explicitly builds on the existing scholarship of Halberstam, Coffman, Ryan and others in arguing that the rigid distinctions between sexuality and gender identity are not only fictitious but also problematic when they dominate historical research and should be studied in tandem while upholding their distinct definitions. I argue that allowing for multiple readings of texts and individuals is the most representative of British transgender identities in this period.

The challenges of producing histories of transgender identities are numerous in an area where terminology is constantly evolving and definitions reinterpreted, but they are challenges to be embraced as aides in expanding the history of gender. As gender is increasingly being recognised as fluid, it is imperative that historians continue to move beyond the two-gender model and undermine any notion that transgender identities are exclusively a modern construct. My work is in no way intended as a definitive study of transgender identities in twentieth-century Britain. My contribution is to represent the diversity apparent in forms of expressing gender non-conformity in this period with or without surgical transition, from which further research can be conducted.

Section One: Medical Cases

Chapter 1: Trans Britannia: Havelock Ellis' Eonism and the British sexological approach to gender non-conformity

[W]hen exploring the phenomena of sexual inversion, I was puzzled by occasional cases I met with of people who took pleasure in behaving and dressing like the opposite sex and yet were not sexually inverted.¹²⁸

Thus Havelock Ellis, the only medically trained British sexologist of the turn of the twentieth century explained the origins of his interest in the main topic of the final volume of his *Studies in the Psychology of Sex* (1897-1928). These *Studies* spanned the greater part of Ellis' career and dealt openly with all aspects of sexuality from a de-pathologized standpoint. It was Ellis' intention to deviate from his contemporaries and produce a 'study of normal sexuality.'¹²⁹ Two exceptions are included amongst the volumes, *Sexual Inversion* (1897) and *Eonism and Other Supplementary Studies* (1928). While *Sexual Inversion* has received much critical attention from historians for its discussion of homosexuality and its controversial reception in England, *Eonism* has been relatively neglected.¹³⁰ This chapter seeks to address this oversight and demonstrate that *Eonism* not only provided examples of gender non-conformity but was crucial evidence of the sexologist's early attempts to classify potential transgender individuals as a separate group. I argue that although European sexology was influential in Ellis' writings on gender non-conformity, his approach to constructing the category of Eonism differed from his European counterparts due to the distinct position of

¹²⁸ Havelock Ellis, *Studies in the Psychology of Sex. Volume VII: Eonism and Other Supplementary Studies* (Philadelphia, 1928), 1.

¹²⁹ Havelock Ellis, *Studies in the Psychology of Sex* (London, 1948), p.xxi.

¹³⁰ Ivan Crozier's essay 'Havelock Ellis, Eonism and the patient's discourse; or, writing a book about sex' is a notable exception, although the focus is on the construction of the case studies rather than their contents. *Eonism* also receives a brief mention in Laura Marcus, 'Sexual Identity as Spectacle and Science', in: Isobel Armstrong and Hans-Werner Ludwig (eds) *Critical Dialogues: Current Issues in English Studies in Germany and Britain* (Germany, 1995), 96-110. and in Richard Ekins and Dave King, *The Transgender Phenomenon* (London, 2006).

British sexology. As Anna Katharina Schaffner has demonstrated, most of the contributors to British sexology such as Edward Carpenter and John Addington Symonds were not medically trained.¹³¹ Consequently, Ellis' medical qualification – albeit largely theoretical – conferred on him the necessary authority to dominate the discourse on gender non-conformity in Britain. The reluctance of the British medical profession to openly discuss matters related to sexuality furthered Ellis' ability to monopolise the categorisation of gender non-conformity in British sexology. The influence of European sexology on Ellis was evident throughout his *Studies*. Ellis' engagement with the theories of German psychiatrist Richard von Krafft-Ebing (1840-1902), German sexologist Magnus Hirschfeld (1868-1935) and others at times led him to bow to their experience. However, Ellis did not simply regurgitate these theories and apply them to a British context. He challenged other sexologist's ideas and terminology and stressed the cultural differences that made it vital to study British case histories. Thus, the British sexological approach to gender non-conformity was distinct from its European counterparts due to Ellis' depathologised and co-operative approach to his research.

Havelock Ellis and Sexology

Havelock Ellis (1859-1939) began his medical training in 1881 at St Thomas' Hospital in London to enable him to pursue the study of sex with more authority. Although becoming a licentiate of the Society of Apothecaries in 1889, Ellis rarely practiced as a physician and instead focused on writing essays and articles on a variety of subjects including religion and politics. Ellis was influenced by the progressive, radical thinkers with whom he associated

¹³¹ Anna Katharina Schaffner, 'Fiction as Evidence: On the Uses of Literature in Nineteenth-Century Sexological Discourse', *Comparative Literature Studies*, 48 (2011), 182.

such as Eleanor Marx, Edward Carpenter and George Bernard Shaw. In the 1890s he began work on his seven-volume series *Studies in the Psychology of Sex* (1897-1928).¹³² Ellis collaborated with John Addington Symonds (1840-1893) on volume two of the *Studies*, *Sexual Inversion*. Symonds was a poet and advocate for homosexual rights as a homosexual himself. As well as poetry and biographies, Symonds wrote *A Problem in Greek Ethics* (1883) in which he defended all forms of male same-sex desire.¹³³ Symonds' death in 1893 left Ellis to complete *Sexual Inversion* alone and thereby dominate the contents. Ellis did however retain the positive, depathologised portrayal of homosexuality, attributing its origins to biology rather than vice or degeneracy. The contemporary medical preoccupation with the dichotomy between 'normal' and 'abnormal' behaviours led sexologists such as Krafft-Ebing in his key work *Psychopathia Sexualis* (1895) to categorise gender non-conformity and homosexuality as forms of mental illness and deviations from the 'norms' of heterosexuality and traditional gender stereotypes.¹³⁴ Conversely, Ellis shared Magnus Hirschfeld's construction of same-sex desire and gender non-conformity as a natural phenomenon requiring understanding rather than a cure.¹³⁵ Alongside extensive research and campaigning for homosexual rights, Hirschfeld opened his Institute for Sexual Research in 1919 in Berlin where research into all aspects of sexuality and gender took place to educate

¹³² Oxford Dictionary of National Biography, *Ellis, (Henry) Havelock (1859–1939), writer and sexologist*, [website], 2004,

<https://www.oxforddnb.com/search?q=havelock+ellis&searchBtn=Search&isQuickSearch=true>.

¹³³ Oxford Dictionary of National Biography, *Symonds, John Addington (1840–1893)*, [website], 2004,

<https://www.oxforddnb.com/search?q=john+addington+symonds&searchBtn=Search&isQuickSearch=true>.

¹³⁴ Richard von Krafft-Ebing, *Psychopathia Sexualis, with especial reference to Contrary Sexual Instinct: A Medico-Legal Study*, trans. Charles Gilbert Chaddock (London, 1895), pp.iv-v.

¹³⁵ Havelock Ellis, *Studies in the Psychology of Sex. Volume II: Sexual Inversion* (Philadelphia, 2nd edn. 1908), 73-4.

both medical specialists and the public, and pioneering gender-affirming surgeries were developed.¹³⁶

Ellis' depathologised construction of gender non-conformity was assisted by his selection of case studies. Ellis' unique position as a physician who rarely practiced medicine allowed him to adopt a collaborative approach in constructing a new medical category, 'Eonism'. Believing that 'Hirschfeld's conception of the anomaly scarcely appeared to me altogether satisfactory,' Ellis coined his own term 'Eonism' – following the precedent of using terms named after literary or historical examples – to describe individuals who adopted the mannerisms and clothing of another gender.¹³⁷ Ellis selected the term based on 'the Chevalier d'Eon, the most famous historical subject of this anomaly, to be used as comparable to the terms "sadism" and "masochism."' ¹³⁸ Initially presenting as male in accordance with their physical sex, d'Eon went on to live the latter half of their life as female, 'regarded by all as really a woman.'¹³⁹ Ellis rejected Berlin's Dr Ralph Pettow's assessment of d'Eon as a "'pseudo-transvestist," who merely used feminine garments to aid their secret diplomatic missions.'¹⁴⁰ Nor did he accept the consensus among d'Eon's biographers that their behaviour was all 'masquerade.'¹⁴¹ It was in Ellis' analysis of d'Eon's case that his construction of gender non-conformity as distinct from both sexuality and mental illness became apparent. For Ellis, d'Eon's living as a woman was of such lengthy

¹³⁶ A. Djajic-Horváth, "Magnus Hirschfeld" *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, [website], 2022, <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Magnus-Hirschfeld>.

¹³⁷ Ellis, *Eonism*, 12.

¹³⁸ Ellis, *Eonism*, 27.

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*, 2.

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*

duration that it could not be read as masquerade for the sake of their career. They were instead 'fulfilling a deep demand of his [*sic*] own nature'.¹⁴² Ellis presented d'Eon as having had 'a constitutional predisposition for the life he adopted, aided by an almost asexual disposition'.¹⁴³

Ivan Crozier has revealed Ellis' reliance on friends and acquaintances for potential case studies as opposed to the direct access to patients available to practicing psychiatrists such as Krafft-Ebing.¹⁴⁴ This seeming obstacle altered the dynamic from the traditional Foucauldian power dynamic between doctor and patient. Ellis was still an authority figure for his participants but by adopting the role of a theorist instead of a practitioner offering treatment, his participants were given a more active position in the construction of the discourse on gender non-conformity. True, Ellis was contributing to the medical profession's preoccupation with categorisation that Foucault identified as a facet of the nineteenth century but was also present in the early twentieth century. Ellis had ultimate control over the characteristics and behaviours selected to represent his definition of Eonism and the resulting discourse. Nevertheless, the construction of a depathologised, gender-identity focused term enabled individuals to articulate their identities through a recognisable narrative. This is not to dismiss the problematic nature of medical discourse on transgender identities dictating access to gender-affirming surgery. However, as no

¹⁴² Ellis, *Eonism*, 3.

¹⁴³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁴ Ivan Crozier, 'Havelock Ellis, Eonism and the patient's discourse; or, writing a book about sex', *History of Psychiatry*, 11 (2000), 130-3.

surgical or hormonal treatment was being offered by Ellis there was less pressure for individuals to subscribe to the category of Eonism for this reason.

Ellis' definition of gender non-conformity was informed by the testimonies of his case studies, and he adapted his theories to coincide more closely with these individual narratives. Thus, through the dialogue between Ellis and his case studies, gender non-conforming individuals had more input in the categorisation of Eonism than for example, the European asylum patients of German psychiatrist Albert Moll (1862-1939) or Krafft-Ebing.¹⁴⁵ This is not to suggest that Ellis did not have ultimate control over the final narrative or that he was entirely led by the testimonies, but rather that his approach and resulting discourse on Eonism were distinct enough from his European contemporaries to deserve greater recognition within transgender history.

Ellis' work on Eonism revealed a growing dichotomy between sexuality and gender within sexological discourse, reflected in the recategorization of cross-dressing as an expression of gender identity as well as sexual orientation. Many of the sexological studies of homosexuality contained classifications and case studies that potentially more closely fit a transgender reading, and Jay Prosser has highlighted these in *Sexual Inversion* and other European sexological works. Yet *Eonism* demonstrated the development of Ellis' definition of gender non-conformity as separate to sexual orientation and made the largest contribution

¹⁴⁵ Harry Oosterhuis, 'Sexual Modernity in the Works of Richard von Krafft-Ebing and Albert Moll', *Medical History*, 56 (2012), 135-6.

among British sexologists towards the establishment of gender non-conformity as a distinct category.

Sexual Inversion: Transgender in Hiding

The controversy surrounding the original publication of *Sexual Inversion* in London in 1897 which led to the Bedborough trial in 1898, and ultimately Ellis' decision to publish future volumes of the *Studies* in America, lent credence to Ellis' complaint that '[m]y own chief quarrel with the psychiatrists is that in England they will not even discuss the question.'¹⁴⁶

Yet in his defence of *Sexual Inversion* in the preface to the book's second edition, Ellis claims not only that '[i]t was favourably received by the medical press on its first publication in London,' but that he had 'the satisfaction of knowing that neither in my own country, nor in continental Europe, nor in America, has anyone entitled to an authoritative opinion on the subjects with which I deal pronounced adversely to my book.'¹⁴⁷ The contents of Ellis' *Studies* were not entirely lost to a British audience even at this point, though strictly confined to medical professionals as was Ellis' intention.¹⁴⁸ By the third edition, Ellis stated it 'is no doubt this human interest of the question of inversion, rather than its scientific importance...which is mainly responsible for the remarkable activity with which the study of homosexuality has been carried on during recent years.'¹⁴⁹ Four years later, Ellis wrote: 'No longer is it a risky and dangerous enterprise to approach this field...It is today almost

¹⁴⁶ Jeffrey Weeks, *Making Sexual History* (Cambridge, 2000), 27-8. John Addington Symonds and Havelock Ellis, 'The Correspondence of John Addington Symonds and Havelock Ellis in the Project of Sexual Inversion', in: Sean Brady (ed.) *John Addington Symonds (1840-1893) and Homosexuality: A Critical Edition of Sources* (Hampshire, 2012), 223.

¹⁴⁷ Ellis, *Sexual Inversion* (2nd edn.), p.iii.

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁹ Havelock Ellis, *Studies in the Psychology of Sex. Volume II: Sexual Inversion* (Philadelphia, 3rd edn. 1931), p.iii.

universally accepted, when it is not actively urged, that definite knowledge of so deeply vital a subject is necessary.¹⁵⁰ This dramatic reversal of attitudes towards the study of sex, leading Ellis to once again allow his *Volume VI: Sex in Relation to Society* to be published in England in 1937, followed by the complete *Studies* in 1948, was in part attributed to ‘the researches of men like Ellis’ by American Lawyer Morris L. Ernst in his foreword to the 1948 edition.¹⁵¹ Even tempering Ernst’s effusive praise of Ellis as ‘the foremost living authority on the psychology of sex,’ his work may fairly be said to have had an impact on British concepts of gender identity as well as sexuality, justifying the notion that Britain had its own – albeit modest – sexology that was not merely a replica of the more overt European theories.¹⁵²

Sexual Inversion was something of an anomaly among Ellis’ *Studies*. Unlike the other volumes, it dealt with subject matter that ‘was inevitably regarded as...abnormal’ and was written in collaboration with the poet and writer John Addington Symonds.¹⁵³ The exclusive focus of the book on homosexuality at first glance implies its irrelevance to gender identity. Yet a closer examination of *Sexual Inversion* reveals a complex entanglement of sexuality and possible gender non-conformity grouped together as different facets of homosexuality. Jay Prosser has skilfully demonstrated the existence of transgender identities among the categories of sexual inversion in the works of pioneering German sexologist Karl Heinrich Ulrichs (1825-95), Krafft-Ebing and Ellis.¹⁵⁴

¹⁵⁰ Ellis, *Studies*, (1948), p.xxiii.

¹⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p.vi.

¹⁵² *Ibid.*, p.v.

¹⁵³ *Ibid.*, p.xxi.

¹⁵⁴ Jay Prosser, ‘Transsexuals and the Transsexologists: Inversion and the Emergence of Transsexual Subjectivity’, in: Lucy Bland and Laura Doan (eds) *Sexology in Culture: Labelling Bodies and Desires* (Cambridge, 1998), 116-31.

Prosser cautions historians not to ‘read the sexual invert as homosexual’ as has been the case in the past, but to recognise as Gert Hekma and George Chauncey have that ‘what sexologists sought to describe through sexual inversion was not homosexuality but differing degrees of *gender* inversion.’¹⁵⁵ Prosser goes further still: ‘My contention is that sexual inversion *was* transgender, and while homosexuals certainly number among inverts, the category described a much larger gender-inverted condition of which homosexuality was only one aspect.’¹⁵⁶

This assessment, though partially defensible seems extreme. Certainly, it is true that a number of potentially transgender cases are evident in *Sexual Inversion*, particularly if the words of the individuals’ testimonies are examined as Prosser urges. However, it is important not to dismiss the intentions with which the book was written. By claiming sexual inversion equates to transgender, Prosser ignores the strong activist motivations with which Symonds wrote his portions of *Sexual Inversion*.¹⁵⁷ Himself a homosexual, Symonds felt the ‘legal and social persecution of abnormal natures requires revision’ and sought to produce ‘an impartial and really scientific survey of the matter’ with Ellis’ help.¹⁵⁸ His main concern was to redress the legal situation in England for homosexuals, writing to Ellis that he ‘should not like to promulgate any book, which did not show the absurdity and injustice of the English law.’¹⁵⁹ This law refers to the illegality of ‘the commission by any male person of, any act of

¹⁵⁵ Ibid., 116.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid.

¹⁵⁷ Matt Cook, *London and the Culture of Homosexuality, 1885-1914* (Cambridge, 2003), 78.

¹⁵⁸ Symonds and Ellis, ‘Correspondence’, 220-1.

¹⁵⁹ Symonds and Ellis, ‘Correspondence’, 220-1.

gross indecency with another male person' enforced by the 'Labouchère amendment to the Criminal Law Amendment Act of 1885.'¹⁶⁰

Ellis too appeared to be concerned with homosexuality when discussing sexual inversion. His wife Edith (herself homosexual) 'suppl[ied] cases of inversion in women from among her own friends', and Ellis wrote to Symonds of 'the frequency of *homosexuality* – both congenital and acquired – in 6 women [Emphasis added].'¹⁶¹ Prosser's assertion that Ellis 'names both sexual inversion *and* homosexuality, suggesting strongly that they were *not* coextensive' is undermined by the absence of anything in the 1897 edition that directly distinguishes between homosexuality and sexual inversion aside from his definition of sexual inversion as being 'a narrower term than homosexuality'.¹⁶² Ellis seemed to use the terms interchangeably as in the above quotes, which Prosser himself acknowledges.¹⁶³

I would argue that sexual inversion *included* gender inversion in Ellis' thinking at this time and that the two were not clearly segregated in twentieth-century discourse as they are now. As Zavier Nunn has stated, '[m]any of these resulting sexological categories were porous, containing within them a multitude of phenomena that are distinct in today's lexicon.'¹⁶⁴ Particularly in the earlier editions of *Sexual Inversion*, cross-dressing and other

¹⁶⁰ UK Parliament, *1885 Labouchere Amendment*, [website], n.d., <https://www.parliament.uk/about/living-heritage/transformingsociety/private-lives/relationships/collections1/sexual-offences-act-1967/1885-labouchere-amendment/#:~:text=This%20changed%20when%20Henry%20Labouchere,of%20'gross%20indecent%20with%20another%20male%20person'%20enforced%20by%20the%20'Labouchere%20amendment%20to%20the%20Criminal%20Law%20Amendment%20Act%20of%201885'>.

¹⁶¹ Symonds and Ellis, 'Correspondence', 224, 239.

¹⁶² Prosser, 'Transsexuals and the Transsexologists', 120.

¹⁶³ Ibid.

¹⁶⁴ Zavier Nunn, 'Trans Liminality and the Nazi State', *Past & Present*, 1 (2023), 131.

gender non-conforming behaviour were included under the umbrella term of the title. Yet in the third edition, there was a slight shift towards differentiating this behaviour as a possible separate entity. By the time *Eonism* was published, Ellis' construction of a separate category for gender non-conforming individuals was complete and he asserted that such cases were 'not sexually inverted.'¹⁶⁵

Within *Sexual Inversion*, there are several testimonies that contain elements of gender non-conformity and represent the difficulties involved in separating sexuality and gender within early sexologists' work where categorisations often overlapped. Two of the clearest examples were cases 38 and 39, two female-to-male individuals included in the third edition.¹⁶⁶ Case 38, thirty-five-year-old 'Miss V.' demonstrated a preoccupation with their gender identity, with sexual orientation as a secondary consideration. Miss V. described their preference for male pastimes as well as their masculine qualities. Despite not being manly in appearance, Miss V. stated 'my walk is mannish, and I have frequently been told that I do things... 'just like a man.' ...[I] used to pretend I was a boy... When my hair was clipped, I was delighted and made everyone call me 'John.'¹⁶⁷ Miss V. also emulated their father and along with a female cousin 'began to address each other as boys and tried to urinate through long tubes of some sort.'¹⁶⁸ Miss V.'s horror at beginning menstruation, the sense of physical and mental alienation from other girls, the repeated

¹⁶⁵ Ellis, *Eonism*, 1.

¹⁶⁶ Prosser's application of the term 'transgender' or 'transsexual' is potentially problematic here as neither term was yet in use and any attempts at imposing a gender on the cases examined must necessarily involve a level of supposition. Therefore, in my discussion of potential transgender individuals included in *Sexual Inversion* I will be using the gender-neutral pronouns 'they/them' in order to avoid misgendering individuals whose preferences remain ambiguous.

¹⁶⁷ Ellis, *Sexual Inversion* (3rd edn.), 229, 230.

¹⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 231.

desire to be a man and attempts to imitate masculinity, are as Prosser points out ‘classical transsexual plots.’¹⁶⁹ Furthermore, the impassioned defence of having feelings for others of the same sex that characterises many of the homosexual testimonies - such as Case 3 in the second edition – was lacking here.¹⁷⁰

Most telling of all was Miss V.’s statement ‘I read a book where a girl was represented as saying she had a ‘boy’s soul in a girl’s body.’ The applicability of this to myself struck me at once.’¹⁷¹ This statement echoed Ulrich’s theory of sexual inversion. In his twelve-volume work *The Riddle of “Man-Manly” Love* (1864-75), Ulrichs defined one form of male homosexual identity he called ‘Urnings’ as having a female soul in a male body, a phrase that – as will be seen – was frequently employed by gender non-conforming individuals in their self-definitions.¹⁷² The concept of wrong embodiment has become the dominant construction of transgender narratives in historical research. Here I use Ulrica Engdahl’s definition of ‘wrong embodiment’:

The notion of “wrong body” consists of a dichotomous explanation of the transgender experience as a state of “being in the wrong body.” Wrongness is here understood in relation to how the body is gendered, connoting that the body is wrongly gendered in relation to a self-identified gender identity.¹⁷³

¹⁶⁹ Prosser, ‘Transsexuals and the Transsexologists’, 125.

¹⁷⁰ Ellis, *Sexual Inversion*, (2nd edn.), 55.

¹⁷¹ Ellis, *Sexual Inversion*, (3rd edn.), 232. Ellis gave no indication of what the book that Miss V. refers to actually was, nor whether it was a novel or a sexological text.

¹⁷² Karl Heinrich Ulrichs, *The Riddle of “Man-Manly” Love: The Pioneering Work on Male Homosexuality Vol. 1*, trans. Michael A. Lombardi-Nash (New York, 1994 reprint of original 1864-1880), 55-7.

¹⁷³ Ulrica Engdahl, ““Wrong Body””, *Transgender Studies Quarterly*, 1 (2014), 267.

As Kit Heyam has argued, this form of transgender identity involving a linear surgical transition and stable gender identity is the most easily discernible and most accepted as transgender history.¹⁷⁴ While this is problematic in that it leads to the neglect of other more fluid forms of transgender identity that will be explored in later chapters, the trope was useful for Ellis' Eonists in articulating their experience.¹⁷⁵ It is significant here then that the other testimonies which feature less gender non-conforming aspects did not use this description. Naturally, they may not have been aware of Ulrichs' work, but its usage by an individual struggling with their gender identity is striking.

Case 39 was even more overtly gender non-conforming. 'Miss D.' aged forty proclaimed almost immediately that '[e]ver since I can remember anything at all I could never think of myself as a girl...whatever anyone said, if I was not a boy at any rate I was not a girl. This has been an unchanged conviction all through my life.'¹⁷⁶ Miss D. did not express a preference for traditionally masculine pursuits or clothing, but an innate, permanent identification with the male gender. Where they did mention sexual preferences, Miss D. stressed their sense of maleness through phrases such as 'I always imagined myself as a man loving a woman', 'if I had been a man, I could have married and settled down' and even physically responded to women in an approximation of male arousal: 'I experienced slight erections when close to other women.'¹⁷⁷ Their statement that when amongst women 'I feel always that I am not

¹⁷⁴ Kit Heyam, *Before We Were Trans: A New History of Gender* (London, 2022), 9.

¹⁷⁵ For a lengthy discussion of the concept of 'wrong embodiment' see Talia Mae Bettcher, 'Trapped in the Wrong Theory: Rethinking Trans Oppression and Resistance', *Signs*, 39 (2014), 383-406, and Caterina Nirta, 'Monstrosity as resistance: rethinking trans embodiment beyond the rhetoric of the wrong body', *Culture, Theory and Critique*, 62 (2022), 1-14.

¹⁷⁶ Ellis, *Sexual Inversion*, (3rd edn.), 235.

¹⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 242-3.

one of them' goes far beyond the sense of being different in terms of sexual orientation.¹⁷⁸ Miss D. believed themselves an 'other', separate entirely from women, not merely a woman without heterosexual desires. Furthermore, Miss D.'s great ambition was to 'dress in men's clothes and go to another country,' not to enable an open homosexual relationship, but 'in order that I might be unhampered by sex considerations and conventions.'¹⁷⁹ Even their self-diagnosis was founded on gender issues, with Miss D. repeating Miss V.'s thought that 'the ultimate explanation might be that there were men's minds in women's bodies.'¹⁸⁰ Miss D. speculated: 'I had never come across any theories on the subject, but I decided that I must belong to a third sex of some kind...I knew physical and psychical sex feeling and yet I seemed to know it quite otherwise from other men and women.'¹⁸¹ Miss D.'s alienation from either of the recognised sexes was centred on their inability to reconcile their female physicality with their masculine outlook and psyche. Miss D. could not be a woman, their innermost thoughts were always 'from the point of view of a boy,' yet they were equally barred from manhood by their female body.¹⁸²

Six of the seven other possible transgender cases in *Sexual Inversion* are male-to-female. Of these the most pronounced gender non-conformity can be seen in Case 3, fifty-year-old F. R., who stated 'I have to a certain extent...a feminine mind in a male body.'¹⁸³ F. R. qualified this with the comment 'I am a combination of an immoral (in tendency, rather

¹⁷⁸ Ellis, *Sexual Inversion*, (3rd edn.), 244.

¹⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 241.

¹⁸⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 240.

¹⁸² *Ibid.*, 239.

¹⁸³ *Ibid.*, 94-5.

than in act) woman and a religious man.’¹⁸⁴ Here there was more ambiguity over their gender identity, some masculine elements still being retained aside from the physical. Yet F. R. emulated their mother in childhood during which time their ‘interests and amusements were more girlish than boyish.’¹⁸⁵ F. R. also affirmed their ‘interest in questions of family relationships, etiquette, dress (women’s as much as, or more than, men’s) and...I am fonder of babies than many women.’¹⁸⁶ Most telling was F. R.’s description of their feelings when taking part in charades where ‘when I took a woman’s part I *felt* less like *acting* than I have done in *propria persona*.’¹⁸⁷ For F. R., the real masquerade was presenting as a man in everyday life. This sense of maleness was validated by others as F. R. commented ‘[a] remark made by an uncle once rather annoyed me: that it [F.R.’s female presentation] seemed more like nature than art. But he was quite right.’¹⁸⁸ F. R.’s irritation at the statement implied a desire to reject their effeminacy, perhaps fearing it would reveal their homosexuality. However, this does not diminish F. R.’s uncertainty over their gender identity, particularly as they confirmed the veracity of their uncle’s comment. Such confusion is difficult to categorise where terminology falls short. It could be that F. R. felt themselves to be most comfortable with a non-binary gender allowing for the co-existence of male and female attributes. Nevertheless, their case is open to both a homosexual and a transgender reading.

¹⁸⁴ Ellis, *Sexual Inversion*, (3rd edn.), 94-5.

¹⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 94.

¹⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 94-5.

¹⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 95.

¹⁸⁸ *Ibid.*

The other cases that demonstrate gender non-conforming attributes represent the ambiguity that existed in early-twentieth-century constructions of gender identity in which sexuality and gender were often merged and at times interchangeable. Consequently, to attempt an overly rigorous differentiation between the two threatens an anachronous reading of the discourse through the lens of current understandings of transgender. In *Sexual Inversion*, gender stereotypes and behaviours served as indicators of same sex desire as was the case in many discourses on homosexuality.¹⁸⁹ Thus, although it is important to identify cases where gender identity was a key part of the narrative, where multiple readings are possible, they should not be ignored. Case 5, S. W. serves to illustrate this point. S. W. displayed certain effeminate characteristics such as ‘weak and flabby [arms] (feminine, he thinks)’ and being ‘easily moved to tears under strong excitement.’¹⁹⁰ Aside from this, S. W. was ‘considered manly in character and tastes.’¹⁹¹ S. W. described themselves as ‘in the frame of a man I had the sexual mind of a female’ and ‘[i]n imagination, I possessed the female organ, and felt toward man exactly as an amorous female would.’¹⁹² In S. W.’s case, there was a clear identification with a female physicality that simultaneously served as a descriptor for their sexual desire towards men. Both interpretations are valid and can coexist without excluding one or the other.

These nuances in the different cases in *Sexual Inversion* reflect the spectrum of sexuality and gender that pervaded sexological theories, particularly the work of Magnus

¹⁸⁹ Heike Bauer, *English Literary Sexology: Translations of Inversion, 1860-1930* (London, 2009), 26-8.

¹⁹⁰ Ellis, *Sexual Inversion*, (3rd edn.), 100.

¹⁹¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁹² *Ibid.*, 97.

Hirschfeld and his theory of 'sexual intermediaries' that described gender non-conforming individuals as well as various forms of same-sex desire.¹⁹³ Hirschfeld's book *Transvestites: The Erotic Drive to Cross Dress* (1910) also included several case studies of individuals who Hirschfeld categorised as 'transvestites', which he defined as 'the strong drive to live in the clothing of that sex that does not belong to the relative build of the body'.¹⁹⁴ The construction of a scale of sexuality and gender was an attempt to accommodate the variety of sexual preferences and gender identities that defied the prevalent effeminate male homosexual and masculine female homosexual constructions. Ellis himself discussed the differing types of homosexual males and argued against the theory that there was always an active and passive partner in same-sex relationships between men, stressing that this was 'very frequently not the case, and the invert cannot tell if he feels like a man or like a woman'.¹⁹⁵ However, Ellis' alterations between the editions of *Sexual Inversion* provide the first indications of his dissatisfaction with the inclusion of gender non-conformity within definitions of sexuality. In the third edition, Ellis included a precis of Hirschfeld's work and the findings of psychoanalysts, particularly Freud. Ellis also adopted Hirschfeld's terminology. When discussing women who cross-dress, Ellis replaced the phrase 'to adopt the ways and garments of men' with Hirschfeld's term 'transvestism,' though this did not lead him to apply the term to any of his case histories.¹⁹⁶

¹⁹³ Nicholas Matte, 'International Sexual Reform and Sexology in Europe, 1897-1933', *Canadian Bulletin of Medical History*, 22 (2005), 256.

¹⁹⁴ Magnus Hirschfeld, *Transvestites: The Erotic Drive to Cross Dress*, trans Michael A. Lombardi-Nash (New York, 1991 reprint of original 1910), 1842.

¹⁹⁵ Ellis, *Sexual Inversion*, (1897), 118.

¹⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 94. Ellis, *Sexual Inversion*, (3rd edn.), 244-5.

More striking was the exclusion from the third edition of appendix F in which Ellis related at length the case of Countess Sarolta V, arguably the clearest example of a transgender individual within *Sexual Inversion*. Sarolta dressed in male clothing from early childhood, was given the name 'Sandor' by their father and 'lived almost constantly as a man' for a decade.¹⁹⁷ In this time, Sandor married twice, on the second occasion wearing 'a bandage round her body to support an artificial organ.'¹⁹⁸ When examined, it was 'difficult for the doctors to realise, in spite of the presence of female clothing, that they had a woman before them.'¹⁹⁹ Sandor also mentioned that they had 'never allowed anyone to touch her [sic] genital organs,' in part because it repelled Sandor.²⁰⁰ Ellis appeared to view the case as other than a straightforward homosexual one, for unlike his discussions of other individuals, here Ellis referred to Sandor as a 'man-woman' and 'Sarolta-Sandor' instead of solely using the female name.²⁰¹ This differing treatment of the Sandor case combined with the removal of this appendix from the third edition strongly suggests that Ellis no longer defined Sandor as homosexual. Ellis gave no indication as to why he removed the Sandor case from the later edition of *Sexual Inversion* and it may have been simply an editing choice to reduce the length of the volume. Nevertheless, the use of more gender non-conforming language and the focus on Sandor's presenting as male does imply a reinterpretation on Ellis' part of the case. Ellis' discourse on gender non-conformity would eventually be fully realised in his work on 'Eonism'.

¹⁹⁷ Ellis, *Sexual Inversion*, (2nd edn.), 280-1.

¹⁹⁸ Ellis, *Sexual Inversion*, (1897), 281, 282.

¹⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 284.

²⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 284-5. Following Jules Gill-Peterson's approach, I use '[sic]' where the gender pronouns used in the quoted text clearly contradict the individual under discussion's use of pronouns.

²⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 279, 280.

Eonism: Transgender revealed

Published over thirty years after the original British release of *Sexual Inversion*, Volume Seven of Ellis' *Studies* revealed much about the changing atmosphere in which Ellis was writing and the development of his thinking after years of study on subjects relating to sex and gender. In *Eonism and Other Supplementary Studies* (1928), Ellis once again moved away from his intended focus on what he termed 'normal' sexuality and shifted his attention to a so-called 'anomaly'. Ellis' decision to produce a seventh volume 'dealing with subjects which had not yet assumed sufficient importance or taken clear and definite shape' in the previous works suggests that his theories were now in an adequately concrete form to be deserving of a place in the *Studies*.²⁰² Certainly where the chapter on *Eonism* was concerned, Ellis deemed the subject of sufficient worth to write an article in 1920 summarising the contents for *Medical Review of Reviews* before the publication of the completed volume.²⁰³

Inspired by Hirschfeld's *Transvestites* and his own discovery of several cases of persons who identified with a gender contrary to their assigned sex, Ellis was spurred on to write his own account. Whereas in *Sexual Inversion*, instances of cross-dressing and other gender non-conforming behaviour were classed as homosexuality when coupled with same-sex desire, in *Eonism* Ellis maintained that not only could gender non-conformity occur independently of homosexual feelings but was not necessarily linked to sexuality at all. As Richard Ekins and Dave King argue, 'Magnus Hirschfeld and Havelock Ellis, were

²⁰² Ellis, *Eonism*, p.v.

²⁰³ Havelock Ellis, 'Eonism', *Medical Review of Reviews* (1920), 3-12.

responsible for establishing a new category that was separate and distinct from homosexuality.²⁰⁴ Foucault's argument that discourse is created through thought which is limited by the available language provides an explanation for Ellis' development of a unique term for gender non-conformity.²⁰⁵ Without sufficient terminology, certain queer identities were rendered invisible within sexological discourse, a fact that was confirmed by the difficulties of Ellis' participants in expressing their identities. None of the case histories included Hirschfeld's term 'transvestite', suggesting their non-identification with Hirschfeld's definition. Thus, Ellis' creation of the term 'Eonism' differentiated his discourse from Hirschfeld's as well as rendering his concept visible. Ellis' term, however, was never adopted in British medical discourse or indeed by gender non-conforming individuals themselves. While the reasons for this are unclear, it is likely that the disruption of the World Wars and Hirschfeld's influence on sexologist Harry Benjamin (1885-1986), who studied at Hirschfeld's Institute of Sexual Research and later pioneered gender-affirming surgery in America were responsible.²⁰⁶ Ellis dominated the British sexological literature but this influence did not extend beyond his written works.

That Ellis perceived a change in the public perception of the study of sex was indicated by his restoration in the preface to *Eonism* of his acknowledgement of 'my indebtedness for the assistance and sympathy...I have received from my wife.'²⁰⁷ Originally part of the preface to Volume One of the *Studies*, Ellis 'removed that acknowledgement from later

²⁰⁴ Richard Ekins and Dave King, *The Transgender Phenomenon* (London, 2006), 61.

²⁰⁵ Michel Foucault, 'The Order of Discourse', in: Robert Young (ed.) *Untying the Text: A Post-Structuralist Reader* (London, 1981), 48-78.

²⁰⁶ Joanne Meyerowitz, *How Sex Changed: A History of Transsexuality in the United States* (Cambridge, 2004), 45-8.

²⁰⁷ Ellis, *Eonism*, p. vi.

editions because in the stormy period my work had to pass through in those days I feared that to some persons any association with it might not seem creditable.²⁰⁸ Clearly Ellis was now sufficiently comfortable with the level of credibility and acceptance accorded to his work that the acknowledgement would no longer threaten his wife's reputation. This acceptance was perhaps limited, given Ellis' decision to publish *Eonism* in America where the 'American public and American authorities have, even from the first, shown a friendly, or at all events, tolerant attitude to my work'.²⁰⁹ This was confirmed in a correspondence between Ellis and the writer Jack Mills Whitham in 1928 in which Ellis discussed the difficulties in convincing *The Times Literary Supplement* to publish. In response to Whitham's urging of Ellis to send a copy of *Eonism* to the *Supplement* to be reviewed, Ellis demurred, stating that 'I imagine that it is not a book which would be regarded as suitable for review there.'²¹⁰ Clearly the British press in 1928 was not yet ready to admit the benefits of bringing his 'work before the public' that Ernst claimed was the case in 1948 and being recognised in the 1930s.²¹¹ Ellis defended his work in his letter to Whitham, arguing that 'it is perfectly true, as you say that to write a review of 'Studies' without saying a word that could offend anyone is...possible. There are indeed a considerable number of quite orthodox/ordinary conventional people who read and approve the 'Studies' themselves.'²¹² Nevertheless, this statement, coupled with the fact that Ellis even attempted to have his work reviewed in England revealed that a slow shift was taking place in the societal attitudes towards open discussion of sexual matters.

²⁰⁸ Ellis, *Eonism*, p. iv.

²⁰⁹ Ellis, *Studies* (1948), p. xxii.

²¹⁰ Havelock Ellis to Jack Mill Whitham, 12 July 1928, London, Wellcome Library, Archives and Manuscripts, Jack Mills Whitham (1883-) and Henry Havelock Ellis (1859-1939), authors, Box MS8016. (Hereafter Ellis to Whitham letters).

²¹¹ Ellis, *Studies* (1948), pp. vii-viii.

²¹² Ellis to Whitham letters, 5 December 1928.

Ellis opened *Eonism* with a systematic critique of the competing classifications of gender non-conformity by other sexologists, thereby demonstrating his familiarity with the subject and consequently his expertise. This indirectly presented his discourse as deserving of being the prevailing one on gender non-conformity that resolved many of the issues presented by other theories. Ellis described his thought process in constructing the category of Eonism in detail, his initial definition of gender non-conforming cases being 'a combination of feminism with fetichism and occupying a sort of annex to inversion proper.'²¹³ However, he soon came to discard this theory on the grounds that 'not only is there usually no real primary inversion in these cases, but there is no true fetichism, the garment possessing no marked dynamic erotic power in itself...in some cases, moreover, clothing played little or no part.'²¹⁴ Ellis now classified gender non-conformity as a totally distinct category, bringing British sexology a small step closer to the modern concept of transgender.

In Ellis' review of the competing sexological discourses, he omitted any mention of Ulrichs despite several of his case histories using an approximation of Ulrichs' theory of a female soul in a male body to describe their experiences. Ulrichs' inclusion of the case of 'Frederike Blank' who 'stuffed his chest and his hips and used every opportunity to mask himself as a woman' was highly suggestive of gender non-conformity, though Ulrichs went on to state that Blank was exceptional and he had 'never noticed the feminine being

²¹³ Ellis, *Eonism*, 10.

²¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 10-11.

in an Urning in the way which [Frederike Blank's] condition is described.'²¹⁵ However, rather than representing an oversight, Ellis' deliberate omission of Ulrichs from his work on Eonism provides further evidence for his developing construction of gender non-conformity as separate from homosexuality. Ellis was attempting to create a new narrative that undermined the existing 'truth' presented by the prevailing discourse that sexuality and gender were interchangeable. To become the dominant discourse, in Foucauldian terms Ellis needed to construct a new form of knowledge on gender non-conformity that would come to be accepted as the 'true' narrative on the subject.²¹⁶ To include Ulrichs, a pioneering writer on homosexuality in a paper dealing with Eonism would potentially create exactly the kind of confusion in the reader that Ellis was seeking to eradicate.

Krafft-Ebing was cited by Ellis as having recorded 'the earliest full and scientifically described case' of Eonism in more recent editions of his book *Psychopathia Sexualis* (1903 English translation).²¹⁷ The book contained numerous case studies of human sexual behaviours including examples of sadism and masochism, bringing these terms into English medical parlance. The Eonist case referred to by Ellis was a married physician whose 'feelings were feminine and he felt to himself like a woman.' Krafft-Ebing's diagnosis of the case as 'a stage of transition to *metamorphosis sexualis paranoica*, that is to say a stage on the road to insanity' was condemned by Ellis as being 'too pathological a

²¹⁵ Ulrichs, *The Riddle of "Man-Manly" Love*, 60.

²¹⁶ Michel Foucault, 'Truth and Power', in: Colin Gordon (ed.) *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings 1972-1977* (New York, 1980), 131.

²¹⁷ Ellis, *Eonism*, 8.

standpoint.²¹⁸ This case, along with several other examples of gender non-conformity in *Psychopathia Sexualis* were all categorised by Krafft-Ebing as degrees of homosexuality and were, as Ellis argues, highly pathologized.²¹⁹ As a psychiatrist, Krafft-Ebing was constructing gender non-conformity as a form of mental illness requiring treatment that he and others of his profession could provide, thereby maintaining their position as the authorities on the subject. Equally, his case studies were patients at his asylum which would naturally have influenced his approach. Those diagnosed as homosexual were described variously by Krafft-Ebing as ‘tainted,’ ‘perverse’ and ‘degenerate,’ language consciously avoided by Ellis.²²⁰ Krafft-Ebing’s definition of gender non-conforming individuals as patients suffering from a ‘disease-process’ differed greatly from Ellis’ more interactive and reciprocal approach to constructing the category of Eonism that Ekins and King describe as ‘non-judgemental.’²²¹

Despite Krafft-Ebing’s earlier mention of a case of Eonism, Ellis credited Hirschfeld with bringing gender non-conforming behaviours under serious medical and sexological scrutiny, and his theories in *Transvestites* clearly influenced Ellis’ work. Ellis applauded Hirschfeld for having ‘distinguished the anomaly from homosexuality and all other recognised groups of sexual aberration’ and endeavoured to do the same in *Eonism*.²²² This is not to say that Ellis agreed with Hirschfeld on all aspects of his theory of transvestism. Hirschfeld’s preoccupation with the cross-dressing aspect of transvestism

²¹⁸ Ellis, *Eonism*, 9.

²¹⁹ Krafft-Ebing, *Psychopathia Sexualis*, 187-320.

²²⁰ *Ibid.*, 190, 188, 191. Ekins and King, *Transgender Phenomenon*, 61.

²²¹ Krafft-Ebing, *Psychopathia Sexualis*, 216. Ekins and King, *Transgender Phenomenon*, 62.

²²² Ellis, *Eonism*, 11-12.

was apparent throughout his work – a feature that Ellis criticised – and he devoted several chapters to the different motivations for crossdressing including obtaining gender-specific jobs, joining or escaping the army and undertaking criminal activities. In relation to his case studies however, Hirschfeld attributed their behaviour to ‘a profound contradiction...between their bodies and their souls’ in terms of their gender identity.²²³ For Hirschfeld, the importance of the clothing was rather more complex than Ellis suggested. By focusing on the desire to dress as another gender, Hirschfeld was not denying the mental affiliation with a particular gender. Instead, the clothing was ‘a form of expression of the inner personality.’²²⁴ Nevertheless, Hirschfeld’s definition of gender non-conformity was strongly characterised by cross-dressing, a fact that Ellis disputed.

As Ekins and King point out, Ellis also questioned Hirschfeld’s use of the term ‘disguise’ in relation to transvestism, arguing that the transvestite ‘far from seeking disguise by adopting the garments of the opposite sex, feels on the contrary, that he has thereby become emancipated from disguise and is at last really himself.’²²⁵ For Ellis, cross-dressing was not a form of play acting, but a means of expressing their gender identity. The real ‘act’ occurred when these individuals were forced to suppress their sense of gender identity and conform to their physical bodies. Thus, Ellis’ engagement with the work of the more prestigious European authorities on gender non-conformity and offering his own opinions rather than deferring to them, demonstrates his credibility as a sexologist.

²²³ Hirschfeld, *Transvestites: The Erotic Drive to Cross Dress*, 1926.

²²⁴ *Ibid.*, 1842.

²²⁵ Ekins and King, *Transgender Phenomenon*, 63. Ellis, *Eonism*, 12.

Ellis' criticism of Krafft-Ebing's overly pathologized approach to gender non-conformity was one he levelled at psychoanalysts too, who he regarded as having made 'the most important effort to carry the investigation further' after Hirschfeld.²²⁶ In an analysis of Wilhelm Stekel (1868-1940), whom 'among psycho-analysts...has most often discussed the nature of cross-dressing,'²²⁷ Ellis denounced Stekel's belief that Hirschfeld 'has overlooked the fact that cross-dressing is really a latent homosexuality.'²²⁸ In Ellis' opinion, '[w]hen we remember that Hirschfeld undoubtedly possesses a wider knowledge of homosexuality than any other investigator of his own or earlier times, it requires some courage to assert that he has here "overlooked" its existence.'²²⁹ Ellis went on to critique Stekel's diagnosis of Eonist case 'Elsa B.' Having attributed Elsa's adoption of masculine clothing and mannerisms from the age of twelve or thirteen to 'the depression felt by the lack of a penis' and an 'incest-attitude...Freud's Oedipus complex and Electra complex', Ellis asserted 'it would hardly be possible to pile up a greater number of complexes and perverse fantasies onto Elsa B.'s devoted head. They seem to be plentiful enough to account for anything.'²³⁰

Having acquainted the reader with the existing theories on gender non-conformity, Ellis then focused on presenting his own construction of Eonism based on the case histories he acquired. Ellis defined Eonism as 'erotic empathy...a usually heterosexual inner imitation which frequently tends to manifest itself in the assumption of the habits and

²²⁶ Ellis, *Eonism*, 16.

²²⁷ *Ibid.*, 16, 17.

²²⁸ *Ibid.*

²²⁹ *Ibid.*

²³⁰ *Ibid.*, 22.

garments of the desired sex.²³¹ He argued: 'this impulse springs out of admiration and affection for the opposite sex, therefore the subject of it is not usually tempted to carry the inner imitation so far as to imitate the sexual desires of that sex and so to become unlike it by being homosexual.'²³²

Throughout, Ellis maintained his emphasis on the dichotomy between homosexuality and Eonism. Originally intending to label gender non-conformity 'Sexo-Aesthetic Inversion,' Ellis replaced this term with Eonism as inversion 'is too apt to arouse suggestions of homosexuality.'²³³ In a letter cited by Crozier to colleague Norman Haire, Ellis expressed his intention to only include what he regarded as heterosexual case histories in *Eonism* again to avoid confusion.²³⁴ Yet Ellis still classed Eonism as having an erotic element. However, he was not suggesting that cross-dressing and other gender non-conforming behaviour was an anomalous expression of heterosexual attraction. The explanation of Eonism as an exaggerated 'sympathy and identification' with a desired object, 'an abnormal and perhaps pathological exaggeration of the secondary component of the normal heterosexual impulse' created the impression that it stemmed from the sexual desire for a different sex.²³⁵ However, Ellis stressed the aesthetic quality of the imitation, stating 'this impulse corresponds to the impulse which various modern philosophers of aesthetics regard as of the essence of the aesthetic attitude, an inner sympathy and imitation, an emotional identification with the beautiful object.'²³⁶

²³¹ Ellis, *Eonism*, 28.

²³² *Ibid.*

²³³ *Ibid.*, 27-8.

²³⁴ Crozier, 'Havelock Ellis, Eonism and the patient's discourse', 130.

²³⁵ *Ibid.*, 104.

²³⁶ Ellis, *Eonism*, 104-5.

In fact, '[t]he Eonist frequently shows feebleness of physical sexual impulse' and 'attaches little importance to the sexual act.'²³⁷ So, while the Eonist was more likely to be heterosexual their sexual orientation was not a precipitating cause of their gender non-conformity. Furthermore, despite expressing doubts about the use of sexo-aesthetic inversion, Ellis repeatedly referred to gender non-conforming behaviour as 'aesthetic inversion'. His two categories of aesthetic inversion were highly indicative of a distinction between gender and sexual identity. The first group, which Ellis deemed 'the most common kind' was that 'in which the inversion is mainly confined to the sphere of clothing.'²³⁸ The second, however was 'less common but more complete, in which cross-dressing is regarded with comparative indifference but the subject so identifies himself with those of his physical and psychic traits which recall the opposite sex that he feels really to belong to that sex, although he has no delusion regarding his anatomical conformation.'²³⁹ This description was a surprisingly close approximation to the modern construction and arguably *Eonism* contained Ellis' most clearly gender non-conforming case studies.

Unlike *Sexual Inversion*, Ellis did not include any first-hand case histories of female-to-male Eonists. While Ellis emphasised the need to include what he considered female cases, expressed through his criticism of Symonds for having 'ignored this side of the subject,' he attributed their absence in *Eonism* to the fact that 'in [women] the homosexuality always

²³⁷ Ellis, *Eonism*, 108.

²³⁸ *Ibid.*, 36.

²³⁹ *Ibid.*

seems primary.²⁴⁰ Certainly there was no suggestion that Eonism was not found among female-bodied individuals, although Ellis did acknowledge that instances were far more difficult to discover.²⁴¹ He argued '[t]he genuine Eonist type can be more easily discovered in women who are never brought prominently to public attention.'²⁴² Those who did become objects of scrutiny had, according to Ellis 'either adopted men's dress and ways for the sake of greater facility in earning a living, or they are in reality sexually inverted.'²⁴³ Conversely, Ellis cited several historical cases of female-to-male Eonists, among them Mary Frith or 'Moll Cutpurse' and James Barry, both of whom had been included as examples of homosexuality in *Sexual Inversion*, further demonstrating Ellis' evolving discourse. Mary Frith was now 'the subject of sexo-aesthetic inversion, perhaps with latent homosexuality.'²⁴⁴ James Barry meanwhile, as there was 'no indication of any sexual tendency in her history' presented an even more complete example of Eonism.²⁴⁵ Ellis' construction of female-bodied Eonists as having greater success in remaining undetected accounted for their underrepresentation in his work as opposed solely to his agreement with Dr Lothar Goldmann and others who maintained Eonism's 'comparative rarity in women'.²⁴⁶ Nevertheless, this led to an imbalanced discussion of Eonism, with Laura Marcus arguing that 'the fullest account of a female transvestite recorded by Ellis is of a woman who experienced her 'inversion' only in

²⁴⁰ Symonds and Ellis, 'Correspondence', 239. Crozier, 'Havelock Ellis, Eonism and the patient's discourse', 130.

²⁴¹ In order to distinguish between Eonist cases in this chapter, I will use an adapted form of Jason Cromwell's term 'female-bodied male'. Male-bodied Eonists will refer to individuals assigned male at birth while female-bodied Eonists will refer to individuals assigned female at birth. This in no way indicates the individual's gender identity but solely their assigned sex. For further reading see Jason Cromwell, *Transmen and FTMs: Identities, Bodies, Genders, and Sexualities* (Illinois, 1999).

²⁴² Ellis, *Eonism*, 32.

²⁴³ *Ibid.*

²⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 8.

²⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 6.

²⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 27.

her dreams.²⁴⁷ The twenty-nine-year-old described their erotic dreams in which 'the dreamer imagines that she herself is a young man of about twenty-three years of age, who is making love to a young girl.'²⁴⁸ In their diary they stated 'In these dreams...I *feel* myself masculine...Personally, I believe I must have been a boy once.'²⁴⁹ This case, while shedding some light on the feelings of female-bodied Eonists was far more muted as an expression of transgender identity than the cases of Miss V. and Miss D. in *Sexual Inversion*. Consequently, within Ellis' work it is *Sexual Inversion* that one must turn to for the clearest examples of potential trans men.

Eonist Case Studies

Ellis' seven Eonist case histories demonstrated the complex process involved in constructing his discourse on gender non-conformity. As previously stated, the cases were all referrals from friends and colleagues including sexologist and surgeon Norman Haire whose one contribution was only sent to Ellis in 1932 and thus not included in *Eonism*.²⁵⁰ The limited number of cases and Ellis' adamant dismissal of cases which appeared to him as homosexual allowed Ellis to present evidence that would support his contentions concerning Eonism. Yet, Ellis' selective approach to the case studies did not entail sustained manipulation of the testimonies. Ellis admitted in the text that his original assumptions had changed to coincide more closely with the experiences expressed by his participants.²⁵¹ Ellis did not alter or override the narratives of his cases in order to support his original theory that Eonism was a

²⁴⁷ Laura Marcus, 'Sexual Identity as Spectacle and Science', in: Isobel Armstrong and Hans-Werner Ludwig (eds) *Critical Dialogues: Current Issues in English Studies in Germany and Britain* (Germany, 1995), 107.

²⁴⁸ Ellis, *Eonism*, 37.

²⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 38.

²⁵⁰ Crozier, 'Havelock Ellis, Eonism and the patient's discourse', 132-3, note 30.

²⁵¹ Ellis, *Eonism*, 10-11.

form of clothing fetishism or an offshoot of homosexuality. Instead, he altered his discourse to incorporate the alternative accounts of those he classified. The testimonies Ellis gathered were also ostensibly not paraphrased by him, but instead appeared – often at great length – in the person’s own words and included their own assessments of their conditions.²⁵² It is impossible to determine the veracity of the claim that the testimonies were verbatim, but their occasional contradictions of Ellis’ arguments suggest that they were at least fairly accurate representations. The participants were thus given an active role in the construction of Eonism, thereby seemingly contradicting Foucault’s understanding of patient testimonies as ‘an effective mechanism for enhancing the power of its administering experts, subsuming subjectivities under an increasingly hegemonic discourse.’²⁵³ At the very least this ought to lead one to consider stopping short of an uncritical acceptance of Foucault’s argument that patient testimonies were always constructed by the medical profession.

The case histories began with a case of ‘partial approximation to the attitude of aesthetic inversion’ and indeed, ‘J. G.’ appeared to be more accurately described as an example of fetishism, their only expression of gender non-conformity being that they ‘not only [feel] attracted to the corset on the woman he is attached to, but [feel] it essential that he should himself wear a corset.’²⁵⁴ J. G. made no allusion to an identification with women and seemed to simply derive sexual arousal from wearing corsets. Ellis himself asserted that J. G. ‘may be

²⁵² Ellis did not include dates for his case studies so it is difficult to ascertain when the events described took place. However, in a letter to Norman Haire in 1925 Ellis confirmed he had obtained a number of cases. Consequently, it is likely that the cases dated between the late nineteenth century to the 1910s.

²⁵³ Linda Alcoff and Laura Gray. ‘Survivor Discourse: Transgression or Recuperation?’, *Signs*, 18, 2 (1993), 260-1.

²⁵⁴ Ellis, *Eonism*, 41, 44.

quite plausibly regarded as a corset fetishist [*sic*].²⁵⁵ A slightly more ambiguous case was that of C. T. who since 'puberty...[has] always had a desire to dress as a woman.'²⁵⁶ Ellis identified C. T. as being similar to J. G. but as representative of 'a further stage of the condition.'²⁵⁷ Although C. T.'s statement that '[i]n my tendency to femininity, I have often thought seriously of castration' echoed the longing in some transgender individuals to modify their physical body to reflect their gender identity, C. T.'s inclination to present as a woman was heavily linked to sexual desire.²⁵⁸ C. T. emphasised their wish to wear women's clothing rather than to actually become a woman. Where mention was made of this, it was always in relation to sex. When C. T.'s wife dressed in men's clothing, C. T. became 'mad with desire to be a girl' and it was during sexual intercourse that C. T. wished to 'become more of a woman, not more of a man.'²⁵⁹ Ellis noted his prolonged contact with C. T. in the years following this testimony and recorded C. T.'s comments that their "'Eonist' impulses' were periodic and sparked by sexual arousal: 'It quite frequently happens, if for any reason in the evening my thoughts have been at all concerned with sex...I have a sudden impulse to...put on earrings and such other feminine adornments.'²⁶⁰

C. T. 's 'desire for female clothing, jewellery, etc., is undiminished,' but they were part of C. T.'s sexual activity, for example masturbating 'if possible with a woman's garment,' as opposed to any sustained feeling of a female identity.²⁶¹ C. T.'s case demonstrates the variety

²⁵⁵ Ellis, *Eonism*, 52.

²⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 66-7.

²⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 52.

²⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 66.

²⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 67, 66.

²⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 70.

²⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 70, 69.

within Eonism of gender non-conformity which echoes the diversity of modern concepts of transgender identity. Ellis described these varieties in terms of how fully developed their Eonism was rather than creating a complex system of categorisation as Hirschfeld did. Ellis presented queer gender identity as not always able to conform to strict demarcated categories and subject to change over time. By positing a spectrum of aesthetic inversion, Ellis liberated his cases from rigid boundaries and demonstrated the wide range of gender non-conforming behaviour incorporated within Eonism.

Ellis' most pronounced cases of Eonism were recorded at length and treated to a detailed analysis as to the potential causes and most fitting definitions. Each testimony is an invaluable resource for transgender historians seeking to gain a sense of how potentially trans women expressed their feelings surrounding their gender identity, as well as revealing how adept such individuals were in articulating their gender identity in the absence of the plethora of modern terms. The case of the artist 'A. T.' was considered by Ellis as a further step towards complete aesthetic inversion while retaining certain sexual connotations regarding their cross-dressing. A. T. described the 'erotic pleasure' they derived from 'the wearing of female clothing' and labelled their feelings as a combination of "'feminism" and "erotic fetichism."' ²⁶² Ellis on the other hand, disputed A. T.'s identification with fetishism, arguing that their female clothes were 'not really fetiches; they are simply the outward symbols of the inner spiritual state.' ²⁶³ Here, Ellis allowed A. T.'s construction of their feelings to remain but assumed authority over what should be considered the 'true' reading. A. T.

²⁶² Ellis, *Eonism*, 52, 51.

²⁶³ *Ibid.*, 53.

repeatedly stated their 'intense longing and desire to be a woman,' 'to have female breasts,' and the sense that 'every nerve in my body seems to cry out that, in spite of my outward masculine form, I am actually feminine.'²⁶⁴ Tellingly, A. T. referred to their experience of trying on their sister's clothes as the 'moment I date what I term my change of sex.'²⁶⁵ When dressed as a woman, A. T. 'was both boy and girl at once, and... today I am actually more female than male, in spite of the actual physical facts to the contrary.'²⁶⁶ These sentiments were indicative of a stronger identification with being female than those expressed by the cases who Ellis acknowledged as possessing elements of fetishism. A. T. yearned to change their sex and felt they had mentally done so to a large extent. They did not merely dress as a woman but *were* predominantly female regardless of their physicality. A. T. had moved beyond cross-dressing for sexual gratification despite the arousal they felt when wearing women's underwear. In Ellis' words, 'the really essential fact about A. T. is that he [*sic*] himself experiences the feminine state, and his tastes have undergone a feminine inversion and that he feels like a woman.'²⁶⁷ Through A. T.'s case, Ellis established the mental identification with another gender that was the defining factor in cases of developed Eonism. This was not a sexual fetish or masquerade, but a deeply felt sense that one's gender was not reflected by one's sex and a desire to present as far as possible their gender identity.

²⁶⁴ Ellis, *Eonism*, 51, 44.

²⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 46.

²⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 47.

²⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 53.

Ellis' most pronounced Eonist cases, 'R. L.' and 'R. M.' demonstrated this identification as women as opposed to an attraction to their clothing alone.²⁶⁸ On the contrary, for R. M., female garments were of secondary concern, they claimed '[i]f I had an opportunity, I should like to try on a woman's clothes, though I have no very special attraction for women's dresses.'²⁶⁹ R. M.'s feelings of aesthetic inversion developed gradually, increasing in intensity until, at the age of fifty-nine, they underwent what R. M. described as 'an alteration of sexual polarity.'²⁷⁰ Following this, R. M. 'felt like a woman born out of her sex, and was affected by the most passionate longing to be a woman.'²⁷¹ This phrasing parallels the testimonies recorded in *Sexual Inversion* that referenced being born with a female mind or soul in a male body or vice versa, and seemed to be a popular expression of this sense of dichotomy between one's gender identity and sex. R. L. too described their sense that 'it is as if the soul of a woman had been born in a male body.'²⁷² R. L. demonstrated a greater interest in women's clothing and had dresses made which they wore in public. However, R. L. repeatedly stressed that they 'really desired to be a woman, and not merely to dress as one.'²⁷³ The clothing was simply a means of achieving a greater outward approximation to the gender they identified with. On this point R. L. was emphatic, explaining that episodes of dressing as a woman '*followed* my early desire and were not the cause of an appetite being created for wearing clothes or acting as a woman.'²⁷⁴ Wearing female attire was a means of presenting their gender identity and not an end in itself.

²⁶⁸ Although R.L.'s case also lacked dates, they mentioned that they were forty-two in 1915 which makes it possible to date certain events in their testimony.

²⁶⁹ Ellis, *Eonism*, 98.

²⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 97.

²⁷¹ *Ibid.*

²⁷² *Ibid.*, 71.

²⁷³ *Ibid.*, 76.

²⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 73.

Both cases expressed a yearning to experience pregnancy and motherhood as well as the wish for a physical change that would allow them to more closely resemble women bodily. For R. M., this manifested itself as an interest in castration, an operation he would willingly have undergone upon the death of his wife 'if I could have carried it out without detection.'²⁷⁵ R. L.'s reflections on the subject provide compelling evidence for the existence of transgender identities before the availability of surgical procedures, despite Bernice Hausman's argument to the contrary.²⁷⁶ R. L. related that 'I gave the matter serious and quiet thought, and felt that I would, if I had the chance, be changed into a woman physically, if I could be a refined charming gentlewoman, and that I should stipulate for full womanhood.'²⁷⁷

R. L.'s insistence on full womanhood revealed their total rejection of their male body and their desire to conform their physicality to their gender identity. Later in their testimony, R. L. articulated this longing through a concrete wish for surgery which is worth quoting in full:

...although I realised all the drawbacks attending some women's lives...though I shrunk from pain and operations as a rule...yet I would undergo a surgical operation if the result would be to give me a beautiful or attractive female form with full womanhood in a type that appealed to me.²⁷⁸

²⁷⁵ Ellis, *Eonism*, 94.

²⁷⁶ For a full discussion of this argument, see Bernice Hausman, *Changing Sex: Transexualism, Technology, and the Idea of Gender* (London, 1995).

²⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 74.

²⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 86.

This passionate need to physically transition was very different to J. G.'s sexual enjoyment of wearing corsets. R. L. was keen to emphasise the absence of arousal when presenting as a woman, recalling an incident at a dressmakers where a lady entered and wishing to show R. L. a present of underwear she'd received, 'lifted her skirts.'²⁷⁹ R. L. 'was filled with pleasure (not sexual)...I was admitted into fellowship!'²⁸⁰ It was joy at being accepted as a woman, not a sexual impulse. In fact, R. L. maintained that relationships with women, whether or not they were accepting of R. L.'s donning of women's clothing were a hindrance to their true ambition, they 'could not carry out my purpose and enjoy a feminine life thoroughly if I gave way to masculine sexual desires.'²⁸¹ Even R. L.'s romantic encounter with a man while dressed as a woman was described by R. L. as 'not so much a physical as a spiritual experience' in spite of their admission that 'I really felt physical desires.'²⁸² The incident allowed R. L. to experience their femininity more intensely, the arousal being part of their female identity and as such R. L. did not consider it an expression of homosexuality.²⁸³ Clearly Ellis agreed with R. L.'s assessment here or the testimony would have been vetoed along with other cases he deemed homosexual. The assumption of women's clothing took on a level of significance for R. L. far beyond sexual gratification or fetishism. When R. L. was living as a woman, wearing female garments and adopting female mannerisms they were not playing a part; they had *become* a woman as fully as they were able, to the point where 'clothes and my inner nature completely conquer the masculine side of my brain.'²⁸⁴ Therefore, R. L.'s case presented compelling evidence of Ellis' newly developed segregation

²⁷⁹ Ellis, *Eonism*, 75.

²⁸⁰ *Ibid.*

²⁸¹ *Ibid.*

²⁸² *Ibid.*, 81.

²⁸³ *Ibid.*

²⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 84.

of sexuality and gender identity in his discourse as well as R. L.'s emphatic reading of their narrative through the lens of gender rather than sexuality.

R. L.'s testimony provides crucial insights into the lived experience of gender non-conformity at the turn of the twentieth century. R. L. went beyond private cross-dressing and periodically lived as a woman for months at a time though largely not in England. They described the difficulties in finding a residence where such a life could be affected with the help of trustworthy housekeepers and landladies. That R. L. was able to achieve this on several occasions, at one point even finding a 'sympathetic' agency who were willing to help, implies that it was possible to live as a male-bodied woman, albeit fraught with problems.²⁸⁵ Clearly it was a hazardous undertaking, and R. L. wrote 'there was a risk of police prosecution, compulsory resignation of my position, and disgrace before friends and relatives.'²⁸⁶ World War I was also cited as an added obstacle to R. L.'s life as a woman. Combined with their fear that they could 'never dress again, nor realise my great desire' should R. L. die or suffer serious injury, R. L. risked increased scrutiny 'during the war when suspicious people were liable to arrest as spies.'²⁸⁷ At a time when women and female-bodied men were being granted greater freedoms in terms of occupations and masculine clothing in order to contribute to the war effort, male-bodied women were seemingly experiencing heightened difficulties.²⁸⁸ Indeed, R. L. bemoaned the inequality in attitudes regarding effeminate men and masculine women. R. L. stated 'I felt the injustice of things in

²⁸⁵ Ellis, *Eonism*, 77.

²⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 79.

²⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 77, 78.

²⁸⁸ Laura Doan, 'Topsy-Turvydom: Gender Inversion, Sapphism, and the Great War', *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies*, 12 (2006), 518.

that women with masculine natures were allowed to dress as men, and often say they wished they were men, yet the opposite was regarded with suspicion or derision.²⁸⁹ Clearly then R. L. believed there was a level of public tolerance for female-bodied men and it is undeniable that masculine hairstyles, trousers and habits were permeating mainstream women's fashions and behaviour in the 1920s.²⁹⁰

Both R. L. and R. M. made attempts to diagnose themselves and arrived at similar conclusions. They both expressed an identification with the novel *2835 Mayfair* by Frank Richardson (1907) which included a character who through a fantastical form of hypnosis was able to leave their male body and enter a female one, living and being accepted as a woman. R. M. went on to describe themselves as a strong example of 'double sex,' holding it to be 'most probable that the sexes are always more or less mixed in varying proportions in every man or woman.'²⁹¹ For R. M., this mixing had taken on a physical manifestation through the development of breasts which R. M. believed was triggered by their yearning to become female, and their growth was 'accompanied by a strange feeling of greatly increased physical comfort and well-being.'²⁹² Ellis noted that 'R. M. had frequently expressed a wish for a physical examination to be made,' presumably to obtain a professional opinion on these bodily changes, but R. M.'s illness and death prevented this taking place.²⁹³ R. M. used Ellis' term aesthetic inversion to define the 'psychical' aspects of their condition and expressed no wish to alter their feelings.²⁹⁴ On the contrary, R. M. viewed their 'double sex'

²⁸⁹ Ellis, *Eonism*, 83.

²⁹⁰ Laura Doan, 'Passing Fashions: Reading Female Masculinities in the 1920s', *Feminist Studies*, 24 (1998), 667.

²⁹¹ Ellis, *Eonism*, 98-9.

²⁹² *Ibid.*, 98.

²⁹³ *Ibid.*, 99-100.

²⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 99.

to be largely ‘an advantage, as enlarging my sympathies.’²⁹⁵ Consequently, R. M. illustrates the collaboration involved on the discourse on Eonism. They were provided with a means of articulating their identity which they in turn assisted in constructing. Like Ellis, R. M. was careful to distinguish aesthetic inversion from homosexuality, arguing that ‘those who are affected by it appear (at least in most cases) never to be attracted by men, but only by women.’²⁹⁶ That R. M. should adopt Ellis’ terminology and conclusions was unsurprising given the lengthy correspondence between them on the subject. Moreover, as a ‘man [*sic*] of science and letters,’ it was likely that R. M. had read some of the relevant texts dealing with aesthetic inversion, though the only one they mentioned by name was the novel *2835 Mayfair*.²⁹⁷ R. M.’s need to ‘submit these points to the judgement of those more competent in such matters’ implied that they sought the opinion of an authority on gender non-conformity to fully comprehend and define their experiences.²⁹⁸

R. M. ended their testimony by emphasising that the ‘condition is no mere fancy, but has continued and indeed increased during almost the whole of a fairly long life.’²⁹⁹ Ellis supported this assessment, despite having observed ‘no outward suggestion of femininity’ and that the physical alterations were not extreme, R. M. himself only suspecting that ‘some very minor physical anomalies might possess a feminine or hermaphroditic significance.’³⁰⁰ Ellis maintained that R. M. might demonstrate ‘what the Freudian would term a “complex,”

²⁹⁵ Ellis, *Eonism*, 98-9.

²⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 99.

²⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 91, 99. See chapter 4 for further discussion of *2835 Mayfair*.

²⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 100.

²⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 99.

³⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 100.

but it is not a paranoid delusional system.³⁰¹ Ellis' own understanding of the case was that it was one of 'Eonism or sexo-aesthetic inversion, in perhaps a complete form.'³⁰² R. M. 'possessed marked feminine affectability' but the tendency to cross-dress was 'minor.'³⁰³ Ellis, in fact, used R. M.'s testimony to illustrate his criticisms of Hirschfeld's transvestism that '[i]n that form it brings home to us the unsatisfactory nature of the term "transvestism." The element of cross-dressing was, indeed, present, but in so slight and unessential a degree as to be almost negligible.³⁰⁴ Ellis' discourse prioritised the mental affiliation with a different gender that many Eonists possessed and presented it as the defining feature rather than cross-dressing, thereby differentiating himself from Hirschfeld. This 'psychical' form of Eonism was not the 'most usual and typical form' in Ellis' opinion but it is closely comparative to some modern concepts of transgender identities and therefore highly suggestive of Eonism as a precursor to the category of transgender at the turn of the twentieth century.³⁰⁵

R. L. also described themselves in terms of a combination of the male and female. They stated: 'I consider that I am a dual personality of which the feminine self has very early expressed itself, and gathered strength, dominating my life, but my male physical self has been strong enough to prevent outward signs of effeminacy.'³⁰⁶ This pre-eminence of the female side was the cause of the fascination with women's clothing and habits, not a sexual impulse, the clothing allowing R. L.'s male side to be 'conquered – a thing I cannot do when

³⁰¹ Ellis, *Eonism*, 100.

³⁰² *Ibid.*

³⁰³ *Ibid.*

³⁰⁴ *Ibid.*

³⁰⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 87.

living as a man.³⁰⁷ As mentioned earlier, R. L. mirrored R. M.'s denial of any homosexual element to their Eonism, asserting that '[a]s a man I should scorn any homosexual relationship, even if imagining I was a woman.'³⁰⁸ It was only when living as a woman, when R. L. felt they *were* a woman, that any desire for a male lover occurred and had as yet not been acted on. Under these conditions, the feelings were heterosexual and expressed how deeply R. L. identified as a woman.

R. L.'s testimony is particularly valuable to studies of the medical attitude to gender non-conforming individuals in that it contained several accounts of R. L.'s interactions with doctors. The medical advice R. L. received was quite accommodating and empathic, provided limitations were placed on R. L.'s periods of living as a woman. R. L.'s doctor actually secured them lodgings in which they could safely present as female, assuming that they would 'only dress at week-ends to obtain relief.'³⁰⁹ The doctor continued to offer support, visiting R. L. and praising their feminine appearance. Yet any indications that this life as a woman become more permanent or frequent gave rise to concerns and warnings 'not to forget that I was Mr.'³¹⁰ R. L. recalled that 'he saw no reason why I should not dress now and again as a relief to what becomes an overpowering desire, but if I let it get hold of me to an undue extent it became pathological.'³¹¹ It is apparent then that sporadic cross-dressing was viewed by this doctor at least as harmless, but any attempts to live consistently as one's gender identity was regarded as an indication of a mental disorder. This opinion was

³⁰⁷ Ellis, *Eonism*, 89.

³⁰⁸ *Ibid.*

³⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 84.

³¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 86.

³¹¹ *Ibid.*

not universally shared, as is made evident in a lengthy consultation R. L. underwent with their doctor and a consultant. Whereas R. L.'s doctor 'rather clings to the mental obsession idea...The consultant took my side often in argument and said it was the strongest case of dual personality he had known.'³¹² No further steps towards treatment or suggested causes were recorded by R. L. but it is clear the comments had little impact on their lifestyle other than R. L.'s agreement with the consultant's diagnosis of dual personality. Ellis however, was dissatisfied with this conclusion and recorded his own assessment. While agreeing that 'that there is a sense (though not the usual sense) in which we can say that R. L. is an example of dual personality,' Ellis disputed that this served any purpose in uncovering the precipitating factors of R. L.'s behaviour.³¹³ Ellis dismissed any inference of homosexuality as readily as R. L., stating '[i]n numerous photographs as a woman his [*sic*] feminine air and bearing seem unimpeachable. There is nothing of the rather provocative and meretricious aspect which sometimes marks homosexual men when in feminine costume.'³¹⁴

Yet unlike R. M.'s case in which Ellis relied mostly on a sexological interpretation, here Ellis turned to psychoanalysis in order to best explain the causes of R. L.'s Eonism. Ellis proposed an 'infantile and always mainly unconscious absorption in the mother' as a potential factor leading to R. L.'s aesthetic inversion.³¹⁵ Acknowledging that no attempt had been made to ascertain the veracity of this claim, Ellis argued that '[t]his seems the only key we can expect to find, or need to find, to the influences that have moulded R. L.'s life.'³¹⁶

³¹² Ellis, *Eonism*, 87.

³¹³ *Ibid.*, 90.

³¹⁴ *Ibid.*

³¹⁵ *Ibid.*

³¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 91.

In his analysis of the causes and categorisation of Eonism, Ellis' primary concern was to establish the distinction between it and homosexuality. Ellis affirmed that Eonists may 'illustrate that universal bisexuality which is now so widely accepted' and described their typical characteristics, including a predisposition towards artistic careers, a low sex-drive and the occasional manifestation of psychic and physical 'eunuchoidism.'³¹⁷ However, none of these were common to all Eonists so provided little assistance in categorising cases. Ellis was even vaguer on the subject of causation. According to Ellis, '[e]arly environmental influences assist, as we have seen, but can scarcely originate in Eonism,' similarly, 'inheritance of the tendency seems not usually to be traceable, though it is sometimes.'³¹⁸ Ellis eventually suggested a biological cause as the most likely explanation:

To me it seems probable...that the real physical basis on which this and the related psychic peculiarities arise may be some unusual balance in the endocrine system, inborn and sometimes, it may be, inherited, whence the resemblance, already noted to eunuchoidism, which has been found associated with disease of the hypophysis.³¹⁹

Even here Ellis could not commit to any certainties, though this seems much less a matter of disinterest and rather an insufficiency of evidence to allow for concrete conclusions. Ellis also offered no comments on the matter of treatment, nor whether Eonism actually required any form of intervention. He denied that it was a 'disease,' commenting instead that 'it is, as

³¹⁷ Ellis, *Eonism*, 100, 109.

³¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 109, 110.

³¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 110.

Näcke said, simply a variety, though, one may add, an abnormal, in the strict sense a pathological, variety.³²⁰

Ellis' vagaries over the treatment and causes of Eonism allowed the subjects of the case histories themselves to construct their own discourses on gender non-conformity, what Foucault calls 'reverse discourse.'³²¹ It is also apparent that they were constructing for themselves what it meant to be female during the early twentieth century. Judith Butler's development of Foucault's argument that sexuality is not an unchanging reality but rather constructed by each era to include gender, is strongly demonstrated within *Eonism*.³²²

Butler asserts that '*gender* is not a noun, but neither is it a set of free-floating attributes, for we have seen that the substantive effect of gender is performatively produced and compelled by the regulatory practices of gender coherence.'³²³ The gender non-conforming individuals adopted the clothing, mannerisms and interests they believed defined femininity derived from the prevailing cultural constructions of gender. The desire for pregnancy and motherhood, an artistic inclination, modesty and emotional sensitivity were all cited as evidence of the subjects' feminine natures. Meanwhile, an intense appreciation of jewellery, highly feminine clothing and beauty were cultivated in order to reinforce their female identities. That all the Eonist case histories without exception adopted this ultra-feminine construction of womanhood is significant, given the rise of masculine fashions for women in interwar Britain.³²⁴ R. L. in fact was scathing about this more masculine construction of

³²⁰ Ellis, *Eonism*, 110.

³²¹ Tamsin Spargo, *Foucault and Queer Theory* (Cambridge, 1999), 21-2.

³²² Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality, Volume 1: An Introduction*, trans. Robert Hurley (New York, 1978), 105-6.

³²³ Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (London, 1990), 24.

³²⁴ Doan, 'Passing Fashions', 667.

femininity, bemoaning the 'injustice' of the fact that 'women with coarse natures and bad manners but good clothes were tolerated. Yet I, who could wear the clothes so much better, and give the impression of being a lady, was taboo, because of my bodily form.'³²⁵ R. L. was more truly female in their opinion than those women who, by rejecting long hair and skirts could only be emulating masculinity. In a period where surgical and hormonal treatments were largely unavailable, clothing, jewellery and hairstyle were the only means through which Eonists could express their gender identity. This overtly feminised construction of womanhood may have been forced upon Eonists by necessity, as to adopt the boyish fashions of the 1920s would risk being taken for men. However, it is equally plausible that this was simply the image of femininity they preferred, particularly when one considers their fascination with garments that were specifically for women. Regardless of the motivation, it is clear that as Ellis wished to remove the emphasis on clothing from his construction of Eonism, these highly feminised constructions of gender identity were largely attributable to the subjects themselves.

The reasons behind Ellis' failure to clearly define the causes and potential treatment of Eonism are difficult to determine. It may simply have been his intention to present cases of aesthetic inversion together with a summary of the dominant theories put forward by other European and American authorities, without reaching any conclusions of his own. This seems unlikely, given Ellis' strong critique of the work of other experts in the field, and his development of terminology and definitions of gender non-conformity that he deemed more accurate. Indeed, Hirschfeld's suggestions for treatment recorded in his work were

³²⁵ Ellis, *Eonism*, 83.

limited to 'a general treatment of the central nervous system, which has as its focus a strengthening of the will as well as an exact regulation of the lifestyle,' and the acknowledgement that 'from a purely medical standpoint, nothing can be said against the actual putting on of the clothing of the opposite sex.'³²⁶ Alternatively, it may have been the case that having studied the available evidence gathered by sexologists, physicians and psychoanalysts, as well as the testimonies he himself obtained from Eonists, Ellis felt the evidence to be too insubstantial to allow him to make a concrete pronouncement on any definite causes applicable to all cases. This view is certainly supported by the vague collection of factors that Ellis states *might* explain aesthetic inversion in *some* cases. However, I would argue that Ellis' position as a theorist was the deciding factor. For Ellis, the focus of his work was in producing written discourse on matters of sexuality and gender. His lack of a sustained practical medical career confirmed his priorities as being a sexological theorist. As a result, the potential causes and treatment of Eonists were very much secondary to defining Eonism itself. Furthermore, Ellis' determination to depathologise his categorisation of gender non-conformity may well have led Ellis to be cautious in suggesting the need for treatment or any causes that too closely resembled a psychoanalytic diagnosis of a disorder. The fact that Ellis did not practise medicine on a regular basis and the low level of his medical qualification may also have led him to feel insufficiently qualified to comment on treatment, whether it be some form of early gender-affirming surgery, or therapy to eradicate the gender non-conforming behaviour.

Ellis as Sexological Theorist: the British approach

³²⁶ Hirschfeld, *Transvestites*, 3513, 3513-3521.

Ellis' position as a more theoretical sexologist impacted not only his discourse on Eonism but also the structure of British sexology as a whole. As a theorist, Ellis' priorities in writing differed from his European colleagues in that he sought to disseminate knowledge and understanding of those he discussed. Ellis did not set out to develop new surgeries or treatments to enable transitions as Hirschfeld did, nor was he concerned with revolutionising the medical profession. While it is true that throughout Ellis' works and personal correspondence, there was a strong element of self-deprecation that historians have interpreted as a sense of inferiority to European sexologists, this is difficult to equate with his involvement in the second International Meeting for Sexual Reform on a Sexological Basis and the World League of Sexual Reform on an equal footing with his international colleagues.³²⁷ Instead, Ellis' tentative approach and acknowledgement of his limitations suggests his framing of himself as distinct from the medical profession as a theorist rather than inferior.

Ellis was certainly quick to acknowledge his limitations in his correspondence with Symonds regarding their collaboration even in the face of Symonds' deference. In a foreword written in 1935 and included in the 1948 edition of his *Studies*, Ellis admitted that when Symonds first proposed they work together on *Sexual Inversion*, Symonds 'knew at that time far more about the subject than I did.'³²⁸ Ellis explained in a letter to Symonds that his reluctance to write on the subject of homosexuality previously was partially 'because I have not felt qualified to do so.'³²⁹ In their later debates over the contents of the book, Ellis stated 'I fully

³²⁷ Matte, 'International Sexual Reform and Sexology in Europe, 1897-1933', 253-70.

³²⁸ Ellis, *Studies* (1948), p.xi.

³²⁹ Symonds and Ellis, 'Correspondence', 223.

appreciate my own incompetence,' and sought Symonds' advice regarding Ulrichs, asking 'Is there anything of his that I ought certainly to read?'³³⁰ Further study, however, bolstered Ellis' confidence, taking as Symonds put it 'the most important chapters,' for himself on the basis that 'it was on the scholarly and historical side alone that Symonds could properly come into the book' and thus had nothing to add to the medical aspects.³³¹ Indeed, although he strove to include Symonds' work posthumously in *Sexual Inversion*, Ellis admitted to being 'already rather doubtful of their value.'³³² He equally dismissed Carpenter's proposed contributions as being 'interesting so far as they go, but too slight to be of much value.'³³³ A combination of increased experience and Carpenter and Symonds' literary backgrounds provided Ellis with the confidence to assert his medical credentials.

Ellis' self-deprecation remained a facet of his writings, particularly with regards to his standing in the medical profession. For example, in response to a letter from a Mr Nugent in which they related to Ellis their belief that they were female, Ellis was reluctant to offer any concrete suggestions or enter into a more in-depth discussion. Despite professing a willingness to give Nugent 'any useful advice,' Ellis added the codicil 'It is not quite clear to me, however, what I could say.'³³⁴ Without access to Nugent's letter, it is difficult to place Ellis' responses in the full context in which they were written, but it can be ascertained that Nugent felt themselves to be 'predominantly 'woman'' and sought Ellis' opinion.³³⁵ Aside

³³⁰ Symonds and Ellis, 'Correspondence', 235, 246.

³³¹ Ellis, *Life*, 295.

³³² *Ibid.*, 296.

³³³ Symonds and Ellis, 'Correspondence', 253.

³³⁴ Havelock Ellis to Mr Nugent, 9 September 1918, London, Wellcome Library, Archives and Manuscripts, Ellis, Henry Havelock (1859-1939), writer, critic, pioneer in scientific study of sexuality, Box MS.7837. (Hereafter Ellis to Nugent letter).

³³⁵ *Ibid.*

from advising against Nugent visiting a prostitute to stimulate a greater interest in women, and his opinion that Nugent's belief in their womanhood was likely to be merely a phase – 'Some people who think it at your age, find a year or two later that they were mistaken' – Ellis summed up his position by stating 'I do not know if there is any definite point on which I could throw light.'³³⁶ Ellis' dismissive and vague response is puzzling, written as it was five years after the publication of the first abridged version of his research into Eonism in the *Alienist and Neurologist*.³³⁷ By this point he had already been in correspondence with other Eonists and had conducted extensive research into the subject. Yet, it is arguable that it was Ellis' position as theorist that influenced his response and not a sense of inferiority. British sexology was centred around categorisation and theoretical works which is unsurprising given that its main proponents were writers.³³⁸ On the other hand, in Germany Hirschfeld had built up a successful practice at his Institute of Sexual Research and was instrumental in promoting the *Transvestitenschein* ('transvestite certification') that provided state-recognition of trans identities.³³⁹ Questions of treatment and medical intervention would consequently have been of greater importance for Hirschfeld and his colleagues who would have regular contact with patients. Therefore, Ellis' reluctance to provide advice as to specific medical treatment to Nugent was arguably due to its being outside of his area of interest and expertise.

³³⁶ Ellis to Nugent letter.

³³⁷ See Havelock Ellis, 'Sexo-Aesthetic Inversion Part 1', *Alienist and Neurologist*, 34 (May, 1913), 156-67 and Havelock Ellis, 'Sexo-Aesthetic Inversion Part 2', *Alienist and Neurologist*, 34 (August, 1913), 249-79.

³³⁸ Lesley Hall, 'The English have Hot-Water Bottles': The Morganatic Marriage Between Sexology and Medicine in Britain since William Acton', in: Roy Porter (ed.) *Sexual Knowledge, Sexual Science: The History of Attitudes to Sexuality* (Cambridge, 1994), 363.

³³⁹ Nunn, 'Trans Liminality and the Nazi State', 125-6.

Ellis viewed himself as an outsider from the British medical profession and appeared to relish this position. In a letter to Whitham, Ellis expressed his surprise at the Royal College of Physicians' decision to make him an Honorary Fellow of the College, stating '[i]t seems quite inappropriate for an obscene rebel whose chief medical work has been judiciously condemned'.³⁴⁰ Ellis' comments suggest amusement at his position as a rebel instead of any genuine concern over his worthiness. Indeed, in Ellis' written works, the respect he accorded other sexologists did not equate to subordination. For example, Ellis praised Hirschfeld in the third edition of *Sexual Inversion* for 'his great work, *Die Homosexualität des Mannes und des Weibes*...[as] not only the largest but the most precise, detailed, and comprehensive – even the most condensed – work which has yet appeared on the subject' as well as his multifaceted role as 'a physician, an investigator [and] a medicolegal expert.'³⁴¹ Yet, this did not preclude Ellis from critiquing Hirschfeld's definition of transvestism.³⁴² Ellis also dismissed American writer C. G. Leland's *The Alternate Sex and the Female Intellect in Man and the Masculine in Women* (1904) as 'vague and unscientific.'³⁴³ Ellis' humility regarding his own work appears to be more a literary device than an admission of deficiency. In the third volume of his *Studies* entitled *Analysis of the Sexual Impulse, Love and Pain, The Sexual Impulse in Women*, Ellis stated 'I do not claim that the conception of the process here stated is novel or original...even since I began to work it out some years ago, various investigators in these fields, especially in Germany, have deprived it of any novelty it might otherwise have possessed, while at the same time aiding me in reaching a more precise statement.'³⁴⁴

³⁴⁰ Ellis to Whitham letters, 2 May 1936.

³⁴¹ Ellis, *Sexual Inversion*, (3rd edn.), 73.

³⁴² Ellis, *Eonism*, 17.

³⁴³ *Ibid.*, 11.

³⁴⁴ Havelock Ellis, *Studies in the Psychology of Sex. Volume III: Analysis of the Sexual Impulse, Love and Pain, The Sexual Impulse in Women* (Philadelphia, 2n 1904), p. v.

Regarding his standing as a sexologist, Ellis reflected '[f]rom the first a few people whose good opinion was worth having had known and admired my books, and therewith I seem to have been content.'³⁴⁵ None of these statements actively diminish Ellis' position as a capable sexological theorist. It is apparent that within his works Ellis was comfortable assessing the value of different sexologist's theories and highlighting their failings, whether he regarded his standing in the field as less exalted or not. As a theorist, Ellis confidently engaged with these authorities on their own level. When practical advice was sought on treatment, Ellis demurred to other experts but this was due to his interest lying in developing the category of Eonism rather than a feeling of inferiority. This arguably contributed to the lack of a successor to Ellis' work. Whereas Hirschfeld's Institute allowed his theories and treatments to disseminate among future medical specialists such as Harry Benjamin, Ellis' purely theoretical writings appear to have been neglected in favour of works by practitioners.³⁴⁶

Conclusion

Ellis' study of gender non-conformity illustrates the unique contribution to sexology provided by Britain. Whereas European sexologists were dominated by practicing physicians and psychologists, the preponderance of non-medical contributors in Britain led to a more theoretical focus. As the lone medically qualified voice, Ellis' *Eonism* became the prevailing British discourse on gender non-conformity, enabling Ellis to effectively dominate how gender non-conformity was constructed and perceived from a British standpoint. The use of

³⁴⁵ Ellis, *Life*, 316.

³⁴⁶ Ekins and King, *The Transgender Phenomenon*, 63-4.

participants outside of a medical setting resulted in a largely de-pathologised discourse as was Ellis' intention. He also developed a different relationship with his Eonists due to the less overt doctor/patient dynamic. Ellis' participants were willing interviewees rather than patients seeking treatment and the resulting discourse was more collaborative in approach than his European counterparts. While still representing an authority figure and having control over the final narrative, Ellis' theories of gender non-conformity were informed and altered by the case histories he considered. True, Ellis did not always bow to his participants' understandings of their identities and presented himself as the expert. However, when disagreements did occur, Ellis allowed the participants' comments to remain in the text, albeit portraying his interpretation as the correct one. This process provides insight into how gender non-conforming individuals articulated their identities prior to definitive terminology as well as their cultural visibility. The references to *2835 Mayfair* made by both R. L. and R. M. reveal a cultural awareness of gender non-conformity, supported by novels including *The Well of Loneliness* and *Orlando*. Additionally, R. L.'s experiences of living as a woman for prolonged periods among people who were both aware of and sympathetic towards the disconnect between their physical sex and gender identity indicates that gender non-conforming individuals were not unheard-of in Britain.

In constructing his own alternate discourse, Ellis deliberately selected cases that served his intention of presenting a divergent narrative on gender non-conformity with a distinct terminology. Eonism was not a facet of homosexuality or a mental disorder as Krafft-Ebing argued, nor was it primarily linked to cross-dressing as was Hirschfeld's opinion. Ellis' cases supported his construction of gender non-conformity as a psychical identity not related to

sexuality, thereby enabling him to present them as evidence of the veracity of his discourse. The dichotomy between gender identity and sexuality in *Eonism* reveals a development in Ellis' thinking from *Sexual Inversion*. From including several potentially transgender cases in his study of homosexuality, in *Eonism* Ellis stressed the separation of sexuality and gender identity, even redefining some of the historical examples of cross-dressing included in *Sexual Inversion* as Eonist. Ellis was emphatic in this segregation, labelling Eonism as predominantly heterosexual, defining the joy felt by individuals such as R. L. when presenting as a woman as being aesthetic in nature instead of sexual and presenting gender identity as the defining factor in more complete Eonist cases.

Chapter 2: A Passing Resemblance: Medical constructions of gender non-conformity in interwar Britain

In this chapter I will argue that mid-twentieth-century medical discourse centred on the necessity of passing as one's gender and the power of the medical profession in enabling successful passing. As World War I both disrupted regular medical practice and helped accelerate the advancement of surgical techniques and the spread of psychoanalysis in Britain, medical constructions of gender non-conformity became rooted in physicality in response to growing fears over the instability of gender as gender roles were undermined by women's war work and the advent of shellshock.³⁴⁷ Through the development of plastic surgery for casualties of war, doctors assumed the power to conceal or repair their patients' injuries, allowing them to pass as unimpaired. Similarly, as David Griffiths has shown, medical constructions of gender non-conformity represented individuals with intersex conditions as the only legitimate candidates for surgical transition.³⁴⁸ Gender non-conforming individuals who possessed unambiguous bodies were represented as mentally ill and in need of psychotherapy. Thus, doctors created a discourse in which the medical professional was the determiner of the patient's identity and who could or could not pass as male, female, able-bodied and healthy. Doctors became the gatekeepers of surgical treatments and authorities on how to determine gender. Gender non-conforming individuals were required to conform to the binary system and identify as male *or* female, never as both or neither.

³⁴⁷ Sandra M. Gilbert, 'Soldier's Heart: Literary Men, Literary Women, and the Great War', in: Margaret Randolph Higonnet, et al., (eds) *Behind the Lines: Gender and the Two World Wars* (London, 1987), 200.

³⁴⁸ David Andrew Griffiths, 'Diagnosing Sex: Intersex surgery and 'sex change' in Britain 1930-1955', *Sexualities*, 21 (2018), 489.

Through an examination of the work of surgeon L. R. Broster, psychiatrist Clifford Allen and their colleagues on intersex conditions, psychoanalytic approaches to gender non-conformity and the development of plastic surgery, this chapter will demonstrate that once the narrative of gender non-conformity became dominated by practitioners rather than theorists, medical discourse resituated gender non-conformity as a facet of intersex, homosexuality or pathology instead of an independent category. However, this medical authority was not uniform. Different disciplines varied in their levels of sympathy for gender non-conforming patients and even within these disciplines, practitioners sometimes diverged in their approach. The one point of agreement was the medical profession's being the authority on gender identity and the architects who enabled passing. Individuals seeking to transition would have to conform to the medical construction of gender if they were to access surgery which, as with all successful passing, would render gender non-conformity invisible.

L. R. Broster and Intersex

The most definitive work on gender non-conformity in mid-twentieth-century Britain was carried out by the surgeon L. R. Broster (1889-1965) and his colleagues. Born in South Africa, Broster moved to the UK to study medicine at Oxford University. After qualifying in 1914, Broster served in the Royal Army Medical Corps throughout World War I. He began work at Charing Cross Hospital in 1923, becoming a full surgeon there in 1933. Broster's specialism in endocrine disease led him to become one of the first surgeons in Britain operating on intersex patients in the 1930s and 1940s, one of his patients being the British athlete Mark

Weston (1905-78).³⁴⁹ Due to Broster's pioneering surgical techniques and press coverage, Charing Cross Hospital became a key institution for treatment relating to intersex and transgender individuals. However, it was Broster's colleague, John Randell, who refocused the hospital's treatment on transgender individuals in the 1950s and 1960s and wrote his MD thesis on 'transsexuality'.³⁵⁰ Broster produced several articles based on his work at Charing Cross and two books, *The Adrenal Cortex and Intersexuality* (1938) and *Endocrine Man: A Study in the Surgery of Sex* (1944), the former being co-authored with colleagues including consultant psychiatrist at Charing Cross, Clifford Allen (dates unknown). Allen provided the psychological perspective on the case studies taken from patients at Charing Cross included in the book, as well as his own *The Sexual Perversions and Abnormalities* (1940) during his time at Charing Cross.³⁵¹

Treating intersex patients at Charing Cross Hospital, Broster constructed a discourse in which individuals with ambiguously sexed bodies should be treated surgically to restore the individual's 'genuine' sex. Broster supported the theory of intermediaries but unlike sexological understandings of intermediate types between heterosexual and homosexual, Broster's theory concerned physical sex.³⁵² Broster argued that 'between the extremes of the normal female and male, there are seven recognisable intermediate and distinct types, which centre round the bisexual or true hermaphrodite condition.'³⁵³ While these

³⁴⁹ Anon., 'Obituary Notices', *The British Medical Journal*, 1 (1965), 1130.

³⁵⁰ Stuart Lorimer, 'Charing Cross Hospital Gender Identity Clinic. Part I: 1818-1982', *A Gender Variance Who's Who*, [web blog], 14 September 2016, <https://zagria.blogspot.com/2016/09/charing-cross-hospital-gender-identity.html>.

³⁵¹ Griffiths, 'Diagnosing Sex', 479, 481.

³⁵² Karl Heinrich Ulrichs, *The Riddle of "Man-Manly" Love: The Pioneering Work on Male Homosexuality Vol. 1*, trans. Michael A. Lombardi-Nash (New York, 1994 reprint of original 1864-1880), 305-6.

³⁵³ L. R. Broster, *Endocrine Man: A Study in the Surgery of Sex* (London, 1944), 96.

intermediate types possessed differing degrees of intersex, Broster stressed the bisexual nature of human biology:

...the sex of the individual is far from being subject to such a rigid rule as the possession of the appropriate sex gland secreting male or female hormone would suggest...the presence in each sex gland of embryonic remains of the other sex, and the fact that each sex produces both male and female hormone, are expressions of an inherent bisexuality.³⁵⁴

Broster's comments on bisexuality served to normalise intersex conditions, although he presented surgery as essential and did not consider the possibility of an individual choosing to remain intersex. While establishing the relative rarity of extreme cases, Broster highlighted the universal potential in human bodies for ambiguous sex characteristics to occur. In his work, Broster referred to cases of 'virilism' and 'feminism'. Broster defined virilism as 'the appearance of secondary male characters in the female with a concomitant retrogression of the feminine characters and sex function.'³⁵⁵ Virilism involved:

the growth of hair, according to the masculine type in texture and distribution, alterations in bodily contour towards broad shoulders and narrow hips, the development of muscle and coarsening of the skin, often with acne...There may be enlargement of the clitoris, and deepening of the voice.³⁵⁶

Feminism, meanwhile, was:

³⁵⁴ Broster, *Endocrine Man*, 77.

³⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 85.

³⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

...the counterpart of virilism...they either do not develop at puberty, or, if they do, they show feminine regression after it...the skin is smooth and hairless and the pubic hair is of the feminine type...The genitalia show a lack of development, the sex function is impaired or diminished, the voice high pitched...There is a mental sense of inferiority and a lack of male aggressiveness.³⁵⁷

While Broster gave detailed descriptions of the physical changes produced by virilism and feminism, when discussing behavioural and psychological aspects of gender, Broster and Allen assumed a level of understanding on the part of their audience as to what these characteristics were that did not require explanation. Patients who were considered to be psychologically bisexual – whether exclusively or in conjunction with their physical characteristics – were pathologized by Broster and his colleagues. Allen, who carried out the psychological evaluations of intersex patients at Charing Cross, presented several case studies in which he redefined the patient’s gender identity and psychotherapy was deemed the suitable form of treatment. A prime example was twenty-three-year-old W. L. whose statements were repeatedly questioned and reinterpreted. Allen wrote:

Menstruated at the age of twelve...She [*sic*] said that at the age of 16 her voice broke. Her mother confirmed this but said that the “breaking” was not the same as in the case of a boy. (There was no alternating squeakiness and depth.)...Doubtless it was an hysterical phenomenon...After this she wore male attire and insisted that she had not menstruated since. (This certainly was not true.)³⁵⁸

³⁵⁷ Broster, *Endocrine Man*, 104.

³⁵⁸ Clifford Allen, ‘Adrenal Dysfunction and its Relation to Sexuality’, in: L.R. Broster, et al., *The Adrenal Cortex and Intersexuality* (London, 1938), 103.

Even with the corroboration of W. L.'s mother that some form of vocal change occurred, Allen identified W. L. as female. This contradiction of the patient's construction of their gender was absent from the physically based cases, where discussion was confined largely to symptoms and the results of surgical intervention. There was also an undercurrent of exasperation from both Allen and Broster when patients refused to undergo the recommended treatment. Broster stated:

Many are unreasonably shy of psychological treatment and will not consent to undertake it, while a few seem to glory in their abnormal attributes and will not submit to treatment of any kind even if there is a reasonable prospect of restoring them to normal.³⁵⁹

Foucault's concept of the 'medical gaze' – the selection by doctors of what is and is not relevant in a patient's case notes – is applicable to Broster and Allen's patient case studies.³⁶⁰ Rather than being led by an objective observation of symptoms, Broster and Allen, influenced by the medical discourses they had studied, used medical language to define the patient's symptoms and illness as either physical and in need of surgery or mental and in need of psychoanalysis. As a result, the medical profession gained a monopoly over societal understandings of gender non-conformity and its treatment. As Foucault stated:

...[t]he clinic — constantly praised for its empiricism, the modesty of its attention, and the care with which it silently lets things surface to the observing gaze without disturbing them with discourse—owes its real importance to the fact that it is a

³⁵⁹ Broster, *Endocrine Man*, 95.

³⁶⁰ Michel Foucault, *The Birth of the Clinic: An Archaeology of Medical Perception*, trans. A. M. Sheridan (Oxford, 2003), 196-7.

reorganization in depth, not only of medical discourse, but of the very possibility of a discourse about disease.³⁶¹

Broster and Allen repeatedly relied on medical discourse to define their intersex and gender non-conforming patients. In W. L.'s case, Allen and Broster interpreted W. L.'s body as unambiguously female, overriding the comments of their fiancée – who was also a nurse – that she 'regarded [W. L.] as a complete male, had seen her [*sic*] body and regarded the breasts as overdeveloped male breasts, and the vulva as undeveloped male organs.'³⁶² Having categorised W. L. as female and superseding W. L.'s and others' construction of them as male, W. L. was diagnosed 'as a pure psychic homosexual.'³⁶³ Similarly, Allen wrote of twenty-five-year-old E. B. that '[f]rom the point of view of her [*sic*] personality she was a complete male.'³⁶⁴ He recorded E. B.'s statement that '[s]he [*sic*] wanted to be converted into a male...in order that she could marry the girl she loved.'³⁶⁵ Yet despite Allen's acknowledgement of E. B.'s male gender identity, he dismissed the suitability of surgery due to the absence of a physical intersex condition. Lacking a parallel to the opportunities in Germany, where the potential diagnosis of 'transvestite' would enable a patient to apply for a *Transvestitenscheinen* and gender-affirming surgery – which took into consideration the gender marker that would ensure the patient's 'mental equilibrium', for Broster, physical ambiguity was the key factor in determining treatment.³⁶⁶ Consequently, E. B. 'was advised to have psychotherapy but stated that although she [*sic*] was grateful for the attempts which

³⁶¹ Foucault, *The Birth of the Clinic*, p.xix.

³⁶² Allen, 'Adrenal Dysfunction and its Relation to Sexuality', 103.

³⁶³ *Ibid.*, 104.

³⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 107.

³⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁶⁶ Zavier Nunn, 'Trans Liminality and the Nazi State', *Past & Present*, 1 (2023), 131-3.

had been made to help her she had no intention of having it...She preferred to stay as she was unless she could be changed physically into a man.³⁶⁷

Notwithstanding the privileging of the medical professional's reading of gender identity, Broster's categorisations did not universally contradict those of his patients. Mark Weston was a case in point. As David Griffiths, Sonja Erikainen and others have noted, Weston's case received much press attention due to his career as an athlete.³⁶⁸ Broster 'supported Weston's self-identification as male and attributed Weston's original female assignment to an intersex condition.'³⁶⁹ Newspaper reports on Weston's transition portrayed Weston's maleness in more ambiguous terms, with Weston himself presenting his 'deep voice and...dark skin', and the fact that he 'used to powder my face, but I never used lip-stick' as indicators of his male identity.³⁷⁰ As with some of Broster's other patients, Weston's own sense of his gender identity was presented as undecided both before and directly following his surgeries. In an interview, Weston explained:

I always imagined I was a girl...until one day I began to realise that I was abnormal and that I had no business to be competing in women's games...I found the change in my life rather difficult to begin with...Up to the time of the operation I always wore women's clothing...When I went into hospital I was placed in a men's ward and, after

³⁶⁷ Allen, 'Adrenal Dysfunction and its Relation to Sexuality', 107.

³⁶⁸ See Sonja Erikainen, 'The Story of Mark Weston: Re-centring Histories and Conceptualising Gender Variance in 1930s International Sport', *Gender & History*, 32 (2020), 304-19, and David Andrew Griffiths, 'Diagnosing Sex: Intersex surgery and 'sex change' in Britain 1930-1955', *Sexualities*, 21 (2018), 476-95.

³⁶⁹ Griffiths, 'Diagnosing Sex', 480.

³⁷⁰ Anon., "'Woman' Athlete Now A Man', *The Daily Telegraph*, 28 May 1936, 18.

seven weeks there mingling with men, I began to get my correct atmosphere. Now it seems quite natural that I should be a man.³⁷¹

This ambivalence aligned with Broster's construction of the medical profession as the ultimate authority. In press accounts, Weston's surgical procedures and time in hospital were presented as the only means by which Weston could become an undisputed man, both to others and himself. The actual surgical procedures were also not specified, thereby adding to the mystical element of transition and the surgeon's skill in performing complex operations. The 'success' of Weston's transition was established in the press through the inclusion of photographs of Weston. Sander Gilman argues that 'the "before and after" photographs are "empirical proof" of the ability to "pass," to document that the patients have now entered into a new category of visibility.'³⁷² Accordingly, the use of two photographs of Weston positioned side by side in *The Daily Mail* solidified Weston's male identity.³⁷³ Despite the poor quality of the images, the transition was made evident through changes in hairstyle and clothing, although Weston's femininity appeared muted in the 'before' photograph. The androgyny of Weston's image prior to surgery reinforced Broster's construction of the underlying presence of maleness in Weston that justified his surgeries. Further evidence of Weston's manhood was provided by accounts of his marriage to childhood friend Alberta Bray. As Erikainen asserts, 'Bray's affirmed 'normality' and the (often visual) contrast between her femininity and Weston's masculinity not only worked to validate Weston's

³⁷¹ Anon., 'Woman' Athlete Now A Man', *The Daily Telegraph*, 28 May 1936, 18.

³⁷² Sander Gilman, *Making the Body Beautiful: A Cultural History of Aesthetic Surgery* (Princeton, 1999).

³⁷³ Anon., 'Woman Athlete Becomes A Man', *The Daily Mail*, 30 May 1936, 12.

manhood, but were also taken by Broster as evidence of the surfacing of Weston's underlying 'male sexual instinct' [.]³⁷⁴

On the other hand, Weston's vacillations over a definitive gender identity according to Erikainen, 'functioned to remind that Weston's masculinity was not given, but was, indeed, claimed and depended upon a metamorphosis'.³⁷⁵ Thus, press reports established medical intervention as the catalyst for determining and restoring Weston's male physiognomy and consequently Broster's authority, recording that '[w]hen Mr. Weston began to feel doubts about his sex, he consulted doctors and underwent two operations in London. Two months ago a new birth certificate was issued from Somerset House formally recording the change in sex.'³⁷⁶ The medical discourse on the dichotomy of treatment for intersex and gender non-conformity necessitated the adoption of an intersex condition by gender non-conforming individuals who wanted to physically transition.³⁷⁷ This subterfuge was, as we shall see, at times endorsed by surgeons such as Sir Harold Gillies (1882-1960), who sought to enable transitions by fabricating an intersex condition. However, it originated a lasting dynamic that Julia Serano has highlighted between transgender individuals compelled to present themselves in accordance with the medical profession's construction of transgender if they are to obtain treatment.³⁷⁸

³⁷⁴ Sonja Erikainen, 'The Story of Mark Weston: Re-centring Histories and Conceptualising Gender Variance in 1930s International Sport', *Gender & History*, 32 (2020), 313.

³⁷⁵ Ibid.

³⁷⁶ Anon., 'Girl' Who Is Now A Husband', *The Daily Mail*, 11 August 1936, 7.

³⁷⁷ Jules Gill-Peterson, *Histories of the Transgender Child* (London, 2018), 131-2.

³⁷⁸ Julia Serano, *Whipping girl: a transsexual woman on sexism and the scapegoating of femininity* (Berkeley, 2007), 135-7.

Combined with his theories of bisexuality and his endorsement of the differing perceptions of physical and alleged mental illnesses, Broster's work made several claims that influenced contemporary discourses on gender non-conformity. Firstly, he asserted that '[a]fter a fairly wide clinical experience of human abnormality, the one fact that stands out in a maze of uncommon disorders, is that the masculinisation of the female is a far more common natural outcrop than the feminisation of the male.'³⁷⁹ Consequently, Broster presented femaleness as far more erratic and problematic than maleness. Such a finding supported the traditional construction of male superiority and strength that influenced the more celebratory treatment of cases of female-to-male cross-dressing in newspaper articles.³⁸⁰

In his work *Modern Discoveries in Medical Psychology* (1937), Allen reinforced the supposedly logical desire of women to emulate men in his discussion of Austrian psychotherapist Alfred Adler's theory of the power instinct. According to Adler, 'since man is the most powerful, women must desire to be men.'³⁸¹ As a result, in childhood 'she will attempt to become a boy', and when continued into maturity, Adler argued it developed into 'the "masculine protest." When it is strong the woman may refuse to recognise her femininity at all.'³⁸² However, while the envy of men was portrayed as reasonable, the manifestation of a male gender identity was pathologised by both Adler and Allen. Similarly, the prevalence of masculinisation did not lead Broster to advocate transitions from female to male. On the contrary, Broster stressed the importance of re-establishing the dominant sex whether male or female, which could not be properly determined 'until portions of the

³⁷⁹ Broster, *Endocrine Man*, 84-5.

³⁸⁰ Angus McLaren, *The Trials of Masculinity: Policing Sexual Boundaries, 1870-1930* (Chicago, 1997), 216.

³⁸¹ Clifford Allen, *Modern Discoveries in Medical Psychology* (London, 1937), 159.

³⁸² *Ibid.*, 159-60, 160.

gonads have been removed and subjected to microscopic examination'.³⁸³ According to Broster's colleague H. W. C. Vines:

...the ultimate sex of the normal individual must be determined by the predominance of the one sex and the necessary repression of the other into a state of latency, and clearly this repression in the normal case must be determined very early in foetal development...But should the necessary stimulus arise, it would be theoretically possible for the repressed sex to become activated again and even to gain a degree of ascendancy over the dominant sex[.]³⁸⁴

Vines here supported the consensus of Broster and Allen that an underlying 'true' sex existed that could become obscured by biological and environmental factors. This 'true' sex could only be determined and 'restored' by medical experts according to Broster and his colleagues. Broster repeatedly stressed the success of his procedures, recording that in cases of virilism in women:

...[after] operative treatment it has been observed that these patients show not only a general and immediate tendency to lose their acquired male characters, and revert to their normal feminine ones, but also to return to normal sexuality psychologically, when this has been abnormal before operation.³⁸⁵

Similarly, in a discussion of the 'rarer' case of feminism in a male patient, Broster emphasised the importance of the medical profession as alleviators of patient suffering. Broster stated that '[t]he patient, who first presented himself in 1933, was so distressed

³⁸³ L. R. Broster, 'The Clinical and Surgical Aspect of the Adrenal Cortex' in: L.R. Broster, et al., *The Adrenal Cortex and Intersexuality* (London, 1938), 19.

³⁸⁴ H.W.C. Vines, 'The Adreno-Genital Syndrome: Some Histological Observations' in: L.R. Broster, et al., *The Adrenal Cortex and Intersexuality* (London, 1938), 137-8.

³⁸⁵ Broster, 'The Clinical and Surgical Aspect of the Adrenal Cortex', 5.

about himself in 1939 that he threatened to take his life unless something was done.³⁸⁶ After undergoing a unilateral adrenalectomy, Broster quoted the patient's letter in which they stated 'I am certain there is already an alteration in my voice; hair has grown on my hands and on my arms, now an inch long.'³⁸⁷ Broster went on to observe that at a follow up appointment in January 1940 the patient looked 'much more manly and confident...The scrotal sacs were fuller...His penis had doubled in size'.³⁸⁸ Notwithstanding Broster's concluding remark that 'although improvement has been maintained further progress does not seem likely after a year, and his age is against him', he constructed the surgery – and by extension himself – as the vital factor in restoring the patient's confidence, happiness and gender.³⁸⁹

Success in Broster et al's work was predicated on the patient's ability to pass in the gender category Broster and his team assigned them. Consequently, Allen categorised patient E. B. as female and used female pronouns despite outlining E. B.'s male gender presentation and request for physical transition. In fact, Allen persistently gendered his cases as female where they had been categorised as women by medical professionals. Therefore, E. G., who prior to surgery '*dug the garden and painted the outside of the house as a hobby [and]... showed no great interest in her [sic] clothes and preferred straight, tailor-made clothes to frilly feminine frocks [Emphasis in original]*' was presented as a success when their interests changed:³⁹⁰

³⁸⁶ L. R. Broster, 'Feminism', *The British Medical Journal*, (1941), 117.

³⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 118.

³⁸⁸ *Ibid.*

³⁸⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁹⁰ Allen, 'Adrenal Dysfunction and its Relation to Sexuality', 78.

Two years after her [*sic*] operation she said that she had lost her taste for digging the garden and gardening. House painting had lost its appeal. She takes no interest in sport...Instead of these have appeared a new pleasure in shopping with a female friend and buying dress material.³⁹¹

Similarly, male pronouns were used throughout the cases designated as men, for example R. S. of whom Allen wrote '*He* [*sic*] realised at the age of six that *he* would prefer to be a girl [Emphasis added].'³⁹² The reverse patient discourse was included in Allen and Broster's writings, but it was always superseded by the medical construction of the patient's gender identity. By focusing on reaffirming the notion of a pre-existing sex, Broster and his colleagues also rejected a more fluid interpretation of gender. His discourse rigidly subscribed to a binary model of gender, deviation from which was pathologized.

Whereas patients whose gender identity did not equate with their assigned sex were presented as mentally ill, those who were mentally and/or physically androgynous were almost erased. While the gender-neutral term 'androgyny' did exist in this period, for example in Virginia Woolf's novel *Orlando* (1928), it was rarely utilized and most descriptions of fluid gender identities continued to rely on binary terms. As will be shown in later chapters, examples can be seen in Vita Sackville-West's description of herself as a 'dual personality' and the non-binary journal *Urania's* reliance on gendered language.³⁹³ It is perhaps not surprising then that Broster and Allen employed binary language within their discourse, particularly given their reading of gender as medically determined. An example of

³⁹¹ Allen, 'Adrenal Dysfunction and its Relation to Sexuality', 78.

³⁹² *Ibid.*, 114.

³⁹³ For a more detailed discussion, see chapters four and five in Section Two.

the absence of non-binary identities within Broster and Allen's work was thirty-seven-year-old M. K. M. K. was described using female pronouns throughout their case history, despite their comments that 'I was between the two (i.e. male and female). I was not fond of being with women nor with a man.'³⁹⁴ The construction of gender as binary and the medical profession as the determiners of gender diverged from Hirschfeld's concept of intermediaries. Broster et al's narrative required the eradication of ambiguity over gender identity in response to cultural concerns over the instability of gender, as evidenced in Alison Oram's work on newspaper accounts of 'changes of sex'.³⁹⁵ As a result, each patient was categorised as male or female and all forms of non-binary identity were rejected. For example, sixteen-year-old J. K.'s gender non-conformity was acknowledged by Allen in his assertion that '[h]er [*sic*] dreams did not suggest that she was either male or female. She had vague day-dreams of entering the Civil Service, and again of marriage, but was not sure which sex she would prefer to be'.³⁹⁶ However, his use of female pronouns revealed his categorisation of J. K. as female, contradicting J. K.'s opinion that postoperatively 'there was no psychic change'.³⁹⁷ Allen reaffirmed the accuracy of his assessment of J. K. in his statement that prior to surgery, '[J. K.] said after some indecision that she would prefer to be a girl'.³⁹⁸ Here, androgyny was presented as a temporary state that would be 'rectified' by the intervention of the medical profession.

³⁹⁴ Allen, 'Adrenal Dysfunction and its Relation to Sexuality', 77.

³⁹⁵ Alison Oram, *Her Husband was a Woman!: Women's gender-crossing in modern British popular culture* (London, 2007).

³⁹⁶ Allen, 'Adrenal Dysfunction and its Relation to Sexuality', 84.

³⁹⁷ *Ibid.*

³⁹⁸ *Ibid.*

Instead of adopting Ellis' and Hirschfeld's concept of the dichotomy between homosexuality and gender non-conformity, Broster et al's discourse reaffirmed their amalgamation. Broster and Allen advanced the theory that in some cases – though by no means all – the physical intersex condition could lead to homosexuality which would revert to heterosexuality following surgery without the need for psychotherapy. In a discussion of virilism, Broster stated that '[t]here have been some striking changes in sexuality, where this has been abnormal before operation...Homosexuality has been restored to normal heterosexuality...In no case has the abnormal sexuality been increased.'³⁹⁹

Broster pathologized homosexuality and constructed the 'restoration' of heterosexuality as expedient and an indication of 'successful' surgery, a belief shared by American surgeon Hugh Hampton Young (1870-1945) that at times overrode biology in determining a patient's suitability for surgery.⁴⁰⁰ Unlike Ellis, Broster et al made no attempt to distinguish between gender non-conformity and homosexuality, in several cases equating the two. This echoes Gill-Peterson's findings in the US that '[d]octors employed the medical category of homosexuality, not hermaphroditism or transvestism, to frame trans life in a way that could justify rejecting requests for support.'⁴⁰¹ In his discussion of psychoanalysis, Allen agreed with the finding that:

...the child while it is loving its mother excessively introjects its mother, and so is psychologically feminine...The child is now homosexual, since it has identified itself

³⁹⁹ Broster, 'The Clinical and Surgical Aspect of the Adrenal Cortex', 19.

⁴⁰⁰ Gill-Peterson, *Histories of the Transgender Child*, 117-8.

⁴⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 132-3.

with its mother. There is little doubt that the basis of psychical homosexuality is to be found in this identification with the mother[.]⁴⁰²

As a result, individuals with a male physicality who identified as female and were attracted to men were defined as homosexual. For Broster and Allen, the physical body ultimately determined gender and therefore sexuality. As a result, the alteration of sexuality occurred frequently in their case studies. E. G.'s operation for example, was presented as successful:

There seems little doubt that her personality has changed completely from homosexual (at least as far as tastes, hobbies and so on are concerned) into a very feminine one, completely heterosexual...This change has coincided with the physical change towards a feminine physique.⁴⁰³

Similarly, the desire to physically transition expressed by E. B. and W. L. was characterised by Allen as resulting solely from their wishing to marry women rather than their identifying as male from childhood.

Broster and his colleagues constructed a discourse in which sex was synonymous with gender and the medical profession were privileged as the legitimate judges of their patients' sex. Broster asserted:

In true hermaphroditism...it is only on the histological report of the gonads that the true condition becomes known...It is important to operate on these children...early,

⁴⁰² Allen, *Modern Discoveries in Medical Psychology*, 126.

⁴⁰³ *Ibid.*, 79.

and to condition their upbringing to their sexuality, if this is definite, if not, to the sex of choice.⁴⁰⁴

This choice denoted the *surgeon's* decision as to the patient's gender in cases of intersex children, irrespective of the patient's opinion or that of their parents. Passing was crucial to determining the 'success' of both surgery and therapy. However, transitioning was not presented as a possibility and successful passing was restricted to the gender identity established by medical experts.

Psychoanalysis and Gender Identity

Whereas Broster's work on the surgical treatment of intersex conditions presented an unambiguous narrative on the doctor's ability to determine gender and what constituted successful passing, the psychoanalytic discourse in Britain was more equivocal. While some analysts endorsed the concept of gender as a social construct, others favoured an essentialist theory of an innate gender identity. These diverging theories of gender existed within the prevailing Freudian tradition, resulting in competing opinions on who could pass as a gender and what this would entail. Despite the dominance of Freud's work, his followers challenged some of his theories and reinterpreted them. As Michal Shapira has stated:

Psychoanalysis in interwar Britain developed under unique circumstances: specialists were drawn to it from a range of professional, gender, religious, and class backgrounds...This, together with the circumstances of modern warfare and the emergence of a dialogue between heterogeneous medical and nonmedical ideas,

⁴⁰⁴ Broster, *Endocrine Man*, 98.

allowed for a flourishing of distinct ideas and intellectual traditions and conventions in Britain.⁴⁰⁵

Graham Richards has examined the distinct British form of psychoanalysis that developed in the interwar period. Richards states that the English translations of Freud's work possessed 'a distinctive, readily identifiable, technical character...[that was] far less true of Freud's original German.'⁴⁰⁶ Similarly, the 'wave of popular psychoanalytic texts' that appeared between 1918 and 1929 focused on presenting a solution to the 'radical social breakdown' in Britain caused by the War, as well as '[p]ackaging psychoanalytic sexual theory in a way that would be acceptable to an educated middle-class British readership'.⁴⁰⁷ Thus, during the 1920s, psychoanalysis was becoming a facet of popular as well as professional discourse, allowing for a greater freedom of interpretation of Freud's theories. This freedom was curtailed in the 1930s through the British Psycho-Analytical Society's efforts to dominate psychoanalysis and consequently, as Richards states, the field of psychoanalysis 'became increasingly insular and insistent on policing doctrinal developments, excluding outsiders from constructive participation.'⁴⁰⁸

The establishment of psychoanalysis as an accepted field in the medical profession in Britain was largely the work of Welsh psychoanalyst Ernest Jones (1879-1958), whom, as Ken Robinson notes 'was determined to establish himself as a respectable practitioner and

⁴⁰⁵ Michal Shapira, 'Criticizing Phallocentrism in Interwar Britain: Psychoanalyst Sylvia M. Payne's Kleinian Challenge to Freud', *Modern Intellectual History*, 19 (2022), 860.

⁴⁰⁶ Graham Richards, 'Britain on the Couch: The Popularization of Psychoanalysis in Britain 1918-1940', *Science in Context*, 13 (2000), 185.

⁴⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 189-90, 200, 191.

⁴⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 204.

psychoanalysis as a respectable treatment in its own right'.⁴⁰⁹ Jones became part of Sigmund Freud's circle after meeting him in 1908, and encouraged Freud to form the 'Committee', a group of Freud's most loyal followers. While Jones diverged from Freud's 'phallogocentric' theories, this did not undermine his loyalty and he wrote *Sigmund Freud: Life and Work*, a three-volume biography published in 1953, 1955 and 1957. Jones also established the *International Journal of Psycho-Analysis* in 1920 and was the first English-speaking psychoanalyst.⁴¹⁰

Originally established in 1913 as the London Psychoanalytical Society and following several restructures and conflicts, the renamed British Psychoanalytical Society was founded and run by Jones and opened in 1919. For much of the interwar period, Robinson states the Society achieved 'remarkable stability' and began developing formal training for members, translating key texts from German psychoanalysts, and self-promotion.⁴¹¹ Jones sought to 'create an unadulterated Freudian Society', to which end the circulated texts were predominantly the works of Sigmund Freud (1856-1939), the founder of psychoanalysis and his followers.⁴¹²

⁴⁰⁹ Ken Robinson, *A Brief History of the British Psychoanalytical Society*, [website], 2015, http://psychoanalysis.org.uk/sites/default/files/documents/pages/history_of_the_bps_by_ken_robinson_0.pdf, (accessed 19 October 2020).

⁴¹⁰ Oxford Dictionary of National Biography, *Jones, (Alfred) Ernest (1879-1958)*, [website], 2004, <https://www.oxforddnb.com/display/10.1093/ref:odnb/9780198614128.001.0001/odnb-9780198614128-e-34221?rskey=u14lGo&result=1>, (accessed 12 April 2023).

⁴¹¹ Robinson, *A Brief History of the British Psychoanalytical Society*.

⁴¹² Ibid.

Among the works on Freud, his discussions of gender have been largely marginalised or confined to feminist research. Peter Gay's *Freud for Historians* (1985) and 'Historians and the Challenge of Freud' (1956) by Richard L. Schoenwald, examine how Freud can be approached generally by historians. Freud's theories have been ably explored from a feminist perspective most notably by Jessica Benjamin in *The Bonds of Love: Psychoanalysis, Feminism and the Problem of Domination* (1988), Nancy Chodorow's work including *Feminism and Psychoanalytic Theory* (1991), Juliet Mitchell in *Psychoanalysis And Feminism: A Radical Reassessment Of Freudian Psychoanalysis* (2000). The most comprehensive study of Freud can be found in by Joel Whitebook in *Freud: An Intellectual Biography* (2020), in which he explores both the written work and personal identity of Freud through the 'pre-oedipal turn' which focuses on the period during which the relationship between mother and infant is dominant.⁴¹³ In *Freud, Race, and Gender* (1993) Sandar Gilman has considered Freud's approach to gender through the lens of his Jewish identity as it pertains to homosexuality and masculinity, and Michal Shapira has explored Sylvia Payne's challenges to Freud's theories in her paper 'Criticizing Phallogentrism in Interwar Britain: Psychoanalyst Sylvia M. Payne's Kleinian Challenge to Freud' (2022). However, none of these make explicit reference to gender non-conformity, particularly from a historical perspective. Therefore, I intend to contribute to the growing work on psychoanalysis in interwar Britain with an examination of Freud's work on gender in relation to gender non-conformity in this period.

Freud's *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality* (1905), translated into English in 1910 and again after considerable revisions in 1949, provided the basis for much of the psychoanalytic

⁴¹³ Joel Whitebook, *Freud: An Intellectual Biography* (Cambridge, 2020), 2.

discourse on gender. As Jane Flax states, 'Freud portrays masculinity and femininity as equally problematic and painfully acquired social constructs...Freud makes the equally radical claim that there is no intrinsic relationship between anatomical difference and sexual desire.'⁴¹⁴ In his first essay, *The Sexual Aberrations*, Freud drew on the works of sexologists including Hirschfeld and Ellis, and his discussion upheld the concept of bisexuality:

Science shows cases in which the sexual characteristics appear blurred and thus the sexual distinction is made difficult, especially on an anatomical basis...The importance of these abnormalities lies in the fact that they unexpectedly facilitate the understanding of the normal formation...In no normally formed male or female are traces of the apparatus of the other sex lacking[.]⁴¹⁵

Having established the universality of physical bisexuality during early development, Freud diverged from the construction of sexuality as manifested through gender presentation. Freud argued that 'it should not be forgotten that the secondary and tertiary sex characteristics very frequently manifest themselves in the other sex, thus indicating androgyny without, however, involving changes in the sexual object in the sense of an inversion.'⁴¹⁶ For Freud, 'such inversion of character can be expected with some regularity only in inverted women; in men the most perfect psychic manliness may be united with the inversion.'⁴¹⁷ Contrary to Broster and Allen, Freud's narrative on gender challenged the theory that homosexuality was identifiable by the individual's psychical and physical gender presentation. Gender non-conformity was not a clear

⁴¹⁴ Jane Flax, 'The Scandal of Desire: Psychoanalysis and Disruptions of Gender', *Contemporary Psychoanalysis*, 40 (2004), 47.

⁴¹⁵ Sigmund Freud, *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality*, trans. A. A. Brill (New York, 1920), 13.

⁴¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 14.

⁴¹⁷ *Ibid.*

indicator of homosexuality, nor was physical bisexuality always accompanied by same-sex desire. Freud did make a distinction between those whom he deemed male and female homosexuals, regarding the latter as conforming more frequently to the model of the masculine woman desiring a feminine partner. He also, according to Angus McLaren, attributed cross-dressing to an 'urge...in infancy' related to a fixation on the mother.⁴¹⁸ Nevertheless, his discourse allowed for diversity and resulted in a complex model of gender identity and homosexuality that deviated from Broster and Allen's amalgamation of gender presentation and same-sex desire. Freud presented the sexual object of masculine male homosexuals 'as not of the like sex, but [uniting] both sex characters, a compromise between the impulses striving for the man and for the woman, but firmly conditioned by the masculinity of body (the genitals).'⁴¹⁹ Thus, homosexuality could manifest as either masculinity or femininity in male-bodied men and did not necessarily correlate to a desire to be female. Even in Freud's assessment of female same-sex desire he maintained the possibility of femininity:

The conditions in the woman are more definite; here the active inverts, with special frequency, show the somatic and psychic characters of man and desire femininity in their sexual object; though even here greater variation will be found on more intimate investigation.⁴²⁰

In opposition to Broster and Allen's work which positioned the medical professional as the arbiter of knowledge and truth and thereby the stabilisers of identity, Freud undermined the

⁴¹⁸ McLaren, *The Trials of Masculinity*, 222.

⁴¹⁹ Freud, *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality*, 16.

⁴²⁰ *Ibid.*, 17.

immutability of gender. As Flax states, '[b]y inserting perversion into the heart of the normal (literally) it unsettles some of the most important categories by which modern Western subjects know themselves: gender, sexuality, rationality, civilized.'⁴²¹ Freud's reading of gendered characteristics as acquired attributes that were culturally determined offered an alternative to the prevailing essentialist discourse. Freud represented gender identity as requiring constant reinforcement through role models from childhood onwards and the elements that constitute 'femininity' and 'masculinity' were subject to constantly altering cultural constructs.⁴²² Flax has highlighted a summary of Freud's argument contained in the following footnote added to his original 1905 text in 1915:

It is essential to understand clearly that the concepts of 'masculine' and 'feminine', whose meaning seems so unambiguous to ordinary people, are among the most confused that occur in science... 'Masculine' and 'feminine' are used sometimes in the sense of activity and passivity, sometimes in a biological, and sometimes, again, in a sociological sense... The third, or sociological, meaning receives its connotation from the observation of actually existing masculine and feminine individuals. Such observation shows that in human beings pure masculinity or femininity is not to be found either in a psychological or a biological sense. *Every individual on the contrary displays a mixture of the character-traits belonging to his own and to the opposite sex;* and he shows a combination of activity and passivity whether or not these last character-traits tally with his biological ones.⁴²³ [Emphasis added]

⁴²¹ Flax, 'The Scandal of Desire', 50.

⁴²² Ibid., 57.

⁴²³ Psychoanalytic Electronic Publishing, *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality*, [website], 2019, https://www.sas.upenn.edu/~cavitch/pdf-library/Freud_SE_Three_Essays_complete.pdf.

The constructed nature of gender that Freud posited was also a facet of many of the interwar psychoanalytic discourses circulating in Britain, particularly those concerning female sexuality and identity. Despite the focus on sexuality, gender presentation formed an important part of the competing narratives. British psychoanalyst Joan Riviere (1883-1962) supported the concept of gender as a construct in her paper 'Womanliness as a Masquerade' (1929). Having undergone analysis with Jones and later Freud, Riviere was a member of the British Psychoanalytical Society and was responsible for English translations of Freud's work, some of which were published in the *International Journal of Psycho-Analysis*.⁴²⁴ It is unclear why there was such a significant gap between the 1910 English translation of Freud's *Three Essays* and Riviere's paper. The answer may lie in the concerns during the early years following the First World War with translating and circulating Freud's work and other psychoanalytic texts in which Riviere was heavily involved.⁴²⁵ Riviere's main argument was 'that women who wish for masculinity may put on a mask of womanliness to avert anxiety and the retribution feared from men.'⁴²⁶ She cited a case study to elucidate her theory of an American woman who combined a successful professional life with 'proficiency as a housewife.'⁴²⁷ Despite her abilities, the individual in question suffered from insecurities and required reassurance from men whom Riviere described as 'father-figures'. Riviere explained the motivation for this behaviour that was 'uncovered' through analysis, 'it was an unconscious attempt to ward off the anxiety which would ensue on account of the reprisals

⁴²⁴ Oxford Dictionary of National Biography, *Riviere [née Verrall], Joan Hodgson (1883-1962)*, [website], 2004, <https://www.oxforddnb.com/display/10.1093/ref:odnb/9780198614128.001.0001/odnb-9780198614128-e-51058?rskey=2jvg4f&result=1>.

⁴²⁵ Robinson, *A Brief History of the British Psychoanalytical Society*.

⁴²⁶ Joan Riviere, 'Womanliness as a Masquerade' (1929), in: Grigg, Russell, Dominique Hecq, and Craig Smith (eds). *Female Sexuality: The Early Psychoanalytic Controversies* (London, 1999), 173.

⁴²⁷ *Ibid.*, 174.

she anticipated from the father-figures after her intellectual performance.⁴²⁸ By asking for reassurance and flirting with the father-figures, the patient protected herself from suspicions of masculinity. As Riviere stated, '[w]omanliness therefore could be assumed and worn as a mask, both to hide the possession of masculinity and to avert the reprisals expected if she was found to possess it'.⁴²⁹ Thus, femininity became a defence mechanism for women pursuing stereotypically male careers. Overt feminine behaviour was also employed in any situation where an individual could be conceived as traversing the cultural construct of womanliness:

In every-day life one may observe the mask of femininity taking curious forms. One capable housewife of my acquaintance is a woman of great ability, and can herself attend to typically masculine matters. But when, e.g. any builder or upholsterer is called in, she has a compulsion to hide all her technical knowledge from him and show deference to the workman, making her suggestions in an innocent and artless manner, as if they were 'lucky guesses'.⁴³⁰

Notwithstanding Riviere's reading of femininity as a defence, she took her theory further and contended that all femaleness was performative. She wrote, '[t]he reader may now ask how I define womanliness or where I draw the line between genuine womanliness and the 'masquerade'. My suggestion is not, however, that there is any such difference; whether radical or superficial, they are the same thing.⁴³¹ Riviere's reading of gender as a construct

⁴²⁸ Riviere, 'Womanliness as a Masquerade', 175.

⁴²⁹ *Ibid.*, 176.

⁴³⁰ *Ibid.*, 177.

⁴³¹ *Ibid.*, 176.

potentially implied an alternative to the biological essentialism expressed by Broster. By positing that womanliness was a performance, Riviere suggested that gender attributes could be acquired and passing did not necessarily require a biological imperative. Nevertheless, this was not a conclusion Riviere herself drew and her discourse focused on women who identified as women and exaggerated their femininity. Where Riviere did discuss an individual she identified as male who presented as female, their assumption of feminine attire and hairstyle was categorised as 'fetishes'.⁴³² Gender might be culturally constructed for Riviere, but it was also definitively assigned.

British psychoanalyst Sylvia M. Payne (1880-1976) who went on to become president of the British Psychoanalytical Society in 1944, built on the work of Austrian-British psychoanalyst Melanie Klein (1882-1960) in her paper 'A Conception of Femininity' (1935).⁴³³ Although primarily focused on establishing the development of femininity in opposition to Freud's views, Payne did discuss the bisexuality present in all individuals and women's 'ability to sublimate trends depending on characteristics of the opposite sex due to bisexuality, without inhibiting or destroying her real sex.'⁴³⁴ The reverse was also true of men according to Payne. All individuals thus had attributes of another gender within themselves that needed to be redirected in order to reach male or female maturity. These bisexual attributes were different to a masculinity complex in which a female-assigned individual adopted masculine behaviours and traits. Payne argued:

⁴³² Riviere, 'Womanliness as a Masquerade', 178.

⁴³³ Shapira, 'Criticizing Phallogentrism in Interwar Britain', 859-61.

⁴³⁴ Sylvia M. Payne, 'A Conception of Femininity', *British Journal of Medical Psychology*, 15 (1935), 20.

...feminine drives are as important as masculine...owing to the fact that our present civilization regards masculine qualities as more valuable than feminine, it stands to reason that the influence of the environment favours the successful repression of feminine tendencies in man, and fosters the growth of masculine aspirations in woman.⁴³⁵

While Payne was not concerned here with gender non-conformity, her argument that masculine traits in women were more accepted by society reflects the experiences of Ellis' Eonist case R.L. who felt that 'masculine women are recognised by the world as a separate type and their personalities (or peculiarities) are allowed expression'.⁴³⁶ Equally, although her support for the theory of bisexuality allowed for a more fluid concept of gender, the notion that this must be sublimated on reaching adulthood reinforced the imperative of a clearly defined gender within the binary model.

Defining the nature of gender also occupied Ernest Jones' discourse contained in his paper 'Early Female Sexuality' (1935). While Jones published prolifically on other topics prior to 1935, his preoccupation with establishing the legitimacy of psychoanalysis and the British Psychoanalytical Society may explain the delay in his commentary on female sexuality.⁴³⁷ In 'Early Female Sexuality', Jones asserted that '[t]he ultimate question is whether a woman is born or made.'⁴³⁸ While not explicit in defining gender non-conformity, Jones' interpretation of penis envy implied an innate gender identity that would manifest despite a rejection of

⁴³⁵ Payne, 'A Conception of Femininity', 19.

⁴³⁶ Havelock Ellis, *Studies in the Psychology of Sex. Volume VII: Eonism and Other Supplementary Studies* (Philadelphia, 1928), 86-7.

⁴³⁷ Robinson, *A Brief History of the British Psychoanalytical Society*.

⁴³⁸ Ernest Jones, 'Early Female Sexuality' (1935), in: Grigg, Russell, Dominique Hecq, and Craig Smith (eds). *Female Sexuality: The Early Psychoanalytic Controversies* (London, 1999), 285.

femininity. Jones argued 'the fact that so many girls envy boys need not blind us to her feminine attributes, her coquetry, etc., and the important fact of the existence of dolls.'⁴³⁹ Here, Jones echoed Broster and Allen in drawing on cultural constructions of female traits and behaviours to define the female psychical identity. Jones built on the work of German psychoanalyst Karen Horney (1885-1952), whose paper 'The Flight from Womanhood: The Masculinity-Complex in Women, as Viewed by Men and Women' (1925) Jones published in the *International Journal of Psychoanalysis*.⁴⁴⁰ Jones adhered to Horney's observation in 'The Denial of the Vagina: a Contribution to the Problem of the Genital Anxieties Specific to Women' (1933), that contrary to Freud's view that puberty was the point at which male and female 'characters' became distinct, 'little girls between their second and fifth years exhibit specifically feminine traits...they often behave with a certain spontaneous feminine coquetry towards men, or display characteristic traits of maternal solicitude.'⁴⁴¹ Simultaneously however, Horney explained the frequency of masculinity in female-assigned children was a defence mechanism against the Oedipal complex that resulted in sexual desire for their father. As a result, Horney argued 'the desire to be a man [was]...clung to tenaciously, the reason being the desire to avoid the realization of libidinal wishes and phantasies in connection with the father.'⁴⁴² Horney also suggested the subordinate role of women in society could account for the prevalence of the masculinity complex: '[o]wing to the hitherto purely masculine character of our civilization it has been much harder for women to achieve

⁴³⁹ Jones, 'Early Female Sexuality', 281.

⁴⁴⁰ Russell Grigg, Dominique Hecq, and Craig Smith (eds). *Female Sexuality: The Early Psychoanalytic Controversies* (London, 2015), 2-3.

⁴⁴¹ Karen Horney, 'The Denial of the Vagina: a Contribution to the Problem of the Genital Anxieties Specific to Women' (1933), in: Grigg, Russell, Dominique Hecq, and Craig Smith (eds). *Female Sexuality: The Early Psychoanalytic Controversies* (London, 1999), 256.

⁴⁴² Karen Horney, 'The Flight from Womanhood: The Masculinity-Complex in Women, as Viewed by Men and Women' (1925), in: Grigg, Russell, Dominique Hecq, and Craig Smith (eds). *Female Sexuality: The Early Psychoanalytic Controversies* (London, 1999), 117.

any sublimation which should really satisfy their nature, for all the ordinary professions have been filled by men.'⁴⁴³

German psychoanalyst Karl Abraham (1877-1925) did not support socio-economic explanations for the masculinity complex. A member of Freud's 'Committee' after their meeting in 1907, Abraham established the Berlin Psychoanalytic Society in 1910 and his works were among those translated and circulated in England by Jones, Riviere and others.⁴⁴⁴ While Abraham concurred that 'a great number of women have repressed the wish to be male', he observed that women's subordination as an explanation was 'of limited value, and [is] the result of rationalisation – a process which veils the motives lying deeper.'⁴⁴⁵ Instead, Abraham constructed female masculinity as a result of the castration complex and the construction of the vagina as the remaining 'wound'. It was in Abraham's discussion of female homosexuality – one consequence of the castration complex – where he most fully engaged with the debates over the nature of gender. In 'Manifestations of the Female Castration Complex' (1922), Abraham argued that homosexual women 'tend to adopt the male role in erotic relations with other women...They love to exhibit their masculinity in dress, in the way of doing their hair, and in their general behaviour.'⁴⁴⁶ On the other hand, there were cases of unconscious homosexuality where:

...the repressed wish to be male [was] found in a sublimated form, i.e. masculine interests of an intellectual and professional character and other kinds [we]re preferred

⁴⁴³ Horney, 'The Flight from Womanhood', 119.

⁴⁴⁴ Amy Tikkanen, "Karl Abraham" *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, [website], 2023, <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Karl-Abraham>.

⁴⁴⁵ Karl Abraham, 'Manifestations of the Female Castration Complex' (1922), in: Grigg, Russell, Dominique Hecq, and Craig Smith (eds). *Female Sexuality: The Early Psychoanalytic Controversies* (London, 1999), 52.

⁴⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 58.

and accentuated...Femininity, however, [was] not consciously denied; they usually proclaim that these interests are just as much feminine as masculine ones.⁴⁴⁷

Here, Abraham suggested that gender non-conforming individuals could redefine gender traits in order to pass as their assigned sex while still maintaining interests that were culturally constructed as male. Abraham both upheld these gendered readings of interests and traits while also implying that gender was an acquired attribute. In a discussion of one case study, Abraham stated that the patient 'was an only child. Her parents had ardently desired a son and had in consequence cultivated the narcissism and particularly the masculinity wishes of their daughter.'⁴⁴⁸ Notwithstanding the parents' wish for a son, there was no attempt either by them or Abraham to support a male gender identity. Indeed, despite the patient exhibiting 'the most extreme resistance against assuming the feminine role', this was the expected outcome of psychoanalysis.⁴⁴⁹ Passing was only permissible in the individual's assigned gender; they could not transition.

Regardless of the motivations for gender non-conformity, the psychoanalytic discourses discussed here all presented the psychoanalyst as the determiner of the patient's gender identity, which would either be rediscovered or relearned by the individual in order for them to pass as their assigned gender. As with sexological discourse, the narrative was influenced by the individuals selected to support the analyst's theories. The patient was categorised as suffering from a form of neurosis, hence their seeking psychoanalysis and the reading of

⁴⁴⁷ Abraham, 'Manifestations of the Female Castration Complex', 58.

⁴⁴⁸ Ibid., 60.

⁴⁴⁹ Ibid.

their gender presentation in terms of symptoms and treatment. As with Allen and Broster, gender non-conformity was pathologized and successful passing could only occur within an individual's assigned gender.

Sir Harold Gillies and the Evolution of Plastic Surgery

The casualties resulting from World War I and World War II brought the concept of passing to the forefront of medical discourse and encompassed many aspects of identity aside from gender. While psychoanalysis became dominated by cases of shellshock that led to re-evaluations of manliness, advances in plastic surgery thrived in the atmosphere of injury during warfare. Previously maligned as 'quackery', the work of New Zealander Sir Harold Gillies elevated plastic surgery to a respected and essential discipline.⁴⁵⁰ Having studied medicine at Cambridge and trained at St Bartholomew's Hospital, Gillies worked as an army surgeon during World War I, becoming head surgeon in 1916 at the newly opened Cambridge Hospital at Aldershot.⁴⁵¹ It was here that Gillies carried out ground-breaking facial surgeries on soldiers disfigured in combat. The experimental nature of what Gillies termed 'aesthetic reconstructive surgery', the impact on the patient's life and the ethos Gillies developed with regards to patient care all influenced his later treatment of gender non-conforming individuals.⁴⁵² Indeed, the treatment of disfigured soldiers and the cultural attitudes to facial injuries shared many parallels with later constructions of gender-affirming surgery. Furthermore, Gillies' writings on reconstructive surgery echoed the dialogue

⁴⁵⁰ Gilman, *Making the Body Beautiful*, 14.

⁴⁵¹ Brian Morgan, 'Saints and Sinners: Sir Harold Gillies', *The Royal College of Surgeons of England Bulletin*, (2013), 204. Gilman, *Making the Body Beautiful*, 159.

⁴⁵² *Ibid.*, 13.

between patient and doctor apparent in Ellis' work. True, the surgeon was still characterised as a heroic restorer of the patient's humanity, but the concerns of the patient were taken into consideration and influenced the surgeon's priorities in developing procedures. This collaborative style of discourse was also a precursor to Gillies' treatment of Britain's first trans man Michael Dillon, whose opinions on his treatment, as will be seen in a later chapter were received with respect by Gillies. Finally, the public erasure of facial reconstruction – despite its prevalence – echoed the silencing of gender non-conformity and its subsummation into the discourse of intersex and mental illness.

The rhetoric surrounding wartime injury created a hierarchy of indicators of manhood, as demonstrated in Joanna Bourke's work on wartime pensions.⁴⁵³ Driven by the need to boost morale and recruitment, First-World-War propaganda constructed images of the heroic soldier as the epitome of manhood. Where injuries were depicted, soldiers who had lost limbs were favoured as Suzannah Biernoff has revealed, 'their prosthetic limbs objects of fascination and even beauty.'⁴⁵⁴ Coupled with the visual appeal Biernoff describes, these amputees demonstrated their restored utility, a crucial factor in cultural constructions of maleness. In his work on rehabilitation of soldiers, R. T. McKensie stressed the importance of occupational therapy as part of the soldiers' recovery:

The purpose of occupational therapy is threefold:...Physical...Vocational: To give him [the patient] an education directed to make him able to keep a set of books, or take a

⁴⁵³ Suzannah Biernoff, 'The Rhetoric of Disfigurement in First World War Britain', *Social History of Medicine*, 24 (2011), 671.

⁴⁵⁴ Suzannah Biernoff, 'Flesh Poems: Henry Tonks and the Art of Surgery', *Visual Culture in Britain*, 11 (2010), 28.

position in business where the handicap of a missing leg or an impaired arm will not be felt...Moral, or self-disciplinary: To give courage to begin life over again, sometimes in a new trade or business. To give him that self-respect that makes him want to stand on his own feet[.]⁴⁵⁵

The role of breadwinner was here characterised as integral to civilian manhood and was made possible by prosthesis. Blindness was similarly presented as a surmountable obstacle and soldiers who had lost their sight were repeatedly praised for their bravery and positivity. Surgeon F. H. Albee for example wrote, 'I have never seen happier men than the blind in these workshops...The patients sang, whistled, and chatted as they soled shoes, made baskets, wove rugs, did cabinet work, made hammocks, and wove shipping bags.'⁴⁵⁶ Orderly Ward Muir also described his experience that 'the blind men themselves are far from melancholy. One of the rowdiest characters we ever had in the hospital was totally blind. The blind men's wards are notoriously amongst the least sedate.'⁴⁵⁷

On the other hand, facial injuries remained hidden from the public gaze. Marguerite Helmers has argued that although '[i]n World War I, the number of wounds to the face and head far outnumbered those of any previous war due to the nature of trench warfare, in which the body was covered by the walls of the trench, but the head was exposed', this was not reflected in the contemporary visual culture.⁴⁵⁸ Biernoff has offered an explanation for this erasure based on the dehumanising effect of disfigurement. She argues '[o]ur faces are

⁴⁵⁵ R. T. McKensie, *Reclaiming the Maimed: A Handbook of Physical Therapy* (New York, 1918), 106-7.

⁴⁵⁶ F. H. Albee, *A Surgeon's Fight to Rebuild Men: An Autobiography* (London, 1950), 86.

⁴⁵⁷ Ward Muir, *Observations of an Orderly: Some Glimpses of Life and Work in an English War Hospital* (London, 1917), 81.

⁴⁵⁸ Marguerite Helmers, 'Iconic images of wounded soldiers by Henry Tonks', *Journal of War and Culture Studies*, 3 (2010), 182.

privileged signifiers of gender, age, social and familial identity, ethnicity, emotion and much more besides.⁴⁵⁹ Consequently, soldiers whose faces were obliterated by shrapnel lost not only their humanity but their maleness and thus did not fit the image of heroic masculinity the soldier was intended to portray. As Jane Tynan, Biernoff and Helmers have revealed, contemporary texts categorised facial injuries as the most disturbing and difficult to live with. McKensie described victims of facial injury as ‘a permanent object of repulsion to others, and a grievous burden to himself’.⁴⁶⁰ Albee equally bemoaned the fate of the facially disfigured:

The psychological effect on a man who must go through life, an object of horror to himself as well as to others, is beyond description...It is a fairly common experience for the maladjusted person to feel like a stranger to his world. It must be unmitigated hell to feel like a stranger to yourself.⁴⁶¹

Albee’s comments mirror the dysphoria felt by some gender non-conforming individuals towards their bodies. Ellis’ case history of R. L. for instance was replete with declarations of despair at not being able to physically transition to a female body, with R. L. stating ‘I felt, and still feel, that my real self has had to be subjected to my physical self, my body.’⁴⁶² In Albee’s text there was a clear acknowledgement of the psychological agony at being forced to live in an unrecognisable physicality. It was a loss that was almost ineffable. Indeed, if facial injuries were confined to medical texts, genital injuries were completely expunged both from contemporary medical sources and historiography. As a result, the development of genital reconstructive surgeries is hidden from the historian in this period. On the other

⁴⁵⁹ Biernoff, ‘The Rhetoric of Disfigurement’, 669-70.

⁴⁶⁰ McKensie, *Reclaiming the Maimed*, 117.

⁴⁶¹ Albee, *A Surgeon’s Fight to Rebuild Men*, 110.

⁴⁶² Ellis, *Eonism*, 83.

hand, the parallels between the emphasis placed on facial reconstruction and gender-affirming surgery as primary indicators of gender and the distress caused by their absence allows comparisons to be drawn.⁴⁶³ As will be seen, whereas restoration of an identifiably male face was vital to injured soldiers, the construction of male genitalia was crucial for Michael Dillon's own sense of maleness, despite his acceptance by others as male without them. Thus, the surgeon's role became crucial in restoring these indicators of manhood.

Gillies' work on facial reconstruction during World War I set a precedent that would later benefit his gender non-conforming patients in terms of treatment and patient care. Biernoff has emphasised Gillies' concern for aesthetics when developing facial surgeries.⁴⁶⁴ Gillies sought to restore recognisable features to the patient's face as well as function, giving both considerations almost equal weight. Gillies acknowledged the psychological impact on the patient of facial disfigurement and, as Biernoff states, he was determined to develop procedures that would not only heal the patient's wounds but re-establish their human visage.

In *Plastic Surgery of the Face* (1920), Gillies repeatedly reiterated the importance of aesthetics, asserting that '[t]he production of an invisible scar is a question constantly exercising the mind of the plastic surgeon.'⁴⁶⁵ The detailed accounts of various

⁴⁶³ This is not to argue that genitalia or facial features *are* the primary indicators of gender, nor that all individuals included under the umbrella term 'transgender' would view genitalia in this way. I am referring here to medical constructions of gender and the very specific experience of Michael Dillon and some of Ellis' Eonist cases.

⁴⁶⁴ Biernoff, 'Flesh Poems', 27.

⁴⁶⁵ H. D. Gillies, *Plastic Surgery of the Face* (London, 1920).

reconstructive procedures included careful consideration of the patient's concerns and reinstating form and function to their satisfaction. A key example was Gillies' discussion of upper lip injuries. Gillies stated with regards to soldiers who had suffered gunshot wounds:

...the subjects being all men, it is a great advantage that your flap should contain hair-bearing follicles: this is more especially the case since it is quite unusual to find an upper lip that is totally destroyed and does not present portions bearing moustache.⁴⁶⁶

Gillies went on to discuss the benefits and limitations of various procedures to reconstruct the upper lip, in which aesthetic considerations were prominent. Gillies listed '[n]o hair', '[s]cars noticeable' and '[s]hortness of mucous membrane lining, apt to be cut too short, and therefore contracts the mouth and puckers the lower lip' among the drawbacks.⁴⁶⁷

Meanwhile, '[p]rovides moustache, and...no secondary scars on face' were recorded as advantages.⁴⁶⁸ Here, Gillies demonstrated an awareness of the significance of appearance if a person was to lead a functional but also fulfilling life in society. Gillies' aim in devising new surgical techniques was not to simply heal problematic wounds, enabling the patient to survive albeit with severe scarring. Such a solution was provided by the production of prosthetic face masks designed to emulate the patient's damaged features. McKensie praised their efficacy and asserted:

...[b]y means of these masks, horribly disfigured men have been able to accept and hold...any position involving appearance among their fellows, who are quite

⁴⁶⁶ Gillies, *Plastic Surgery of the Face*, 77.

⁴⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 78.

⁴⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 79.

unconscious of the grisly gap present beneath this fair exterior...Self-respect returns, depression departs, and physical health follows the upward trend of their spirits.⁴⁶⁹

Gillies however, was determined to allow his patients to 'pass' as far as possible within the culturally determined acceptable standards of human appearance without resorting to masks. The language of passing resonates strongly with accounts of gender non-conforming individuals wishing to physically transition. T. S., one of Ellis' Eonist cases expressed elation at passing as female in front of strangers, stating '[t]o be called 'Ma'am' delighted me. I do not think I was ever suspected.'⁴⁷⁰ Comparably, Roberta Cowell, Britain's first trans woman to undergo gender-affirming surgery recalled her first post-operative experience of passing:

My heart seemed to stop completely. Then one man said to the other, in a low but distinct voice, "Definitely, yes." I realised, with a sudden glow of pleasure, that my appearance was acceptable.⁴⁷¹

Sander Gilman has discussed the meaning of 'passing' and its relation to plastic surgery:

The model of "passing" is the most fruitful to use in examining the history and efficacy of aesthetic surgery...those wanting to "pass" had to believe that changing the exterior also changed the inner reality or at least that society would accept the external appearance as a true indication of the internal reality...Thus "passing" remains central to all of the endeavours of the surgeon as well as to the patient...You will look like everyone else, or at least your fantasy of how everyone else looks.⁴⁷²

⁴⁶⁹ McKensie, *Reclaiming the Maimed*, 123.

⁴⁷⁰ Ellis, *Eonism*, 61.

⁴⁷¹ Roberta Cowell, *Roberta Cowell's Story* (New York, 1954), 55.

⁴⁷² Gilman, *Making the Body Beautiful*, 22-42.

Gilman presents passing as the goal of all aesthetic surgery, including gender-affirming surgery, in which '[s]ilence marks the individual's ability to "pass," and "passing" is the means to validate the new body. "Happiness" results only when there is a silent acceptance of a new identity.'⁴⁷³ Thus, Gillies' intention to enable his facially disfigured patients to pass as human directly correlates with his later focus on facilitating gender non-conforming patients to present as their gender identity without question. Gilman though, denies the concept of passing in relation to facial disfigurement during World War I. Gilman argues '[t]he question of "passing" is not raised with the faces reconstructed by the surgeons following the battles of World War I. There is never any doubt that the only cadre into which they could "silently" pass would be that of the war-wounded.'⁴⁷⁴ Although Gilman's point is justifiable to an extent in that images of soldiers who had undergone facial reconstruction do not fully resemble an uninjured physiognomy, Gilman's belief in the failure of facial reconstruction to restore wounded soldiers does not indicate that passing was not a concern of the surgeon. Soldiers sustaining facial injuries may have been unable to 'pass' physically as the men they were prior to warfare, but it was clearly Gillies' intention to help restore their appearance as far as possible and assist them in at least passing as less severely injured.

A preoccupation with long-term patient rehabilitation was a further development that influenced Gillies' later ethos regarding patient care. While not explicitly referred to in

⁴⁷³ Gilman, *Making the Body Beautiful*, 288.

⁴⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 168.

Plastic Surgery of the Face, the environment Gillies established at his hospital Rooksdown House was clearly influenced by the First World War methods of holistically rehabilitating patients beyond the treatment of their wounds. As previously stated, McKensie listed the benefits of providing vocational training and exercise to patients to prevent ‘hospital habit’, where ‘[m]en who came to them keen, well-disciplined, and alert, too often lapsed in an atmosphere of indulgence and hero worship into disorderly loafers’.⁴⁷⁵ Similarly, Muir wrote:

We rather pride ourselves, at the 3rd London, on the fame of our hospital not merely as a place in which the wounded get well, but as a place in which they also “have a good time.” The two things, truth to tell, are interlinked – a truism which might seem to need no labouring, were it not for the evidence brought from more rigid and red-tape-ridden establishments.⁴⁷⁶

Muir’s account strongly resembles Michael Dillon’s description of Rooksdown where patients ‘felt that Rooksdown was more of a country club than anything else.’⁴⁷⁷ Dillon’s opinion that ‘the making of life normal again for those who were mutilated, whether by man or by Nature, was all-important [to Gillies]’ again illustrates the lasting impact of wartime medical advancements.⁴⁷⁸ Indeed, Gillies was unequivocal in his intention of applying his newly cultivated techniques to civilian cases following the War. Gillies devoted an entire chapter to the subject in *Plastic Surgery of the Face*, stating ‘[t]he application of the methods described and discussed in the previous pages will, in the author’s opinion, have considerable effect upon the possibilities of plastic surgery amongst the civil community.’⁴⁷⁹ Among the

⁴⁷⁵ McKensie, *Reclaiming the Maimed*, 105.

⁴⁷⁶ Muir, *Observations of an Orderly*, 159.

⁴⁷⁷ Michael Dillon/Lobzang Jivaka, *Out of the Ordinary: A Life of Gender and Spiritual Transitions* (New York, 2017), 112.

⁴⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

⁴⁷⁹ Gillies, *Plastic Surgery of the Face*, 391.

conditions that would benefit from the advancement and legitimisation of plastic surgery, Gillies mentions hypospadias, the diagnosis he would later apply to Dillon and Cowell to justify their surgeries. Thus, while Gillies did not expressly seek to assist gender non-conforming individuals with his procedures, he did intend his work to have a sustained impact on reconstructive surgery and the successful passing of his patients which benefitted Dillon and Cowell.

Conclusion

Mid-twentieth-century British conceptions of gender non-conformity gradually moved out of the quasi-medical sphere of sexology and became dominated by medical practitioners. Different medical disciplines became focused on the concept of passing successfully as one's 'true' gender which would be determined by a medical professional. It was also during this period that an intersex condition became established as the only route to physical transition. Gender non-conforming individuals were thus subject to the 'medical gaze' when seeking physical transition, which categorised the patient based on the doctor's preconceptions derived from medical texts. Broster et al advocated the medical profession's supremacy in matters of gender identity, presenting surgical and hormonal treatment as being designed to restore the 'true' sex of the patient. As societal concerns over the instability of sex and gender were exacerbated by women's suffrage, the wartime assumption of traditionally male jobs by women and the weakening of the strong, stoic soldier image through shellshock cases, Broster's reading of sex as inextricably linked to biological sex and

determinable by a physician provided a reassuring narrative.⁴⁸⁰ Gender non-conforming patients with unambiguous physical sex were categorised as mentally ill and essentially barred from surgical transition. This discourse created a precursor to the gatekeeper role assumed by doctors from the genesis of gender-affirming surgery as to who could access treatment.

Psychoanalytic discourse offered various constructions of gender as either a cultural construct or an innate facet of identity. Despite accounting for gender non-conformity as a product of the original biological bisexuality of the foetal stage, any deviation from the patient's assigned gender was categorised as psychosis. Therapy was intended to either re-establish or re-learn the patient's assigned gender that was determined by their biological sex. Recovery was therefore dependent on successful behavioural passing in this gender. Finally, physical passing became a concern in this period following the level of casualties resulting from warfare. Gillies, the pioneering plastic surgeon who would perform the first gender-affirming surgeries in Britain, honed his skills on disfigured soldiers and adapted his techniques – including the tube pedicle skin graft – to accommodate genital reconstruction. However, at this stage in his career, Gillies was focused on enabling patients to pass as uninjured, able men as opposed to transitioning. Consequently, for gender non-conforming individuals seeking physical transition there was no direct path towards treatment. Passing in their self-identified gender required physical ambiguity to receive medical sanction. This

⁴⁸⁰ See Susan Kingsley Kent, 'The Politics of Sexual Difference: World War I and the Demise of British Feminism', *Journal of British Studies*, 27 (1988), 232-53 and Michael Roper, 'Between Manliness and Masculinity: The "War Generation" and the Psychology of Fear in Britain, 1914–1950', *Journal of British Studies*, 44 (2005), 343-62.

construction of physical sex and gender as interconnected impacted the earliest cases of gender-affirming surgery, requiring them to pass – with medical cooperation – as intersex.

Chapter 3: Fitting the Body to the Mind: Michael Dillon, Roberta Cowell and the birth of gender-affirming surgery in Britain

In 1939 a desperate but hopeful patient entered the office of Dr George Foss (1909-1985). Foss inherited his father's practice in St George, Bristol which he ran with a colleague Dr Culark and specialised in endocrinology.⁴⁸¹ This was not the patient's first visit to this 'expert on sex problems' and having dutifully followed Foss's instructions to consult a psychiatrist, the patient had every reason to believe that this appointment would mark the beginning of the treatment that would finally help him live as the gender he identified with.⁴⁸² Foss had originally agreed to consensually test the effects of testosterone on the patient, having written papers on using the hormone in the treatment of female patients.⁴⁸³ Much to the patient's disappointment however, Foss's previous assurances of assistance were replaced with excuses and apologies that his help must be withdrawn and their plans curtailed as he was to serve in the Navy at the start of the Second World War. Foss ended their association by throwing a packet of pills at the patient, saying '[s]ee what they can do'.⁴⁸⁴ This seemingly minor, placatory gesture set in motion a transition that would culminate in the first female-to-male gender-affirming surgery for which evidence survives performed in Britain on the patient in question, Laurence Michael Dillon (1915-1962).⁴⁸⁵

⁴⁸¹ A.T.M.R., 'Obituary', *Bristol Medico-Chirurgical Journal* (1985), 82.

⁴⁸² Michael Dillon/Lobzang Jivaka, *Out of the Ordinary: A Life of Gender and Spiritual Transitions* (New York, 2017), 90.

⁴⁸³ It has not been possible to identify these papers, although Foss' obituary states he wrote fifty-one papers on endocrinology, his final paper co-authored with Mr Michael Hull concerned AID.

⁴⁸⁴ Dillon/Jivaka, *Out of the Ordinary*, 90.

⁴⁸⁵ It is possible as Pagan Kennedy has suggested that there are earlier international examples of trans men receiving gender-affirming surgery, but my research has not uncovered any who underwent such a complete surgical transition before Dillon.

Dillon's case marks the advent of the use of surgical procedures and hormone treatments – originally designed for intersex individuals and those suffering genital injuries – to alter the physical sex of patients whose biology did not reflect their gender identity. Adopting a medically-required intersex diagnosis, Dillon underwent thirteen gender-affirming surgeries between 1946 and 1949. These operations, including a phalloplasty, were carried out by Dillon's surgeon, Sir Harold Gillies (assisted by American surgeon Ralph Millard) and built on his experience working with soldiers mutilated during warfare and his growing expertise as Britain's sole plastic surgeon. Gillies also went on to perform male-to-female gender-affirming surgery on Roberta Cowell (1918-2011) in 1951, having been recommended to Cowell by Dillon when they met the year before.⁴⁸⁶

This chapter will provide a British counterpart to Joanne Meyerowitz's excellent study of early gender-affirming surgeries in the United States through the atypical cases of Dillon and Cowell. It will also build on Alison Oram's work by examining the ways in which Dillon and Cowell presented their gender identities, the normative cultural discourses they adopted and rejected in this presentation, and the role that surgery and hormonal treatments played. I argue that just as the prevailing discourses sought to promote an essentialist concept of gender while simultaneously highlighting cases of gender transgression, gender non-conforming individuals both destabilised and reaffirmed gender norms.⁴⁸⁷ The advent of women's suffrage, women's contributions during the World Wars, male unemployment and 'shell shock' all served to disrupt traditional understandings of femininity and

⁴⁸⁶ Pagan Kennedy, *The First Man-Made Man: The Story of Two Sex Changes, One Love Affair, and a Twentieth-Century Medical Revolution* (New York, 2007), 88-9.

⁴⁸⁷ Alison Oram, *Her Husband was a Woman!: Women's gender-crossing in modern British popular culture* (London, 2007), 114-17.

masculinity and led to the creation of a plethora of competing discourses on gender. While these more expansive constructions of gender may indicate greater freedom for men and women to express their identities, paradoxically, transgender individuals in this period appear to have confined themselves to very narrow, stereotypical discourses on masculinity and femininity.⁴⁸⁸

This chapter will explore the different factors that constituted the construction of male and female in medical, psychological and cultural discourses, and how far these interconnected, co-existent discourses allowed Dillon and Cowell to successfully live as man and woman respectively. In doing so, I will be considering the differing experiences of trans men and trans women, the impact of Dillon's dual role as doctor and patient, and the significance of surgery in determining gender. Ultimately, I will argue that mid-twentieth-century understandings of male and female were composed of several distinct elements that were physical, psychological and cultural, and that achievement of each was required if a gender non-conforming individual was to gain acceptance as man or woman from others.

Terminology: Michael Dillon and Roberta Cowell

Dillon and Cowell represent two examples of the 'wrong embodiment' narrative that is most prevalent within transgender histories.⁴⁸⁹ In brief, this describes an individual whose gender identity does not equate to their assigned sex at birth and undergoes surgery to enable a

⁴⁸⁸ Susan Kingsley Kent, 'The Politics of Sexual Difference: World War I and the Demise of British Feminism', *Journal of British Studies*, 27 (1988), 239. Angus McLaren, *The Trials of Masculinity: Policing Sexual Boundaries, 1870-1930* (Chicago, 1997), 2-3, 229-30.

⁴⁸⁹ Kit Heyam, *Before We Were Trans: A New History of Gender* (London, 2022), 11.

physical transition. As will be discussed in greater detail, Dillon obtained his first dose of testosterone in 1939, underwent a mastectomy in 1942, reregistered as male in 1944 and underwent gender-affirming surgeries from 1946-1949. Having qualified as a doctor in 1951 from Trinity College, Dublin, Dillon worked in a Dublin hospital before serving as a naval surgeon until 1958, when his assigned sex at birth was discovered and publicised in the press. As a result, Dillon abandoned his medical career and sought ordination as a Buddhist monk in India, taking the name Lobzang Jivaka, where he remained until his death in 1962.⁴⁹⁰

Cowell was a racing driver and fighter pilot during World War II. Having married Diana Carpenter in 1941 with whom Cowell had two children, the marriage ended in 1948 and by 1950 Cowell had begun taking oestrogen but still presented as male. Cowell met Dillon in 1950, after reading Dillon's book *Self: A Study in Ethics and Endocrinology* (1946) and contacting his publisher in the hope of meeting Dillon. She also reregistered as female in this year after being diagnosed as intersex by a gynaecologist in Harley Street. Following the meeting with Dillon, Cowell allegedly persuaded Dillon to perform an orchidectomy on her, and Dillon recommended her to his own surgeon, Gillies who went onto perform the gender-affirming surgeries Cowell requested in 1951. Following her transition, Cowell's difficulties in obtaining secure employment led her to publish her autobiography in 1954, but she continued to experience financial problems until her death.⁴⁹¹

⁴⁹⁰ Oxford Dictionary of National Biography, *Dillon, (Laurence) Michael (1915-1962)*, [website], 2004, <https://www.oxforddnb.com/display/10.1093/ref:odnb/9780198614128.001.0001/odnb-9780198614128-e-76743?rskey=Pw6JFD&result=1>.

⁴⁹¹ Oxford Dictionary of National Biography, *Dillon, (Laurence) Michael (1915-1962)*, [website], 2004, <https://www.oxforddnb.com/display/10.1093/ref:odnb/9780198614128.001.0001/odnb-9780198614128-e-76743?rskey=Pw6JFD&result=1>.

The limited sources upon which this chapter is based are largely autobiographical in various forms. As such they present the problem of corroborative evidence. While it is possible to view Dillon and Cowell's altered identity papers, much of their experiences were only evidenced in their correspondence and their own writings. Dillon wrote his autobiography to pre-empt an attempt by a fellow monk to publish Dillon's story. Cowell, too, published *Roberta's Story* out of financial necessity. Hindsight and the desire to defend their experiences would have influenced the construction of these accounts. Similarly, Gillies' case studies were published in 1957, providing sufficient distance for him to be more candid and to witness the success of his procedures. These issues have required the most plausible explanation to be selected in several situations covered in this chapter, as opposed to having incontrovertible proof. Nevertheless, the value of these sources in understanding how gender non-conformity was expressed and discussed in mid-twentieth-century Britain is not diminished by these problems. On the contrary, an examination of Dillon and Cowell not only provides an insight into the differing experiences of trans men and trans women during the early days of gender-affirming surgery in Britain and the ways in which their gender identities were constructed, it is also highly valuable to gender history in general. As Alison Oram has demonstrated in her work on the press treatment of gender non-conformity, individuals who challenged perceived gender norms shed light on the discourses on gender and how – and indeed by whom – the categories of male and female were constructed.⁴⁹²

⁴⁹² See Oram, *Her Husband was a Woman!*.

Despite Cowell and Dillon's shared desire for physical transition, their experiences and constructions of their gender identities differed significantly. Indeed, as discussed earlier, the one consistency among gender non-conforming identities is their diversity. As such, I have adapted my use of terminology for each individual. Consequently, I have chosen to use the terms 'gender non-conforming' and 'gender variant' as well as transgender to refer to the individuals under discussion in this chapter. I also use gender-affirming surgery as opposed to the potentially offensive sex-reassignment surgery. These are far from ideal descriptors, given that they were not in circulation during the 1940s and 1950s. However, in my opinion they represent the best compromise from among the available options. The terminology of the period was largely derogatory and will only be used here in direct quotations and descriptions of contemporary categories. While the phrases 'gender non-conforming', 'gender variant' and 'transition' were not in circulation during the period under discussion, individuals would have understood the concept of gender and the meaning of non-conforming, variant, and transition, a movement from one gender to another. Equally, I am using transgender here to refer to individuals who identified as a gender other than that assigned at birth. This is a very narrow and incomplete definition and by no means represents the broad range of identities encompassed by the umbrella term transgender. However, for ease of reference I have chosen to use it in relation to Dillon and Cowell despite its being coined in the 1960s as their understandings of their gender identities appear to reflect my basic definition.

In terms of pronouns, unlike Dillon's biographers Liz Hodgkinson and Pagan Kennedy, I use male pronouns for Dillon throughout as he identified as male regardless of his biology

throughout his life. While Cowell classified herself as intersex from birth but stated in her autobiography that she lived as a man for the first part of her life, I will use female pronouns for Cowell throughout in accordance with her gender identity.

Within this chapter, I have included descriptions of gender-affirming surgical procedures, particularly with regards to Dillon. While I do support Kit Heyam's argument that invasive details regarding trans bodies should be avoided in histories, they are necessary here in order to demonstrate the developing techniques, Dillon's input into his treatment and his role as doctor and patient. Dillon himself included graphic details of his operations in his autobiography which was intended for publication and here I have attempted to avoid any unnecessary details. They are in no way intended to offend or exploit trans experiences of medical care.

Surgery and Medical Discourse

The unprecedented nature of Dillon's case in Britain placed his doctors in the position of joining Hirschfeld and his colleagues in Germany in developing a new medicalised understanding of gender identity and the appropriate treatments for gender non-conforming individuals. As in the nineteenth century, in cases of gender non-conformity the medical profession was preoccupied with categorising and 'curing' their patients, thereby gaining a monopoly over the discourse on gender-affirming surgery.⁴⁹³ The construction of these discourses echoes the confessional power structures Foucault attributes to the

⁴⁹³ See L.R. Broster, et al., *The Adrenal Cortex and Intersexuality* (London, 1938).

medicalisation of sex a century earlier.⁴⁹⁴ Gender, while distinct from sexuality, frequently overlapped and merged with understandings of sexual preference such as the link between effeminacy and homosexuality.⁴⁹⁵ Furthermore, the dynamic between doctor and patient in which the patient 'confesses' their condition to a medical professional who then becomes the 'master of truth' by interpreting their words holds true for gender non-conforming individuals.⁴⁹⁶ Dillon and Cowell related their histories to various doctors who then categorised them, prescribed treatment and, in the case of Sir Harold Gillies, constructed their own discourse which created the 'truth' of their patients' gender variance. However, as Foucault argued, 'we must not imagine a world of discourse divided between accepted discourse and excluded discourse, or between the dominant discourse and the dominated one; but as a multiplicity of discursive elements that can come into play in various strategies.'⁴⁹⁷

The mid-twentieth century witnessed a number of discourses on gender non-conformity produced by the patients themselves that were not simply silenced or subordinated to a dominant medical interpretation. Yet neither were they entirely antagonistic reverse discourses that presented an alternative construction of gender variance. This section will examine the complex interplay of discourses on the treatment of gender non-conforming individuals produced by the patients and the medical authorities involved in their care. The interactions between these differing accounts can be read as both

⁴⁹⁴ Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality, Volume 1: An Introduction*, trans. Robert Hurley (New York, 1978), 58.

⁴⁹⁵ McLaren, *The Trials of Masculinity*, 210.

⁴⁹⁶ Foucault, *History of Sexuality*, 66-7.

⁴⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 100.

supporting and contradicting Foucault's theories on power and knowledge. The relationship was a mix of collaboration and dominance whereby patients and doctors influenced each other's accounts of gender variance while simultaneously contradicting and seeking supremacy. Ultimately, medical professionals gained the monopoly over constructing the 'truth' of gender non-conformity, infiltrating both medical pedagogy and newspaper accounts. However, rather than silencing alternative accounts these medical discourses were often inclusive of their patients' statements and served to legitimise their conditions, allowing patients to access treatment and gain acceptance for their gender identity.

i) Hormone treatment

Dr Foss, the man who provided Dillon with his first dose of testosterone pills in 1939, left no record of his impressions of Dillon and terminated his involvement in the case before his treatment had taken effect. Thus, it is only possible to speculate on his motivations for providing the hormones and his categorisation of Dillon. Dillon too made no mention of a diagnosis from Foss in his account of their meeting and focused instead on the side effects of the testosterone, only synthesised in 1935, prescribed with no advice as to dosage.⁴⁹⁸ The resulting beard growth, deepening voice and larger shoulders allowed Dillon to openly present as male in some situations. Pagan Kennedy states, '[i]t was thanks to the pills that Dillon became a man.'⁴⁹⁹ This assumption, though, is not fully supported by Dillon's own account. He described the differing understandings of his gender identity held by his

⁴⁹⁸ Jacob Lau and Cameron Partridge, 'Introduction', in: Michael Dillon/Lobzang Jivaka, *Out of the Ordinary: A Life of Gender and Spiritual Transitions* (New York, 2017), 6.

⁴⁹⁹ Kennedy, *First Man-Made Man*, 47.

colleagues and customers during his time as a petrol pump attendant, a job he started shortly after meeting Foss. Dillon's colleagues were quick to inform new employees that 'he's [Dillon] not a man he's a girl.'⁵⁰⁰ Dillon's boss also insisted on referring to him as 'Miss' until confusion among the customers forced him to use male pronouns. Furthermore, Dillon recorded his distress at strangers' confusion over his gender identity: 'I have sat on a seat in a bus and listened to husband and wife discuss openly to which sex I might belong.'⁵⁰¹ This public ambiguity over Dillon's gender demonstrates the contradictory and complex constructions of gender that existed in Britain in this period. Dillon's work colleagues, aware of his female genitals based their understanding of Dillon as a woman on his biology. The absence of a penis excluded him in their minds from manhood. Customers however, unaware of Dillon's biological sex, were clearly influenced by other signifiers – facial hair, a male tone of voice and clothing – that denoted a male gender identity, signifiers highlighted in press accounts of successful passing.⁵⁰²

On the other hand, by taking testosterone, Dillon was able to meet the medical experts' understanding of what it meant to be male which allowed him to access the surgeries that would ultimately confirm Dillon's legal status as a man. Moreover, Dillon was perceived as male by medical staff during his hospitalisation after a hypoglycaemic blackout. He was placed in the male ward despite giving his name as Laura and producing an identity card confirming his 'official' female status. Dillon recorded the house surgeon's reaction to his attempts to identify himself as Laura; 'he said I was still wandering in my mind from

⁵⁰⁰ Dillon/Jivaka, *Out of the Ordinary*, 93.

⁵⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 88.

⁵⁰² Oram, *Her Husband was a Woman!*, 17.

concussion.⁵⁰³ This episode reveals an interesting inconsistency in perceptions of gender by medical authorities. As discussed in a previous chapter, medical discourses on sex and gender were heavily influenced by endocrinology and the work of L. R. Broster from the 1930s onwards.⁵⁰⁴ Broster's construction of male physical and mental attributes in intersex patients included excessive body hair, beard growth and a receding hair line, an enlarged clitoris and a 'broad-shouldered, flat and deep-chested, narrow-hipped'; an interest in 'male' hobbies such as gardening and sport and a subsequent lack of enthusiasm for feminine ones including jewellery, perfume and shopping, a preference for male clothing and an attraction to women.⁵⁰⁵ Dillon by this stage certainly possessed male physical traits and dressed in men's clothing, but legally and medically he was considered female. He did not possess the intersexed genitalia that Broster's patients frequently did, and a superficial physical examination would have revealed the presence of breasts. Alice Dreger has argued the ovaries and testicles were the main signifiers used by medical professionals to determine sex and gender in this period.⁵⁰⁶ For Dillon though, the presence of ovaries and the absence of male sex organs were not enough to convince the house surgeon to categorise Dillon as female. He superseded the medical categorisation of gender with a more culturally constructed concept of masculinity. The incongruity of a broad-shouldered, deep-voiced, masculine-looking individual being placed on a female ward was of greater concern than the hidden biological discrepancies of Dillon's body.

⁵⁰³ Dillon/Jivaka, *Out of the Ordinary*, 98.

⁵⁰⁴ L. R. Broster, et al., *The Adrenal Cortex and Intersexuality* (London, 1938).

⁵⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 8-9.

⁵⁰⁶ Alice Domurat Dreger, 'A History of Intersex: From the Age of Gonads to the Age of Consent', in: Alice Domurat Dreger (ed.) *Intersex in the Age of Ethics* (Maryland, 1999), 5-22.

Dillon's entry onto the men's ward passed without comment. This suggests a shared understanding and acceptance of a construction of masculinity by the other patients and medical staff that allowed Dillon to be categorised as male during his hospitalisation. Here the complex power relations are made evident. In line with Foucault's theory of experts constructing truth through discourse, the house surgeon labelled Dillon as male and this became Dillon's 'true' identity on the ward.⁵⁰⁷ Nor was there any attempt by the medical profession at any point to 'restore' Dillon to womanhood as was the case for Broster's patients. On the contrary, following another hypoglycaemic attack, a different house surgeon introduced Dillon to a plastic surgeon who performed a double mastectomy and was responsible for involving Sir Harold Gillies in Dillon's case. Thus, the medical professionals that Dillon encountered at this stage adopted his own discourse on his gender identity and did not seek to impose their own medicalised interpretation.

ii) Surgery and medical discourse

Both Dillon and his surgeon Sir Harold Gillies wrote accounts of his gender-affirming surgery that vary greatly in terms of detail and intended audience. Their shared aim was to educate and promote understanding of gender variance and acceptance of surgery and hormones as the established treatment. Gillies, chiefly known for his work with disfigured soldiers, published his record of Dillon's case in 1957 in *The Principles and Art of Plastic Surgery Vol 1*, co-authored with Ralph Millard. Dillon's identity was protected and Gillies referred to him as 'Female with Male Outlook'.⁵⁰⁸ Gillies' original diagnosis of

⁵⁰⁷ Foucault, *History of Sexuality*, 66.

⁵⁰⁸ Sir Harold Gillies and D. Ralph Millard, *The Principles and Art of Plastic Surgery Vol 1* (London, 1957), 383.

Dillon with acute hypospadias was absent from *Principles*. Kennedy argues that acute hypospadias was ‘a catch-all diagnosis’ Gillies employed to enable him to treat ‘patients who’d been designated “female” at birth but who possessed ambiguous genitals and preferred to be men.’⁵⁰⁹ In Dillon’s case, this ambiguity was entirely an invention of Gillies’, one which in 1957, as Kennedy asserts, feeling safe from any repercussions or scandal by this point was no longer necessary. Gillies instead revealed that ‘[a]lthough [Dillon’s] external genitalia...were predominantly female, her [sic] outlook was vividly male.’⁵¹⁰ Gillies gave no explanation as to what he meant by the statement ‘vividly male’. There was an assumption that the audience would need only this sparse hint to understand the intended meaning. This seems to have been a common belief in medical discourses on sex and gender. The intersex case studies published by Clifford Allen included phrases such as ‘psychically a male’ and ‘[i]n her [sic] tastes, interests, choice of clothing and so on she was completely male’.⁵¹¹ Little detail was given as to which interests were classified as masculine, but an aptitude for sport, physical strength and a preference for male clothing appeared to be critical. In many patients the expression of the desire to be a man was sufficient to categorise the patient as masculine. It seems then a fair assumption that Dillon’s male outlook was represented by his male attire and hairstyle, his passion for rowing and his desire for a male physicality. It is here that the limitation of language becomes relevant. As Foucault states, ‘a proposition must fulfil complex and heavy requirements to be able to belong to the grouping of a discipline; before it can be called true or false, it must be “in the true”, as Canguilhem would say.’⁵¹²

⁵⁰⁹ Kennedy, *First Man-Made Man*, 64.

⁵¹⁰ Gillies and Millard, *Principles and Art of Plastic Surgery*, 383.

⁵¹¹ Broster, et al., *Adrenal Cortex*, 83.

⁵¹² Michel Foucault, ‘The Order of Discourse’, in: Robert Young (ed.) *Untying the Text: A Post-Structuralist Reader* (London, 1981), 48-78.

Previous medical discourse on gender had classified male and female; those whose sex or gender were ambiguous were still situated on a spectrum between two genders. Failure to comply with the established medical knowledge and language on gender risked outright rejection.⁵¹³ As a surgeon, Gillies was motivated by a desire to solve his patients' problems through his expertise and reconstruction of their bodies. However, the groundbreaking nature of his procedures required some form of precedential link with the existing medical discourse if his position was to be protected and his surgeries accepted by the medical profession. Therefore, Gillies incorporated the existing vague medical terms into his account, fine-tuning them rather than creating a new term for gender non-conforming individuals.

Gillies summarised the process of designing and building Dillon's genitalia in *Principles*:

The technical performances included the partial closing of the vaginal opening, the joining of the female urethra to a new length of skin tube incorporated in a tube pedicle, and finally the insertion of cartilage in this new penis...The clitoris, with its special nerve supply, was preserved and grafted at the dorsum of the penis near its root...A scrotum was constructed by a square flap from the pubic region including the mons pubis with its hair and fat. On bilateral pedicles it was lifted over the penis and suspended below to form the sac.⁵¹⁴

⁵¹³ Foucault, 'The Order of Discourse', 60-1.

⁵¹⁴ Gillies and Millard, *Principles and Art of Plastic Surgery*, 384.

Gillies largely ignored the numerous complications indicated in the case notes and Dillon's own account and simply asserted that '[a]fter minor initial difficulties no trouble has been experienced with urination.'⁵¹⁵ These 'minor' issues involved repeated problems in fitting a catheter, on one occasion the process 'was very painful and further investigation could not be carried out without an anaesthetic.'⁵¹⁶ In addition to minimising the complications of Dillon's surgeries, Gillies' elevated their significance to Dillon's manhood beyond that expressed by his patient. Kennedy explains Gillies' belief that the surgeries he performed on Dillon were vital and life changing: 'If [Gillies] could only give Dillon a penis, then all of his other problems – the social awkwardness, the aloofness, the fear of women – would surely clear up.'⁵¹⁷ This assessment is certainly borne out by Gillies' take on the aftermath of Dillon's treatment. He concluded his case study of Dillon by claiming that '[p]rovided thus with the new organ, the patient's life has been a social success.'⁵¹⁸ By minimising the sufferings and difficulties endured by Dillon and emphasising the incredible results, Gillies was constructing an identity for himself as well as his patient. Gillies presented himself as the creator of Dillon's male body and controlled the presentation of Dillon's case in medical discourse. Although to some extent Gillies' description of Dillon accords with Dillon's own sense of being innately male with a female physicality, the use of female pronouns suggests that for Gillies, without surgical intervention Dillon was unable to be truly accepted as male. By constructing the knowledge of Dillon's transition that would become accessible to medical students and

⁵¹⁵ Gillies and Millard, *Principles and Art of Plastic Surgery*, 384.

⁵¹⁶ Sir Harold Gillies' case notes, 3 June 1947, London, Wellcome Library, Closed Stores Archives and Manuscripts, Transgender individuals: Laurence Michael Dillon, Box 9 (hereafter Gillies' case notes).

⁵¹⁷ Kennedy, *First Man-Made Man*, 78.

⁵¹⁸ Gillies and Millard, *Principles and Art of Plastic Surgery*, 384.

to a lesser extent the public, Gillies demonstrated his power to define not only Dillon's case but also the medical discourse on gender-affirming surgery.⁵¹⁹

However, Gillies was also motivated by his desire to legitimise surgical intervention in cases of gender variance which previously had only been possible for those with intersexed bodies. Those with unambiguous biology who identified as another gender were categorised as mentally ill and therapy was the only prescribed treatment.⁵²⁰ In *Principles*, Gillies revealed Dillon's female physicality and presented surgery and hormone treatment as appropriate in his case. His dispassionate description of the procedures and emphasis on the success of the results complied with the accepted structure of medical discourses and would have been familiar to medical peers and students. Passionate appeals for sympathy would have weakened the educational tone of Gillies' account while undermining his position as the authority on gender-affirming surgery. As Foucault states, 'one is 'in the truth' only by obeying the rules of a discursive 'policing' which one has to reactivate in each of one's discourses.'⁵²¹

Gillies however, did not present himself as the only contributor to Dillon's male identity. Gillies began to use male pronouns for Dillon in his account once he had begun taking testosterone and undergone a mastectomy, though still cast himself as the one who

⁵¹⁹ Michel Foucault, 'Truth and Power', in: Colin Gordon (ed.) *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings 1972-1977* (New York, 1980), 133.

⁵²⁰ David Andrew Griffiths, 'Diagnosing Sex: Intersex surgery and 'sex change' in Britain 1930-1955', *Sexualities*, 21 (2018), 481-2.

⁵²¹ Foucault, 'The Order of Discourse', 61.

ultimately secured Dillon's future happiness.⁵²² Kennedy also stresses that 'Gillies particularly delighted in helping people who had been ill-treated by society' and valued the happiness of his patients; an opinion that is corroborated by Dillon who recounted the lengths Gillies went to at Rooksdown House to give it a 'country club' atmosphere for patients.⁵²³ Gillies' desire to help his patients and his publication of *Principles* eight years after his final operation on Dillon belies the notion that his primary motivation was to secure prestige and power. True, he represented himself as a pioneer in gender-affirming surgery which would confer on him the authority to construct the knowledge of gender non-conformity. However, Gillies appears to have been largely concerned with propagating his methods in order to make surgery accessible for gender non-conforming individuals.

Gillies' account of Roberta Cowell's surgery was far more ambiguous. Cowell was described as a 'pseudo male' and her gender identity in Gillies' estimation was in constant flux between male and female.⁵²⁴ Gillies adhered to Cowell's own understanding of herself as intersex. No mention was made of Cowell's wife and two children, instead the emphasis was on the lack of functionality of Cowell's testicles prior to hormone treatment and the consistency of Cowell's femininity. This contradicts Cowell's own account where there was a very clear transition from male to female. The reason for Gillies' acceptance of the intersex diagnosis highlights the discrepancy between men and women in early gender-affirming surgery. Under the terms of the law

⁵²² Gillies and Millard, *Principles and Art of Plastic Surgery*, 384.

⁵²³ Kennedy, *First Man-Made Man*, 64. Dillon/Jivaka, *Out of the Ordinary*, 112.

⁵²⁴ Gillies and Millard, *Principles and Art of Plastic Surgery*, 383.

of Mayhem, maiming of the healthy male body in such a way that rendered the individual 'less able' to fight was prohibited. Maiming under this law included 'the cutting off or disabling or weakening a man's hand or finger, or striking out his eye or fore-tooth, or castrating him...'.⁵²⁵ However, no equivalent restrictions existed regarding women's bodies.⁵²⁶ In order for Cowell's physical transition to be achieved legally, the testicles could not be functional. Furthermore, Gillies was aware that the surgeon who illegally performed an orchidectomy on Cowell was in fact Michael Dillon. His construction of Cowell as intersexed provided protection for Dillon and legitimised Gillies' own surgeries on Cowell. The debate surrounding Cowell's biology however continued throughout the account and the success of the surgery was far more uncertain than Dillon's. After establishing the 'marked atrophy' in Cowell's testicles when Gillies performed his surgery, Gillies admitted '[i]t is very probable, because of their size, that these gonads must at one time have been normal'.⁵²⁷ The explanation for this comment may have been to avoid difficulties should Cowell's children be brought to public attention, a convincing argument given Gillies' emphatic assertions of their lack of functionality prior to being removed.

Yet Gillies' lack of conviction as to the success of the transition is harder to explain. Gillies used male pronouns throughout in reference to Cowell and his assessment of the results of his work, 'the sex change is sufficiently arresting to give this patient a deep and, it is hoped, lasting happiness' does not quite portray the level of confidence expressed in

⁵²⁵ William Hawkins, *A Treatise of Pleas of the Crown; Or, A System of the Principal Matters Relating to that Subject, Digested Under Proper Heads, Volume 1* (London, 8th edn. 1824).

⁵²⁶ Kennedy, *First Man-Made Man*, 16.

⁵²⁷ Gillies and Millard, *Principles and Art of Plastic Surgery*, 386.

Dillon's transition.⁵²⁸ Gillies also included a report on Cowell by a medical authority, Mr Anwyl Davies who gave his opinion that while 'the patient is now more female than male...I think there is justification for operative treatment to assist metamorphosis, in spite of the vaguely possible danger that in 10 years or more the patient's female feelings may again change to the opposite sex.'⁵²⁹ It is difficult to account for such uncertainty but it suggests the possibility of transmisogyny, which Julia Serano defines as '[w]hen a trans person is ridiculed or dismissed not merely for failing to live up to gender norms, but for their expressions of femaleness or femininity, they become the victims of a specific form of discrimination: *trans-misogyny*.'⁵³⁰ As with cases of effeminate male homosexuals, the differing treatment of Cowell and Dillon reflects the inexplicability of desiring womanhood in the mid-twentieth-century British context where masculinity was presented as superior.⁵³¹ Cowell's 'preference' for a female identity threatened the gender hierarchy and consequently was here portrayed as unstable and subject to change.⁵³²

On the other hand, it is feasible that Gillies sought to present a range of gender non-conforming cases and that even in the most ambiguous cases surgery was successful, a theory that is borne out by Gillies' closing quotation from a letter he received from

⁵²⁸ Gillies and Millard, *Principles and Art of Plastic Surgery*, 388.

⁵²⁹ *Ibid.*, 386.

⁵³⁰ Julia Serano, *Whipping girl: a transsexual woman on sexism and the scapegoating of femininity* (Berkeley, 2007), 14-15.

⁵³¹ Matt Houlbrook, *Queer London: Perils and Pleasures in the Sexual Metropolis, 1918-1957* (London, 2005), 139-66.

⁵³² *Ibid.*, 15. For a greater discussion of transmisogyny see Emma Heaney, *The New Woman: Literary Modernism, Queer Theory and the Trans Feminine Allegory* (Chicago, 2017).

Cowell: 'You will be interested to know that I am very well and happy, and am frequently taken for eight or ten years younger than my real age.'⁵³³

Thus, despite the ambiguities in Cowell's case, Gillies presented gender non-conformity as a legitimate medical 'condition' that should be treated surgically. His discourse conformed to established conventions and language of the medical profession, yet he also drew on his patient's own understandings of their gender, particularly in Dillon's case. Positioning himself as the saviour of his patients and an authority on the treatment of gender non-conformity, Gillies' discourse was nevertheless constructed through a reciprocal exchange with the patients' themselves.

iii) Patient Discourse: Michael Dillon

Both Dillon and Cowell produced autobiographies that allowed them to posit their own discourses on their gender identities and on Gillies' role in their transitions. Cowell's, published in 1954, joined Gillies' work as a publicly accessible text. Dillon's account on the other hand, remained unpublished until 2017 due to the intervention of his brother, effectively excluding Dillon – at least regarding his own surgery – from contemporary discourses on gender variance. Dillon's portrayal of his treatment is nevertheless an important counterpart to Gillies' account and serves to demonstrate the mutually beneficial relationship between doctor and patient discourses.

⁵³³ Gillies and Millard, *Principles and Art of Plastic Surgery*, 388.

Dillon's descriptions of his surgeries were necessarily more personal than those given by Gillies. He paid far more attention to the hardships suffered during treatment and his endurance in studying for a medical degree throughout his surgeries. Dillon's account shared Gillies' emphasis of the importance of surgery for gender non-conforming individuals despite its not being fundamental to his gender identity. Prior to genital surgery, Dillon was able to officially register as male and live as Laurence Michael Dillon, dropping the 'Laurence' as too reminiscent of Laura.⁵³⁴ He also enrolled at Trinity College in Dublin to begin training as a physician and successfully passed as a male student. Equally, Dillon did not equate his masculinity solely with his physicality. As will be discussed later, Dillon's construction of his male identity and what for him constituted a 'complete' man was constantly in flux. He repeatedly redefined what was required of his body in order to become male. Surgery and medical intervention were both crucial *and* incidental to Dillon's male identity. This is apparent in his reaction to the mastectomy, which Dillon called 'the beginning of my emancipation'.⁵³⁵ However, neither the mastectomy nor genital surgery created Dillon's gender identity. In his autobiography, he gave no indication of ever feeling to any degree that he was a woman and was always clear in his own mind that he was male. It was outsiders, work colleagues and strangers who accepted Dillon's male identity based on his physical appearance. Dr James Morrow, a fellow student of Dillon's at Trinity College was just one example, who told Hodgkinson, 'I had heard that he was once a woman, but, to tell you the truth, I didn't believe it...As far as I can remember, he behaved like a perfectly normal male, and looked like one, too.'⁵³⁶

⁵³⁴ Dillon/Jivaka, *Out of the Ordinary*, 63.

⁵³⁵ *Ibid.*, 98.

⁵³⁶ Liz Hodgkinson, *Michael née Laura* (London, 1989), 75.

Yet equally, Dillon chose to accept Gillies' offer to construct an artificial penis for him, a completely experimental and potentially dangerous operation. Dillon also frequently expressed his joy at finally possessing a male body that reflected his mind. Dillon wrote to Gillies on several occasions with updates on his physical development. In a letter dated November 1947, Dillon stated '[a]s the organ is growing furiously I was wondering if you would like another photograph of it to compare with the one taken in London[?]'.⁵³⁷ The increasing size of Dillon's penis was mentioned again later in the correspondence as well as his critical description of his new organ as looking 'rather like a dog's at half-cock – but it works.'⁵³⁸ The ever-increasing size of Dillon's penis and its functionality solidified for him his status as a man. The necessity of the surgery appears to lie in constructing Dillon's sex rather than his gender.⁵³⁹ Dillon's motivations in writing may account for his contradictory stance on the importance of surgery. Dillon's autobiography was written in response to the exposure of his transition in the press. As such, it was important to garner both sympathy and understanding for gender non-conformity. It was then clearly important for Dillon to establish his pre-existing male identity to justify the transition of his physical body to his audience. Dillon achieved this by drawing on the medical discourses on gender and sex combined with emotive portrayals of his suffering.

⁵³⁷ Gillies and Dillon correspondence, 30 November 1947, in: London, Wellcome Library, Closed Stores Archives and Manuscripts, Transgender individuals: Laurence Michael Dillon, Box 9.

⁵³⁸ Gillies and Dillon correspondence, 31 January 1948, in: London, Wellcome Library, Closed Stores Archives and Manuscripts, Transgender individuals: Laurence Michael Dillon, Box 9.

⁵³⁹ As will be discussed later, Dillon appeared to distinguish between an innate sense of masculinity and physical manhood, both of which were required to become fully male.

Like Gillies, Dillon was anxious to establish surgery as the appropriate treatment for gender variance. He emphasised the vital role surgery played in his physical transition, describing his first operation as an event of 'supreme importance', a sentiment that was clearly genuine given that Dillon told Gillies in their correspondence '[i]f I can just get this op. done so as to look all right' he could achieve his dearest wish, 'to be ordinary.'⁵⁴⁰ Dillon's discussion of the complications he suffered following his surgeries reinforce the construction of surgery as vital for gender variant individuals. In his autobiography, Dillon recounted his three-month hospital stay and the complications involved in the skin grafts required for the tube pedicle:

...my upper legs had been denuded of their top layer of skin for replacement grafts and more haematoma had appeared even of these graft areas, so that they looked as if strawberry jam had been spread over them... I walked with a stick and felt far from well.⁵⁴¹

Dillon elaborated further in his correspondence with Gillies on the realities of living with the pedicle in the interim between procedures. In one letter, Dillon declared that '[a]ll is very satisfactory, just having to keep a piece of tubing in is a bit of a nuisance, it has a tendency to fall out every now and then'.⁵⁴² Later, in January 1947, the problem became more debilitating. Always an active person and keen rower, Dillon found that 'any exercise except the most mild form of walking and it gets engorged...and the...attachment inflamed and this stays for about a week.'⁵⁴³ Dillon went on to complain

⁵⁴⁰ Dillon/Jivaka, *Out of the Ordinary*, 104. Kennedy, *First Man-Made Man*, 12.

⁵⁴¹ Dillon/Jivaka, *Out of the Ordinary*, 111.

⁵⁴² Gillies and Dillon correspondence, n.d, in: London, Wellcome Library, Closed Stores Archives and Manuscripts, Transgender individuals: Laurence Michael Dillon, Box 9.

⁵⁴³ Gillies and Dillon correspondence, 2 January 1947, in: London, Wellcome Library, Closed Stores Archives and Manuscripts, Transgender individuals: Laurence Michael Dillon, Box 9.

that '[y]esterday I cycled gently...on a flat road...and it is swollen today,' while on another occasion the pedicle began to go septic after cycling.⁵⁴⁴ These descriptions of the hardships endured by Dillon demonstrate more evocatively than Gillies' account the importance of physical transition. That Dillon was willing to undergo the pain, risks and expense of these procedures would confirm to the reader that there was no acceptable alternative.

Notwithstanding Dillon's medical training, his discourse on the treatments he underwent was largely colloquial and made only sparse use of established medical terminology. This was perhaps due to his intention of reaching a wide audience and gaining their sympathy. It is however possible to detect similarities between Gillies' more clinical approach and Dillon's emotional appeal. Dillon clearly drew on Gillies' explanation for his condition and opinion on the appropriate course of treatment. Dillon recorded his initial consultation with Gillies in which the latter stated 'I think your case merits surgical interference. I will put you down as an acute hypospadiac.'⁵⁴⁵ Here, rather than being subjugated to Gillies' medical diagnosis, Dillon represented the liberation he gained by accepting an erroneous condition that allowed him access to surgery.⁵⁴⁶ This incident also reveals the collaboration between doctor and patient in Dillon's case, where the patient had medical training. Gillies' phrasing strongly indicated his compliance in diagnosing a condition he knew to be false in order to assist his patient in obtaining surgical treatment. The absence of this diagnosis from Gillies' own account further represents the interaction

⁵⁴⁴ Gillies and Dillon correspondence, 2 January 1947.

⁵⁴⁵ Dillon/Jivaka, *Out of the Ordinary*, 101.

⁵⁴⁶ Jules Gill-Peterson, *Histories of the Transgender Child* (London, 2018), 131-2.

between doctor and patient discourses. The medical discourse may have been more visible and widely read, but it did not exclude the patient's construction of their condition; instead the influence was reciprocal and both Gillies and Dillon used elements of the other's discourse to further their shared aim of normalising gender-affirming surgery.

Dillon's autobiography also recorded his interpretation of Gillies' role in his transition. He supported the saviour-like image of his surgeon that is only implied in Gillies' own discourse. Dillon explained Gillies' purpose, 'to Sir Harold the making of life normal again for those who were mutilated, whether by man or by Nature, was all-important.'⁵⁴⁷ The importance of Gillies' services to Dillon in giving him an artificial phallus was so profound that in Dillon's words, 'my debt to him can never be repaid.'⁵⁴⁸ Gillies remained on somewhat of a pedestal for Dillon throughout their acquaintance. As David Griffiths has pointed out, years later when Gillies had begun referring to Dillon in his correspondence as 'My dear Michael,' Dillon retained his formality and always addressed Gillies as Sir Harold.⁵⁴⁹ Yet despite his evident reverence for Gillies, Dillon did not appear subdued by Gillies or dominated by his interpretation of Dillon's condition. Nor did Dillon credit Gillies with originating his male identity. Instead, Dillon adopted elements of Gillies' discourse such as the importance of surgery and the erroneous diagnosis to enhance his own interpretation of his transition. For Dillon, Gillies' work was vital in securing a male body, but Dillon maintained his belief in his pre-existing masculine gender identity that

⁵⁴⁷ Dillon/Jivaka, *Out of the Ordinary*, 112.

⁵⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 187.

⁵⁴⁹ Gillies and Dillon correspondence, 5 August 1954, in: London, Wellcome Library, Closed Stores Archives and Manuscripts, Transgender individuals: Laurence Michael Dillon, Box 9, Griffiths, 'Diagnosing Sex', 482.

required a male physicality to be fully realised. Gillies, in turn adopted Dillon's own interpretation of his gender identity in his medical discourse, though he still stressed the need for medical treatment to justify acceptance as male through his change to male pronouns only after hormone treatments had begun. Therefore, in both discourses Gillies was not the *creator* of Dillon's male self, but rather the *enabler*.

iv) Patient Discourse: Roberta Cowell

Roberta Cowell's discourse on her gender identity reveals the disparity between cultural constructions of masculinity and femininity and the differing experiences of Cowell and Dillon during their treatment. Cowell relied more heavily on medical discourse and in her autobiography her gender identity was completely subsumed into medical constructions of gender non-conformity. At first glance, Cowell's account appears to fit Foucault's assessment of nineteenth-century medical discourses on sex. She 'confessed' her depression to several psychiatrists, one of whom – in Foucault's words – 'constitute[d] a discourse of truth on the basis of its decipherment' by categorising Cowell as 'psychologically a woman'.⁵⁵⁰ While this assessment contradicted Cowell's own interpretation as 'an unconscious fear of losing my masculinity', Cowell unquestioningly accepted this medical categorisation which led to suicidal thoughts.⁵⁵¹ Cowell also fully embraced the later intersex diagnosis. Whereas Dillon presented Gillies' erroneous diagnosis of hypospadias as being an open secret between the two and a necessity to access treatment, Cowell represented her intersexed condition as genuine throughout

⁵⁵⁰ Foucault, *History of Sexuality*, 67. Roberta Cowell, *Roberta Cowell's Story* (New York, 1954), 40.

⁵⁵¹ Cowell, *Roberta Cowell's Story*, 40.

her life despite no corroboratory evidence existing.⁵⁵² Cowell's behaviour could be interpreted as a simple case of the dominant medical discourse silencing the reverse patient discourse. I would argue however that the situation was far more complex and reflected Foucault's interpretation of power as not being a repressive, 'general system of domination exerted by one group over another' but productive.⁵⁵³ Due to the issues presented by the law of Mayhem, Cowell was obliged far more than Dillon to justify her treatment and female identity. Her use of medical terminology and the established categorisation of intersex legitimised her need for surgical treatment as well as her 'genuine' womanhood. Once Cowell's condition was categorised as a physical issue, the stigma of mental illness was removed as '[t]he intense shame I had felt began to disappear. Once I realised that my femininity had a *physical* basis I did not despise myself so much.'⁵⁵⁴

It was the medical confirmation of intersexuality that allowed Cowell to begin the process of transition, starting with expensive hormone treatments and culminating in the surgeries performed by Gillies. Cowell presented the surgeries as fundamental to the creation of her womanhood. Prior to Gillies' intervention, even with Cowell's apparently natural 'prominent feminine sex characteristics' which were enhanced by the effects of the female hormones, she continued to present as male publicly.⁵⁵⁵ Once Cowell confirmed she would be undergoing genital surgery, she began 'experimenting with

⁵⁵² Kennedy has argued "if there was any trace of femininity in Robert Cowell back in 1941, the Royal Air Force medical examiners did not detect it." (Kennedy, *First Man-Made Man*, 55).

⁵⁵³ Foucault, *History of Sexuality*, 92.

⁵⁵⁴ Cowell, *Roberta Cowell's Story*, 42.

⁵⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 41.

woman's clothes,' but only following a relocation to an area where no one knew her.⁵⁵⁶ Nor did she yet feel assured in her female identity but was instead 'midway between the two sexes.'⁵⁵⁷ Cowell's autobiography presented the beginning of the gender-affirming surgeries as the pivotal moment of transition regardless of the necessity of future treatment. Cowell recorded how she then became confident enough to cease living a double life and 'broke away from all activities which had to be carried out in trousers.'⁵⁵⁸ Indeed, such an existence was now unfeasible as '[i]t was by now almost impossible to pose as a man...I felt that I was now truly a complete female.'⁵⁵⁹

Like Dillon, Cowell represented the surgeries as the only form of appropriate treatment in her case, though she did not share his concern with increasing the accessibility of surgery. Cowell acknowledged the burden of treatment – '[m]y first treatments were a shock, though not a physical one. I had of course not realised just how expensive hormones would be', – but contrary to Dillon, she glossed over the physical discomfort in a few short sentences:⁵⁶⁰

The backs of both hands and the top of one foot are swollen and blue from repeated injections of anaesthetic... My body feels as though all my internal organs had been removed. It is strange but not uncomfortable; there is no pain...The stitches were

⁵⁵⁶ Cowell, *Roberta Cowell's Story*, 53.

⁵⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 48.

⁵⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 55.

⁵⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

⁵⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 45.

taken out...Some were excruciatingly painful, being in a terribly tender spot, but finally, with extreme care, the last of them was removed.⁵⁶¹

Cowell instead used much of her account of the surgeries to stress their success. She described the vaginoplasty as 'a brilliant success' and repeatedly emphasised the life-changing nature of her treatment:⁵⁶²

The first operation had changed my body completely, beyond recognition, and my personality was now entirely a new one. But my face was still fundamentally the same...The plan, therefore, was to have my face drastically altered by surgery. This would remove all residual traces of masculinity...The surgeon had certainly done a wonderful job.⁵⁶³

Notwithstanding the vital role surgery played in Cowell's female gender identity, her representation of the medical professionals who undertook her treatment was rather more muted than Dillon's. She referred to the 'very kind and understanding' sexologist and 'a brilliant woman doctor, a specialist in glands' who were both key figures on the road to Cowell's obtaining gender-affirming surgery.⁵⁶⁴ Yet Cowell only gave implicit indications of their importance. Even Gillies received no overt expressions of praise. Cowell described her enthusiastic letter to Gillies following their first meeting in which she related her desire for the speedy completion of the surgery and 'how happy [Cowell] was that he had taken the case.'⁵⁶⁵ Yet this was the only mention of her gratitude.

⁵⁶¹ Cowell, *Roberta Cowell's Story*, 55.

⁵⁶² *Ibid.*

⁵⁶³ *Ibid.*

⁵⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 41, 43.

⁵⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 53.

Undoubtedly Cowell was appreciative of the service Gillies had done for her and expressed the impact it had on her self-acceptance as a woman. However, he was characterised as one of many valuable people who assisted Cowell. He was a talented and compassionate surgeon, but not a hero to emulate as Dillon did, nor was he depicted as Cowell's saviour.

Cowell and Dillon's differing accounts represent the complex and contradictory nature of patient discourses on gender variance even between these two exceptional cases. Both accounts drew on medical categorisations to different extents and supported the Gillies' medical construction of gender non-conformity. Yet rather than their voices being silenced by the prevailing medical knowledge, Dillon and Cowell legitimised their own statements by adopting certain medical tropes. The multiplicity of discourses enhanced, influenced and contradicted each other, with each contributing to the construction of surgery as a signifier of 'complete' or 'successful' transition.

From the Operating Table to the Hand that wields the Scalpel: Dillon as Doctor and Psychological Discourse

Dillon's status as a trainee doctor allowed him a certain level of involvement in his treatment that Cowell did not experience and his relationship with Gillies resembled that of mentor and pupil at times. Always remaining deferential to Gillies, Dillon proposed 'an idea which probably won't work but which is designed to retain the sensation [in his constructed

penis]’.⁵⁶⁶ Dillon outlined his suggested procedure in three annotated diagrams which he sent to Gillies for his opinion. Anxious not to appear presumptuous, Dillon qualified his proposition with the statement ‘it’s easy to have ideas. The difficulty comes in carrying them out!’⁵⁶⁷ Gillies’ reaction to Dillon’s diagrams has not survived, but in response to another of Dillon’s suggestions, Gillies wrote ‘[y]our idea of getting another attachment to [the pedicle] is quite a good one’.⁵⁶⁸ Gillies’ willingness to consider these propositions put Dillon in an advisory capacity in terms of his own treatment that differentiates his surgical experience from that of Cowell. Gillies was also complicit in Dillon’s alleged role as the surgeon responsible for Cowell’s orchidectomy. It is impossible to say with absolute certainty that Dillon performed the operation, given his silence on the subject and the obvious absence of medical records. However, the circumstantial evidence is overwhelmingly in favour of Dillon being Cowell’s surgeon for this procedure. According to Kennedy, Gillies not only had the opportunity to study the removed testicles apparently preserved by Dillon, he also protected himself and Dillon from prosecution by claiming the testicles were not functional in his case study of Cowell meaning ‘the law of mayhem in reference to mutilation would not have applied.’⁵⁶⁹ Kennedy also cites a document – a draft of which is held in Hodgkinson’s private collection – signed by Cowell agreeing to Dillon’s performing the orchidectomy and absolving him of any responsibility for any dangerous or fatal consequences of the procedure.⁵⁷⁰

⁵⁶⁶ Gillies and Dillon correspondence, 1 September 1949, in: London, Wellcome Library, Closed Stores Archives and Manuscripts, Transgender individuals: Laurence Michael Dillon, Box 9.

⁵⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁶⁸ Gillies and Dillon correspondence, 12 September 1947, in: London, Wellcome Library, Closed Stores Archives and Manuscripts, Transgender individuals: Laurence Michael Dillon, Box 9.

⁵⁶⁹ Gillies and Millard, *Principles and Art of Plastic Surgery*, 386.

⁵⁷⁰ Kennedy, *First Man-Made Man*, 91. The draft document can be viewed online at: Lauren Ward and Duncan Jones, *A draft of Cowell's pre-operation consent notice written by Dillon [Private Collection of Liz Hodgkinson]*, [online image], <https://www.st-annes.ox.ac.uk/life-here/library/blog/michael-dillon/>.

Taking Dillon's involvement at face value, his motivations for helping Cowell were complex. Unlike Cowell, Dillon repeatedly expressed his empathy for other gender non-conforming individuals and was anxious to offer help. Hodgkinson refers to a letter in which Dillon commiserated with a gender variant correspondent seeking surgery, recalling 'the doctor let me down and it was not till 1942 that I was able to get going and not till '45 that I met [Sir Harold Gillies] so I know *just* how you feel.'⁵⁷¹ The opportunity to remove the barrier preventing Cowell from obtaining surgery would have appealed to this need to alleviate the suffering of others. The operation also allowed Dillon to become involved in the medical transition of a patient as one of the 'creators' rather than the 'creation'. True, he was not performing the ground-breaking operations that Gillies undertook, but his orchidectomy provided the catalyst for these surgeries to take place. Perhaps Dillon's primary motivation however was his romantic feelings towards Cowell, a relationship that will be discussed below. The orchidectomy would enable the woman he loved to begin the process of becoming physically female. It would also, as Kennedy and Hodgkinson emphasise, allow for the possibility of their marriage, a treasured hope of Dillon's not shared by Cowell. As Cowell revealed to Hodgkinson, 'When I realised he was really serious [about the proposal]...I had to tell him that, although I liked and respected him very much as a person, there was no possible way I could ever think of marrying him.'⁵⁷²

⁵⁷¹ Hodgkinson, *Michael née Laura*, 55. The original of this letter is held in Liz Hodgkinson's private collection and it has not been possible to access it.

⁵⁷² *Ibid.*, 95-6.

Self and Dillon's Construction of Gender Non-Conformity

The fact that Dillon would risk his career and liberty to perform Cowell's orchidectomy speaks to the importance of surgical intervention in his own transition. However, Dillon's own understanding of his maleness was at once unchanging and mercurial. In his writings, Dillon presented his male gender as something that predated any medical intervention and manifested in childhood as somehow essentially part of himself. Dillon's male presentation though reflected behaviours and interests deemed masculine by British cultural discourses in the 1930s and 1940s. A rejection in childhood of a feminine appearance and hobbies deemed girlish were as Oram has shown, frequently cited in the 'sex-change' press stories of the 1930s as early indications of masculinity.⁵⁷³ Similarly, Dillon's dislike of dolls and needlework and desire to emulate his brother's clothing and hairstyle led him in retrospect to define himself as innately male.⁵⁷⁴ The inculcation of cultural constructions of gender into Dillon's sense of masculinity parallels the comments present in Ellis' Eonist cases recorded in the 1920s. 'A.T.' for example, described themselves as 'very effeminate and girlish in my tastes and habits' when a child.⁵⁷⁵ Similarly, 'R.M.' partly categorised their femininity through their feelings for children, stating, 'I am fond of children, and perhaps my feeling towards them may resemble those of a woman.'⁵⁷⁶ Dillon's biological sex on the other hand, needed to be reconstructed to avoid the criticism of and conflation with masculine women, demonstrated by an anonymous female reader of the *Morning Post* in her condemnation of the women in military uniform during the First World War.⁵⁷⁷ This may offer an explanation

⁵⁷³ Oram, *Her Husband was a Woman!*, 115.

⁵⁷⁴ Dillon/Jivaka, *Out of the Ordinary*, 46-53.

⁵⁷⁵ Havelock Ellis, *Studies in the Psychology of Sex. Volume VII: Eonism and Other Supplementary Studies* (Philadelphia, 1928), 45.

⁵⁷⁶ Ellis, *Eonism*, 98.

⁵⁷⁷ Jenny Gould, 'Women's Military Services in First World War Britain', in: Margaret Randolph Higonnet, et al., (eds) *Behind the Lines: Gender and the Two World Wars* (London, 1987), 119.

as to why Dillon sought genital surgery despite his ability to live legally as male following his mastectomy and continued doses of testosterone. While Dillon's masculinity was never in question in his own mind, the constructed phallus represented an undisputable external indicator of his male gender. Again, Ellis' case studies included this need for physical transition in order to become fully female, such as 'R.L.'s comment that they 'would undergo a surgical operation if the result would be to give me a beautiful or attractive female form with full womanhood'.⁵⁷⁸

Dillon repeatedly made a distinction between his physicality and self-identified gender. Yet his descriptions of what constituted this 'male outlook' remained enigmatic. He was confronted by the limitations of language and in the absence of a recognisable term, was forced to rely on vague constructions of what this gender identity actually meant, stating: 'I had never thought of myself as such despite being technically a girl...People thought I was a woman. But I wasn't. I was just me.'⁵⁷⁹ Dillon's inability to fully articulate his sense of innate masculinity mirrors the struggles faced by Ellis' Eonists when defining themselves. 'R.M.' 'felt like a woman born out of her sex', while 'R.L.' drew on Ulrichs' descriptions of homosexuality, stating 'it is as if the soul of a woman had been born in a male body' as the closest approximation to their understanding of themselves.⁵⁸⁰ None of the psychiatrists visited by Dillon and Cowell adopted any of the proposed terminology for gender variance – such as Ellis' 'Eonism' and Hirschfeld's 'transvestites' – developed in earlier decades either.

⁵⁷⁸ Ellis, *Eonism*, 86.

⁵⁷⁹ Dillon/Jivaka, *Out of the Ordinary*, 73.

⁵⁸⁰ Ellis, *Eonism*, 97, 71.

Indeed, Cowell's psychiatrist made the ambiguous pronouncement that Cowell's 'unconscious mind was predominantly female...I was psychologically a woman!'⁵⁸¹

As has been discussed in an earlier chapter, psychological discourses on gender identity in this period were sparse and often amalgamated into discussions of sexuality.⁵⁸²

Psychoanalysis in Britain was preoccupied with war neuroses following WWI and the advent of 'shell shock'.⁵⁸³ While Sigmund Freud, Karl Abraham, Karen Horney and Joan Riviere touched on the issue of gender, it was largely in terms of its link with sexuality and neurosis. Riviere most closely broached the subject of gender variance in her discussion of bisexuality, but failed to attribute an identification with being male as a factor.⁵⁸⁴ Instead, while Riviere allowed that in 'daily life types of men and women are constantly met with who, while mainly heterosexual in their development, plainly display strong features of the other sex,' Riviere's patients did not appear to identify as *being* male but rather possessed masculine *attributes* and instead of presenting a male identity, 'women who wish for masculinity may put on a mask of womanliness to avert anxiety and the retribution feared from men.'⁵⁸⁵

Given the disparity between psychoanalytic constructions of gender non-conformity and Dillon's experiences, it is perhaps not surprising therefore that Dillon developed his own

⁵⁸¹ Cowell, *Roberta Cowell's Story*, 40.

⁵⁸² For a more in-depth discussion of British psychoanalysis in relation to gender non-conformity see chapter two.

⁵⁸³ Ken Robinson, *A Brief History of the British Psychoanalytical Society*, [website], 2015, http://psychoanalysis.org.uk/sites/default/files/documents/pages/history_of_the_bps_by_ken_robinson_0.pdf.

⁵⁸⁴ Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (London, 1990), 50.

⁵⁸⁵ Joan Riviere, 'Womanliness as a Masquerade' (1929), in: Grigg, Russell, Dominique Hecq, and Craig Smith (eds). *Female Sexuality: The Early Psychoanalytic Controversies* (London, 1999), 172-3.

discourse on the subject, thereby reinforcing Jules Gill-Peterson's argument that 'at many key moments trans people's embodied fluency in medical science far outpaced institutional medical knowledge.'⁵⁸⁶ Published in 1946, *Self: A Study in Ethics and Endocrinology* contained Dillon's most lucid descriptions of gender variance and its treatment. It was intended for lay consumption rather than 'to be in any way a text-book' and provided a discussion of matters pertaining to the sex glands in an informative but accessible way.⁵⁸⁷ Aside from the biological, Dillon also offered reflections on cerebral topics such as free will and personality. Of particular interest to historians of queer theory are Dillon's chapters on homosexuality and gender variance. Kennedy proposes Dillon as the first person to acknowledge the distinction between homosexuality, transvestism and gender non-conformity.⁵⁸⁸ This assumption overlooks Ellis' study of Eonism in which he explicitly attempted to separate Eonism from 'sexual inversion'.⁵⁸⁹ However, Dillon's suggestions for treatment were certainly innovative and represented his strongest motivation in writing, to 'promote understanding' of those like himself struggling with a body that did not equate to their gender identity.⁵⁹⁰

In *Self*, Dillon's discussion of gender non-conformity is situated within his chapters on intersexuality and homosexuality, predominantly in the latter. Like other medical discourses, Dillon offered no definitive terminology or categorisation of such individuals, instead using phrases such as the 'personality' or 'outlook' being juxtaposed to the

⁵⁸⁶ Gill-Peterson, *Histories of the Transgender Child*, 34-5.

⁵⁸⁷ Michael Dillon, *Self: A Study in Ethics and Endocrinology* (London, 1946), 6.

⁵⁸⁸ Kennedy, *First Man-Made Man*, 53.

⁵⁸⁹ Ellis, *Eonism*, 1.

⁵⁹⁰ Dillon, *Self*, 6.

physical sex and loosely labelling the individuals ‘the feminine man and the masculine woman.’⁵⁹¹ Dillon incorporated aspects of the cultural and medical discourses viewed through the filter of his own experience, which led him to reject the fundamental argument of the medical profession that intersexuality was the sole category under which genuine gender non-conformity could be placed. In *Self*, Dillon adopted the structure and terminology of medical discourse, imbuing his writing with a sense of authority which he then used to undermine and critique existing medical understandings of gender non-conformity. Dillon was careful though to endorse certain medical theories. For example, he agreed that hypospadias was the most common – though not exclusive – explanation for suspected cases of ‘pseudo-hermaphroditism’ and attributed the reported cases of female athletes changing sex to this diagnosis.⁵⁹² Oram has highlighted how frequently ‘change of sex’ stories concerning women involved in sport appeared in British newspapers from the 1930s.⁵⁹³ Laura King has in turn stressed the prevalence of newspapers in twentieth-century British culture.⁵⁹⁴ The female athlete who ‘becomes’ a man would therefore have been a familiar figure to Dillon’s readers, lending his discussion of gender non-conformity an air of familiarity and laying the foundations for Dillon’s attempts at normalising these sensationalised accounts.

⁵⁹¹ Dillon, *Self*, 51, 44, 50.

⁵⁹² *Ibid.*, 60. At this point, Dillon was obviously unaware that hypospadias would be used as the justification for his own gender-affirming surgery. This diagnosis forced him, at least for medical records, to assume the label of intersexuality; a label he clearly rejected in his own theories of his form of gender variance. See also Clare Tebbutt, ‘The Spectre of the ‘Man-Woman Athlete’: Mark Weston, Zdenek Koubek, the 1936 Olympics and the uncertainty of sex’, *Women’s History Review*, 24 (2015), 721-38.

⁵⁹³ Oram, *Her Husband was a Woman!*, 118.

⁵⁹⁴ Laura King, *Family Men: Fatherhood and Masculinity in Britain, 1914-1960* (Oxford, 2015), 9, available from: E-Book Library, (accessed 19 March 2020).

The construction of gender variance most closely reflective of Dillon's own experience was contained in the chapter on homosexuality. Rather than demonstrating Dillon's confusion over issues of sexuality and gender identity, I would argue that his choice was deliberate. By placing individuals with unambiguous biological sex who identify as a different gender under the chapter relating to homosexuality, he seems to be making a clear statement about what it means to be gender non-conforming. As Griffiths asserts, the medical profession urged sympathy and surgical intervention for individuals with physical intersex characteristics, while those with unambiguous physicality were categorised as sufferers of a form of mental disorder.⁵⁹⁵ Dillon on the other hand, differentiated his feminine men and masculine women from those with ambiguous biology, and stressed their undisputed physical sex. It was on this basis that Dillon critiqued the current mode of treatment for such individuals. Dillon argued:

There is therefore at present no popular understanding of the situation, nor is any remedy offered that might do any real good...The psychologist's only suggestion is to make the mind fit the body, to which course such a patient will never accede.⁵⁹⁶

Dillon advocated instead for surgical intervention and hormone treatment in his often-quoted statement 'where the mind cannot be made to fit the body, the body should be made to fit, approximately, at any rate to the mind'.⁵⁹⁷

Dillon urged a more collaborative relationship between doctor and patient, a relationship he experienced in his own later treatment. It was the patient's personal sense of their

⁵⁹⁵ Griffiths, 'Diagnosing Sex', 481-2.

⁵⁹⁶ Dillon, *Self*, 51.

⁵⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 53.

gender and not the presence of ovaries or testes that should be the determining factor in selecting an appropriate treatment. Here, Dillon controversially renounced the importance of biological features in categorising gender. In order to support such a radical argument, Dillon relied on the medical preoccupation with prenatal development.⁵⁹⁸ Dillon argued that gender identity was determined at the foetal stage, and ‘the child would seem to develop naturally enough if only he belonged to the other sex.’⁵⁹⁹ Therefore, by restructuring the body to reflect the patient’s gender identity, the surgeon was following the dictates of nature and ensuring the individual was ‘relieved from the nervous strain’ of having to live as a gender they do not identify with.⁶⁰⁰ As Dillon put it, ‘[the patient] does not feel himself to be a man, and how would any woman like to be turned into a man?’⁶⁰¹ While Dillon acknowledged that gender variant individuals might in some cases possess secondary and tertiary sex characteristics of the gender they identified as, the basis for treatment remained the mental outlook.⁶⁰² Dillon’s definition of what this ‘outlook’ entailed was as vague as those found in other medical texts including Broster’s and Gillies’. Like them, he relied largely on an individual’s feeling like another gender as the key characteristic. The lack of detail across medical discourses concerning gender non-conformity within a discipline obsessed with the minutiae of categorisation suggests a belief in a shared understanding of what constitutes male and female genders that was so ingrained it could remain unspoken.

⁵⁹⁸ Dillon, *Self*, 52.

⁵⁹⁹ *Ibid.*

⁶⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 54.

⁶⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 51-2.

⁶⁰² *Ibid.*, 44, 52.

Dillon's advocacy for the sympathetic and respectful treatment of gender non-conforming individuals went beyond seeking to establish surgery as the proper solution to their difficulties. Dillon had personal experience of the expense involved in obtaining regular doses of testosterone. According to Cowell, Dillon spent '£2.10s...on hormones' out of his weekly £5 earnings.⁶⁰³ Later, despite Gillies' generosity to his patients in offering discounted treatment, Dillon was only able to finance his surgeries by drawing on his substantial inheritance.⁶⁰⁴ Such costs would have been beyond the means of most individuals, and surely forms part of the explanation for the dearth of cases contemporaneous with Dillon. Dillon, mindful of his privilege and the life-affirming benefits of surgery and hormone treatment, proposed that 'all medical products...should be free to all sufferers.'⁶⁰⁵ Obviously Dillon had a personal interest in securing accessible, cost-free treatment for gender non-conforming individuals. Nevertheless, Dillon provided reasoned arguments based on science to support his theories. He was passionate in his calls for understanding and tolerance, but his approach was measured and therefore more likely to appeal to those who viewed these individuals with distaste. By adopting a scholarly, methodical style, Dillon created what Kennedy refers to as 'a scandalous book in drag as a boring one.'⁶⁰⁶ This too served his purpose. Dillon's greatest wish in reconstructing his physicality was to become an unremarkable, uncontested male. The categorisation of gender variance he created in *Self* was a form of self-definition. He destroyed the psychological construction of gender variance as mental disorder, and instead posited the idea that such individuals were rational beings who were the

⁶⁰³ Hodgkinson, *Michael née Laura*, 87.

⁶⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 82.

⁶⁰⁵ Dillon, *Self*, 53.

⁶⁰⁶ Kennedy, *First Man-Made Man*, 84.

supreme authorities on their gender identity. They – and by extension he – should be provided with the medical treatment of their choosing.

Aside from constructing a more satisfactory definition of his own condition, Dillon's decision to publish his discourse on gender non-conformity appears to have been motivated by a genuine concern with helping others to secure treatment and understanding. He stated in his introduction to *Self*,

It is to be hoped, therefore, that, with the progress of science, and especially of medical science, there will come about a change in the attitude of the people from a narrow-minded hypocrisy which has eyes and sees not, to a sympathy born of understanding and knowledge and intelligence, to an open mind, to tolerance of things still unexplained.⁶⁰⁷

Later in his own practice, Dillon prided himself on his ability to sympathise with his patients, stating 'I came to know hospital life from the patient's point of view as well as the doctor's, an advantage which many of my colleagues lacked.'⁶⁰⁸ Sadly, while David Griffiths recognised *Self* as a valuable work, and Hodgkinson called it 'intelligent and decades ahead of its time,' the same cannot be said of its reception on publication.⁶⁰⁹ Intended to reach a wide and largely non-medical audience, Hodgkinson asserts the book 'was read mainly by those who identified with the conditions he describes – homosexuals, lesbians and potential transsexuals.'⁶¹⁰ Kennedy speculates that this was

⁶⁰⁷ Dillon, *Self*, 10.

⁶⁰⁸ Dillon/Jivaka, *Out of the Ordinary*, 105.

⁶⁰⁹ Hodgkinson, *Michael née Laura*, 71.

⁶¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 72.

precisely what Dillon hoped for, to draw to himself fellow sufferers whom he could both relate to and offer assistance.⁶¹¹ Yet given that the majority of responses to the book came from homosexuals, it is likely that he felt some disappointment in not discovering other gender variant individuals who could offer mutual support and understanding.⁶¹²

Self did however lead Cowell to contact Dillon, resulting in his ability to put into practice his desire to help by performing an orchidectomy on Cowell. While in *Self* Dillon defined a transgender identity as ‘the innate possession of the mental outlook and temperament of the other sex’, his repeated insistence on surgery being the correct course of treatment for gender variance, imply that in Dillon’s view a reconstructed body was a crucial factor in categorising a person’s gender.⁶¹³ Gender identity might be developed prenatally in Dillon’s discourse, but he acknowledged the need for a reconstructed physicality in order to gain societal recognition as one’s gender.

Cowell’s sense of gender identity had a far more biological basis than Dillon’s and placed even greater importance on the role of surgery. Prior to medical intervention, Cowell presented her gender identity as definitively male, describing herself as ‘an aggressive male who had piloted a Spitfire during the war...married and become the father of two children.’⁶¹⁴ Cowell went on to write ‘[s]ince May 18th, 1951, I have been Roberta

⁶¹¹ Kennedy, *First Man-Made Man*, 84.

⁶¹² Though both Kennedy and Hodgkinson refer to these responses from homosexuals, neither indicates from where they obtained this information and so it is not possible to locate the original correspondence. The only reference Kennedy makes as to their contents is contained within her comment ‘One of them demanded that Dillon supply him with a list of all the gay men in London’. (Kennedy, *First Man-Made Man*, 84.).

⁶¹³ Dillon, *Self*, 44.

⁶¹⁴ Cowell, *Roberta Cowell’s Story*, 5.

Cowell, female. I have become woman physically, psychologically, glandularly and legally.’⁶¹⁵ This ‘becoming’ female indicates a complete transition from one gender to another, unlike Dillon, who required a reconstruction of his physicality to complement his male ‘outlook’. Cowell initially underwent psychoanalysis for depression, where she received the diagnosis mentioned above of her psychological femininity. So potent was Cowell’s masculinity at this stage, that the revelation led her to contemplate suicide. This reflects a common cultural understanding of gender hierarchy in mid-twentieth-century Britain that constructed masculinity as superior. Individuals with biologically male bodies who displayed any aspects of femininity were likely to be viewed as homosexual and were treated with derision. Following the large number of ‘shell shock’ cases resulting from World War I, competing discourses on masculinity developed. Some acknowledged that fear during warfare was a common experience and that it did not have to be ignored or repressed as a threat to manliness. Other interpretations adopted a far more critical characterisation of soldiers suffering post-traumatic stress disorder as ‘madmen...or cowards and malingerers’.⁶¹⁶ During and after World War II there was an attempt to reinforce gender divisions and define appropriate behaviour based on traditional concepts of male dominance and female submission.⁶¹⁷ Such ideas stemmed from concerns that women’s success in performing traditionally male jobs during wartime posed a threat to British masculinity.⁶¹⁸ Even in cases of gender non-conformity reported in the press, those assigned male at birth presenting as female, such as Augustine Hull –

⁶¹⁵ Cowell, *Roberta Cowell’s Story*, 5.

⁶¹⁶ Elaine Showalter, ‘Rivers and Sassoon: The Inscription of Male Gender Anxieties’, in: Margaret Randolph Higonnet, et al., (eds) *Behind the Lines: Gender and the Two World Wars* (London, 1987), 64.

⁶¹⁷ Susan Gubar, ‘“This Is My Rifle, This Is My Gun”: World War II and the Blitz on Women’, in: Margaret Randolph Higonnet, et al., (eds) *Behind the Lines: Gender and the Two World Wars* (London, 1987), 227-31.

⁶¹⁸ Sandra M. Gilbert, ‘Soldier’s Heart: Literary Men, Literary Women, and the Great War’, in: Margaret Randolph Higonnet, et al., (eds) *Behind the Lines: Gender and the Two World Wars* (London, 1987), 200.

who was arrested on a charge of 'gross indecency' – were often presumed to be homosexual and their actions met with incomprehension.⁶¹⁹ Cases of those assigned female at birth presenting as men meanwhile, could be treated with understanding if not admiration by the press.⁶²⁰ As Angus McLaren states, '[w]omen's cross-dressing could be rationalized as a practical matter, but most commentators assumed that cases of male transvestism could not because it made no sense for a man to dress like a woman.'⁶²¹ Thus, Cowell's shame can be viewed as a reflection of the transmisogyny in cultural discourses on acceptable forms of masculinity and male privilege which her perceived 'decision' to identify as female threatened.⁶²²

Once Cowell received a diagnosis of intersex, the physical basis of this condition relieved the feelings of humiliation and Cowell's construction of her gender identity was dominated by this biological interpretation. Cowell quickly dismissed her portrayal of her unambiguous masculinity with the comment 'I had always known that my body had certain feminine characteristics. My aggressively masculine manner compensated for this'.⁶²³ In her autobiography, Cowell summarised the contents of her therapy sessions in a few lines and instead devoted more space to the physical aspects of her condition. Cowell described in detail the opinion of a sexologist in Harley Street:

He gave it as his considered opinion that my body showed quite prominent feminine sex characteristics: wide hips and narrow shoulders, pelvis female in type, hair

⁶¹⁹ McLaren, *Trials of Masculinity*, 210.

⁶²⁰ Oram, *Her Husband was a Woman!*, 73.

⁶²¹ McLaren, *Trials of Masculinity*, 216.

⁶²² Serano, *Whipping Girl*, 15.

⁶²³ Cowell, *Roberta Cowell's Story*, 5.

distribution and skin female in type...the absence of laryngeal relief (no Adam's apple) and a tendency of the lower limbs to converge towards the knees...My breast formation was examined and judged to be typically feminine though very little developed...The recent development, I was told, was due to an alteration in gland balance and perhaps in gland structure...There seemed to be some degree of hermaphroditism present.⁶²⁴

Thus, Cowell's determination to disassociate herself from the stigma of mental illness led her to construct her female gender identity as firmly rooted in biology and dependant on surgery to correct her intersexed body.

Each of the discourses discussed here represent just how multifaceted mid-twentieth century constructions of gender were. Autobiographical accounts incorporated the structure and language of medical texts to legitimise their own understandings of their gender identities and the need for surgery rather than therapy. Yet they also demonstrate the mutual influence between official and personal discourses, neither fully dominating the other. The vagaries of terminology were shared by medical experts and patients alike despite previous preoccupations with categorisation. *Self* occupied an interesting middle ground between personal and medical narrative, and could, along with the autobiographies, potentially be understood as an example of the type of 'commentaries' which Foucault defined as secondary texts that discuss a primary work, and thereby allow for 'the (endless) construction of new discourses'.⁶²⁵ In turn,

⁶²⁴ Cowell, *Roberta Cowell's Story*, 41-2.

⁶²⁵ Foucault, 'The Order of Discourse', 57.

commentaries reassert 'the dominance of the primary text'.⁶²⁶ Certainly Cowell's account relied heavily on prevailing medical definitions of intersex. However, in *Self* and his autobiography, Dillon was not constrained by limitations of commentaries. Foucault asserts, 'the commentary's only role...is to say at last what was silently articulated 'beyond', in the text...the commentary must say for the first time what had, nonetheless, already been said, and must tirelessly repeat what had, however, never been said.'⁶²⁷

This does not apply to *Self*, which not only denied the validity of the medical profession's pronouncements on appropriate treatment but offered alternative understandings that were absent from the primary medical discourse. It is then more accurate to interpret Dillon's work as an alternative but not entirely reverse discourse rather than a commentary. In terms of dominance then, accessibility rather than deliberate exclusion appears to be the key factor in gaining primacy. Medical texts received wider circulation, especially at universities where their construction of individuals like Dillon would be adopted and propagated by future doctors. These discourses though often drew on patients' own narratives, and while some doctors rejected these outright, this was far from universally true as Gillies' work has demonstrated. A complex multiplicity of discourses on gender identity therefore existed that were both interdependent and contradictory.

Post-operative gender identity

⁶²⁶ Foucault, 'The Order of Discourse', 57.

⁶²⁷ *Ibid.*, 57-8.

The one common thread that runs throughout the varying discourses is the common understanding of the myriad elements that constituted 'man' and 'woman'. Dillon and Cowell combined cultural constructions of gendered traits and roles with their post-operative bodies in their narratives to legitimise their gender identities. Their accounts also emphasised the social aspect of gender attribution as discussed by Suzanne Kessler and Wendy McKenna. Kessler and McKenna stress the collaboration between the individual and outside observers in acceptance into a gender category:

The displayer creates the initial gender attribution, probably by his/her public appearance and present talk. However, after that point, the gender attribution is maintained by virtue of two things: (1) Every act of the displayer's is filtered through the initial gender attribution which the perceiver has made; (2) The perceiver holds the natural attitude (e.g., gender is invariant).⁶²⁸

Accordingly, both Dillon and Cowell relied on others to reaffirm their gender identities through their making the appropriate gender attribution, which in turn was based on their ability to adhere to the cultural perceptions of male and female gender.

i) Gender Traits

Dillon represented his masculinity as pre-existing and his 'true' self which was belied by his female biology. If his masculinity was in any way acquired it allowed the possibility that Dillon possessed elements of femininity, an idea that he firmly rejected. Dillon's belief in his innate masculinity was absolute and should be respected. However, the very

⁶²⁸ Suzanne Kessler and Wendy McKenna, *Gender: An Ethnomethodological Approach* (Chicago, 1985), 136-7.

attributes that Dillon felt established his masculinity were in fact non-binary in themselves. They became gendered by the cultural constructions of masculinity existent in mid-twentieth-century Britain. Butler argues:

When the constructed status of gender is theorised as radically independent of sex, gender itself becomes a free-floating artifice, with the consequence that *man* and *masculine* might just as easily signify a female body as a male one[.]⁶²⁹

Butler explains the performative element of gender as ‘a reenactment and reexperiencing of a set of meanings already socially established’.⁶³⁰ These socially established meanings were precisely why Dillon categorised himself as male. As Butler states, in such discourses ‘one is one’s gender to the extent that one is not the other gender’.⁶³¹ The binary system of mid-twentieth-century Britain dictated that one was either male or female if one was to ‘exist’. Consequently, Dillon adopted a cultural construction of his masculinity in order to both interpret his identity and legitimise it as a socially accepted identity. This is not to say that in another century where short hair and sporting prowess are not indicators of masculinity that Dillon would not have identified as male. Rather, his masculinity incorporated cultural definitions of masculine behaviour instead of being rooted in a stable, pre-existing male gender.

Dillon included two acquired characteristics in his male identity. Firstly, Dillon took up smoking a pipe, ostensibly to deter male attention preoperatively, but this was a

⁶²⁹ Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 6.

⁶³⁰ *Ibid.*

⁶³¹ *Ibid.*, 22.

medically accepted attribute of masculinity.⁶³² Clifford Allen for example, in his discussion of his patient M.K., noted that '[d]uring her period of depression she felt conscious of a change in her sexuality. She said, "I felt I was turning into a man..." She smoked a lot when she was depressed.'⁶³³ Cowell too took up smoking to cement his male heterosexual status.⁶³⁴ Again, the interactions between cultural and medical discourses are reflected in the medical equation of smoking with masculinity becoming part of the cultural consciousness. The second example is Dillon's assimilation of sexism into his gender performance. In her autobiography, Cowell referred to her conversation with Dillon at their first meeting regarding 'the connection between sex and intelligence, I, of course, maintaining that given equal opportunities, women can be the mental equals of men. He disagreed violently.'⁶³⁵ Dillon characterised this sexism as a defence mechanism against unwanted female attention. He wrote '[w]ith girls one had to be careful...I developed something of a reputation of being a woman-hater, since I made a point of treating them in a rather rough brotherly fashion, and sheered off if any showed any signs of being interested.'⁶³⁶

The fear of discovery may well have influenced his attitude towards women, yet Dillon's sustained sexist stance suggests that it was more imbedded in his construction of masculinity than he was prepared to admit. In *Self*, Dillon presented women's intellectual

⁶³² Dillon/Jivaka, *Out of the Ordinary*, 82.

⁶³³ Clifford Allen, 'Adrenal Dysfunction and its Relation to Sexuality', in: L.R. Broster, et al., *The Adrenal Cortex and Intersexuality* (London, 1938), 77.

⁶³⁴ Cowell, *Roberta Cowell's Story*, 10.

⁶³⁵ *Ibid.*, 50.

⁶³⁶ Dillon/Jivaka, *Out of the Ordinary*, 125.

inferiority to men as a natural development that no form of social conditioning could reverse:

...women who have been taught to use their reason in some degree develop it until they are capable of tackling certain of the problems which had been for male consideration alone before...[This] may lead people to argue that it was only a lack of education that previously made them appear inferior to...men in intelligence...This, however, is an illusion...The highest education cannot eradicate...the marked development of the emotional part which is woman's heritage.⁶³⁷

Hodgkinson points to Dillon's correspondence with Cowell as further evidence of Dillon's subscribing to a highly traditional discourse on masculinity in which hobbies and gender roles were clearly demarcated. In one letter, Dillon questioned whether Cowell's traditionally masculine interests such as 'motor-racing, flying, engineering – would fit in with her 'chosen mode of life', by which he meant 'cooking, sewing and housework.'⁶³⁸ Here, Dillon drew on cultural discourses in which cars and planes constituted masculine hobbies and women who encroached on these were ridiculed in motoring magazine articles, while careers in skilled engineering work were accepted as 'men's jobs'.⁶³⁹

Aside from his sexist opinions, Dillon did not cultivate an aggressive masculinity. He behaved very much as he did prior to any medical intervention. His autobiography offers no descriptions of hours spent assimilating masculine characteristics into his personality,

⁶³⁷ Dillon, *Self*, 101-2.

⁶³⁸ Hodgkinson, *Michael née Laura*, 92.

⁶³⁹ Greenfield, O'Connell and Reid, 'Fashioning Masculinity', 461. Braybon and Summerfield, *Out of the Cage*, 157.

nor did he mention any dramatic alterations to his psychology post-operatively. Dillon simply expressed intense relief that he could now dress and live openly as a man. This differs greatly from Cowell's gender presentation which required a construction that was more than physical. She devoted numerous pages to her efforts as a woman 'in training'. Cowell required conscious effort to eradicate 'snatches of R.A.F. jargon and mannish expressions.'⁶⁴⁰ She also found the arts of hair, make up and clothing 'unexpectedly difficult to learn.'⁶⁴¹ In contrast to Dillon, she had to take pains to rid herself of ingrained masculine habits including 'stroking my face, a gesture which a man often uses, but a woman never does [and] [s]tanding with my back to the fire and going upstairs two at a time'.⁶⁴² Swearing, a 'masculine' vice that Cowell had been prone to prior to treatment was also naturally expunged from her character after transitioning:

My vocabulary, or at least my choice of some phrases, modified itself without any conscious effort on my part. Happily plying the electric iron one day, I dropped it on to my foot, which was in an opentoed [*sic*] shoe. "Oh, bother!" I exclaimed.⁶⁴³

Similarly, as a result of her hormone treatments, Cowell 'developed one super-feminine quality—the ability to blush' and her nature became 'milder and less aggressive'.⁶⁴⁴

Cowell went on to cite what she viewed as one of the key indicators of her femininity; '[t]he most direct contrast to my previous self was my development of a strong maternal instinct, and a new and strong interest in domestic work.'⁶⁴⁵

⁶⁴⁰ Cowell, *Roberta Cowell's Story*, 58.

⁶⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 57.

⁶⁴² *Ibid.*, 58.

⁶⁴³ *Ibid.*

⁶⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

⁶⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 59.

Cowell's construction of womanliness appears to draw strongly on wartime and post-war discourses of ideal womanhood. The glamorous, sexualised images of women in men's magazines and popular British cartoons would no doubt have circulated among Cowell's RAF compatriots during their war service and seem to have informed her physical femininity.⁶⁴⁶ Pictures of Cowell show her wearing full make up and perfectly styled long blonde hair. Cowell admitted 'it has always been my conviction that the more feminine woman looks better with longish hair' and 'wore a hair-piece, deliberately made longer than the prevailing fashion.'⁶⁴⁷ Cowell's style was more understated than these blatantly erotic images and her clothing while feminine was not overtly revealing, but there was a distinct similarity in terms of hair and makeup. Rachel Ritchie has argued that 'glamour' had lost its popularity in some women's magazines in the 1950s and was negatively associated with artifice, despite Cynthia White's argument that there was a 'cult of personal glamour'.⁶⁴⁸ The focus in magazines such as *Home and Country* and *Woman's Outlook* was on tidiness and natural beauty, with glamorous looks reserved for special occasions.⁶⁴⁹ Cowell appears to have subscribed to the form of beauty promoted in magazines like *Woman* with their frequent advertisements for beauty products.⁶⁵⁰ The only remnant of masculinity Cowell maintained was her interest in motor-racing and one of the few images of her in trousers depicts her in overalls at the racetrack. However,

⁶⁴⁶ Gubar, "This Is My Rifle, This Is My Gun", 240.

⁶⁴⁷ Cowell, *Roberta Cowell's Story*, 58, 54.

⁶⁴⁸ Rachel Ritchie, "Beauty isn't all a matter of looking glamorous': attitudes to glamour and beauty in 1950s women's magazines", *Women's History Review*, 23 (2014), 729, 724.

⁶⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 732-3.

⁶⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 729.

Cowell was careful to counteract her one manly interest with her highly feminine appearance and domestic hobbies.

ii) Gender Roles

In terms of gender roles, Dillon did adopt certain cultural tropes of manliness though his career choice was not explicitly a gendered one. While the medical profession was dominated by men who received higher wages, several women were enrolled on Dillon's course and their number was increasing.⁶⁵¹ Gail Braybon and Penny Summerfield assert that after 1945 there were 7198 female doctors compared to 2580 in 1928.⁶⁵² Nevertheless, his work as a ship's doctor provided the opportunity to adopt a pseudo-naval uniform, allowing Dillon a tenuous link with the popular warrior male identity.⁶⁵³ Arthur Mclvor has discussed the insecurity felt by men in reserved occupations, unable to fulfil the heroic soldier image that dominated wartime discourses on British masculinity and sought to justify their masculinity by constructing alternative images of patriotic manhood.⁶⁵⁴ As a Spitfire pilot during World War Two, Cowell was at the pinnacle of the cultural hierarchy of masculine ideals.⁶⁵⁵ Military pilots represented 'the epitome of heroic manly identity' in interwar Britain, an image Dillon was prevented from adopting by his female biology.⁶⁵⁶ Conversely,

⁶⁵¹ Hodgkinson, *Michael née Laura*, 73.

⁶⁵² Braybon and Summerfield, *Out of the Cage*, 261.

⁶⁵³ Herbert Sussman has stressed the continual presence of the warrior as a key male identity across cultures and centuries. See Herbert L. Sussman, *Masculine Identities: The History and Meanings of Manliness* (Oxford, 2012), 11-36.

⁶⁵⁴ Arthur Mclvor, 'Rebuilding 'Real Men': Work and Working-Class Male Civilian Bodies in Wartime', in: Linsey Robb and Juliette Pattinson (eds), *Men, Masculinities and Male Culture in the Second World War* (London, 2017), 121-44.

⁶⁵⁵ Linsey Robb and Juliette Pattinson, 'Becoming Visible: Gendering the Study of Men at War', in: Linsey Robb and Juliette Pattinson (eds), *Men, Masculinities and Male Culture in the Second World War* (London, 2017), 14.

⁶⁵⁶ Frances Houghton, 'Becoming 'a Man' During the Battle of Britain: Combat, Masculinity and Rites of Passage in the Memoirs of 'the Few'', in: Linsey Robb and Juliette Pattinson (eds), *Men, Masculinities and Male Culture in the Second World War* (London, 2017), 100.

Dillon's ability to secure work as a man was unimpeded by his transition. Cowell on the other hand, experienced the prejudices faced by cis women in accessing employment. Her case is instructive in revealing not only the differing experiences of postoperative gender non-conforming men and women but also the gendered nature of work in mid-twentieth-century British culture. Cowell's womanhood barred her from continuing in her career in motor racing. She pursued several business ventures, including running a women's clothing company started before her surgery with the intention of 'allow[ing] some of my innate femininity to express itself.'⁶⁵⁷ Cowell's linking femininity with clothing reflects the interwar discourse on consumption in which a passion for clothing was associated with femininity.⁶⁵⁸ The adoption of a stereotypically female job thus enhanced Cowell's female gender performance and allowed her to remain financially solvent.

It was the exposure of Cowell's transition in the press that led to the near impossibility of her securing employment. At her bankruptcy hearing in 1958, where she was said to have accrued debts of £12,580, Cowell explained how London Designs Ltd in which she had shares had gone 'into voluntary liquidation' in January 1952 due to fears of 'the possibility of publicity' arising from her inability to continue competing in the Grand Prix.⁶⁵⁹ Taking advantage of the press attention, Cowell sold her story to the *Picture Post* for around £8000 though this did little to alleviate her long-term situation.⁶⁶⁰ In an article in 1962, Cowell was still struggling to support herself. She wrote '[a]t the moment I am working as a

⁶⁵⁷ Cowell, *Roberta Cowell's Story*, 42.

⁶⁵⁸ Jill Greenfield, Sean O'Connell and Chris Reid, 'Fashioning Masculinity: *Men Only*, Consumption and the Development of Marketing in the 1930s', *Twentieth Century British History*, 10 (1999), 461.

⁶⁵⁹ Anon., 'Got £8,000 For Life'.

⁶⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

psychotherapist and doing some writing, but neither pay any money at the moment and I am living on my parents...I find it virtually impossible to get a salaried job because there would inevitably be publicity.⁶⁶¹

Though Cowell's postoperative employability was far more compromised than Dillon's, this was not wholly attributable to her womanhood. While Braybon and Summerfield acknowledge the redundancies faced by women who adopted traditionally masculine roles such as engineering work during the Second World War, 'there was not the same wholesale dismissal of women that there had been at the end of the First'.⁶⁶² Women were able to find jobs following the War and married women with jobs were viewed more positively, despite continued medical advocacy of women's remaining in the domestic sphere.⁶⁶³ It was the revelation of Cowell's transition and the consequent transmisogyny that was the root of her employment issues. She became 'the other', neither fully male nor female. As Butler argues:

...the very notion of "the person" is called into question by the cultural emergence of those "incoherent" or "discontinuous" gendered beings who appear to be persons but who fail to conform to the gendered norms of cultural intelligibility by which persons are defined.⁶⁶⁴

⁶⁶¹ Anon., 'No Jobs For Miss Roberta Cowell', *The Times*, 2 February 1962, <https://gdc.gale.com/gdc/artemis/NewspapersDetailsPage>.

⁶⁶² Gail Braybon and Penny Summerfield, *Out of the Cage: Women's Experiences in Two World Wars* (Oxford, 2013), 262.

⁶⁶³ *Ibid.*, 278-9.

⁶⁶⁴ Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 17.

Cowell's transition was too problematic for most employers to hire her. It was her reconstructed body rather than an acceptance of her female sex that excluded her from regular employment.

Outside of employment, the construction of the family was a key aspect of gender roles. King's study of cultural images of fatherhood in Britain stresses the importance of family life in constructions of masculinity in the 1940s:

The rise of popular psychological modes of thinking and raised standards of living, coupled with an emphasis on the family at the heart of post-Second World War reconstruction, led to a new stress on the father–child relationship and an increased assumption that men should focus their masculine identities on fatherhood.⁶⁶⁵

Dillon's exclusion from fatherhood led to a reticence in pursuing relationships as he argued '[o]ne must not lead a girl on if one could not give her children. That was the basis of my ethics. An evening's flirting at a dance was one thing and a relief – but no more.'⁶⁶⁶ Dillon's inability to reproduce may have contributed to his insecurity over being accepted as a man by others. However, it is also probable that the overwhelming fear of discovery influenced Dillon's rejection of companionship. By emphasising his moral stance in not deceiving women, Dillon presented himself as chivalrous, the classic feature of traditional masculinity.⁶⁶⁷ While the interwar period produced reverse discourses on male courage that explored the possibility of fear and courage coinciding in the male psyche, fear was

⁶⁶⁵ King, *Family Men*, 3.

⁶⁶⁶ Dillon/Jivaka, *Out of the Ordinary*, 125.

⁶⁶⁷ Ilana R. Bet-El, 'Men and Soldiers: British Conscripts, Concepts of Masculinity, and the Great War', in: Billie Melman (ed.) *Borderlines: Genders and Identities in War and Peace 1870-1930* (London, 1998), 78-9.

still a problematic concept for male identities.⁶⁶⁸ Juliette Pattinson has stressed the numerous poems, stories and plays glorifying warfare in the interwar period and that '[w]hile the notion of what it meant to be a man was under extreme pressure, the 'soldier hero' as a masculine ideal survived the First World War intact.'⁶⁶⁹ For Dillon, contending with a newly restructured male body, the image of a selfless, moral man must have seemed far more desirable to cultivate than one paralysed by fear.

Dillon's qualms over his male infertility did not extend to Cowell, who represented for Dillon the ideal partner.⁶⁷⁰ Dillon's letters to Cowell reveal his belief in a strongly traditional representation of marriage in which the husband acted as protector and breadwinner while the wife attended to domestic duties.⁶⁷¹ This is unsurprising given the post-war reinforcement of stereotypical gender roles. Braybon and Summerfield have argued that '[a]n image of wives and mothers longing to return home was created by policy-makers and in the press' despite many women seeking to maintain their positions as workers.⁶⁷² Yet this propaganda was bolstered by increased marriage rates following the War, as well as reflecting the attitudes of some women, including wife and mother Clara Moore.⁶⁷³ Moore is quoted by Braybon and Summerfield as having declared 'I didn't want to go on working after the war...[her husband] said 'Your place is in the home', and I

⁶⁶⁸ Michael Roper, 'Between Manliness and Masculinity: The "War Generation" and the Psychology of Fear in Britain, 1914–1950', *Journal of British Studies*, 44 (2005), 352-3.

⁶⁶⁹ Juliette Pattinson, 'Fantasies of the 'Soldier Hero', Frustrations of the Jedburghs', in: Linsey Robb and Juliette Pattinson (eds), *Men, Masculinities and Male Culture in the Second World War* (London, 2017), 29.

⁶⁷⁰ Kennedy, *First Man-Made Man*, 12, Cowell later maintained she was unaware of Dillon's serious intention to marry her, and as her side of their correspondence has not been preserved, it is difficult to dispute this.

⁶⁷¹ King, *Family Men*, 158-9.

⁶⁷² Braybon and Summerfield, *Out of the Cage*, 263-4.

⁶⁷³ *Ibid.*, 271.

wanted to stay with the children anyway'.⁶⁷⁴ Women were urged to vacate the jobs they had temporarily undertaken in favour of male workers and to return to their 'natural' roles as housewives and mothers.⁶⁷⁵ Caitríona Beaumont's work has further shown that while women's lived experiences following the Second World War were far more multifaceted than domestic ideology suggests, the 'prevailing view of women at this time, as illustrated in popular women's magazines, was that the vast majority aspired only to marriage and motherhood.'⁶⁷⁶ Fears over the feminisation of culture and the threat to patriarchy posed by women's new powers as workers and voters led to the popularisation of misogynistic discourses and a reassertion of active male dominance from the interwar period.⁶⁷⁷ Dillon absorbed this discourse and believed that financial responsibilities lay with the husband. He waited until he was able to support Cowell financially before making the engagement official by offering her a ring, writing 'open the package I sent you, look inside. I passed my exams and we can marry.'⁶⁷⁸ Cowell ultimately refused Dillon's proposal, leading him to obliterate her from his autobiography, and as Kennedy states, 'Dillon never mentioned Roberta Cowell again.'⁶⁷⁹ Dillon did not attempt to form a relationship with another woman and he portrayed himself as an asexual bachelor. Having failed in his attempt at marrying the only woman he felt would understand and accept him, Dillon was forced to abandon this hegemonic form of masculinity and seek alternative constructions.

⁶⁷⁴ Braybon and Summerfield, *Out of the Cage*, 271.

⁶⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 281.

⁶⁷⁶ Caitríona Beaumont, 'What Do Women Want? Housewives' Associations, Activism and Changing Representations of Women in the 1950s', *Women's History Review*, 26 (2017), 148.

⁶⁷⁷ Greenfield, O'Connell and Reid, 'Fashioning Masculinity', 461.

⁶⁷⁸ Kennedy, *First Man-Made Man*, 94.

⁶⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 96.

For Cowell, her sexuality was very much connected to her gender identity. Cowell divided her sexual orientation into three phases and her discourse on the subject reflects the facets of institutional heterosexuality described by Butler. Butler states '[t]his conception of gender presupposes not only a causal relation among sex, gender, and desire, but suggests as well that desire reflects or expresses gender and that gender reflects or expresses desire.'⁶⁸⁰ Cowell subscribed to this understanding of the causal link between gender and desire. When presenting as male, Cowell 'was not a homosexual; my inclinations, as they developed, were entirely heterosexual.'⁶⁸¹ During transition Cowell asserted '[m]y life at this time was asexual.'⁶⁸² Cowell then emerged as a heterosexual woman post-operatively, a direct result of her newly feminised physicality and not an indication of homosexuality, which Cowell was 'horrified and repelled by'.⁶⁸³ Cowell's violent homophobia in her autobiography reflected cultural attitudes towards male same-sex relationships. Even after the moderation of her temperament that occurred once Cowell identified as a woman, her disparagement of homosexuals continued:

It is true that I had become a little more tolerant in this direction than I had been in the past; this meant, however, that had I met one I would have refrained from actually kicking his spine up through the top of his head...but my general attitude towards these gentlemen was exactly as it had been.⁶⁸⁴

⁶⁸⁰ Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 22.

⁶⁸¹ Cowell, *Roberta Cowell's Story*, 5.

⁶⁸² *Ibid.*, 47.

⁶⁸³ *Ibid.*

⁶⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 42.

The discourse on homosexuality was dominated by shame and ridicule, but whereas masculine women were mocked by the press and medically categorised as sexually deviant, homosexual men had the added stigma of their sexuality being criminalised.⁶⁸⁵ McLaren notes Quentin Crisp's remark that '[t]he men of the twenties searched themselves for vestiges of effeminacy as though for lice.'⁶⁸⁶ Cowell was thus adamant that her romantic interest in men followed her transition.

Cowell's construction of her gender identity closely aligned with popular patriarchal discourses in which women were sexually attractive, domesticated wives and mothers who were 'naturally' drawn to these roles. She subscribed to the 'equal but different' interpretation of gender roles posited by interwar feminists, telling Dillon that women were as intellectually competent as men.⁶⁸⁷ Conversely, Dillon, unable to cultivate a domesticated masculinity or a heroic warrior image reverted to a form of misogynistic masculinity that would most definitively distance him from any resemblance to women.

iii) Outside acceptance

Dillon and Cowell required the acknowledgement of their gender identities by others if they were to gain legal and social recognition, echoing the "double dependency" system — dependent on both legal and medical determination — for trans people seeking to transition' that Xavier Nunn has identified in Weimar Germany.⁶⁸⁸ Legally, in the 1940s

⁶⁸⁵ Oram, *Her Husband was a Woman!*, 81. McLaren, *The Trials of Masculinity*, 221.

⁶⁸⁶ McLaren, *The Trials of Masculinity*, 231.

⁶⁸⁷ Kent, 'The Politics of Sexual Difference', 242.

⁶⁸⁸ Xavier Nunn, 'Trans Liminality and the Nazi State', *Past & Present*, 1 (2023), 131.

registering as a gender other than that assigned at birth appears to have been a relatively straightforward process.⁶⁸⁹ A signed medical certificate from a doctor diagnosing an intersex condition and a supporting statement from a family member confirming that the person in question's sex was wrongly assigned at birth formed the sole basis of the application.⁶⁹⁰ Thus, the reregistration would in theory correct this mistake. Dillon applied and was granted reregistration as male in 1944, two years before his first genital operation.⁶⁹¹ Dillon's familial support came from a distant cousin, Maude Beauchamp, whom Dillon described as 'more modern than anyone else. Having for some time suspected something she readily obliged.'⁶⁹² Here, Dillon equated 'modern' with progressive and enlightened, qualities that he rejected in his male gender presentation but nevertheless benefitted from here. Dillon was not reissued with a new birth certificate. Instead, the original was altered by a note in the margin stating:

In entry no 54, col 2, for Laura Maud read Laurence Michael and in col 3 for 'girl' read 'boy'. Corrected on 14th April 1944 by C.E. Weston, Supt Registrar on production of a statutory declaration.⁶⁹³

Here again Foucault's theory of the power of institutions in creating knowledge is evidenced.⁶⁹⁴ Dillon's male gender required the confirmation of a family member, a medical professional and a registrar at Somerset House. Each of these individuals were involved in the construction of Dillon's legal status as male but it was the 'doctor from

⁶⁸⁹ Hodgkinson, *Michael née Laura*, 87.

⁶⁹⁰ Dillon/Jivaka, *Out of the Ordinary*, 100.

⁶⁹¹ In his autobiography, Dillon maintains the reregistration was granted in 1943. However, Hodgkinson has cited the official documentation which dates the changes to Dillon's birth certificate as occurring in 1944.

⁶⁹² Dillon/Jivaka, *Out of the Ordinary*, 100.

⁶⁹³ Hodgkinson, *Michael née Laura*, 63.

⁶⁹⁴ Foucault, 'Truth and Power', 131.

Bath' who was pivotal.⁶⁹⁵ His classification of Dillon as intersex made it possible for Dillon to reregister.

After his reregistration, Dillon received a male identity card which led to his being called-up for the army. In the eyes of the law then, Dillon's reconstructed physicality granted him recognition as a man and required him to fulfil his male duty to fight. Yet this recognition was limited.⁶⁹⁶ A physical examination exempted Dillon from military service, the doctor commenting 'we've turned down a lot like you.'⁶⁹⁷ Notwithstanding the reconstruction of Dillon's body, his biology was still categorised as officially female (or intersex) in terms of his wartime role. When being given his identity card at the Labour Exchange, Dillon was told 'we have had quite a lot of these applications [to alter the sex].'⁶⁹⁸ Despite this, Dillon had no knowledge of the possibility of reregistering before he was advised of the details by his surgeon.⁶⁹⁹ Similarly, Cowell received her guidance on the matter from Dillon. Following Dillon's advice, a 'new birth certificate was issued upon submission of sworn medical affidavits, and [Cowell] became legally a woman at the beginning of 1951.'⁷⁰⁰ This lack of awareness of the legal possibilities for gender non-conforming individuals by the very people avidly seeking out such information, implies

⁶⁹⁵ Dillon/Jivaka, *Out of the Ordinary*, 100.

⁶⁹⁶ Following the 1939 National Registration Act, all British citizens were required to carry identity cards for the purposes of rationing, recording current statistics about the population and to track citizens during the mass dispersal caused by evacuation and mobilisation. The identity card provided information on a person's name, age, sex, occupation, marital status, residence and whether they belonged to one of the armed forces. The act was abolished in 1952. (Statewatch, *Identity cards in the UK - a lesson from history*, [website], 2003, <http://www.statewatch.org/news/2003/jul/26ukid.htm>).

⁶⁹⁷ Dillon/Jivaka, *Out of the Ordinary*, 100.

⁶⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 101.

⁶⁹⁹ Adrian Kane-Galbraith, 'Male Breadwinners of "Doubtful Sex": Trans Men and the Welfare State, 1954-1970', in: Matt Houlbrook, Katie Jones and Ben Mechen (eds) *Men and Masculinities in Modern Britain: A History for the Present*, 'forthcoming' (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2024).

⁷⁰⁰ Cowell, *Roberta Cowell's Story*, 52.

that while it was not unheard of, there was certainly no real enthusiasm from authorities to advertise the availability of reregistration.

The limitations of Dillon's physical reconstruction were emphasised by the reactions of his family to his male identity. Dillon felt unable to ask the aunts who raised him or his brother – labelled accurately as 'transphobic and publicity-averse' by Susan Stryker – for help in becoming legally male.⁷⁰¹ Dillon summarised their reactions on hearing of his transition from a female physician:

Toto's reaction was that God made them male and female, she had never heard of His making them intersex as well...Daisy said she had never heard of it either but if it could happen then I would be the most likely person it could happen to, and Maudie merely snorted.⁷⁰²

Dillon's aunts were clearly far from supportive of Dillon's transition and he felt their disapproval strongly enough to declare it 'impossible' to ask for their help with his reregistration.⁷⁰³ Yet there was a level of toleration of Dillon as a man that was implied in the aunts' postoperative contact with him, as well as their approval of Cowell as a potential fiancée.⁷⁰⁴ Dillon's brother on the other hand was far more definitive. As fearful as Dillon of scandal should his transition be discovered, Dillon's brother Robert estranged

⁷⁰¹ Susan Stryker, 'Foreword', in: Michael Dillon/Lobzang Jivaka, *Out of the Ordinary: A Life of Gender and Spiritual Transitions* (New York, 2017), p. viii.

⁷⁰² Dillon/Jivaka, *Out of the Ordinary*, 100-1.

⁷⁰³ *Ibid.*, 100.

⁷⁰⁴ Kennedy, *First Man-Made Man*, 92.

himself from Dillon and 'would never own [Dillon] as a brother.'⁷⁰⁵ Dillon's account of their final meeting illustrates Robert's vehement rejection of Dillon's male identity:

He accepted the fact of my residence in Dublin as a *fait accompli* that could not be altered, but begged me never to couple my name with his or to admit to any relationship. Nor might I visit him at his home...⁷⁰⁶

Robert's disassociation with Dillon continued after Dillon's death, when he attempted to have his brother's autobiography destroyed and after a few initial comments recorded in the *Sunday Telegraph*, refused to ever speak of Dillon publicly again.⁷⁰⁷ Robert's denial of Dillon's masculine identity highlights the potentially heightened struggle faced by those who had known these gender non-conforming individuals prior to their transition. Having grown up with Dillon as 'Laura' in an era where surgery and hormone treatments were in their infancy and gender non-conforming terminology was largely absent, embracing Dillon as a man was incomprehensible to Robert. Instead, he chose to view Dillon as an embarrassing family secret that should never be mentioned.⁷⁰⁸

In contrast to Robert's rejection, Dillon's university tutor who had known him as 'Laura' not only accepted Dillon as male but assisted in his securing a university place as a male student. Seeking to study in Ireland for a medical degree to reduce the likelihood of his transition being discovered, Dillon needed to produce evidence of his first degree from Oxford, obtained under the name Laura Dillon. As with much of Dillon's journey towards life as a

⁷⁰⁵ Dillon/Jivaka, *Out of the Ordinary*, 103.

⁷⁰⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁰⁷ Hodgkinson, *Michael née Laura*, 189-90.

⁷⁰⁸ For a discussion of family secrets, see Deborah Cohen, *Family Secrets: The Things We Tried to Hide* (London, 2014).

man, he owed his ability to study as a male to his good fortune in having worked with a sympathetic and proactive tutor at Oxford and his position as a relatively wealthy member of the aristocracy that had granted him access to Oxford as Laura. Dillon recorded how his philosophy tutor, Jimmy McKie, managed to convince the 'University Registrar...to issue me an M.A. certificate with only my initials in place of my first names.'⁷⁰⁹ Thus, Laura Maud Dillon could become Laurence Michael. McKie's ingenuity did not stop there; he went on to write 'a masterpiece of a reference, which did not use any pronoun whatsoever.'⁷¹⁰ Consequently, Dillon was granted a place at Trinity College and encountered no further issues regarding his status as male throughout his studies. Dillon's acceptance by his fellow students was crucial to his male status. As John Tosh's work on the nineteenth century reveals, 'manhood was...essentially an achieved status. It was not a birthright, but lay within the power of one's peers to confirm or deny.'⁷¹¹ The importance of approval from others in achieving male gender identity was still very apparent in the twentieth century. At university, Dillon's male identity went unquestioned and in later interviews with Hodgkinson, Dillon's fellow students admitted their astonishment upon hearing of Dillon's transition. Alec Meldrum for example, was also 'absolutely amazed' and Hillas Smith was 'staggered'.⁷¹² Here, a combination of behaviour and appearance secured Dillon's male identity, again emphasising the complex amalgamation of elements that constituted 'man' aside from biological sex.

⁷⁰⁹ Dillon/Jivaka, *Out of the Ordinary*, 102.

⁷¹⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹¹ John Tosh, *Manliness and Masculinities in Nineteenth-Century Britain: Essays on Gender, Family and Empire* (Oxford, 2005), 14.

⁷¹² Hodgkinson, *Michael née Laura*, 75.

Even after Dillon's transition was revealed to his fellow crew members when working as a ship's doctor through a newspaper article, Dillon's masculinity was upheld. Dillon recorded his Captain's positive response, '[h]e became kindly and sympathetic at once and promised to do all he could to help'.⁷¹³ Dillon then described the Second Mate's response:

The Second...said that they had discussed it at length over beer the night before and had come to the conclusion that I had had a raw deal and since they had liked me before and I had not changed overnight they saw no reason for letting it make any difference.⁷¹⁴

Only one crew member expressed any descension in this plan to accept Dillon as a man and claimed 'he always felt something was wrong but couldn't put a finger on it and now it was obvious. But he got no support in this.'⁷¹⁵ In a letter to Dillon, the Medical Superintendent at Ellerman Lines – the company employing Dillon – wrote that he 'still hoped I would stay with the company and would back any arrangements I liked.'⁷¹⁶

However, Dillon's masculinity was rejected during his quest to become a monk. Due to a monastic code barring members of the 'third sex' from higher ordination, Dillon was prevented from becoming a Theravada monk, the tradition he originally sought to follow.⁷¹⁷ His confession of the details of his transition to an English Buddhist monk, Sangharakshita, led to further complications when Sangharakshita betrayed Dillon by

⁷¹³ Dillon/Jivaka, *Out of the Ordinary*, 214.

⁷¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 215.

⁷¹⁵ *Ibid.*

⁷¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 217.

⁷¹⁷ Kennedy, *First Man-Made Man*, 155.

exposing his secret in a letter designed to prevent Dillon's ordination in the Tibetan tradition.⁷¹⁸ Sangharakshita explained his motivation in subsequent interviews which was his rejection of Dillon as a man; Dillon 'was not able to beget a child [as a man]. To my mind it is this factor that determines the gender to which one belongs.'⁷¹⁹ For Sangharakshita, procreation became the deciding factor in legitimising gender and superseded Dillon's convincing masculinity. Cowell was also heavily influenced by medical constructions of the link between sex and gender. Following Dillon's proposal of marriage – confirming his acceptance of her femininity – Cowell rejected him on the grounds that '[a]s far as I was concerned, it would have been two females getting married.'⁷²⁰ Despite her opinion on first meeting Dillon that 'I found it impossible to imagine him as a girl. He was as genuine a man as any I have met', Dillon's potent masculinity failed to render him male after Cowell discovered his transition.⁷²¹ Popular cultural discourses promoted certain rites of passage that were necessary in becoming a man, often related to acts of violence characterised by prowess in warfare.⁷²² Dillon was excluded from these rites of passage, just as he was from fatherhood. In contrast, Cowell achieved these markers of manhood and thus arguably interpreted Dillon's failure in this respect as a confirmation of his continued womanhood.

Cowell's femininity also required confirmation from outsiders. After she 'stopped seeing the circle of people [she] had known in the previous two years', Cowell's one friendship

⁷¹⁸ Kennedy, *First Man-Made Man*, 161.

⁷¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 155.

⁷²⁰ *Ibid.*, 96.

⁷²¹ Cowell, *Roberta Cowell's Story*, 51.

⁷²² Houghton, 'Becoming 'a Man' During the Battle of Britain', 105.

that continued throughout her transition was with her roommate Lisa.⁷²³ Cowell recorded Lisa's navigation of the difficulties involved in what Cowell referred to as her period of 'limbo' before surgery:

One of the trickier problems she had to face was the matter of pronouns, but she never made a mistake...In public, at any rate, she always remembered that I was "he" when in trousers and "she" when in skirts.⁷²⁴

Lisa continued to respect Cowell's own definitions of her gender identity, but Cowell's parents were more heavily influenced by medical discourses provided by Cowell's doctors.⁷²⁵ The discussions with Cowell's medical team coupled with their genuine affection for their child led to their acceptance of her female identity. The medical diagnosis of intersex, a physical condition might have been more comprehensible to Cowell's parents and tolerable than the negative connotations that psychological gender non-conformity would have aroused. Cowell described her separate postoperative meetings with her parents in her autobiography. Cowell's father 'start[ed] violently as I opened the door', but Cowell was 'soon completely at [her] ease' with him. Her concerns at meeting her mother were more intense as Cowell recalled, 'I knew Mother would be sweet and kind, but I think I was probably afraid that she would not like me as a girl, and that she would find me so changed that she might hold me responsible for having done away with her son.'⁷²⁶

Ultimately, following an adjustment period Cowell's mother became reconciled to Cowell's female identity. Thus, as with Dillon, Cowell's friends and family based their acceptance or

⁷²³ Cowell, *Roberta Cowell's Story*, 53.

⁷²⁴ *Ibid.*

⁷²⁵ *Ibid.*

⁷²⁶ *Ibid.*, 62-3.

rejection of her femininity on medical and cultural discourses on gender as well as – at least among those who accepted it – her own construction.

Conclusion: Constructing Transgender

Cowell and Dillon both created their own accounts of their experiences and gave precedence to different aspects of their gender identities. For Cowell, her surgeries were pivotal to her female presentation and she presented her sex, gender and sexuality as co-dependent. Cowell constructed her femininity as both natural and acquired by juxtaposing her postoperative femininity against her previous virile male identity. While certain aspects of her femininity were produced by surgery, such as blushing, much of her womanly behaviour was adopted. Having achieved physical womanhood, she actively practised walking, talking and behaving in what she deemed to be a womanly way based on popular images of gentle, domesticated femininity.

Dillon on the other hand, presented surgery as a reflection of an innate psychological male gender but later contradictorily used his reconstructed body as a signifier of his manhood. He stressed the necessity of accepting an erroneous intersex diagnosis to obtain surgery. Despite his essentialist interpretation of his male gender, the classification of his behaviour and interests as male was determined by cultural and medical discourses on what constituted masculinity.

Equally, his subsequent gender presentation was influenced by cultural celebrations of male superiority in response to the perceived crisis of masculinity caused by newly empowered women. Indeed, despite numerous competing discourses on gender in the 1940s and 1950s, Cowell and Dillon felt compelled to emulate traditional constructions of gender in which visual and behavioural differences were emphasised. A concern with discovery and rejection as 'true' men and women appears to have limited their gender presentations to only the most stereotypical constructions. The adoption of such stereotypes remained – and continues to be – a feature of the gate-keeping process of accessing gender-affirming treatment in the UK from the 1960s onwards.⁷²⁷ These stereotypes were the most recognisable form of gender presentation in mid-twentieth-century culture and would thus shield Cowell and Dillon most successfully from misgendering. This was certainly the case for those unaware of Cowell and Dillon's transitions who largely accepted their postoperative gender identities. For those who had known them prior to transition, particularly family members, Cowell and Dillon's assigned genders were harder to supersede regardless of their successful gender presentation. Thus, ultimate acknowledgment as man or woman required successful public gender attribution informed by traits and behaviours as well as physicality. Even after extensive surgery and the adoption of cultural stereotypes, acceptance was not universal and for some Cowell and Dillon would forever remain the 'other'.

Following the revelation in the press of Dillon's transition in 1958, his arrival in India placed him in a new cultural landscape. Like Cowell, Dillon spent years establishing his male gender

⁷²⁷ Serano, *Whipping girl*, 139.

identity within the British binary discourse on gender. He underwent numerous procedures and took hormones that allowed him to obtain a male physicality and cemented his appearance through the growth of a beard, a short haircut and consistently dressing in masculine clothing both prior to and following his transition. Dillon cultivated a sexist attitude towards gender roles, acquired culturally defined 'male' habits such as smoking a pipe and performed a pseudo-military job as a ship's surgeon. Dillon's male identity was recognised in British law through his reregistration and socially he was accepted as male by colleagues and acquaintances. Even after the revelation of Dillon's transition, there were those – his employers for example – who continued to support his identity as a man or at least his right to live as he wished. Similarly, Cowell described efforts to alter her mannerisms, speech and appearance to comply with cultural representations of femininity and attempted to work in the stereotypically feminine industry of fashion.

Both were aided in gaining legal acceptance of their gender identities by medical professionals. Although the official medical position dictated that intersex patients were the only legitimate candidates for surgery, individual practitioners such as Gillies adapted the narrative to accommodate Dillon and Cowell's transitions. These narratives involved a complex interplay between medical and cultural discourse as well as reciprocal engagements between medical practitioners and their patients. While both Dillon and Cowell were obliged to accept an erroneous intersex diagnosis to obtain legal reregistration as another gender and medical treatments, the medical professionals responsible for Dillon and Cowell's treatment did not attempt to impose medical categorisations on their patients without reference to their own interpretations. Thus, for Cowell and Dillon there was a

possibility of living as their gender identity after transition with the help and tentative acceptance of those around them.

However, this recognition was both limited and culturally specific. Once Dillon was living in India, he faced different challenges to his maleness. The monastic order into which he desired to be ordained recognised the existence of a 'third sex' that transcended the British binary model. Despite the absence of a specific definition of what constituted this 'third sex', it is reasonable to infer that it applied to individuals who did not, for various reasons, fit the categories of male or female. Such an alternative identity may have been liberating for some gender non-conforming individuals whose gender was more fluid, but for Dillon it was another descriptor – like his false intersex diagnosis – that did not equate to his experiences but one which he was obliged to accept. A more material problem for Dillon's spiritual calling was that the monastic code prohibited his ordination as a member of the 'third sex'. Once again, the parameters of what defined 'man' and 'woman' had changed and Dillon's transition and male identity papers became meaningless in this Buddhist monastic setting. Notwithstanding Sangharakshita's own British origins and use of male pronouns for Dillon, once Dillon had confided in Sangharakshita regarding his transition, Sangharakshita believed, in Kennedy's words, that 'Dillon was a woman, and therefore completely unfit to take vows in the male community.'⁷²⁸ Thus, Sangharakshita not only prevented Dillon's monastic ordination, he also ignored the category of 'third sex' and resituated Dillon in the western binary concept of gender as a woman.

⁷²⁸ Kennedy, *First Man-Made Man*, 155.

The disagreements over what it meant to be a 'man' or 'woman' demonstrate how precarious the categorisations of gender were, even within one country. For Gillies, Dillon's altered body sealed his maleness, but for Cowell, his female assigned birth sex prevented her from viewing him as a male suitor. Such vacillating interpretations reveal the importance of country specific histories of gender non-conformity. In Britain, concerns over the mutability of sex and gender informed the medical and cultural discourses on gender non-conformity. The medical narrative did not allow for vagaries or boundary crossing between the genders. Everyone was either a man or a woman and in cases of uncertainty, the physician had the power to determine the 'true' sex. Medical discourses co-opted knowledge created by cultural narratives and presented it as being medical in origin. Case studies in which doctors were determining to which sex the patient belonged relied heavily on gendered interpretations of hobbies, occupations and behaviours. In turn, gender non-conforming individuals themselves made use of these cultural and medical narratives in their own constructions of their gender identity which were diverse and often inconsistent. Cowell and Dillon's autobiographies reflect these differing approaches while also sharing certain similarities. Both accounts reveal an understanding of manhood and womanhood as encompassing physical, mental and psychological attributes, requiring all three to achieve 'full' manhood/womanhood.

Cowell and Dillon both appeared to successfully present culturally acceptable forms of femininity and masculinity. Equally, both individuals, to different extents, acquired manly and womanly behaviours that received confirmation from others through their acceptance

of their gender identity. On the other hand, it was their physical transitions that would ultimately endorse or deny their acceptance as man and woman. In law and in Gillies' medical construction, Dillon and Cowell's transitions legitimised their gender identities. However, in other situations, surgery assisted the achievement of an individual's gender identity only to the extent that it remained hidden. Once the reconstructed nature of Dillon and Cowell's bodies was discovered, their identities as man and woman became questionable again.

Section Two: Cultural Representations

Chapter 4: 'I would have given my soul...to lead the life of a beautiful woman': 2835 *Mayfair*
and the importance of fictional accounts of gender non-conformity in early-twentieth-
century British novels

In his discussion of Leslie Feinberg's novel *Stone Butch Blues* (1993), Jay Prosser stressed the value of fiction in representing transgender identities. He stated that '[f]iction is less factual than autobiography but truer, for truth and facts are not identical in [Feinberg's] usage...S/he claims s/he chose fiction as the frame because of fiction's concealing or disguising effect. Concealing the facts allows hir to recount "more of the truth."' ⁷²⁹ According to Prosser, Feinberg represented autobiography as 'strip[ping] the transgendered narrative down to the naked facts', a process that was 'powerfully violent, invasive, and fundamentally desubjectivizing of the author.' ⁷³⁰ Thus, the veneer of fiction provided a safeguard against the forcible exposure of the transgendered subject that consequently allowed for a comprehensively representative narrative. Prosser described Feinberg's use of fiction heavily informed by hir own transgender identity as 'a trans-genre: a text as between genres as its subject is between genders.' ⁷³¹

This idea of a trans-genre could be used in reference to the two most famous and heavily debated early-twentieth-century novels on gender non-conformity. The contemporaneous works *The Well of Loneliness* (1928) by Radclyffe Hall and *Orlando* (1928) by Virginia Woolf share Feinberg's blend of fact and fiction albeit to different extents. *The Well's* protagonist, the masculine lesbian Stephen Gordon drew on Hall's own experiences of same-sex desire

⁷²⁹ Jay Prosser, *Second Skins: The Body Narratives of Transsexuality* (New York, 1998), 192.

⁷³⁰ *Ibid.*, 193-4.

⁷³¹ *Ibid.*, 191.

and gender non-conformity, while Woolf based *Orlando* on her lover Vita Sackville-West who – as will be discussed in the next chapter – characterised herself as possessing a dual-gendered personality.

Much of the scholarly debate around the two novels has centred on their usefulness – or lack thereof – to historical constructions of transgender, and, with regards to *The Well*, whether the narrative more accurately fits a transgendered or homosexual construction. Interestingly, despite his comments on *Stone Butch Blues*, Prosser rejected *Orlando* as irrelevant to studies of historical transgender identities due to the fictional and unproblematic representation of Orlando's transition. On the other hand, Prosser argued that a transgendered reading of *The Well* was far more accurate than the generally accepted view of the novel as a lesbian narrative held for example by Esther Newton.⁷³² Several historians, such as Jessica Berman and Maureen M. Melita have reassessed *Orlando* and sought to establish its importance for histories of transgender, particularly as a representation of the more inclusive and diverse categorisation of trans that is not confined to individuals who undergo sex reassignment surgery.⁷³³ These debates are valuable in offering alternative constructions of the texts in question, but I argue that the focus on 'correct' classification is limiting. Judith Butler has argued '[t]he terms by which we are recognized as human are socially articulated and changeable,' and this is evident in early-twentieth-century constructions of sexuality and gender which amalgamated the two far

⁷³² Jay Prosser, "Some Primitive Thing Conceived in a Turbulent Age of Transition": The Transsexual Emerging from *The Well*, in: Laura Doan and Jay Prosser (eds) *Palatable Poison: Critical Perspectives on The Well of Loneliness* (New York, 2001), 129-44.

⁷³³ Jessica Berman, 'Is the Trans in Transnational the Trans in Transgender?', *Modernism/modernity*, 24 (2017), 217-44. Maureen M. Melita, 'Gender identity and Androgyny in Ludovico Ariosto's *Orlando Furioso* and Virginia Woolf's *Orlando: a biography*', *Romance Notes*, 53 (2013), 123-33.

more than modern categorisations of homosexuality and gender identity.⁷³⁴ Drawing on Chris Coffman's argument that that 'it is more productive to take a "both/and" rather than an "either/or" approach', I maintain that viewing the novels as relevant to histories of homosexuality *and* gender non-conformity most closely resembles early-twentieth-century constructions of same-sex desire and gender identity as interlinked.⁷³⁵ Such an approach more successfully avoids imposing anachronistic definitions of sexuality and gender on historical narratives.

More importantly, the preoccupation with claiming *Orlando* and *The Well* for studies of gender identity or sexuality has led to the neglect of a third equally important novel: *2835 Mayfair* by Frank Richardson (1907). In this chapter I will position *2835 Mayfair* alongside *Orlando* and *The Well* to demonstrate the novel's contribution to studies of early-twentieth-century gender non-conforming identities. By situating the novel beside its more famous contemporaries, I argue that *2835 Mayfair* more successfully represents the diversity and lived experience of gender fluidity in early-twentieth-century Britain. Whereas *The Well's* reliance on sexological texts led to its suppression in Britain shortly after its publication, and *Orlando's* exclusion from contemporary commentaries on gender identity due to its fantasy elements, *2835 Mayfair* navigated between the two extremes to produce a construction of gender non-conformity that escaped censorship while also achieving recognition in sexological case studies. Furthermore, by examining the three works 'beside' one another I will adopt Eve Sedgwick and Coffman's approach which holds that 'to consider similarities

⁷³⁴ Judith Butler, *Undoing Gender* (London, 2004), 2.

⁷³⁵ Chris Coffman, 'Woolf's *Orlando* and the resonances of trans studies', *Genders*, 51 (2010), 25.

among members of disparate groups or among different discourses without conflating or appropriating them, thinking the “beside” is a particularly productive way of thinking’.⁷³⁶ Adapting Coffman’s method of examining modern constructions of gender identity beside their historical counterparts, I argue that an inclusive analysis of differing contemporary fictional texts beside each other, as well as maintaining a less rigid categorisation of transgender identities allows for the most comprehensive and representative discussion of early-twentieth-century gender non-conformity.

2835 Mayfair

Originally published in 1907 as *2835 Mayfair*, the novel combines the fantastical elements of *Orlando* with a pseudo-medical theme reminiscent of *The Well’s* sexological content.

Although not an example of trans-genre – the novel was an entirely fictitious crime thriller – *2835 Mayfair* provides a fascinating commentary on cultural constructions of gender. As in *Orlando*, the character Sir Clifford’s transition from male to female occurs through fantastical means rather than surgical, in this case through a form of hypnosis which allows Clifford’s soul to enter the female body of Sarah Mingey and later return to his own repeatedly throughout the novel. Clifford’s vacillation between genders and the absence of a definitive singular transition allows for a more diverse construction of gender non-conformity than the medical linear ‘wrong body’ narrative that dominates both modern and twentieth-century transgender autobiographies.⁷³⁷ Simultaneously however, *2835 Mayfair* remains relevant to

⁷³⁶ Coffman, ‘Woolf’s *Orlando*’, 25.

⁷³⁷ As stated in chapter one, in discussing ‘wrong embodiment’ I use the phrase as defined by Ulrica Engdahl: ‘The notion of “wrong body” consists of a dichotomous explanation of the transgender experience as a state of “being in the wrong body.” Wrongness is here understood in relation to how the body is gendered, connoting that the body is wrongly gendered in relation to a self-identified gender identity.’ See Ulrica Engdahl, ““Wrong Body””, *Transgender Studies Quarterly*, 1 (2014), 267.

the wrong embodiment narrative through Clifford's ultimate decision at the close of the novel to remain female. Sandy Stone has highlighted the importance of rejecting the 'passing' framework for transgender narratives as it erases the experiences of individuals who either are unable or choose not to physically transition.⁷³⁸ Stone's argument is important in encouraging awareness of the diversity of transgender identities, but a complete eschewal of passing narratives excludes individuals whose ability to pass and/or physically transition is a part of their identity. By incorporating both the movement between genders as well as a permanent transition, *2835 Mayfair* encompasses a wide range of gender non-conforming experiences and suggests the recognition of these in early-twentieth-century culture. *2835 Mayfair's* popularity was attested to by its reprint in 1929 as part of 'The Detective Story Club', a collection of twelve of the best detective novels selected by experts.⁷³⁹ Furthermore, *2835 Mayfair* was cited by two of Ellis' Eonists as a text they related to as representative of their experiences.⁷⁴⁰

In light of its popularity and relevance to gender fluid individuals it is difficult to comprehend *2835 Mayfair's* absence from historical studies of literary examples of gender non-conformity. It is perhaps attributable to the author's relative obscurity when compared to the fame and notoriety of Woolf and Hall, as well as Richardson's lack of intention in providing a discussion on gender non-conformity. Richardson (1870-1917) became a novelist after his career as a barrister failed.⁷⁴¹ After his first law-based novel *King's Counsel* (1902),

⁷³⁸ Sandy Stone, 'The *Empire Strikes Back*: A Posttranssexual Manifesto', in: Susan Stryker and Stephen Whittle (eds) *The Transgender Studies Reader* (London, 2006), 231.

⁷³⁹ Frank Richardson, *Mayfair Mystery* (London, 2015 reprint of 1929, original 1907), p. vi.

⁷⁴⁰ Havelock Ellis, *Studies in the Psychology of Sex. Volume VII: Eonism and Other Supplementary Studies* (Philadelphia, 1928), 77, 99.

⁷⁴¹ Anon., 'Mr. Frank Richardson', *The Times*, 2 August 1917, 5.

Richardson went on to write several comical works in 'a bright and lively style, and his novels were popular with many readers.'⁷⁴² The unifying theme of his books was humour rather than discussions of gender and his suicide in 1917 prevented his having access to either *Orlando* or *The Well of Loneliness*. Nevertheless, this does not prohibit the novel's relevance to examinations of gender non-conformity. As Nancy Cervetti states in her analysis of clothing in *Orlando*: 'Orlando's story which began as a joke and became serious, moves beyond and in excess of the narrator's or Woolf's understanding.'⁷⁴³ Similarly, *2835 Mayfair* exceeded Richardson's intention to create a crime thriller, as is evidenced by Ellis' Eonist cases' identification with the novel. R. L. and R. M. read and identified with *2835 Mayfair's* account of one character's transition from male to female.⁷⁴⁴ R. L. wrote '[b]efore my marriage I had accidentally found and read Richardson's novel *2835 Mayfair* and was still more infatuated with the idea of changing to a woman.'⁷⁴⁵ Comparably, R. M. explained:

I consider it most probable that the sexes are always more or less mixed in varying proportions in every man or woman, one or the other preponderating...The peculiar psychical affection which I have described might be called aesthetic inversion. It is dealt with by several novelists, especially Frank Richardson in *2835 Mayfair*.⁷⁴⁶

In examining *2835 Mayfair* I seek to demonstrate the book's parallels with gender non-conforming narratives that justify its place alongside *Orlando* and *The Well* as an early-twentieth-century cultural representation of gender non-conformity. I argue that like

⁷⁴² Anon., 'Mr. Frank Richardson', *The Daily Telegraph*, 2 August 1917, 3.

⁷⁴³ Nancy Cervetti, 'In the Breeches, Petticoats, and Pleasures of "Orlando"', *Journal of Modern Literature*, 20 (1996), 173.

⁷⁴⁴ Ellis, *Eonism*, 100.

⁷⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 77.

⁷⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 99.

Orlando, Richardson's magical elements protected the book from scrutiny and removed the constraints of sexological categorisations. Simultaneously, the pseudo-scientific method of achieving transition, hypnotism, provided a tenuous link with medical treatment that served as a metaphor for the developing gender-affirming treatments that would become achievable if not accessible in the following decades. Moreover, the novel's description of the transmission of the soul into different bodies created a visible articulation of the Eonists' sense of – as R. L. stated 'the soul of a woman [being] born in a male body'.⁷⁴⁷ Through a discussion of gendered traits and clothing, *2835 Mayfair* highlights the specific early-twentieth-century performative aspects of gender and reinforces the rigid gender binary system as it stood in this period. The emphasis on conformity to the discourse on gender norms mirrors Orlando's forced adherence to English constructions of womanhood if they were to gain legal recognition. At the same time, both novels to different extents flouted the contemporary gender expectations through their characters' gender non-conformity, but finally succumb to cultural constructions of femaleness.

Authorial Intent

Of the three novels considered here, the combination of innate identification with a female gender and the assimilation of femininity evident in *2835 Mayfair* most closely reflects the gender non-conforming testimonies of Ellis' Eonists. Despite this, Richardson never stated any interest in constructing a discourse on gender non-conformity as Hall did and appears to have sought solely to write an entertaining story. His popular approach however, may have been the reason for the book's circulation among Ellis' Eonists. Equally, the novel's

⁷⁴⁷ Ellis, *Eonism*, 71.

essentialist understanding of gender identity coupled with the contradictory need to learn how to perform gender arguably made Richardson's novel a relatable representation of gender non-conformity as well as a fictional fulfilment of the need to physically transition experienced by R. L. and R. M.

Richardson's novel ultimately followed the linear wrong embodiment narrative of medical discourse even as it undermined it through the character's vacillation between male and female genders, reaffirming the reciprocal relationship between cultural and medical discourse in constructing gender categories. *2835 Mayfair* subscribes to Nael Bhanji's description of a gender identity narrative in which 'the prefix *trans* signifies multiple crossings, but still within a very confined nexus of homecoming and belonging, or borders and centres.'⁷⁴⁸ As such, the novel provided an articulation of the experiences of individuals who viewed their female gender identity as largely unchanging but requiring a transition to a female physicality, despite, as Bhanji notes of homecoming narratives, 'ultimately fail[ing] to take into account the lived realities of those who have no choice but to inhabit the borderlands'.⁷⁴⁹

2835 Mayfair opens with a possible murder mystery as eminent physician Sir Clifford Oakleigh's body was discovered on the floor of his home by his valet Reggie Pardell. However, on informing Sir Clifford's friend George Harding of his discovery, the pair find Sir

⁷⁴⁸ Nael Bhanji, 'TRANS/SCRIPTIIONS: Homing Desires, (Trans)sexual Citizenship and Racialized Bodies', in: Trystan Cotton (ed.), *Transgender Migrations: The Bodies, Borders, and Politics of Transition* (New York, 2012), 162.

⁷⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 171.

Clifford's body has disappeared. Following this incident, Sir Clifford emerges alive and well, leading Harding to question Pardell's sanity. The novel centres around Sir Clifford's subsequent disappearances and reappearances, and the mysterious Miss Miriam Clive who moves into Sir Clifford's home and with whom Harding falls in love. The solution to the mystery is provided in the final chapters when Sir Clifford reveals that he has discovered a form of hypnosis that allows his soul to leave his body and enter the body of the person whom he has hypnotised. Once this process has occurred, Sarah's soul disappears, presumably indicating her death, and no mention is made of this other than Sir Clifford's need to find an 'unknown girl' for his experiment.⁷⁵⁰ This is presumably to ensure that her disappearance would go unremarked and indeed, although Sarah's father searches for her, by the close of the novel, he appears to give up on his hunt. Throughout the novel, Sir Clifford alternates between living in his own male body as Sir Clifford and living in the female body of Harding's clerk's daughter Sarah under the pseudonym Miriam Clive.

While Richardson never expressed an intention of producing a commentary on gender non-conformity, *2835 Mayfair* shares several parallels with early transition narratives. Richardson explored the 'body swap' theme more than once. In his novel *The Bayswater Miracle* (1903), the story centres on an engaged heterosexual couple who by using a magic ring can swap bodies and live as another gender. Richardson emphasised what he felt to be the comedic effect of a man attempting to pass as a woman and presented gender as binary opposites. Notably, Richardson described the shock and incomprehension his male character Fred felt

⁷⁵⁰ Richardson, *Mayfair Mystery*, 226.

when being reduced to tears, an experience so alien to his male self that Fred believes himself to be ill:

Palpitating waves passed over my body. Heaving sensations caught at my heart. I had no conception of what was happening to me. 'I'm dying! I'm dying!' I cried...Something flowed from my eyes; I thought it was blood. But eventually I found out that I was weeping great, laborious tears.⁷⁵¹

A similar situation occurs when Fred as Muriel blushes when accused of thinking about their fiancé:

This time a burning sensation spread over the surface of my skin. A horrible hotness scorched my face. I experienced a sensation that I had not felt since I suffered from measles in the latter portion of the seventies. The conviction seized me that I was sickening for something. I was seriously alarmed.⁷⁵²

Here, Richardson presented gender as so dichotomous as to render different genders inconceivable to each other. The point though, was not to challenge or reaffirm this concept as such but rather to use cultural stereotypes for comedic effect. Consequently, given Richardson's background in writing predominantly humorous fiction, it seems unlikely that the motivation for writing *2835 Mayfair* was to present a discourse on gender non-conformity.

⁷⁵¹ Frank Richardson, *The Bayswater Miracle* (London, 1903), 29.

⁷⁵² *Ibid.*, 48-9.

Radclyffe Hall on the other hand, had just such an intention in producing *The Well of Loneliness*. The novel recounts the struggles of Stephen Gordon, an individual born with a female body but a strong identification with a male gender. Stephen's masculinity is expressed through clothing, skill in culturally stereotypical male pursuits such as riding, driving and writing as well as her physical strength.⁷⁵³ After being rejected by her mother and early failed attempts at relationships with women, Stephen distinguishes herself as an ambulance driver during World War I and begins a relationship with a woman, Mary Llewellyn who subsequently moves in with Stephen. At the novel's climax, Stephen relinquishes Mary to a male rival with whom Stephen believes Mary will be happier, having the conventional marriage and children that Stephen cannot provide. Hall drew on the sexological discourse to render her own account of 'sexual inversion'. Hall used the character Adolphe Blanc to express her awareness of the limitations of medical discourse. Blanc states 'what doctor can know the entire truth?...They are good, these doctors – some of them very good; they work hard trying to solve our problem, but half the time they must work in the dark – the whole truth is known only to the normal invert.'⁷⁵⁴

Hall expressed the gendered differences between the characters she identified as 'inverts'. Margaret Roland for instance, was described as 'quite a womanly woman, unless...rendered suspicious by her voice...It was like a boy's voice on the verge of breaking.'⁷⁵⁵ Conversely, 'few were as pronounced as Stephen Gordon, unless it were Wanda, the Polish painter...If she dressed like a woman she looked like a man, if she dressed like a man she looked like a

⁷⁵³ Throughout this chapter I will refer to Stephen Gordon using female pronouns as Radclyffe Hall retained female pronouns throughout her novel.

⁷⁵⁴ Radclyffe Hall, *The Well of Loneliness* (Adelaide, 2014 reprint of original 1928), 7302.

⁷⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 3249.

woman!⁷⁵⁶ Hall here demonstrated an awareness of a cultural discourse on gender identity and sexuality in which individuals like Stephen would be recognisable to readers despite the lack of specified language. Terms such as butch and femme and gender non-conforming were preceded by visual cues – voice cadence, clothing, hairstyle – that rendered these individuals knowable even while the discourse limited their diversity. As Butler states, '[w]hat remains "unthinkable" and "unsayable" within the terms of an existing cultural form is not necessarily what is excluded from the matrix of intelligibility within that form'.⁷⁵⁷

Hall's use of the gradations within 'inversion' lends itself to a construction of Stephen as a precursor to trans men as well as a discourse on the variety of expressions of female same-sex desire, thereby reinforcing the relevance of more nuanced readings of *The Well* demonstrated by Coffman, Gretchen Busl and Jaime E. Hovey among others. Sherron Knopp's discussion of Hall's motivations in writing *The Well* further substantiates the problems with upholding definitive classifications. Quoting Hall's partner Una Troubridge at length, Knopp draws attention to Hall's intention to write from personal experience:

She [Hall] had long wanted to write a book on sexual inversion, a novel that would be accessible to the general public who did not have access to technical treatises...It was her absolute conviction that such a book could only be written by a sexual invert, who alone could be qualified by personal knowledge and experience to speak on behalf of a misunderstood and misjudged minority.⁷⁵⁸

⁷⁵⁶ Hall, *The Well*, 3249.

⁷⁵⁷ Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (London, 1990), 77.

⁷⁵⁸ Sherron Knopp, "'If I Saw You Would You Kiss Me?': Sapphism and the Subversiveness of Virginia Woolf's *Orlando*", *Journal of the Modern Language Association of America (PMLA)*, 103 (1988), 27-8.

Hall's personal identification with the sexological category of 'inversion' arguably informed *The Well*, but Stephen was not a fictional representation of Hall. As Hovey has shown, Hall 'was not a crossdresser, and so it is interesting that she is often remembered as one. While other photographs taken at informal private gatherings sometimes showed John – as Hall like to be called – in trousers, Hall consistently wore skirts in public.'⁷⁵⁹ While Hall presented as *masculine* – through a cropped hairstyle, masculine tailored jackets and a male nickname – she never identified as *male*. Hall's was a definitively female masculinity in Jack Halberstam's sense of the multiple forms of masculinity performed by women who identify as women.⁷⁶⁰ Unlike her protagonist, Hall maintained successful same-sex relationships with women and Heike Bauer interprets her masculinity as a signifier of Hall's lesbian identity rather than a male gender identity.⁷⁶¹ Stephen on the other hand was portrayed as suffering deep emotional anguish over her inability to be read by others as fully male or recognisably female. Hall emphasised Stephen's maleness through her culturally stereotypical male clothing that included neckties, trouser suits and 'heavy silk masculine underwear', as well as her physique and character traits:

hard, boyish forearms...the strong line of the jaw, the square, massive brow... brave and strong-limbed...there are some cases – and Stephen's was one – in which the male will emerge triumphant[.]⁷⁶²

For Stephen, her appearance signified her male gender more so than a lesbian identity and Stephen's struggle stemmed from her non-traditional gender rather than her attraction to

⁷⁵⁹ Jaime E. Hovey, 'Gallantry and its discontents: Joan of Arc and virtuous transmasculinity in Radclyffe Hall and Vita Sackville-West', *Feminist Modernist Studies*, 1:1-2 (2018), 125.

⁷⁶⁰ Jack Halberstam, *Female Masculinity* (North Carolina, 1998), 9.

⁷⁶¹ Heike Bauer, *English Literary Sexology: Translations of Inversion, 1860-1930* (London, 2009), 117.

⁷⁶² Hall, *The Well*, 5979, 909-17, 1093, 6307.

women. Stephen's disassociation from Hall was far less ambiguous than Feinberg's from his fictional character Jess, whom Feinberg described at times as a 'total and complete work of fiction,' and at others a 'very thinly disguised *autobiography*.'⁷⁶³ Hampered however, by the limited terminology offered by sexologists, Hall could only define herself and Stephen as different degrees of 'inversion'. Consequently, Hall's intention to write about 'inversion' as well as contemporary understandings of gender and sexuality should not be completely superseded by a transgendered reading of Stephen despite its relevance.

Different motivations have been attributed to Virginia Woolf's decision to create such a personal depiction of her lover Vita Sackville-West in *Orlando*. Beginning life in the sixteenth century as a man, the eponymous protagonist's 'biography' spans centuries and includes a magical and complete male-to-female transition during sleep as well as relationships with other gender non-conforming characters. Woolf's use of Sackville-West as inspiration for the gender non-conforming Orlando has been viewed as both celebration and revenge. Susan McNamara asserts that '[i]n imagining, writing, and publishing *Orlando*, Woolf turns her infatuation with Vita Sackville-West, and her rage and despair about Vita's betrayal, into a permanent monument of revenge'.⁷⁶⁴ On the other hand, Knopp argues 'Virginia wrote *Orlando* as an act of love – identified Vita by name in the dedication – and, "very clear & plain, so that people will understand every word," celebrated her sapphic nature with an insider's knowledge'.⁷⁶⁵ Certainly, *Orlando*'s timing – Woolf began writing the novel shortly after discovering Sackville-West had begun an affair with Mary Campbell – lends credence to

⁷⁶³ Prosser, *Second Skins*, 191.

⁷⁶⁴ Susan McNamara, 'Seduction and Revenge in Virginia Woolf's *Orlando*', *The Psychoanalytic Quarterly*, 80 (2011), 623.

⁷⁶⁵ Knopp, "'If I Saw You Would You Kiss Me?'" , 33.

McNamara's theory of revenge. Yet whether or not *Orlando* originated from Woolf's anger over Sackville-West's betrayal, other considerations clearly became involved, particularly given Sackville-West's involvement in providing pictures of herself and her ancestors to accompany the text, as well as her positive response to the finished novel: 'I am completely dazzled, bewitched, enchanted, under a spell...It seems to me the loveliest, wisest, richest book that I have ever read, – excelling even your own Lighthouse.'⁷⁶⁶

Equally, Sackville-West's husband Harold Nicolson not only praised *Orlando* but declared '[i]t really is Vita'.⁷⁶⁷ The focus on Sackville-West as the inspiration for *Orlando* has been criticised by some scholars for devaluing the novel's radical potential. Stef Craps has argued 'that *Orlando*...is in fact a radical text, whose subversion of deep-seated and taken-for-granted assumptions about gendered behaviour is suppressed by its reduction to an escapade or a mere tribute to Vita Sackville-West.'⁷⁶⁸ Cervetti too contends that *Orlando*'s characterisation as solely a loving tribute to Sackville-West 'works to silence this radical text.'⁷⁶⁹ I would argue the opposite, that Sackville-West's serving as Woolf's inspiration *solidifies* the importance of *Orlando* to studies of transgender identities through her demonstrable gender non-conformity. The novel skilfully represented Sackville-West's understanding of herself as possessing two distinct personalities, one male and one female that alternately dominated rather than intermingling. Woolf echoed Sackville-West's

⁷⁶⁶ Louise DeSalvo and Mitchell A. Leaska (eds), *The Letters of Vita Sackville-West to Virginia Woolf* (London, 1984), 304.

⁷⁶⁷ Nigel Nicolson and Joanne Trautmann (eds), *The Letters of Virginia Woolf, Vol. 3* (New York, 1978), 548, note 1.

⁷⁶⁸ Stef Craps, 'How to Do Things with Gender: Transgenderism in Virginia Woolf's *Orlando*', in: Michael Wintle (ed.) *Image into Identity: Constructing and Assigning Identity in a Culture of Modernity* (Brill, 2006), 175.

⁷⁶⁹ Cervetti, 'In the Breeches', 172.

ultimate decision to prioritise her marriage and consequently her female identity through Orlando's marriage and recognition as a woman in England. The parallels between Orlando and Sackville-West were well-known to the public and referenced in reviews of the novel.

The *Daily Mail* reported:

The book is dedicated to V. Sackville West, the maiden name of the Hon. Mrs. Harold Nicholson, the poetess and novelist. Most of the photographs of Orlando through the ages which illustrate these pages are plainly those of Mrs. Harold Nicholson; the house which forms the unchanging background of Orlando's elongated life is plainly Knole, her ancestral home.⁷⁷⁰

This close association of *Orlando* with Sackville-West may explain the novel's absence from gender non-conforming testimonies. The narrative's personal connection to a famously bisexual individual might well have alienated those seeking to avoid the typical amalgamation of gender identity and sexuality. Like *The Well*, *Orlando's* discussion of gender identity has been extensively examined and cited as a radical expression of gender non-conformity and queer sexuality that renders it significant to research on modern transgender identities. However, the book's relevance to contemporary gender non-conforming readers is more questionable. While *Orlando* was not officially banned unlike Hall's novel, Woolf's concern cited by Knopp that 'the balance between truth & fantasy must be careful', potentially led to its invisibility as a commentary on gender non-conformity for contemporaries.⁷⁷¹ *2835 Mayfair* on the other hand, achieved this balance through the use

⁷⁷⁰ Anon., 'A Fantastic Biography', *Daily Mail*, 11 October 1928, 21.

⁷⁷¹ Anne Olivier Bell and Andrew McNeillie (eds), *The Diary of Virginia Woolf, Vol. 3: 1925-1930* (New York, 1980), 162.

of hypnotism rather than outright fantasy and combined with its shared tropes with early gender non-conforming narratives may have increased its relatability.

Textual Interpretation: Transition

Hypnotism as the method through which Sir Clifford's transition was achieved in 2835

Mayfair bridged the fantastical and the medical. Notwithstanding the scepticism

surrounding its efficacy, the British Medical Association received a report by a Committee they established who endorsed the practice of hypnotism in its 1892 Annual Meeting.⁷⁷²

Hypnotism's precarious position on the borders of accepted medical treatment mirrors the developing techniques at Hirschfeld's Institute for gender-affirming procedures. In the semi-

autobiographical *Man into Woman: An Authentic Record of a Change of Sex* (1933), Norman Haire opened his introduction to the narrative of the life of Einar Wegener/Lili Elbe with the statement 'the story told in this book...Incredible as it may seem...is true.'⁷⁷³ Elbe (1882-

1931), a Danish painter, was one of the first individuals to undergo gender-affirming surgeries in Berlin and Dresden. Following these operations, Elbe was able to legally change her name and sex in Denmark. Elbe died in 1931 undergoing a fourth procedure intended to transplant a uterus to enable her to carry a child.⁷⁷⁴ The treatments that enabled Elbe's

physical transition were presented as almost fantastical but potentially achievable. Similarly,

Sir Clifford's ability to obtain female physicality through hypnosis – a recognised albeit

controversial medical practice – gave an element of reality amid the magical, a hint of the

⁷⁷² Alyson Dunlop, *1892 BMA Report on Hypnosis*, [website], 2012, <https://achilleshealing.com/articles/1892-bma-report-on-hypnosis>.

⁷⁷³ Niels Hoyer, (ed.) *Man into Woman: An Authentic Record of a Change of Sex*, trans. H. J. Stenning (London, 1933), p. v.

⁷⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. vii-viii.

possibility of transition, despite remaining, as Elbe's treatments did, out of reach for most gender non-conforming individuals.

Equally, the concept of the dichotomy of body and soul, with the latter entering bodies that may or may not equate with the soul's sense of gender, recalls Ulrichs' theory of a female soul in a male body. The parallel is not exact as Sir Clifford did not express any feelings of alienation from manhood, but rather a curiosity to experience life as a woman.

Nevertheless, Sir Clifford's phrasing, 'I would have given my soul to satisfy my curiosity...I wanted to lead the life of a beautiful woman' closely resembles those used by gender fluid individuals.⁷⁷⁵ D. S. for example, stated 'my inner desire was to live as a girl' and R. L. revealed: 'I have had a real desire that amounts to physical feelings at times to enjoy the full experience of womanhood'; an experience that included 'a beautiful or attractive female form'.⁷⁷⁶ The longing for womanhood may stem from inquisitiveness in Sir Clifford's case rather than gender non-conformity, but the intensity of the feeling was relatable for both R. L. and R. M. in their readings of *2835 Mayfair*.

Hypnotism was not *2835 Mayfair's* only analogy with the medical treatments described in transition narratives. In the later chapters of the novel, while living as Miriam, Sir Clifford is involved in a car accident that leads to Miriam's hospitalisation and the amputation of her leg. As a result of her time spent in hospital, Miriam's original male body dies, forcing her to live permanently as a woman. Miriam's time in hospital provides a convincing metaphor for

⁷⁷⁵ Richardson, *Mayfair Mystery*, 225.

⁷⁷⁶ Ellis, *Eonism*, 54, 76, 86.

early gender-affirming surgery. Prior to the accident, Sir Clifford/Miriam vacillated between living in a male and female body, initially spending relatively equal amounts of time in each. As the novel progresses, Miriam gradually begins to appear more frequently, even stating '[w]hen I began, I thought that I would only keep up the experiment for a week or two. But I was fascinated with being a woman. I loved it.'⁷⁷⁷ Sir Clifford's living a double life that gradually came to be dominated by a female life as Miriam was a key aspect in *Man into Woman*. Wegener (referred to by the pseudonym Andreas Sparre) explained the nature of the dual life he shared with Elbe: 'This condition is gradually becoming intolerable. Lili is no longer content to share her existence with me. She wants to have an existence of her own...I - I'm no longer any use...And consequently she rebels more vigorously every day.'⁷⁷⁸

Roberta Cowell too, writing in 1954 described her vacillating gender identity during her transition that eventually became fixed as female.⁷⁷⁹ Similarly, the experiences described by Sir Clifford/Miriam as to how they lived a double life and the difficulties this entailed are again reminiscent of those recounted by R. L. and in *Man into Woman*. In the final chapter of *2835 Mayfair*, Miriam explained to Harding how she managed to live as Sir Clifford and Miriam:

...the difficulties in the way were enormous...It was necessary for me to find an unknown girl. It was necessary that I should have practically two houses...After an enormous amount of trouble I managed, by the assistance of obscure builders, to construct a secret passage between this house and the ground floor of King Street...My

⁷⁷⁷ Richardson, *Mayfair Mystery*, 227.

⁷⁷⁸ Hoyer, (ed.), *Man into Woman*, 16.

⁷⁷⁹ Roberta Cowell, *Roberta Cowell's Story* (New York, 1954), 46-9.

servants in this house are all people on whom I have conferred benefits...They are willing to do anything for me...Everything was ready, except the woman.⁷⁸⁰

R. L. was forced to move abroad during the times they presented as female, and like Sir Clifford, relied on the cooperation of sympathetic landladies for whom they carried out chores in return for housing and acceptance of their female self.⁷⁸¹ For R. L., a permanent female physicality was inaccessible and considered necessary to live exclusively as their female gender. Consequently, the double life continued to supply the only means by which they could present as female for any length of time. Thus, Sir Clifford's permanent transition to a female body whether involuntary or not, represented the fictional fulfilment of R. L.'s longings for female embodiment.

Furthermore, the amputation of Miriam's leg that directly results in Sir Clifford's death and her subsequent inability to return to his male body could arguably serve as a metaphor for the removal of the male genitals undertaken in male-to-female gender-affirming surgery. The metaphor becomes even more convincing when compared to *Man into Woman's* account of Wegener/Elbe's experience. Sir Clifford's death by heart failure due to their being unable to return to the male body throughout Miriam's hospital stay also meant the death of their male identity. Miriam underwent potentially dangerous surgery during which part of their anatomy was removed and remained in a weakened state before recovering as a now permanent female. In *Man into Woman*, Wegener/Elbe described the gender-affirming procedures they would undergo in terms of the death of Wegener. Shortly before being

⁷⁸⁰ Richardson, *Mayfair Mystery*, 225-6.

⁷⁸¹ Ellis, *Eonism*, 82-3.

admitted to hospital, Wegener commented to a friend ‘the man you are talking to is condemned to death’, and in a letter to his brother-in-law Wegener wrote that following the operation ‘*it will be Lili who will survive!*’⁷⁸² Again, during the series of operations Wegener/Elbe underwent to complete physical transition, Elbe commented that ‘I have forgotten Andreas and everything connected with him. For me he is a dead person.’⁷⁸³ Wegener’s wife also commented on visiting Elbe in the hospital that ‘Andreas is dead’.⁷⁸⁴ The finality of death resonated with Wegener/Elbe’s complete disassociation with the male Wegener following their transition. His death not only signalled Elbe’s life but also the fixity of Lili’s female gender which would no longer vacillate between male and female. Similarly, Sir Clifford’s physical death occasioned Miriam’s ascendance, a circumstance that reflected the specific experience of gender non-conformity of R. L., who characterised their maleness as purely physical and were they able to transition, any remnants of their manhood would be extinguished. R. L. and R. M. did not identify with or express a sense of liberation in a non-binary gender. Instead, they sought a linear narrative, a ‘home-coming’ to their female gender identity that would be achieved through physical transition. Consequently, the relatively unproblematic transition illustrated in *2835 Mayfair* and Miriam’s engagement as a woman to Harding at the novel’s end would appear more appealing to R. L. and R. M. than the melancholy tone of *The Well* or the ambiguity in *Orlando*.

⁷⁸² Hoyer, (ed.), *Man into Woman*, 49, 30.

⁷⁸³ *Ibid.*, 202.

⁷⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 133.

The Well did not include a transition magical or otherwise, but it was replete with the desire for one. Jay Prosser provides compelling examples of Stephen's transgender identity in his analysis of *The Well*, notably her rejection of her female physicality:

...[the] mirror scene...is most symptomatic of a transsexual narrative, in which mirror scenes proliferate as motifs because they dramatize the difference between the image reflected and the body image projected...What makes this (Stephen's) body uninhabitable is its femaleness...The body is visibly transgendered...Yet it is still a discernibly female body with its "compact breasts."⁷⁸⁵

The scene is certainly reminiscent of the feelings of wrong embodiment expressed by Michael Dillon. Indeed, Prosser himself states that '[f]or Michael Dillon the key text that he turns to to illustrate his explanation of transsexuality and the text with which he identifies is *The Well of Loneliness*'.⁷⁸⁶ Hall repeatedly used 'maimed' to describe Stephen's body, at birth they are a 'blemished, unworthy, maimed reproduction' of Stephen's father.⁷⁸⁷ When studying herself in the mirror, Stephen 'hated her body with its muscular shoulders, its small compact breasts, and its slender flanks of an athlete. All her life she must drag this body of hers like a monstrous fetter imposed on her spirit...She longed to maim it...She began to grieve over it, touching her breasts with pitiful fingers...Oh, poor and most desolate body!⁷⁸⁸ Thus, Stephen's inability to transition heightens the pathos of *The Well* as a transgender narrative.

⁷⁸⁵ Prosser, "Some Primitive Thing", 137-8.

⁷⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 141.

⁷⁸⁷ Hall, *The Well*, 192.

⁷⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 3522-9.

While Orlando's transition was magical and physically almost instantaneous, the process of 'becoming' a woman was more lengthy. Woolf described an extended period in which Orlando's gender and sexual orientation were nebulous. This period straddled Orlando's physical transition and manifested through confusion over the gender identity of their love interest, Sasha, Orlando's living among a band of gypsies, and their wearing of oriental androgynous clothing. Each of these incidents have been interpreted by scholars as evidence of the novel's subversive treatment of gender and its relationship to sexuality. According to Berman, the location of Orlando's transition in Constantinople and their donning of the 'fluid Turkish trousers seem to offer options of identity not available in England'.⁷⁸⁹ In other words, Woolf framed Orlando's experience of androgyny within the cultural discourse that held gypsies and the Orient as representations of the 'other'.⁷⁹⁰ This period of androgyny differs from Clifford's vacillation between their male and female identities. Clifford was always one or the other, never both. Morgan Danielle Beers argues in her thesis on trans embodiment and temporality in *Orlando*, that '[m]uch like Feinberg and Bornstein, Orlando's narrative and post-transition embodiment of gender does not fit into the typical timeline of transsexual transition.'⁷⁹¹ Beers cites Halberstam's theory of 'queer temporality' which 'attempt[s] to differentiate between normative and non-normative timelines experienced by queer individuals' as representative of Orlando's narrative.⁷⁹² Orlando's transition may have been instantaneous and complete, but the period in which they alternately vacillate between male and female, and embrace an androgynous identity undermines the linear progression that characterises medical constructions of physical transition. Consequently,

⁷⁸⁹ Berman, 'Is the Trans in Transnational the Trans in Transgender?', 218.

⁷⁹⁰ See Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (London, 1978).

⁷⁹¹ Morgan Danielle Beers, "'Orlando had become a Woman": Trans Embodiment and Temporality in Virginia Woolf's *Orlando*', MA Thesis, University of Alabama, 2020, 13.

⁷⁹² *Ibid.*, 16.

Orlando's experience becomes representative of trans individuals who do not conform to a linear narrative of wrong embodiment or a construction of their gender identity as stable and unchanging.

However, just as Orlando presents as androgynous for a period, they also – like Clifford/Miriam – transition from male to female, marry as a woman and live as a woman until the novel's end, thereby *also* subscribing to the linear construction of transition. Beers does acknowledge this discrepancy, interpreting it as a representation of the negative effects of medical constructions of transgender. Beers states '[t]hough not a direct correlation, Orlando's experience with identity, sex, and the pressures of society and the law sharply imitate trans experience with harmful medical discourse and the need to conform'.⁷⁹³

For Beers, Orlando's androgynous identity is a positive manifestation of how they want to present themselves given the option. Orlando's female gender presentation on the other hand, results from the constraints of British legal discourse in which one must identify as either male or female to be rendered visible. Orlando succumbs to heterosexual marriage and the legal identity – and limitations – of a woman through necessity. In Richardson's novel, Miriam's permanent transition is also forced upon her, but it is constructed as a happy and desirable ending. Contrary to Beers, this suggests that medical discourses on transition can be both negative *and* affirming depending on the individual. As Butler asserts, '[a]utonomy is a socially conditioned way of living in the world. Those instruments, such as

⁷⁹³ Beers, 'Trans Embodiment and Temporality', 22.

the diagnosis, can be enabling, but they can also be restrictive and often they can function as both at the same time.⁷⁹⁴ Thus, taken together both novels reveal the multiple constructions of gender non-conformity in early-twentieth-century Britain and the complexities involved in the linear medical readings.

Textual Interpretation: Constructions of Gender

The binary gender model was an important element in all three novels under discussion. In her examination of gender identity in *Orlando* and *Orlando Furioso*, Melita states ‘the protagonist is allowed to fully and completely experience what it means to live life as both a male and as a female...Orlando becomes, after four centuries of existence, the perfect androgyne.’⁷⁹⁵ However, while the potential for Orlando’s androgyny to disrupt the contemporary binary discourses on gender is acknowledged by several scholars, few accept Melita’s portrayal of this androgyny as unquestionable. Kaivola qualifies Melita’s use of androgyny, arguing that ‘if Orlando’s identity is androgynous, that androgyny is mobile, not static: presenting not a smooth synthesis of oppositions but a more chaotic hermaphroditic “intermix”’.⁷⁹⁶ Cervetti goes further and questions the applicability of the term ‘androgyny’ in relation to Orlando, given its position ‘within a binary frame [that] always recall[s] male and female’.⁷⁹⁷ Instead, Cervetti asserts that ‘Orlando uses identity as a practice and performance, disrupting not only the categories of male and female, but the concept of category itself’, thereby invalidating attempts to interpret Orlando as androgynous even if

⁷⁹⁴ Butler, *Undoing Gender*, 77.

⁷⁹⁵ Melita, ‘Gender identity and Androgyny’, 131.

⁷⁹⁶ Karen Kaivola, ‘Revisiting Woolf’s Representations of Androgyny: Gender, Race, Sexuality, and Nation’, *Tulsa Studies in Women’s Literature*, 18 (1999), 235.

⁷⁹⁷ Cervetti, ‘In the Breeches’, 173.

the definition is, as Pamela L. Caughie and Rachel Blau DuPlessis intended, 'a refusal to choose.'⁷⁹⁸

Stephen could also be said to occupy a liminal space throughout the novel and her anguish reveals the ineffability of those outside of the rigid binary construction of gender. *The Well* contains several instances in which other characters were unable to define Stephen, as well as Stephen's own despair at having no clear terminology with which to identify herself.

Angela Crosby, a love interest of Stephen's asked 'you're so very unusual, Stephen...What in the Lord's name are you?' and later, '[c]an I help it if you're – what you obviously are?'⁷⁹⁹

Similarly, Stephen voiced her frustration when she asked '[w]hat am I, in God's name – some kind of abomination?' and '[w]hy am I as I am – and what am I?'⁸⁰⁰ Even the discovery of the sexological works on 'inversion' with which Stephen identified and used as a defining discourse on her identity ultimately proved inadequate in representing the diversity apparent among the individuals Stephen encounters. However, despite challenging binary discourse both *The Well* and *Orlando* remained embedded within a male and female dichotomy. Stephen's rejection of her assigned female gender did not extend to her relationship with Mary Llewellyn for whom she fabricated an affair to force Mary to leave her and marry Martin as Stephen stated 'I can't give her protection or happiness'.⁸⁰¹ Like Michael Dillon, Stephen's inability to father children was a barrier to her forming a lasting relationship with a woman.

⁷⁹⁸ Cervetti, 'In the Breeches', 171, 173.

⁷⁹⁹ Hall, *The Well*, 2666, 2833.

⁸⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 2833.

⁸⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 8184.

On the other hand, Richardson scrupulously upheld the binary gender model in *2835 Mayfair*, and his construction of gender reflected elements of essentialism as well as its performative nature. Mirroring contemporary concerns over the increasing diversification of women's roles and emancipation, Richardson presented a model of gender in which there was a very definite 'correct' way of being male or female and any divergence from this was met with derision. The novel presented men as predominantly cerebral whereas women were defined by their physical beauty. Clothing and physical appearance were critical to Richardson's construction of femininity, though they are only cursorily mentioned in conjunction with the male characters. In *The Well* however, Stephen's maleness was also affirmed by her appearance such as when Stephen '[i]n a mood of defiance...had suddenly walked off to the barber's one morning and had made him crop [her hair]...like a man's. And mightily did the fashion become her...Stephen had grown fond and proud of her hair'.⁸⁰² Similarly, Caughie and Coffman have emphasised the changing role of clothing in *Orlando*, at one point described by Woolf as 'clothes...change our view of the world and the world's view of us...there is much to support the view that it is clothes that wear us and not we them'.⁸⁰³ Further on however, Woolf states '[c]lothes are but a symbol of something hid deep beneath. It was a change in Orlando herself that dictated her choice of a woman's dress and of a woman's sex.'⁸⁰⁴

⁸⁰² Hall, *The Well*, 3925.

⁸⁰³ Virginia Woolf, *Orlando: A Biography*, (London, 1977 reprint of original 1928), 117.

⁸⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 117-18.

Beth Jenkins has shown the extent to which women entering male-dominated professions in early-twentieth-century Britain were scrutinised in terms of their clothing and appearance by prospective employers, the press and the public. Jenkins writes, '[a]s clear signals of gender and social status, women's appearance, manners and self-conduct were often considered more important than academic achievements or occupational skill.'⁸⁰⁵ To counter criticisms of masculine or unattractive attire, career advice manuals presented models of appropriate female professional appearance. Jenkins reveals:

One publication, in 1903, lamented that 'uncouthness in dress, or manner, or movement' was ingrained in the minds of the public in relation to medical women. Advising prospective doctors to adopt a heightened femininity to counter such stereotypes, the author advocated 'good manners, a soft, refined voice [and]...little touches of colour or ornaments which may add so much to the general pleasing effect of dress.'⁸⁰⁶

This judgement of a woman's character based on appearance is also represented in Richardson's novel and extends beyond professionals. The most striking example occurs in the comparisons of Sarah, whose body Sir Clifford enters to live his female identity, and Miriam Clive, Sir Clifford's interpretation of Sarah's body when living as his female identity. Descriptions of nineteen-year-old Sarah recall Edwardian caricatures of the New Woman and feminist campaigners.⁸⁰⁷ Sarah:

⁸⁰⁵Beth Jenkins, 'Gender, Embodiment and Professional Identity in Britain, C. 1890-1930', *Cultural and Social History*, 17 (2020), 504.

⁸⁰⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁰⁷ Katy Birch, 'I roll my cigarette, and cycle to my club': Playing with Stereotypes and Subverting Anti-Feminism in New Woman Writers' Contributions to *Punch' Cahiers, victoriens & édouardiens*, 96 (2022), <https://journals.openedition.org/cve/11788>.

wore spectacles; her hair was done in an unbecoming way; her dress was abominable...With no evidence as to her complexion and her figure one could not say whether the girl was good-looking or plain; but the fact that she took no trouble with her hair, that her dress stood in no relation to the fashion...that she was photographed in spectacles, proved that she regarded herself as unattractive. A girl who takes this view is almost certain to be right...⁸⁰⁸

In contrast, Miriam Clive was praised for her beauty and well-dressed appearance:

Sumptuously gowned, magnificently jewelled...Her hair of deep brown was arranged in the French fashion, which...was particularly becoming to her. Her profile was almost Greek, her violet eyes shone bewitchingly under long eyelashes. But the greatest beauty she possessed was her wonderful complexion like peaches and cream...She walked with all the grace and confidence of an American woman[.]⁸⁰⁹

Later in the novel, when Sarah's father confronts Harding and Miriam and insists the latter is his daughter, Harding presents the disparity in the two women's sense of feminine style as evidence that they cannot be the same person. Harding asserts:

You showed me a photograph of your daughter. She was a plain girl in spectacles. Miss Clive is a beautiful woman, and she doesn't wear spectacles. Indeed, no beautiful woman wears spectacles...No girl, unless she had given up all hope of presenting a pleasing appearance to the world, would wear spectacles.⁸¹⁰

⁸⁰⁸ Richardson, *Mayfair Mystery*, 25.

⁸⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 28.

⁸¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 164.

The inference throughout the novel is that Miriam's gender performance, subscribing as it does to contemporary cultural constructions of the decorative aspect of femininity, is more praiseworthy and 'appropriate' than Sarah's disinterest in fashion.⁸¹¹

The importance of female appearance can also be found in Ellis' Eonist testimonies, where beauty was often cited as crucial not only to their ability to pass as female publicly but also to their personal satisfaction with their female identity. For example, R. M. commented that 'I could not look at a pretty girl without envying her, her beauty and her womanhood'.⁸¹² An interest in clothing, make up and jewellery was also presented as evidence of female gender among Ellis' Eonists, just as its absence indicated maleness. However, feminine beauty in *2835 Mayfair* was constructed as an artifice, a skill acquired through practice as opposed to an innate quality of womanhood. Nevertheless, the ability to dress well secured Miriam's recognition as a woman and one worthy of admiration. Charlotte Nicklas' analysis of the use of hats in late-nineteenth and early-twentieth-century literature emphasised the connection contemporary culture made between a woman's skill at following fashion trends and her character. Nicklas states 'Several authors...present female skill in domestic hat-making as evidence of female ingenuity and even virtue', and quotes Oriole Cullen's assessment of etiquette books which demonstrated 'that a woman's choice of millinery figured prominently in the impression she made on others'.⁸¹³ In the novels Nicklas discusses, fashionable appearance denoted respectability, a quality that some middle-class suffragettes

⁸¹¹ Jenkins, 'Gender, Embodiment and Professional Identity', 509.

⁸¹² Ellis, *Eonism*, 97.

⁸¹³ Charlotte Nicklas, 'It is the Hat that Matters the Most': Hats, Propriety and Fashion in British Fiction, 1890-1930', *Costume*, 51 (2017), 96, 80.

strove to convey through their attire.⁸¹⁴ While the attainment of respectability was also a factor in Miriam's attire, her aptitude for feminine styling was crucial to her acceptance as female. Early in the novel, when a neighbouring servant glimpsed Sarah entering a cab with Sir Clifford, she described Sarah as 'a creature', 'a drab', and 'a sort of untidy middle-class woman...not the sort of woman a gentleman should keep company with'.⁸¹⁵ Without being explicit, the reader is given the impression that Sarah's slovenly dress indicates a reprehensible character. Once Sir Clifford's soul entered Sarah's body and became Miriam, the latter recognised the importance of developing an understanding of women's fashions. Miriam admits 'I have one fault. I can't hold my own with women about dress.'⁸¹⁶ This fault is one that Miriam overcomes, and she is described as 'dressed in the height of the fashion of the day', receiving approval of her appearance from those who meet her.⁸¹⁷ At a dinner party for example, Harding 'knew that his appreciation of Miriam was shared by everybody present.'⁸¹⁸

Miriam's fashion sense is only questioned in one scene with Harding and it serves as an allusion to her gender non-conformity. On an occasion when Miriam wears a 'large gold heart-shaped locket', Harding comments 'That's an awfully out-of-date sort of thing. These things have been out of fashion for about six years.'⁸¹⁹ Richardson further explains '[t]hey had, indeed, been invented by an actress, and for a time were all the vogue, but [Harding]

⁸¹⁴ Ibid., Nicklas, "It is the Hat that Matters the Most", 84.

⁸¹⁵ Richardson, *Mayfair Mystery*, 15, 15-16.

⁸¹⁶ Ibid., 79.

⁸¹⁷ Ibid., 36.

⁸¹⁸ Ibid., 57.

⁸¹⁹ Ibid., 159.

had not seen one on a well-dressed woman for years.’⁸²⁰ This locket conceals the key to the adjoining passageway through which Sir Clifford travels when becoming Miriam and returning to his original body. That it is the locket that casts doubt on Miriam’s skill at dressing well while concealing the ‘key’ to her secret of inhabiting two differently gendered bodies suggests the enduring connection between a woman’s attractiveness and her appreciation and value as female. Indeed, beauty becomes a metaphor in the novel for Miriam’s gender identity.

As the novel progresses, it is Miriam’s beauty rather than her gender that becomes questionable. When Harding argues that Miriam cannot be Sarah due to her beauty that Sarah did not share, Sarah’s father responds ‘[a]ny girl, sir, would look pretty dressed up as she was.’⁸²¹ Later, shortly before Miriam reveals her secret to Harding, he begins to suspect that her attractiveness is not due to her physical features but rather her styling. Harding tells Miriam ‘I was thinking that you are not really a beautiful woman. That you were not, even before your illness, a beautiful woman’.⁸²² Miriam’s answer confirms Harding’s opinion and further illustrates the importance of passing:

I never was really beautiful. But the secret of being beautiful is to behave as though you are beautiful. In England if a man thinks he is an actor or an architect people will take him at his word...I’m a very peculiar type. If I were badly dressed I should be ugly. When I am well-dressed...I [am] beautiful.⁸²³

⁸²⁰ Richardson, *Mayfair Mystery*, 159.

⁸²¹ *Ibid.*, 164.

⁸²² *Ibid.*, 222.

⁸²³ *Ibid.*, 222-3.

This passage indicates the performative nature of gender. Penelope Harvey and Peter Gow have stated that 'gender is...a process of becoming rather than a state of being'.⁸²⁴ Likewise, with practice and acquirement of the appropriate visual cues, Miriam can become beautiful and Sir Clifford can become female. The role of others in creating and confirming identity is also represented in the novel. Butler has argued 'What I call my "own" gender appears perhaps at times as something that I author or, indeed, own. But the terms that make up one's own gender are, from the start, outside oneself, beyond oneself in a sociality that has no single author'.⁸²⁵ Her point is repeatedly evidenced in gender non-conforming testimonies where the ability to 'pass' as a woman – especially an attractive one – among strangers is cited as evidence of their female gender. R. L. for example recalled 'My hostess...said herself that I was more lady-like than some of her friends', while a friend told R. L. that '[y]ou are perfectly wonderful; I feel you are really a woman.'⁸²⁶ Equally, in *2835 Mayfair*, Miriam 'passes' as a beautiful woman through fashionable attire. On the other hand, despite the importance of clothing in representing Miriam's femaleness, her ability to live successfully and permanently as a woman is arguably dependent on her female physicality.

The novel does not, as *The Well* did, contend with the concept of Miriam seeking to live as a woman in a male body, thereby allowing for Miriam's unproblematic continued engagement to Harding. The possibility of marriage and motherhood were cited as aspirations of Ellis'

⁸²⁴ Penelope Harvey and Peter Gow (eds) *Sex and Violence: Issues in Representation and Experience* (London, 1994), cited in Lynn Meskell, 'Archaeologies of identity', in: Timothy Insoll (ed.), *The Archaeology of Identities: A Reader* (Oxford, 2007), 30.

⁸²⁵ Butler, *Undoing Gender*, 1.

⁸²⁶ Ellis, *Eonism*, 82, 76.

Eonists that their male biology prohibited them from obtaining. Similarly, Lili Elbe was partly motivated to undergo further dangerous surgeries through a longing to marry and bear children, stating '[t]hrough a child I should be able to convince myself in the most unequivocal manner that I have been a woman from the very beginning.'⁸²⁷ Thus, Richardson's novel illustrates the paradox of clothing and visual cues as paramount to recognition as one's gender identity, but acceptance required a corresponding physicality in early-twentieth-century constructions of gender.

Miriam's relationship with Harding is never understood as potentially homosexual in *2835 Mayfair*. Consequently, the amalgamation of sexuality and gender in medical and cultural discourse was not a motif within the novel. On the other hand, discussions of *The Well* have been dominated by debates between historians as to whether Hall's novel is best interpreted as a lesbian or transgender narrative. Originally deemed a lesbian text, historians have criticised its negative and limited portrayal of the lesbian figure. Esther Newton upheld the reading of *The Well* as a key lesbian text, calling it a 'daring articulation of lesbian identity.'⁸²⁸ Newton describes Stephen as a 'mannish lesbian' which she identifies as 'a figure who is defined as lesbian because her behaviour or dress (and usually both) manifest elements designated as exclusively masculine.'⁸²⁹ Hall's association of masculinity with female same-sex desire was in Newton's view an adherence to the sexological constructions

⁸²⁷ Hoyer, (ed.), *Man into Woman*, 274, 278.

⁸²⁸ Esther Newton, 'The Mythic Mannish Lesbian: Radclyffe Hall and the New Woman', in: Martin Duberman, Martha Vicinus and George Chauncey Jr (eds) *Hidden from History: Reclaiming the Gay and Lesbian Past* (London, 1989), 281.

⁸²⁹ Newton, 'The Mythic Mannish Lesbian', 283.

of female homosexuality as inherently masculine. Newton argues that cross-dressing was an indication of female same-sex desire:

Stephen's difference, her overt sexuality, is also represented by cross-dressing...Cross-dressing for Hall is not a masquerade. It stands for the New Woman's rebellion against the male order and, at the same time, for the lesbian's desperate struggle to be and express her true self.⁸³⁰

Newton's criticism of *The Well* stems from her perception of its limited scope in representing female homosexuality as masculine, arguing that 'Hall's association of lesbianism and masculinity needs to be challenged, not because it doesn't exist, but because it is not the only possibility.'⁸³¹ Despite acknowledging the compounding of gender and sexuality in sexological categorisations of 'inversion' as well as the fact that '[s]ome people, then and now, experience "gender dysphoria,"' Newton rejects any indication that Stephen's masculinity could reflect her gender identity.⁸³² This approach fails to consider Stephen's consistent cross-dressing and masculinity regardless of her relationships, as well as *The Well's* portrayal of other lesbian identities such as the overtly feminine Valérie Seymour whom Hall described as 'not beautiful...but her limbs were very perfectly proportioned...She was dressed all in white, and a large white fox skin was clasped round her slender and shapely shoulders...she had masses of thick fair hair'.⁸³³

⁸³⁰ Newton, 'The Mythic Mannish Lesbian', 289-90.

⁸³¹ Ibid., 292.

⁸³² Ibid.

⁸³³ Hall, *The Well*, 4585-92.

Newton's rigid interpretation of *The Well* as a same-sex desire narrative demonstrates the limitations of allowing a single reading of the text. Coffman has stated that '[a]cknowledged throughout these [scholarly] debates [on *The Well*] is the ultimate irreducibility of Hall's book and of Stephen's character to simplistic categories of identity'.⁸³⁴ However, the acknowledgement would seem to be rather tenuous in Prosser and Newton's work and by advocating a same-sex desire *or* a transgender reading, each loses the nuances of early-twentieth-century identity categories. As Rebecca Jennings has shown in her examination of *The Well*, the masculine image of lesbianism was solidified by 1928 due to the obscenity trial for *The Well* and Hall's masculine appearance.⁸³⁵ While Jennings acknowledges that 'Hall continues to emphasise Stephen's essentially masculine nature throughout the novel, giving her an excessive smoking habit and other stereotypically masculine features', she situates this masculinity within the category of 'female invert'.⁸³⁶ Although this category involved elements of gender identity *and* sexuality, the gendered elements were largely an expression of the individual's sexuality. As Busl has argued in her analysis of *The Well* and *Nightwood* (1936) by Djuna Barnes:

...not only are fixed categories insufficient for representing identity in language, but that it is all but impossible to conceive of gender without being limited by existing linguistic structures...Both Hall and Barnes very clearly demonstrate that the sign systems used to express identity...are not mediums which represent any "truth" about inner reality, but are merely contingent upon pre-existing systems.⁸³⁷

⁸³⁴ Coffman, 'Woolf's *Orlando*', 8.

⁸³⁵ Rebecca Jennings, *A Lesbian History of Britain: Love and Sex Between Women Since 1500* (Oxford, 2007), 119-20.

⁸³⁶ *Ibid.*, 117.

⁸³⁷ Gretchen Busl, 'Drag's Double Inversion: Insufficient Language and Gender Performativity in *The Well of Loneliness* and *Nightwood*', *English Studies*, 98 (2017), 311.

Stephen and Hall were limited to existing medical and cultural discourses when articulating their sexual and gender identities. Stephen's construction of her gender mirrors that of Foucault's account of Herculine Barbin who, as Butler notes 'maintains h/er own discourse of sexual difference even within this ostensibly homosexual context.'⁸³⁸ Stephen must define herself within the context of the medical construction of inversion despite its failure to express the nuances of her experiences.

Similarly, *Orlando* accommodates different readings. For example, Kaivola argues that 'Woolf uses Constantinople to imply lesbian desire', while D. A. Boxwell blurs the distinctions between androgyny and same-sex relationships.⁸³⁹

De Lauretis has...analysed how "lesbian writers and artists have sought variously to escape gender, deny, transcend it, or perform it in excess" ...Orlando's masquerade in oriental clothing becomes the symbolic costume for a desired state of gendered ambiguity.⁸⁴⁰

Thus, androgyny could indicate gender non-conformity, same-sex relationships, or both depending on the individual. These connections between gender identity and sexuality were fundamental to early-twentieth-century cultural and medical discourse.⁸⁴¹ Woolf's eschewing of medical categories in her novel and the contradictions that appear throughout her characterisation of Orlando enable multiple readings to co-exist with equal validity.

⁸³⁸ Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 100.

⁸³⁹ Kaivola, 'Revisiting Woolf's Representations of Androgyny', 249.

⁸⁴⁰ D. A. Boxwell, '(Dis)orienting Spectacle: The Politics of Orlando's Sapphic Camp', *Twentieth Century Literature*, 44 (1998), 310, 319.

⁸⁴¹ Carroll Smith-Rosenberg, 'Discourses of Sexuality and Subjectivity: The New Woman, 1870-1936', in: Martin Duberman, Martha Vicinus and George Chauncey Jr. (eds) *Hidden from History: Reclaiming the Gay and Lesbian Past* (London, 1989), 277.

Caughie highlights these contradictions as evidence of *Orlando* being a 'prototype of the transgenre...narratives treating transgender lives that transfigure conventions of narrative diegesis'.⁸⁴² *Orlando* certainly transcended the typical discourses on gender and sexuality even as it supported the links between the two categories. As Coffman argues, 'Woolf's experimentalism involves not so much an escapist evasion of the question of embodiment as it does a critical interrogation of it.'⁸⁴³ Woolf's use of the format of fictional biography coupled with her refusal to restrict *Orlando* to one ultimate interpretation critiqued the binary construction of gender in early-twentieth-century Britain. Here, Berman's comments on the meaning of 'trans' are particularly relevant as an explanation of *Orlando's* disruptive potential:

When we use the prefix "trans" to mean not just "across, through over . . . or on the other side of" but also "beyond, surpassing, transcending," it represents a challenge to the normative dimension of the original entity or space, a crossing over that looks back critically from its space beyond.⁸⁴⁴

Thus, *Orlando* embraces seemingly incompatible identities and questions their incongruity. These multiple readings of *Orlando* and *The Well* are not a facet of *2835 Mayfair* which may explain its appeal to Ellis' Eonists. Both individuals who cited the book sought to irradicate their gender ambiguity rather than embrace it, making the uncomplicated transition of Miriam alluring.

⁸⁴² Pamela L. Caughie, 'The Temporality of Modernist Life Writing in the era of Transsexualism: Virginia Woolf's *Orlando* and Einar Wegener's *Man into Woman*', *Modern Fiction Studies*, 59 (2013), 502-3.

⁸⁴³ Coffman, 'Woolf's *Orlando*', 15.

⁸⁴⁴ Berman, 'Is the Trans in Transnational the Trans in Transgender?', 220-1.

The gendering of characteristics and behaviours is a major theme in *2835 Mayfair*, one that Richardson employs to allude to Sir Clifford/Miriam's secret. As previously stated, Miriam's female gender is predominantly confirmed in the novel through her physical appearance. This extends to her name, which Harding decides must be 'a stately name, a beautiful name...As she was perfect in figure and in face, there would be no jarring note in her name'.⁸⁴⁵ Equally, Miriam's desirability as a potential wife reaffirms her womanhood, as Miriam 'became the success of the season...Her beauty and talent and wealth carried all before them...Indeed, she received within a short time no less than three quite reasonable proposals of marriage.'⁸⁴⁶ Indeed, Miriam's appearance and personality are sufficient for Harding to declare her an almost perfect woman when he reflects that '[a]s to her mode of life, or indeed her social status, [Harding] knew nothing. She was simply the ideal woman, that was all.'⁸⁴⁷ Miriam's only other culturally stereotypical female trait is her frailty following her accident and fear and vulnerability on being suspected of Sir Clifford's murder when his body is found. Miriam faints during interrogation by the police and is described as looking 'even paler than when Harding had seen her last. There was in her eyes an expression of terror.'⁸⁴⁸ The novel implies these are expected behaviours from a woman that evoke a 'natural' protectiveness in Harding who tells Miriam 'I will myself appear for you at the inquest tomorrow. You may rely on me to refute this monstrous charge.'⁸⁴⁹ At this point in the novel then, Miriam's construction as an idealised woman seems to consist of her beauty, frailty and dependence that allow Harding to perform the role of strong, protective hero.

⁸⁴⁵ Richardson, *Mayfair Mystery*, 35.

⁸⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 84.

⁸⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 43.

⁸⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 211.

⁸⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 212.

This portrayal of Miriam however is not consistent throughout *2835 Mayfair*. On the contrary, prior to the accident, Sir Clifford retains much of his former personality when living as Miriam. Richardson characterises Sir Clifford/Miriam's intelligence, lack of vanity and selfishness as male traits that causes surprise in Harding when Miriam exhibits these qualities. For example, when Harding visits Miriam at her home after their first meeting in the hopes of discovering more about her, he is thwarted in his attempts as '[v]ainly, however, did he strive to make her talk about herself. Of all women she appeared to be the least egotistical. She was as sensible as a man.'⁸⁵⁰

Again, later Harding tells Miriam 'you are so completely sensible that I talk to you as though you were a man,' to which she responds '[t]hat is a high compliment'.⁸⁵¹ Miriam's transgression of female gender norms is in fact praised rather than censured in the novel. Her knowledge on a range of topics though surprising, causes admiration in her potential husband. In one scene, Harding discovers that Miriam 'seemed, even to his acute mind, to possess an extraordinary knowledge of medical jurisprudence. Never in his Chambers, when discussing these matters with the most eminent physicians, had he been so impressed as he was by this beautiful girl's knowledge of the subject.'⁸⁵²

⁸⁵⁰ Richardson, *Mayfair Mystery*, 36-7.

⁸⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 216, 217.

⁸⁵² *Ibid.*, 85.

Richardson was careful to minimise Miriam's intelligence through references to her beauty and lack of arrogance which shielded her from the criticism faced by Edwardian campaigners for greater educational opportunities for women.⁸⁵³ A prime example is Miriam's first meeting with Harding at a party in which Richardson distances Miriam from the derogatory connotations of female education, where '[w]ithout the aggressive self-assurance of a blue-stocking, she yet seemed extraordinarily confident in her own knowledge.'⁸⁵⁴ By mentioning 'blue-stocking', the popular epithet used to ridicule studious women, Richardson recalled a figure familiar to his audience through satirical caricatures before quickly dispelling any notion that Miriam could be thus defined.⁸⁵⁵ The positive representation of Miriam's co-mingling of male and female characteristics is reminiscent of early-twentieth-century concepts of a gendered spectrum in which individuals possessing male and female aspects were praised by some. Edward Carpenter's work on 'the intermediate sex' eschewed contemporary concerns over the increasingly questionable immutability of the binary system, and instead extolled the virtues of more androgynous individuals.⁸⁵⁶

The character of Miriam could consequently provide personal affirmation for gender non-conforming individuals who were biologically male and identified as women but feared their culturally constructed male characteristics would prohibit their recognition as female.

Miriam's portrayal as an intelligent and sensible woman meets with consistent approval and only enhances her eligibility as a potential wife, thereby presenting an alternative, positive

⁸⁵³ Jenkins, 'Gender, Embodiment and Professional Identity', 501-2.

⁸⁵⁴ Richardson, *Mayfair Mystery*, 57.

⁸⁵⁵ Jenkins, 'Gender, Embodiment and Professional Identity', 503.

⁸⁵⁶ Edward Carpenter, *Love's Coming-of-Age: A Series of Papers on the Relation of the Sexes* (London, 12th edn. 1923), 131.

female construct. Yet, it is unlikely that this was Richardson's intention given his derogatory attitude towards women in the novel. Through the pontifications of other male characters, Richardson represents women as typically vain, jealous, inclined to gossip and susceptible to addiction. Miriam's difference is used as a trope to hint at the secret of her male identity; it is so astonishing that Miriam is knowledgeable and rational that the explanation lies in her original manhood. Furthermore, while Miriam's exhibiting male traits elicits approval, Sir Clifford's occasional effeminacy is presented in a negative light.⁸⁵⁷ For example, when Harding asks Sir Clifford to examine Miriam for signs of drug addiction, Sir Clifford refuses, stating 'I'm not going to do it. I don't want to do it.'⁸⁵⁸ Harding reacts with disbelief and frustration, arguing '[t]hat's a woman's reason.'⁸⁵⁹ The absence of a logical explanation instantly characterises Sir Clifford's behaviour as female and implies the detrimental effect femininity produces in men.

The inexplicability of a man identifying as – or desiring to become – a woman is conveyed in a discussion about Sir Clifford at a dinner party attended by Miriam and Harding. Harding asks those present, 'you wouldn't say there is anything effeminate about [Sir Clifford], would you?'.⁸⁶⁰ The response Harding receives is an immediate 'Good heavens, no!'⁸⁶¹ Harding goes on to explain the motivation behind his question:

⁸⁵⁷ Matt Houlbrook, *Queer London: Perils and Pleasures in the Sexual Metropolis, 1918-1957* (London, 2005), 179.

⁸⁵⁸ Richardson, *Mayfair Mystery*, 176.

⁸⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

⁸⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 61.

⁸⁶¹ *Ibid.*

He was intensely athletic at Oxford: good at all games, keen on all sports. And yet he has told me not once, but twenty times, that he always regretted that he wasn't a woman, for he held that women occupy the best position both in life and in love.⁸⁶²

The response of one guest, Mrs Onslow-Parker, mirrors the contemporary construction of the desire to be male as natural, while the reverse was incomprehensible in her exclamation: '[w]hat an extraordinary thing to regret...Being a woman is a curse. Have you ever come across a woman, a sensible woman...who would not give her soul to be a man?'⁸⁶³ Earlier in the conversation, Mrs Onslow-Parker similarly dismissed Sir Clifford's views. On being told that 'Sir Clifford Oakleigh...believes firmly in the possibility of a dual identity. I fancy he would like to be two people', Mrs Onslow-Parker sneers '[h]e ought to be content with being Sir Clifford Oakleigh...I can imagine no more delightful position than his.'⁸⁶⁴ This double standard in the treatment of gender variant individuals was a common observation in early-twentieth-century discussions of gender non-conformity including Ellis' Eonist who bemoaned the discrimination against male-bodied individuals who identified as women.⁸⁶⁵ Consequently, Richardson's representation of this issue coupled with Sir Clifford's desire to be female which is ultimately achieved, would have resonated more strongly with Ellis' Eonist cases than the more androgynous *Orlando* or *The Well's* focus on female masculinity.

Reviews and Reception

⁸⁶² Richardson, *Mayfair Mystery*, 61.

⁸⁶³ Ibid.

⁸⁶⁴ Ibid., 60.

⁸⁶⁵ Ellis, *Eonism*, 83.

Of the three novels under discussion, *The Well* received the most notorious reception. Hall's representation of sexual 'inversion' that resulted in the subsequent indecency trial and ban in England led Michael Dillon to comment in *Self*, '[h]ad the book been handled with more restraint it might have done much as a popular novel towards bringing about an understanding of the situation'.⁸⁶⁶ Upon its release, *The Well* initially received praise for its literary prowess and relevant commentary. *The Times Literary Supplement* called the novel '[s]incere, courageous, high-minded, and often beautifully expressed', and elsewhere quoted Ellis' opinion that '[a]part from its fine qualities as a novel by a writer of accomplished art...it possesses a notable psychological and sociological significance'.⁸⁶⁷ Yet Orlo Williams' early review revealed the problematic nature of the combination of reality and art for contemporaries and who had the authority to use sexological discourse.⁸⁶⁸ Williams stated:

Miss Radclyffe Hall's latest work THE WELL OF LONELINESS is a novel, and we propose to treat it as such. We therefore rather regret that it should have been thought necessary to insert at the beginning a "commentary" by Mr. Havelock Ellis...The presence of this commentary, however, points to the criticism...that this long novel, sincere, courageous, high-minded, and often beautifully expressed as it is, fails as a work of art through divided purpose. It is meant as a thesis and a challenge as well as an artistic creation.⁸⁶⁹

These criticisms were not shared by M. M. whose review in *The Daily Telegraph* praised *The Well* as:

⁸⁶⁶ Michael Dillon, *Self: A Study in Ethics and Endocrinology* (London, 1946), 51.

⁸⁶⁷ Anon., 'Radclyffe Hall's *The Well of Loneliness*', *The Times Literary Supplement*, 16 August 1928, 588. Anon., 'The Well of Loneliness', *The Times Literary Supplement*, 19 July 1928, 528.

⁸⁶⁸ Anna Clark, 'Twilight Moments', *Journal of the History of Sexuality*, 14 (2005), 151.

⁸⁶⁹ Orlo Williams, 'The Well of Loneliness', *The Times Literary Supplement*, 2 August 1928, 566.

...a truly remarkable book. It is remarkable in the first place as a work of art finely conceived and finely written. Secondly, it is remarkable as dealing with an aspect of abnormal life seldom or never presented in English fiction – certainly never with such unreserved frankness.⁸⁷⁰

Though M. M. noted that opinion was divided, it is clear that fictional texts were not universally condemned as contributors to discourses on sexuality and gender.⁸⁷¹

Nevertheless, six days after M. M.'s review, *The Times* recorded the Home Secretary's request to Jonathan Cape's publishing house to 'discontinue publication of Miss Radclyffe Hall's novel "The Well of Loneliness"'.⁸⁷²

Coverage of the trial which resulted in the novel being banned in England revealed concerns over obscenity as well as the consequent merging of sexuality and gender in constructions of 'inversion'. In the examination by Mr Metcalfe for the defence of Chief Inspector Prospero, the latter gave his opinion of the novel as 'objectionable', 'offensive' and that it 'deal[t] with physical passion... an indecent subject.'⁸⁷³ The basis of the obscenity came from inference alone as the most explicit description of female same-sex desire in *The Well* was the phrase 'she kissed Mary many times on the mouth'.⁸⁷⁴ This point was raised several times by the defence, who argued '[n]owhere is there an obscene word, a lascivious passage.'⁸⁷⁵ A later commentary in 1937 on the decision to ban *The Well* asserted that 'the "Cockburn rule"[that offered a definition of obscenity] is wide enough to impeach, along with genuine

⁸⁷⁰ M. M., 'The Well of Loneliness', *The Daily Telegraph*, 17 August 1928, 13.

⁸⁷¹ Ibid.

⁸⁷² Jonathan Cape, 'The Well of Loneliness', *The Times*, 23 August 1928, 13.

⁸⁷³ Anon., 'The Well of Loneliness', *The Daily Mail*, 10 November 1928, 7.

⁸⁷⁴ Hall, *The Well*, 6938.

⁸⁷⁵ Anon., 'The Well of Loneliness', *The Daily Mail*, 10 November 1928, 7.

pornography, some, if not most, of the supreme examples of human literary genius.⁸⁷⁶

Notwithstanding the absence of pornographic detail, the judge in the case, Sir Chartres Biron gave his opinion on the novel:

It is suggested that this book cannot be described fairly as obscene because in the course of it there are no filthy words, and it is said to be well written...the fact that the book is well written can be no answer to these proceedings...The more palatable the poison the more insidious...I shall order it to be destroyed.⁸⁷⁷

The problem appeared to be not that *The Well* discussed 'inversion' so openly, but that it did not condemn it. Biron gave his opinion that:

There is not a single word from beginning to end in this book which suggests that anyone with these tendencies is in the least blameworthy or that they should be resisted...The whole of this book...is a demand for the toleration and recognition of this type of women – that in ordinary society they should not be made outcasts or pariahs or ostracised by decent people.⁸⁷⁸

The Court of Appeals upheld the decision to destroy copies of *The Well*, and restated Hall's failure to criticise her characters as problematic:

In the view of the court it is a most dangerous and corrupting book...It is a book which, if it does not commend unnatural practices, certainly condones them, and suggests

⁸⁷⁶ Anon., 'The Test of "Obscenity"', *The Times Literary Supplement*, 10 April 1937, 268; Katherine Mullin, 'Unmasking *The Confessional Unmasked*: The 1868 Hicklin Test and the Toleration of Obscenity', *English Literary History*, 85 (2018), 471-99.

⁸⁷⁷ Anon., 'The Well of Loneliness', *The Daily Mail*, 17 November 1928, 18.

⁸⁷⁸ Ibid.

that those guilty of them should not receive the consequences they deserve to suffer.⁸⁷⁹

Despite citing female same-sex practices as the cause of the novel's indecency, much reference was made to Stephen's masculinity, revealing the inseparable nature of gender and sexuality in this period. Laura Doan has argued that prior to *The Well*, outside of medical discourse the link between female masculinity and same-sex desire was 'more elusive' and that '[f]emale mannishness causes (gender) confusion, but it would be a stretch to read the masculine woman as aberrant, abnormal, or sexually deviant.'⁸⁸⁰ Hall's novel and the subsequent trial served to clarify this association within cultural depictions. The defence team's Mr Birkett 'used the term "invert" to describe women born with certain *masculine tendencies* and with an inclination in certain directions...with their own sex' [Emphasis added].⁸⁸¹ Similarly, the Attorney-General quoted *The Well's* book jacket comment that "The Well of Loneliness,'...is concerned with the phenomenon of the masculine woman in all its implications' as evidence of its obscenity.⁸⁸² Williams too, in his review referred to Stephen as a 'man-woman', the term used to denote those assigned female at birth who presented as male, suggesting an awareness of the gender dimension in Stephen's case.⁸⁸³ Arguably, in the aftermath of the New Woman, the success of women's assumption of culturally constructed male occupations during World War I and the advent of 'shell shock' threatening traditional images of the stalwart British man, Hall's novel fuelled concerns over

⁸⁷⁹ Anon., 'The Well of Loneliness', *The Daily Telegraph*, 15 December 1928, 6.

⁸⁸⁰ Laura Doan, 'Topsy-Turvydom: Gender Inversion, Sapphism, and the Great War', *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies*, 12 (2006), 523.

⁸⁸¹ Anon., 'Novel Condemned as Obscene', *The Times*, 17 November 1928, 5.

⁸⁸² Anon., 'The Well of Loneliness', *The Daily Telegraph*, 15 December 1928, 6.

⁸⁸³ Williams, 'The Well of Loneliness', 566.

the dissolution of traditional constructions of gender. This view is further substantiated by the difference of opinion between countries, as in America, *The Well* was 'held not to be obscene by a special sessions court in New York' and was 'in huge demand in other countries.'⁸⁸⁴ Stephen's success as an author and ambulance driver, her strength, bravery and relationships with women all encroached on culturally constructed notions of male identity. Consequently, *The Well's* influence on contemporary cultural constructions of gender identity was curtailed by its almost immediate censorship. Hall was also limited by her reliance on medical discourse in presenting the possibilities of living as one's gender identity rather than assigned sex, and in articulating the differences between those who loved women as masculine women and those who did so within a male gender identity. Thus, *The Well* may prove more fruitful as a source for modern discussions of transgender narratives, but for Hall's contemporaries the veneer of fantasy was required if censorship was to be avoided.

Orlando fared better in reviews potentially due to its fantastical elements. Reviews of *Orlando* repeatedly stressed its detachment from reality in every sense, calling it 'a fantasy, impossible but delicious', 'a fictitious biography', 'a poetic masterpiece' and echoed Woolf's assessment of it as a 'jest' and a 'joke'.⁸⁸⁵ The terminology of passing was invoked by one reviewer, A. S. McDowall, who wrote Orlando's "'biography' is an artifice, used quite cavalierly, to set off a freedom ampler than a novel's."⁸⁸⁶ The freedom described mirrors that

⁸⁸⁴ Anon., 'News from Everywhere', *The Daily Mail Atlantic Edition*, 21 April 1929, 11.

⁸⁸⁵ A. S. McDowall, 'Orlando', *The Times Literary Supplement*, 11 October 1928, 729. S. P. B., 'Fiction in 1928', *The Daily Telegraph*, 28 December 1928, 13. Anon., 'Orlando', *The Times*, 30 October 1928, 22. McDowall, 'Orlando', 729. Anon., 'Orlando', *The Times*, 7 December 1928, 22.

⁸⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 729.

experienced by Orlando when they pass as either male or female – or both – during their androgynous period through adopting different forms of clothing. *Orlando* then, cloaked in the protective guise of fantasy and witticism, was able to pass as an unthreatening fiction, thereby escaping the censure directed at *The Well*. Coupled with these fantasy elements, as Jennings has argued, Woolf's 'rejection of traditional literary styles and deconstruction of gender categories in *Orlando* prevented the lesbian theme from becoming explicit to a mainstream audience and enabled her to portray lesbianism positively without attracting the attention of the censors.'⁸⁸⁷ Similarly, Jennings suggests that the differences between Hall's public lesbian relationship and masculine appearance and Woolf's heterosexual marriage and feminine attire may have offered further protection.⁸⁸⁸ Yet the very elements that defended *Orlando* from allegations of indecency may have alienated readers from identifying with Orlando's gender narrative. McDowall's review touched on the potential relevance of Orlando's gender non-conformity to the lived experience of certain individuals, but this potential was swiftly discredited:

One could hardly dogmatize whether a past self was man or woman. Even now, as a page of this book reminds us, are we not aware of all sorts of possible selves within us so that we summon up one, perhaps, in preference to another? Some such thoughts may hover within call as we read "Orlando," but they need scarcely press into sight. For *nothing could be less like a treatise on psychology or heredity* than this. [Emphasis added].⁸⁸⁹

⁸⁸⁷ Jennings, *A Lesbian History of Britain*, 127.

⁸⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁸⁹ McDowall, 'Orlando', 729.

Such dismissive comments may have discouraged those seeking relatable representation of gender non-conformity from giving *Orlando* the same serious consideration *The Well* received through its inclusion of sexological material. However, the fictional genre of *Orlando* seems unlikely to have been a deterrent given the interest in the entirely fictitious novel *2835 Mayfair*.

Alternatively, it is probable that the lack of specificity in terms of experience and categorisation that allows *Orlando* to be so relevant to modern discussions of gender identity, reduced its applicability to the contemporary gender variant individuals whose testimonies survive. Dillon and Cowell adhered to a linear, wrong embodiment narrative when presenting their gender non-conformity. Cowell's autobiography shares the most similarities with *Orlando*, given her characterisation of her gender identity as male prior to medical treatment, androgynous during treatment and female post-operatively. Given that Cowell did not include references to any fictional texts as reflective of her experiences it is unlikely that a magical, unproblematic transition would have been of great appeal. For Dillon, the duality that *Orlando* presents, the androgynous aspects and continuous mix of male and female traits and the absence of the desire to physically transition, would not have equated to his feelings of an established gender identity that contradicted that assigned at birth. Their narratives exemplified one specific form of transgender identity in which a wrong embodiment construction was embraced, – whether motivated by the need to obtain surgery or actual identification – making the fluctuations in Orlando's gender incompatible.

The popular reception of *2835 Mayfair* in press reviews was varied. In the main, the novel was praised for its wit and treated as a light entertainment. *The Daily Mail* described *2835 Mayfair* as ‘A Satire on the Smart Set’, while *The Times* included the novel in its Book Club suggestions, stating ‘[i]t is a lively tale...and has a remarkable dénouement.’⁸⁹⁰ One review was particularly positive in its assessment of Richardson’s work:

“2835 Mayfair” is a kind of Richardsonian variant on the Jekyll-and-Hyde theme. The detectives who are called in to solve it are creations in Mr. Richardson’s funniest, most irresponsible manner. The pages in which they appear are as good as any he has yet written.⁸⁹¹

The same paper later opined that ‘[t]he final chapters of the book are weird and wild, and altogether it is an original and entertaining work.’⁸⁹² The dismissal of *2835 Mayfair* as an amusing detective novel protected it from the level of scrutiny applied to *The Well*, as did Richardson’s reputation as a popular author rather than a writer of serious or intellectual prose. Neither contemporaries nor subsequent historians have considered the book in relation to discussions of gender non-conformity. *2835 Mayfair* was and is rendered invisible due to its author’s lack of intent in writing a commentary on gender non-conformity and its casting as a satirical mystery novel. Yet as Cervetti has noted in relation to *Orlando*, humour can be a powerful tool as ‘[w]ith laughter, the tone changes, undermining and diminishing the formidable nature of what is being laughed at...there is an exchange of power in laughter, and laughter is one way to take control.’⁸⁹³

⁸⁹⁰ Anon., ‘2835 Mayfair’, *The Daily Mail*, 27 April 1907, 4; Anon., ‘Personal &c.’, *The Times*, 27 November 1907, 1.

⁸⁹¹ Anon., ‘Latest News in World of Books’ *The New York Herald (European Edition)*, 19 May 1907, 8.

⁸⁹² Anon., ‘Mr. A. Jones’ Book on Old Gold Plate’, *The New York Herald (European Edition)*, 15 September 1907, 8.

⁸⁹³ Cervetti, ‘In the Breeches’, 174-5.

In *2835 Mayfair*, the detectives attempting to solve the mystery of Sir Clifford/Miriam's connection were cited by reviews as the humorous element, not the gender non-conforming character. The amusement caused by the detectives' ineptitude allows a symbolic ridiculing of the futility of the efforts of authorities to provide an explanation of gender non-conformity that resonated with the experiences of some of Ellis' Eonists, including R. L.'s repeated unsuccessful diagnoses from medical experts, an experience shared by Lili Elbe.⁸⁹⁴ Simultaneously, the comparisons with Jekyll and Hyde and the use of phrases such as 'weird and wild' and 'remarkable' stressed the fantastical elements of the novel's conclusion, thereby shielding it from any meaningful analysis by legal and medical experts.

However, the reviews did not entirely overlook *2835 Mayfair's* consideration of gender non-conformity. Unlike *Orlando*, Richardson did use the sexological term 'dual personality' in reference to Sir Clifford/Miriam and provided other fictional accounts of such cases during a dinner party at which Sir Clifford's dual personality was discussed. Those reviews that did refer to Sir Clifford/Miriam's gender non-conformity expressed disapproval. In its discussion of the novel's ending, *The Times Literary Supplement* commented 'we have had something like it before from Mr. Richardson; and...though it is ingenious, it is not wholly pleasant.'⁸⁹⁵ F. G. Bettany's review for *The Sunday Times* was more pronounced in its condemnation.

Bettany wrote:

⁸⁹⁴ Ellis, *Eonism*, 79. Hoyer, (ed.), *Man into Woman*, p. vi.

⁸⁹⁵ Anon., 'List of New Books and Reprints', *The Times Literary Supplement*, 26 April 1907, 135.

If there were not something repellent about the central idea of Mr. Frank Richardson's new tale, "2835 Mayfair"...it would be both easy and right to praise the book as a very clever piece of sensationalism...But surely the notion of a modern Damon, who makes his Pylades fall in love with him while he, Damon, that is to say, is masquerading in the body of a hypnotised woman (let us give away as little of Mr. Richardson's plot as possible), is more than a trifle ugly.⁸⁹⁶

Bettany's review provides another example of the early-twentieth-century equation of gender non-conformity with homosexuality. The 'repellent' aspect of the novel was not for Bettany the transition from male to female, but rather the romance between Harding and Miriam which he categorises as homosexual. Ignoring Sir Clifford's professed desire to experience life as a woman, Bettany constructed the character's transition as an enabling device for same-sex desire. As with *The Well*, homosexuality was cited as the 'indecent' aspect of the novel instead of gender non-conformity, though Miriam's successful passing as a woman and ability to live as two genders undoubtedly recalled cultural concerns over the instability of the sexes.⁸⁹⁷ Clearly though, *2835 Mayfair's* satirical and imaginative elements eclipsed the disapproval of its central theme as only two negative reviews were released and both contained praise as well as criticism. Even Bettany conceded that 'if the reader can get over his objection to the idea he will be bound to admire the ingenuity with which the novelist works it out and to chuckle over the catastrophe in which Mr. Richardson involves his hero who was so eager to enjoy the experiences of both sexes.'⁸⁹⁸

⁸⁹⁶ F. G. Bettany, 'The World of Books', *The Sunday Times*, 19 May 1907, 2.

⁸⁹⁷ Alison Oram, *Her Husband was a Woman!: Women's gender-crossing in modern British popular culture* (London, 2007), 17-39.

⁸⁹⁸ Bettany, 'The World of Books', 2.

2835 Mayfair consequently achieved the balance of medical discussion with a fantastical transition that protected the novel from censorship while remaining relatable to its gender non-conforming readers. Whereas *The Well* became inaccessible to contemporaries through its ban and *Orlando* was more personally reflective of Vita Sackville-West's experience of gender non-conformity, *2835 Mayfair's* continued circulation and commentary on gender resonated with Ellis' Eonists. The novel was, for these readers, more representative of their feelings and desires and as such is worthy of consideration in any examination of early-twentieth-century gender non-conformity.

Conclusion

Historical analyses of *Orlando* and *The Well* have established the value of fiction as commentaries on gender non-conformity. Woolf's use of fantasy enabled her to transcend contemporary medical discourses on gender identity to express the uncategorisable form of gender non-conformity and queer sexuality experienced by her lover Vita Sackville-West that medical terminology rendered inexpressible. Juxtaposed to Woolf's imaginative work, Hall employed sexological texts to produce a medicalised narrative on the female 'invert' that Bauer has called 'the key work of female inversion'.⁸⁹⁹ Each of these texts however suffered inevitable limitations. *The Well's* reliance on realism and medical discourse led to its removal from circulation in England thereby restricting its impact on gender non-conforming individuals. Equally *Orlando*, despite being celebrated by modern queer theorists for its

⁸⁹⁹ Bauer, *English Literary Sexology*, 142.

rejection of a medicalised narrative and representation of a more fluid, androgynous gender identity, was less relatable to individuals who sought a linear, physical transition. *2835 Mayfair* addresses some of these limitations by striking a balance between medical terminology and fantasy that made its plot resonate with the specific experience of Ellis' Eonists who longed for a female physicality to equate to their female gender identity. Notwithstanding the Eonist reading of the novel as a linear wrong embodiment narrative, *2835 Mayfair* accommodates several readings, including as it does Sir Clifford/Miriam's fluctuation between identities for the majority of the novel, reminiscent of the sexological concept of 'dual personality'. Coupled with the similarities between *2835 Mayfair* and gender variant testimonies such as Lili Elbe's – the longing for womanhood, the operation that resulted in permanent transition and the resultant marital opportunities – Richardson's novel solidifies its place as an important cultural representation of gender non-conformity regardless of his motivations in writing it.

By broadening the scope of research into fictional accounts of early-twentieth-century gender non-conformity and looking at all three novels together as opposed to in isolation, a more comprehensive understanding of the period's conceptualisation of gender is achieved. The temptation to rigidly segregate histories of gender identity from histories of sexuality while understandable, given Prosser's concerns about the erasure of the former, is not reflective of contemporary discourse. Matt Houlbrook has shown the indivisibility of gender and male same-sex desire in early-twentieth-century Britain, particularly in the interwar period:

Set against an 'exaggerated' and rigid distinction between men and women, male and female bodies were assumed to be 'sexed' in particular ways. The desire for a woman was considered inherently masculine. The desire for a man was a priori womanlike...This gendering of desire underpinned the ways that *all* contemporaries interpreted same-sex practices.⁹⁰⁰ [Emphasis added].

The equation of sexuality with gender was borne out by the critical reviews of *2835 Mayfair* in which Miriam and Harding's relationship was depicted as homosexual due to the misgendering of Miriam as male following transition. As mentioned in chapter one, Ellis' Eonist cases' insistence on the absence of sexual desire in their female gender identity consolidates the prevalence of the assumed link between the two. Consequently, it is not only possible but essential to maintain and highlight the distinction between sexuality and gender identity while adopting a method of research that allows for a blurring of the boundaries and an inclusive, expansive consideration of the variety of expressions of gender non-conformity and sexuality. Such an approach is aided by an examination of a broader range of fictional accounts that represent these differing experiences of gender non-conformity. The inclusion of *2835 Mayfair's* more linear transition alongside *Orlando's* androgyny and *The Well's* female masculinity and same-sex desire is a first step in the diversification of the history of transgender identities, in which no one form of gender non-conformity is privileged and a more nuanced discussion can emerge.

⁹⁰⁰ Matt Houlbrook, 'The Man with the Powder Puff' in Interwar London', *The Historical Journal*, 50 (2007), 152-3.

Chapter 5: '[M]any more people of my type do exist': The dual personality of Vita Sackville-West

The history of sexualities and gender history have a long-established uneasy, even hostile relationship. The suspicion with which each regards the other has led to territorial claiming of figures as either examples of homosexuality *or* gender non-conformity. Jack Halberstam has highlighted the tendency for those assigned women at birth who present as male to be subsumed into lesbian history, their male gender identity being devalued and recast as a necessity for better employment prospects or to enable same-sex relationships.⁹⁰¹ While such interpretations seek to reclaim historical examples of female same-sex desire, they inevitably render gender non-conformity invisible. Concerns over the erasure of transgender history by queer theory or lesbian and gay histories are valid and it is undoubtedly vital to maintain the distinction between the definitions of gender identity and sexuality. However, a rigid division between gender and sexuality where each is studied in isolation is equally problematic. In *Female Masculinity*, Halberstam made the case for a more permeable boundary between histories of sexuality and gender:

...while it is true that transgender and transsexual men have been wrongly folded into lesbian history, it is also true that the distinctions between some transsexual identities and some lesbian identities may at times become quite blurry...Many FTMs do come out as lesbians before they come out as transsexuals (many, it must also be said, do not). And for this reason alone, one cannot always maintain hard and fast and definitive distinctions between lesbians and transsexuals.⁹⁰²

⁹⁰¹ Jack Halberstam gives the example of jazz musician Billie Tipton in: Jack Halberstam, *Female Masculinity* (North Carolina, 1998), 149.

⁹⁰² *Ibid.*, 150.

Building on Halberstam's collaborative approach to gender identity and sexuality, in this chapter I will argue that a 'blurring' of the boundaries between sexuality and gender identity provides a richer and more nuanced history of gender non-conformity.

The diversity and complexities of gender identities and sexualities require an equally multi-faceted approach by historians which will ultimately provide a more comprehensive understanding of both areas of research. Here, I will use Vita Sackville-West as a case-in-point of the value of adopting this approach in histories of gender non-conformity. As Judith Butler has theorised:

The cultural matrix through which gender identity has become intelligible requires that certain kinds of "identities" cannot "exist" – that is, those in which gender does not follow from sex and those in which the practices of desire do not "follow" from either sex or gender...Their persistence and proliferation, however, provide critical opportunities to expose the limits and regulatory aims of that domain of intelligibility[.]⁹⁰³

Sackville-West's life was full of contradictions. She was at once a conventional wife and mother in a loving marriage where both husband and wife were repeatedly unfaithful by mutual consent, a talented author, a lesbian, a bisexual, a woman and a gender non-conforming individual who at times presented as male. Sackville-West has most frequently been claimed as a lesbian by historians, but to do so risks erasing crucial

⁹⁰³ Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (London, 1990), 17.

aspects of her identity.⁹⁰⁴ Though her female relationships were arguably more numerous and intense, Sackville-West had an initially sexual relationship with her husband and at least one male lover, indicating an element of bisexuality. Equally, Sackville-West presented as male during her relationship with Violet Trefusis which could be interpreted as Sackville-West's expressions of love in a same-sex relationship. This would make her in modern parlance the butch to Violet's femme.⁹⁰⁵ Yet I would argue that Sackville-West's intense joy while living as Julian and her identifying many parts of her personality as male go beyond her sexuality. Indeed, Julian was not a feature of Sackville-West's other same-sex relationships, her expressions of masculine desire for Virginia Woolf being far more muted and overwhelmed by maternal sentiments. Drawing on Sackville-West's fictional and autobiographical writings, her correspondence with Woolf and Trefusis' letters, I will argue that Sackville-West can be read as butch, lesbian, male, female and bisexual simultaneously, while also representing none of these categories fully. As Julian, Sackville-West assumed male pronouns and attire but never expressed the intense feelings of wrong embodiment experienced by Michael Dillon or Havelock Ellis' Eonists. Sackville-West pursued relationships with women while simultaneously claiming her relationship with her husband to be the most significant and valued of her life. Thus, the contradictions and difficulties in positioning Sackville-West in histories of sexuality or gender can only be fully explored by an inclusive examination of the many facets of her

⁹⁰⁴ See for example Louise A. DeSalvo, 'Lighting the Cave: The Relationship between Vita Sackville-West and Virginia Woolf', *Signs*, 8 (1982), 195-214 and Sherron Knopp, "'If I Saw You Would You Kiss Me?': Sapphism and the Subversiveness of Virginia Woolf's *Orlando*', *Journal of the Modern Language Association of America (PMLA)*, 103 (1988), 24-34.

⁹⁰⁵ Sue-Ellen Case, 'Towards a Butch-Femme Aesthetic', *Discourse*, 11 (1988-9), 64.

identity, which is, to use Laura Doan's words, a 'strategy that seems obvious, but one that has been surprisingly rare.'⁹⁰⁶

Vita Sackville-West: A Fluid Case Study

The case of Vita Sackville-West (1892-1962) illustrates the limitations of segregating histories of sexuality and gender identity. Rather than defining Sackville-West as *either* a lesbian/bisexual woman *or* a gender non-conforming individual, she is better read as both.⁹⁰⁷ Born in 1892 into minor aristocracy, Sackville-West grew up at Knole, her family's ancestral home. On the death of her father in 1928, Sackville-West was barred from inheriting Knole due to her female gender and throughout her life this caused her great anguish. During her childhood and adolescence, she wrote constantly in various genres, and later became a writer of poetry, novels and a journalist. Sackville-West had several affairs with men and women before her marriage and her relationship with Rosamund Grosvenor ended with her marriage to diplomat Harold Nicolson in 1913. Both Sackville-West and Harold agreed to an open marriage and continued to have same-sex relationships, though always expressing their ultimate devotion and loyalty to each other. They had three children of whom two boys survived. The younger son, Nigel (born in 1917) went on to publish Sackville-West's autobiographical account of her relationship with Violet Trefusis (1894-1972) in *Portrait of a Marriage* (1973).⁹⁰⁸

⁹⁰⁶ Laura Doan, 'Topsy-Turvydom: Gender Inversion, Sapphism, and the Great War', *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies*, 12 (2006), 523.

⁹⁰⁷ As Vita Sackville-West consistently used female pronouns with reference to herself, I will also use she/her for Sackville-West throughout this chapter.

⁹⁰⁸ Oxford Dictionary of National Biography, *West, Victoria Mary [Vita] Sackville- (1892-1962)*, [website], 2017, <https://www.oxforddnb.com/display/10.1093/ref:odnb/9780198614128.001.0001/odnb-9780198614128-e-35903?rskey=60mpWc&result=1>.

Sackville-West began a sexual relationship with Trefusis as teenagers and they continued a passionate love affair for years. In 1920, the pair ran away to France with Sackville-West wearing male clothing and presenting as Trefusis' husband. Both women's husbands eventually pursued them and brought them back to England after which Sackville-West slowly distanced herself from Trefusis, prioritising Harold and her family life. Sackville-West's relationship with Virginia Woolf began in 1925, receiving strong endorsement from Harold. Aside from a two-year disagreement, the pair remained friends until Woolf's suicide in 1941. Ultimately Sackville-West remained married to Harold until her death, her final years spent quietly cultivating her famous garden at Sissinghurst.⁹⁰⁹

As seen in earlier chapters, during the first half of the twentieth century there were many individuals like Sackville-West who defied categorisation. The classification of the 'invert' went some way towards providing a medicalised identity for those whose sexuality and gender identity merged to a certain extent. Yet as Jay Prosser has argued, the 'invert' was largely understood in terms of homosexuality and thus subsumed gender non-conforming individuals into this preoccupation with same-sex desire.⁹¹⁰ Furthermore, many individuals eschewed medical terminology in their understandings of themselves and are evidently fluid in terms of gender and sexuality. However, it is important to stress that by acknowledging the mutual relevance and interplay between sexuality and gender identity,

⁹⁰⁹ Oxford Dictionary of National Biography, *West, Victoria Mary [Vita] Sackville- (1892-1962)*.

⁹¹⁰ Jay Prosser, 'Transsexuals and the Transsexologists: Inversion and the Emergence of Transsexual Subjectivity', in: Lucy Bland and Laura Doan (eds) *Sexology in Culture: Labelling Bodies and Desires* (Cambridge, 1998), 116-31.

I am not suggesting an amalgamation of the two. Nor is it appropriate to consider all forms of gender identity as ambiguous, fluid and linked to sexuality. As has been shown in an earlier chapter, Michael Dillon's gender identity was consistently male regardless of his physicality and his sexual preference for women was unchanging and largely irrelevant to his maleness. It would be inappropriate to position Dillon in any way as part of lesbian history. The distinct definitions of gender identity and sexualities must be upheld to avoid Prosser's concerns over the tendency of queer theory to distort the transgender narrative. Prosser has critiqued Halberstam for following the general trend of queer theory which represents the transitional stage between genders as a liberating moment in which the gender binary is undermined.⁹¹¹ Prosser's argument is valid in terms of experiences where a transition from one gender to another occurs without any future movement between genders and 'the actual crossing, is simply a means to an end rather than an end in itself'.⁹¹² Yet it cannot be applied to all forms of gender non-conformity as some individuals do find the liberation Halberstam suggests in the liminal stage. To do so, I argue, is to misread – to use Prosser's term – many gender non-conforming identities that do not fit neatly into the category of gender variance or sexuality but fall somewhere in between. Halberstam successfully answered Prosser's criticism of his earlier essay, stating 'many subjects, not only transsexual subjects do not feel at home in their bodies', and 'there are a variety of gender-deviant bodies under the sign of nonnormative masculinities and femininities'.⁹¹³ Thus, it would be a misrepresentation of these individuals to insist upon impermeable borders between different categories.

⁹¹¹ Jay Prosser, 'No Place like Home: The Transgendered Narrative of Leslie Feinberg's Stone Butch Blues', *Modern Fiction Studies*, 41 (1995), 486.

⁹¹² *Ibid.*, 488-9.

⁹¹³ Halberstam, *Female Masculinity*, 148.

Gender identity and sexuality

Sackville-West's gender fluidity has received minimal attention from historians. Georgia Johnston has considered the masculine aspects of Sackville-West's character, but they are very much viewed through the lens of her sexuality rather than a distinct identification with maleness.⁹¹⁴ In her analysis of *Portrait of a Marriage*, Johnston privileges Sackville-West's construction of her gender identity and sexuality over that of her son's. The text is a combination of an autobiographical account of Sackville-West's relationship with Violet Trefusis, written by her in the early 1920s and three chapters written by her son Nigel Nicolson ostensibly to provide contextual information on Sackville-West's marriage to Harold Nicolson. Published in 1973 after Sackville-West's death, *Portrait* is dominated by Nicolson's interpretation of his parent's marriage as the preeminent relationship for both husband and wife. According to Nicolson, '[t]heir marriage succeeded because each found permanent and undiluted happiness only in the company of the other. If their marriage is seen as a harbour, their love-affairs were mere ports-of-call.'⁹¹⁵ The relationship with Trefusis is portrayed as a destructive, passionate interlude for which his mother sought atonement through her written 'confession' of the affair which ultimately posed no real threat to her marriage to Harold Nicolson. Coupled with this confessional element, Nicolson stressed the benefits for sexology and other sexually fluid individuals which served as a further motivation for Sackville-West's text.

⁹¹⁴ While I have largely chosen to use the terms 'gender variant' and 'gender non-conforming' for individuals who identified as a gender other than that assigned at birth, I believe 'gender fluid' is appropriate in Sackville-West's case as representative of the movement between 'male' and 'female' in her gender presentation.

⁹¹⁵ Nigel Nicolson, 'Foreword', in: Nicolson, Nigel (ed.), *Portrait of a Marriage* (London, 1992), p. xiii.

This interpretation of Sackville-West's account is shared by Johnston and seemingly by Sackville-West, though arguably – as Johnston suggests – the importance of constructing her affair with Trefusis as fleeting and regrettable in a text she believed her husband or sons might read undermines the veracity of her interpretation. Johnston attributes more significance to Sackville-West's relationship with Trefusis and represents the text as a necessary confession that reflected contemporary moral discourses and sexological understandings of same-sex desire. Sackville-West explained her fluid sexuality and gender presentation as a 'duality' in her nature.⁹¹⁶ Johnston characterises Sackville-West's dual personality as both an example of the influence of sexology and a tool that allowed Sackville-West to exculpate herself from full responsibility. Johnston argues that Sackville-West:

...divides herself, presenting herself as a "dual personality", so that she is able to absolve the straight, feminine, married side of wrongdoing, while agreeing with everyone surrounding her that the side desiring Violet is abhorrent...By acknowledging her "dual personality" and by presenting the married side as valuable, she validates her decision to stay with Nicolson.⁹¹⁷

Johnston's article is useful in its elucidation of the motivations behind Sackville-West's account and its efforts to restore focus to Sackville-West's rather than Nicolson's understanding of her relationships. However, there are two issues with her interpretation. One is her emphasis on the impact of sexology on Sackville-West's account. Both

⁹¹⁶ Vita Sackville-West, 'Part One', in: Nicolson, Nigel (ed.), *Portrait of a Marriage* (London, 1992), 36.

⁹¹⁷ Georgia Johnston, 'Counterfeit Perversion: Vita Sackville-West's "Portrait of a Marriage"', *Journal of Modern Literature*, 28 (2004), 127.

Johnston and Nicolson agree with Suzanne Raitt's theory that 'Sackville-West envisaged readers of her manuscript...and saw it as a scientific document that would promote understanding of homosexuality in years to come'.⁹¹⁸ Yet although sexology plausibly influenced Sackville-West's understanding of her sexuality and gender identity, Johnston and Raitt credit it with too much power. Her theory stems from a couple of sentences that preface Sackville-West's account of her love affair, which seems more akin to an afterthought than a guiding influence for the text:

I believe...the psychology of people like myself will be a matter of interest, and I believe it will be recognised that many more people of my type do exist than under the present-day system of hypocrisy is commonly admitted...I...claim that I am qualified to speak with the intimacy of a professional scientist could acquire only after years of study and indirect information, because I have the object of study always to hand[.]⁹¹⁹

At no point does Sackville-West refer to herself using specific sexological terminology aside from the vague references to a dual personality, nor does her account appear impersonal, rendering her scientific motives dubious at best.

The second issue in Johnston's article is her focus on sexuality at the expense of gender identity. Johnston acknowledges that Sackville-West's divided personality involves a feminine and masculine side, but she connects them exclusively with Sackville-West's sexuality, even referring to her 'double sexual personality'.⁹²⁰ This ignores Sackville-West's

⁹¹⁸ Suzanne Raitt, *Vita and Virginia: the work and friendship of V. Sackville-West and Virginia Woolf* (Oxford, 1993), 80.

⁹¹⁹ Vita Sackville-West, 'Part Three', in: Nicolson, Nigel (ed.), *Portrait of a Marriage* (London, 1992), 101-2.

⁹²⁰ Johnston, 'Counterfeit Perversions', 127.

own interpretation of her duality which included strong elements of gender identity independent of her same-sex desire. In his introduction to Violet Trefusis' letters to Sackville-West, Mitchell A. Leaska goes some way towards addressing the neglect of gender in analyses of Sackville-West. Leaska highlights Sackville-West's 'fantasies of masculine power' and male character traits that were enhanced by Trefusis' overt femininity.⁹²¹ As a result though, Leaska underplays Sackville-West's marriage and female side, portraying Sackville-West's return to Nicolson as a consequence of her being 'a slave to convention and respectability.'⁹²² I would argue however that acknowledging the importance of Sackville-West's love for Trefusis and her male gender identity does not undermine her devotion to her husband and dominant female presentation. They are co-existent and contradictory facets of Sackville-West that demonstrate the importance of a more fluid approach in examining her identity.

Portrait of a Marriage

In reference to *Portrait* on its publication, biographer Leon Edel stated 'Vita Sackville-West's journal of her Sapphic and transvestite passion will live in erotic history as a supreme document...of the spiritual as well as physical conflicts of androgyny.'⁹²³ His comment is a prime example of the persistent yet ultimately unsuccessful desire to categorise Sackville-West. Edel recognised Sackville-West's gender non-conformity, but the terms 'transvestite' and 'androgyny' are inadequate and once again subordinated to

⁹²¹ Mitchell A. Leaska, 'Introduction', in: Mitchell A. Leaska and John Phillips (eds), *Violet to Vita: The Letters of Violet Trefusis to Vita Sackville-West* (London, 1990), 21.

⁹²² *Ibid.*, 44.

⁹²³ *Ibid.*, 1.

her sexuality by the descriptors 'passion' and 'erotic'. Far from being androgynous, Sackville-West's dual personalities were clearly defined as distinctly male and female without overlap. Furthermore, Sackville-West's male identity went beyond the adoption of men's clothing and was dominated far more by male personality traits, a reading that is closer to Ellis' category of Eonism than Magnus Hirschfeld's transvestism. Edel's reliance on medical classifications to represent Sackville-West reflects Foucault's argument that nothing can be known outside of what can be stated in discourse, resulting in identities being confined by the available language included in medical and/or cultural discourses.⁹²⁴ Consequently, terms such as Sapphist or androgynous can be – in certain cases correctly – interpreted as empowering individuals by allowing their visibility through the creation of knowable sexualities and gender identities. Conversely, in Sackville-West's case the absence of definitive terminology provides her liberation. Sackville-West becomes most fully understandable when her refusal to be categorised is accepted. By deconstructing the categories of lesbian and gender non-conformity so that they are no longer exclusionary but instead interactive, Sackville-West can be read as heterosexual, lesbian, male and female. She is both all of these and none of them, and it is this ineffability that most fully elucidates the fluid, contradictory nature of her identity, itself an example of the impossible yet persistent identities Butler describes.⁹²⁵

As with Michael Dillon, Sackville-West based her interpretation of her male and female identities on contemporary cultural constructions of gender. Her descriptions of her

⁹²⁴ Michel Foucault, 'The Order of Discourse', in: Robert Young (ed.) *Untying the Text: A Post-Structuralist Reader* (London, 1981), 55-6.

⁹²⁵ Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 17.

childhood are reminiscent of Dillon's account, including an interest in military games and attire and the 'tears of rage [she] shed because [she] was not allowed to have [a khaki suit] made with trousers'.⁹²⁶ In conjunction with this enjoyment of culturally 'boyish' activities Sackville-West characterised her masculinity in childhood through acts of bravery, strength and even violence. She recorded several incidents in which she intimidated other children, including 'stuffing their nostrils with putty and beating a little boy with stinging-nettles', and despite acknowledging the cruelty of her actions, Sackville-West did not record any feelings of shame.⁹²⁷ Such behaviour was a testament to the masculinity she strove to obtain. Sackville-West distanced herself from her female peers through comparisons with her future lover Rosamund Grosvenor, who in childhood 'was always clean and neat whereas [Sackville-West] was always grubby and in tatters'.⁹²⁸ She recollected in *Portrait* that 'I used to be taken to [Mother's] room to be 'passed' before going down to luncheon on party days, when I had had my hair crimped; and I was always wrong and miserable'.⁹²⁹ This rejection of cultural tropes of femininity is a common thread in gender non-conforming narratives as well as those of female masculinity.⁹³⁰ Yet there is a distinction in Sackville-West's case. In her summation of her childhood self, Sackville-West wrote 'I kept my nerves under control, and made a great ideal of being hardy, and as like a boy as possible... I see myself, plain, lean, dark, unsociable, unattractive – horribly unattractive! – rough, and secret'.⁹³¹

⁹²⁶ Sackville-West, 'Part One' in *Portrait*, 17.

⁹²⁷ *Ibid.*, 11.

⁹²⁸ *Ibid.*, 17.

⁹²⁹ *Ibid.*, 19.

⁹³⁰ See for example R.L.'s case in: Havelock Ellis, *Studies in the Psychology of Sex. Volume VII: Eonism and Other Supplementary Studies* (Philadelphia, 1928).

⁹³¹ Sackville-West, 'Part One' in *Portrait*, 11, 17.

Unlike Dillon, who identified as male from childhood regardless of his physicality, Sackville-West was *like* a boy rather than having a clear sense that she *was* one. There is also an absence of repeated expressions of the desire to become male or reconstruct the body to equate with a male gender identity that proliferate in Ellis' Eonists' accounts. Such omissions might imply that Sackville-West's should be read as a lesbian or Sapphist narrative, albeit one that demonstrates female masculinity. Yet constructing Sackville-West's account purely in terms of same-sex desire is equally problematic and erroneously privileges the wrong embodiment narrative as the only trans experience. In her analysis of *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit* (1985) by Jeanette Winterson, Laura Doan quotes a passage which describes the semi-autobiographical character Jeanette's reaction to her mother's accusation that her lesbian identity is 'aping men':⁹³²

Now if I was aping men she'd have every reason to be disgusted. As far as I was concerned men were something you had around the place, not particularly interesting, but quite harmless...and apart from my never wearing a skirt, saw nothing else in common between us.⁹³³

This is very different to Sackville-West's sense of maleness, which goes beyond clothing to include character traits and behaviours that form half of her personality. Doan offers an interesting insight that seems appropriate for Sackville-West. Doan states that '[h]omosexuals, male or female, with sexual politics or without, are not simply and unproblematically one gender trapped in the wrong (opposite) body. But what they are, even if they are separate, remains unclear, unspecified'.⁹³⁴ Sackville-West's narrative is

⁹³² Laura Doan, 'Jeanette Winterson's Sexing the Postmodern', in: Laura Doan (ed.) *The Lesbian Postmodern* (New York, 1994), 145-6.

⁹³³ *Ibid.*

⁹³⁴ *Ibid.*, 146.

evidently not one of wrong embodiment, but nor is it unproblematically homosexual (her relationship with her husband necessitates the recognition of a certain amount of sexual fluidity) and gender identity is a key factor.

In adulthood, Sackville-West defined both her sexuality and gender identity in terms of a dual personality: 'I separate my loves into two halves: Harold, who is unalterable, perennial, and *best*...And on the other hand stands my perverted nature, which loved and tyrannised over Rosamund...and which now is linked irremediably with Violet.'⁹³⁵ In terms of her gender identity, Sackville-West stated 'all the gentleness and all the femininity of me was called out by Harold alone' with whom she was 'really gentle, self-sacrificing, chaste' and 'thoroughly tamed.'⁹³⁶ Meanwhile her masculine identity was 'brutal and hard and savage'.⁹³⁷ Sackville-West went to great lengths to stress the superiority of her heterosexual marriage and the virtues of her female identity. On the other hand, Sackville-West demonised her same-sex desire for Violet in *Portrait* and expressed relief when in the early years of her marriage her male identity 'was completely submerged'.⁹³⁸ However, the depiction of her two sides as unambiguously good and bad is as ambivalent as her gender and sexual identities. While undoubtedly Sackville-West valued her marriage as far more than a cover for her same-sex desire, her dismissal of all other romantic relationships as inconsequential does not stand up to scrutiny. Notwithstanding

⁹³⁵ Sackville-West, 'Part One' in *Portrait*, 36.

⁹³⁶ Sackville-West, 'Part Three' in *Portrait*, 100. Sackville-West, 'Part One' in *Portrait*, 40, 40-1.

⁹³⁷ Sackville-West, 'Part One' in *Portrait*, 37.

⁹³⁸ *Ibid.*

their early sexual encounters resulting in children, the relationship between Sackville-West and Nicolson was essentially platonic. Sackville-West herself admitted:

It never struck me as wrong that I should be more or less engaged to Harold, and at the same time much in love with Rosamund. The fact is that I regarded Harold far more as a playfellow than in any other light. Our relationship was so fresh, so intellectual, so unphysical, that I never thought of him in that aspect at all... although I never knew the physical passion I had felt for Rosamund, I didn't really miss it.⁹³⁹

It is difficult to accept the irrelevance of physical intimacy to Sackville-West given her subsequent relationships with women, neither were all her same-sex relationships equally condemned. As will be discussed below, both Sackville-West and Harold Nicolson viewed her relationship with Virginia Woolf in a positive light. It did not require a remorseful confession any more than her affairs with Mary Campbell and even Rosamund did. The censure and regret were largely reserved for Trefusis and even here it is often more implicit. Sackville-West characterised Trefusis as 'spoilt', 'jealous' and obsessive, a 'flirt' who seduced Sackville-West and treated her own husband appallingly: 'I wouldn't sacrifice Harold to someone whom I thought unworthy...I thought [Violet] had played Denys [Trefusis] a worse than mean trick...marrying him like that and accepting his devotion, and deceiving him all the time'.⁹⁴⁰ In addition to these unflattering depictions of Trefusis, Sackville-West expressed regret at ever meeting her, but her remorse was half-

⁹³⁹ Sackville-West, 'Part One' in *Portrait*, 35.

⁹⁴⁰ Sackville-West, 'Part Three' in *Portrait*, 109-10.

hearted and prefaced by passionate phrases that confirm the pre-eminence of her same-sex desire:

...one side of my life was opened to me, and...I found things out about my own temperament that I had never been sure of before. Of course I wish now that I had never made those discoveries. One doesn't miss what one doesn't know, and now life is made wretched for me by privations.⁹⁴¹

Sackville-West may have written her account as a confession of her affair, but the relationship with Trefusis was not consistently portrayed as negative or wrong. Indeed, there are many passages that almost eulogise their love. She wrote: 'There *is* a bond which unites me to Violet, Violet to me; it united us no less than it unites us now, but what that bond is God alone knows; sometimes I feel it is as something legendary. Violet is *mine*, she has always been, it is inescapable.'⁹⁴² A comparison of this description with Sackville-West's feelings for her husband reveals the constant contradictions in her narrative. Regarding Nicolson, Sackville-West wrote '[Harold] is the only person of whom I think with consistent tenderness. I can say with truth that I have never, never cherished a harsh thought about him'.⁹⁴³ The beginning of her sexual relationship with Violet however was a life-changing experience, of which she wrote: 'I felt like a person translated, or re-born; it was like beginning one's life again in a different capacity.'⁹⁴⁴ Sackville-West was able to structure her heterosexual marriage as unassailable and paramount while

⁹⁴¹ Sackville-West, 'Part Three' in *Portrait*, 103.

⁹⁴² Sackville-West, 'Part One', in *Portrait*, 27.

⁹⁴³ *Ibid.*, 18.

⁹⁴⁴ Sackville-West, 'Part Three' in *Portrait*, 103.

simultaneously revealing the dominance of her same-sex desire. The concept of a dual personality allowed Sackville-West to accept her incompatible sexual identities without having to renounce one for the other, though she was aware of the limitations of this concept. Sackville-West wrote 'I regret that the person Harold married wasn't entirely and wholly what he thought of her, and that the person who loves and owns Violet isn't a second person, because each suits each.'⁹⁴⁵

There is truth in the argument that the disparities in Sackville-West's discourse on her sexuality were potentially motivated by a need to justify her decision to remain with Nicolson and abandon Trefusis (as Johnston asserts), or a need to discredit the one affair that threatened to destroy her marriage. Nevertheless, it is also plausible that Sackville-West viewed her identity as encompassing both devoted wife and lesbian, roles that were so incompatible to her that she constructed a divided personality as the only discourse through which she could comprehend her sense of self. Halberstam has drawn on Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's concept of 'nonce' taxonomies to emphasise the existence of identities such as Sackville-West's that defy categorisation: 'All kinds of people, all kinds of identities...are simply not accounted for in the taxonomies we live with. Nonce taxonomies indicate a not-knowing already embedded in recognition.'⁹⁴⁶ Sedgwick coined the term 'nonce' taxonomies to refer to categories constructed by an individual to articulate the particularities of their identity that are not expressed in the existing broad categories within a society. Nonce taxonomies involve 'the making and unmaking and

⁹⁴⁵ Sackville-West, 'Part One', in *Portrait*, 40.

⁹⁴⁶ Jack Halberstam, 'F2M: The Making of Female Masculinity', in: Laura Doan (ed.) *The Lesbian Postmodern* (New York, 1994), 211.

remaking and redissolution of hundreds of old and new categorical imaginings concerning all the kinds it may take to make up a world.⁹⁴⁷ Although utilised by all, Sedgwick argues that nonce taxonomies hold most value for marginalised groups:

...probably everybody who survives at all has reasonably rich, unsystematic resources of nonce taxonomy for mapping out the possibilities, dangers, and stimulations of their human social landscape. It is probably people with the experience of oppression or subordination who have most *need* to know it[.]⁹⁴⁸

This construct of an identity that is recognisable while being enigmatic speaks to Sackville-West's sexually and gender-fluid discourse. The divergent facets of her self-presentation were individually recognisable, but their amalgamation in one person was incongruous, situating her in the realm of nonce taxonomies.

The same contradictions that were present in Sackville-West's sexual identity can be seen in her understanding of her gender. In *Portrait*, Sackville-West represented her gender as one 'in which the feminine and the masculine elements alternately preponderate.'⁹⁴⁹ Far from adopting an androgynous presentation, Sackville-West constructed her gender as two distinct personalities, male and female that never conflated despite both being contained within one body that she unremittingly sexed as female. Aside from defining certain character traits as male, such as her cruelty, Sackville-West's most complete male gender presentation occurred during her relationship with Trefusis. During their time in Paris together Sackville-West began cross-dressing and adopted a male name, 'Julian'.

⁹⁴⁷ Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Epistemology of the Closet* (California, 2008), 23.

⁹⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 22-3.

⁹⁴⁹ Sackville-West, 'Part Three' in *Portrait*, 102.

What began as a necessity to enable the couple to share a hotel room developed into the emancipation of Sackville-West's male identity. As previously discussed, Sackville-West portrayed her married female identity as praiseworthy and superior while her male characteristics were frightening and undesirable. However, in the passages describing her life as Julian expressions of remorse and disapproval are absent. Instead, sentiments of joy and freedom proliferate. It is in these passages that Sackville-West's narrative most closely resembles those of potentially transgendered individuals. Notwithstanding the lack of a mirror scene, a touchstone in many transgender narratives as Prosser has emphasised, Sackville-West's discussion of the liberation her cross-dressing corresponds to similar expressions in Ellis' gender non-conforming cases. Her first foray into masculine clothing is a prime example:

...everything changed suddenly...changed my life...An absurd circumstance gave rise to the whole thing; I had just got clothes like the women-on-the-land were wearing, and in the unaccustomed freedom of breeches and gaiters I went into wild spirits; I ran, I shouted, I jumped, I climbed, I vaulted over gates, I felt like a schoolboy let out on a holiday...It was one of the most vibrant days of my life.⁹⁵⁰

Later, when Sackville-West presented in Paris as Julian in full male attire she declared 'I practically lived in that role. Violet used to call me Julian...I, personally, had never felt so free in my life.'⁹⁵¹ Her feelings are comparable with Ellis' Eonist case R.L. who wrote 'I possessed pure aesthetic enjoyment, the delight of feeling myself to be a woman...spiritual enjoyment...mental delight and peace.'⁹⁵² Similarly, the detailed

⁹⁵⁰ Sackville-West, 'Part Three' in *Portrait*, 99.

⁹⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 105-6.

⁹⁵² Havelock Ellis, *Studies in the Psychology of Sex. Volume VII: Eonism and Other Supplementary Studies* (Philadelphia, 1928), 85.

accounts of the construction of a physical female identity present in *Eonism* are also apparent in Sackville-West's discourse.⁹⁵³ Rather than dwelling specifically on the garments though, Sackville-West focused on the physical accessories of manhood, thereby avoiding the potential association with a feminine interest in clothing:

I dressed as a boy. It was easy, because I could put a khaki bandage round my head, which in those days was so common that it attracted no attention at all. I browned my face and hands...My height of course was my great advantage...I looked like a rather untidy young man, a sort of undergraduate, of about nineteen.⁹⁵⁴

Sackville-West's account of her time presenting as Julian shares another feature with other gender non-conforming narratives, the delight of successful passing. In a description of an occasion in London where Sackville-West accompanied Trefusis dressed in male attire, she recalled her acceptance as male by everyone she encountered, stating 'I walked along, smoking a cigarette, buying a newspaper off a little boy who called me 'sir'...(The extraordinary thing was, how natural it all was for me). Nobody, even in the glare of the station, glanced at me twice. I had wondered about my voice, but found I could sink it sufficiently.⁹⁵⁵ Again, in Paris 'no one looked at me at all curiously or suspiciously – never once, out of the many times I did it.'⁹⁵⁶ Her success was compounded by a hotel landlady who accepted Sackville-West as Trefusis' husband, as well as a family in France with whose son she 'exchanged war reminiscences' and who 'had an eye on

⁹⁵³ See for example C.T.

⁹⁵⁴ Sackville-West, 'Part Three' in *Portrait*, 105.

⁹⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

⁹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

[Julian] for their daughter'.⁹⁵⁷ Sackville-West was careful to couch her male gender performance in the language of masquerade which differs from Ellis' Eonists' focus on the authenticity of their femaleness. Sackville-West's comments that presenting as Julian 'was marvellous fun, all the more so because there was always the risk of being found out', and 'I never appreciated anything so much as living like that with my tongue perpetually in my cheek', assure her potential audience of the artifice involved in her portrayal of Julian.⁹⁵⁸ Sackville-West emphasised her enjoyment in fooling others as to her gender, thereby protecting herself from accusations of the subversive desire to become fully male.

Yet, the performative nature of gender undermines this distinction between Vita as real and Julian as masquerade with the result that Sackville-West's female identity is no more or less authentic than her male identity. In his discussion of Sergio Toledo's film *Vera* (1986), Halberstam argues that 'occupying a gender or fictionalising a gender for some people requires an other, or others, witnesses or readers who will...confirm the gender performance'.⁹⁵⁹ The protagonist, Bauer is biologically female and identifies as male, who according to Halberstam 'needs another woman to validate her gender fiction so that she can be the man she needs to be'.⁹⁶⁰ For Sackville-West, Trefusis became this reader of her male gender. Trefusis was present at each of the occasions Sackville-West presented as Julian, she alone used the name Julian in reference to Sackville-West and, as will be discussed below, she was fundamental in the construction of Julian as an identity. Like Bauer

⁹⁵⁷ Sackville-West, 'Part Three' in *Portrait*, 106.

⁹⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 105, 110.

⁹⁵⁹ Halberstam, *F2M*, 220.

⁹⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 223.

in *Vera*, while Sackville-West is read by Trefusis as Julian, she 'is a man' and 'the costume becomes equivalent to self.'⁹⁶¹ Sackville-West's presentation as Julian did not elicit the earlier criticisms of her male side. Instead, he provided Sackville-West with her fullest sense of liberation. During Julian and Trefusis' time in Paris, '[t]here was no abatement, rather the reverse, in our caring for one another; there was no abatement either in my passion for the freedom of that life.'⁹⁶² Sackville-West's censure was reserved for her behaviour as male lover not male identity. The clearest example of this is the disgust with which Sackville-West recorded an occasion on which her love-making with Trefusis became aggressive:

I can't describe how terrible it all was...It makes me physically ill to write about it and think about it, and my cheeks are burning...I treated her savagely, I made love to her, I had her, I didn't care, I only wanted to hurt Denys, even though he didn't know of it.⁹⁶³

The shame was partly elicited by Sackville-West's betrayal of Nicolson, but the disgust at the violence of her behaviour which she associated with her male identity is evident. It was the brutality of Julian as lover that elicited Sackville-West's antipathy, not the entirety of her male persona, though the indivisibility of the two obscures Sackville-West's interpretation of her maleness.

Challenge

While Sackville-West's autobiographical account renders a conflicting and inconsistent portrayal of her gender and sexual identities, the most in-depth exploration of Sackville-

⁹⁶¹ Halberstam, *F2M*, 221.

⁹⁶² Sackville-West, 'Part Three' in *Portrait*, 110.

⁹⁶³ *Ibid.*, 108.

West's male identity and relationship with Trefusis can be found in the partially collaborative novel, *Challenge* (1920). The novel chronicles their love affair through the fictional heterosexual characters Julian and Eve who represent Sackville-West and Trefusis respectively. The use of male and female protagonists can be read as an attempt to obscure the inspiration for the novel and avoid scandal. This attempt at discretion proved unsuccessful and the novel was not published until 1974. However, a more positive reading of the use of a heterosexual couple would be to provide an accurate characterisation of the relationship. In descriptions of their sexual encounters and many aspects of the relationship, Sackville-West constructed her behaviour as male and mirrored cultural discourses on gender that defined the male as provider and protector of a more delicate and dependant woman.⁹⁶⁴ In *Portrait*, Sackville-West repeatedly used possessive language in reference to Trefusis, including 'I have *her*' and 'she is mine in every sense of the word'.⁹⁶⁵ Sackville-West's male identity was in fact arguably inextricably linked to her relationship with Trefusis. Sue-Ellen Case provides one construction of this relationship:

If one reads them from within Riviere's theory [in *Womanliness as a Masquerade*], the butch is the lesbian woman who proudly displays the possession of the penis, while the femme takes on the compensatory masquerade of womanliness. The femme, however, foregrounds her masquerade by playing to a butch, another woman in a role; likewise the butch exhibits her penis to a woman who is playing the role of compensatory castration.⁹⁶⁶

⁹⁶⁴ Laura King, *Family Men: Fatherhood and Masculinity in Britain, 1914-1960* (Oxford, 2015), 155.

⁹⁶⁵ Sackville-West, 'Part One' in *Portrait*, 26-7. Sackville-West, 'Part Three' in *Portrait*, 108-9.

⁹⁶⁶ Case, 'Towards a Butch-Femme Aesthetic', 64.

Case stresses the indivisibility of butch and femme subjects, and this certainly applies to Sackville-West's presentation as Julian.⁹⁶⁷ Although Sackville-West retained elements of a male identity in her subsequent same-sex relationships, she only embodied Julian with Trefusis. In turn, Trefusis presented an ultrafeminine counterpart, dependant on Sackville-West and submissive in their physical relationship. During their first sexual encounter for example, Sackville-West stated 'She let herself go entirely limp and passive in my arms.'⁹⁶⁸ Trefusis' role as femme enabled Sackville-West to realise her masculinity. As Leaska states, '[i]n many ways the feminine Violet and the masculine Vita might have been a perfect match. Violet recognised her lover's nature from the start. Vita needed constant affirmation of her own self-estimate. Violet provided that.'⁹⁶⁹

The reliance on Trefusis' femininity to bolster Sackville-West's male traits does at first glance appear to fit the butch-femme aesthetic. Yet this construction collapses when one considers that Sackville-West as Julian presented as fully *male* not just *masculine*. Trefusis' husband Denys confirmed this in his treatment of Sackville-West when she recalled 'he asked me how much money I should have to keep Violet and myself if we went away, so that I felt like a young man wanting to marry Violet and being interviewed by her father.'⁹⁷⁰ When Violet, Denys and Sackville-West were together, it was with Denys she identified as a fellow suitor and caretaker of the fragile, feminine Violet:

⁹⁶⁷ Case, 'Towards a Butch-Femme Aesthetic', 56.

⁹⁶⁸ Sackville-West, 'Part Three' in *Portrait*, 101.

⁹⁶⁹ Leaska, 'Introduction', 49.

⁹⁷⁰ Sackville-West, 'Part Three' in *Portrait*, 111.

After dinner...it was Denys and I who talked. I saw that evening how intelligent he was...I even saw with regret what good friends we might have been under other circumstances; and above all I was touched by his very naïve joy at having Violet safe, and present...because I shared and could understand it.⁹⁷¹

Once again, Sackville-West defied simple classification. The anachronistic term butch lesbian does not sufficiently account for Sackville-West's male identity as Julian, but at the same time it would not be wholly inaccurate, particularly given the absence of any stated desire or attempts to live permanently as a man.

In *Challenge*, Sackville-West took the opportunity to fully realise her male identity through the characterisation of Julian. The story is set on a fictional Greek island where a political revolution occurs in which Julian becomes a central figure. Notwithstanding the dramatic setting, the relationship and characters of Julian and Eve were an accurate portrayal of Sackville-West and Trefusis as people and lovers. Suzanne Raitt argues that 'the dangerous voice of Trefusis' lesbian passion is contained and domesticated by Sackville-West's incorporation of its characteristic intonations into a novel about heterosexual love'.⁹⁷² The subversive nature of the passion is retained to some extent though through the familial ties between Eve and Julian (they are cousins) and the context of the affair taking place outside of marriage. Trefusis played a pivotal role in the construction of Eve and Julian, providing editorial feedback and suggestions that were sometimes incorporated into the novel. In a letter to Sackville-West, Trefusis revealed just how closely art was imitating life:

⁹⁷¹ Sackville-West, 'Part Three' in *Portrait*, 116.

⁹⁷² Raitt, *Vita and Virginia*, 93.

The description of Julian I thought most adequate. You say it's not like you! It *is* you, word for word, trait for trait...I must say I should like either a more *detailed* description of Julian's appearance whereas hitherto you have confined yourself more to the impression it produced on other people.⁹⁷³

After providing her own lengthy portrait of Julian, that focused on his 'beauty', strength and resemblance to a 'Gypsy', (all traits Trefusis attributed to Sackville-West) Trefusis compounded the unity between Julian and Vita in her declaration, 'It's too wonderful writing about you. I can't tell you how much I enjoy it.'⁹⁷⁴ The version of Trefusis' description of Julian that appeared in the novel remained slightly vague as to his masculine physique, comparing him with a statue as 'his limbs, fallen into their natural grace of relaxed muscularity, suggested the sculptural ease of stone'.⁹⁷⁵ This was potentially due to Sackville-West's modesty, but may also have occurred because a description of Julian's biologically male body would necessarily distance him from Sackville-West. Instead, *Challenge* is replete with accounts of Julian's bravery, ruthless strength, leadership ability and devotion to duty. Such descriptors were, as Leaska suggests qualities Sackville-West possessed and wished to heighten while simultaneously fearing Nicolson's condemnation.⁹⁷⁶ In *Challenge*, Sackville-West was free to fully actualise her male gender to an extent she was prohibited from in life. Julian appears akin to a Greek hero during a battle on the island:

⁹⁷³ Mitchell A. Leaska and John Phillips (eds), *Violet to Vita: The Letters of Violet Trefusis to Vita Sackville-West* (London, 1990), 79.

⁹⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 79, 80.

⁹⁷⁵ Vita Sackville-West, *Challenge* (New York, 2008 reprint of original 1974), 83-4.

⁹⁷⁶ Leaska, 'Introduction', 24.

[Julian] was full of the lust of fighting; he had seen men roll over before the shot of his revolver, and had driven them down before the weight of his fist...All his thought was to kill, and to rid his island of these invaders[.]⁹⁷⁷

Similarly, his strength and power are praised by other characters who tell him '[y]ou have the quality of leadership. You have it. You have the secret'.⁹⁷⁸ Elsewhere he is told 'you have seen the world; you are a man. You have returned, no doubt, ready to pick up the weapon you tentatively fingered as a boy.'⁹⁷⁹

Coupled with the celebration of Julian's maleness, Sackville-West repeatedly distanced him from any sympathy with the culturally constructed womanliness of Eve. 'Woman' is used as an insult throughout *Challenge*, regardless of gender. Julian vilifies Eve, calling her '[y]ou thing of leisure, you toy!...You make a plaything of men's pain — you woman!'⁹⁸⁰ The flaws in her character – jealousy, idleness and vanity – are attributed to her gender and are incomprehensible to Julian as 'no man in his senses would expect politics from any woman so demoralisingly feminine as yourself. Besides, that isn't your role. Your role is to be soft, idle; a toy; a siren; the negation of enterprise. Work and woman — the terms contradict one another. The woman who works, or who tolerates work, is only half a woman.'⁹⁸¹ Julian reserves his greatest praise for the female islander Kato, whom he paid 'the greatest compliment that lay within his power, for he would be raising her to the status of a man and a comrade.'⁹⁸² The insurmountable divide between men and women in *Challenge*

⁹⁷⁷ Sackville-West, *Challenge*, 34.

⁹⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 96-7.

⁹⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 125-6.

⁹⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 162.

⁹⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 145-6.

⁹⁸² *Ibid.*, 91.

epitomised in Eve's observation 'you're a man, and I'm a woman; that's the rift. Perhaps it's a rift that can never be bridged', suggests Sackville-West's own understanding of herself as other than female.⁹⁸³ Though she never completely rejected her womanhood, she clearly perceived her gender identity as different to that of the feminine Trefusis and more closely allied to cultural constructions of maleness. Sackville-West's discourse on her duality in *Portrait* revealed the dominance of her masculine identity, while her female side only came to the fore as a concession to her husband who disapproved of the 'Julian' part of Sackville-West.

Despite acknowledging Sackville-West's cross-dressing as Julian in life as well as in the novel and stating that 'Sackville-West does seem to turn to the text as if it were real experience, referring to her writing of it as if she is actually living it', Johnston ends her essay with the statement 'the enigmatic Julian who exists only in a text.'⁹⁸⁴ This assessment is problematic. True, the fictional Julian of *Challenge* is the pinnacle of the male identity Sackville-West can only partially achieve in her female body and dual roles as Nicolson's wife and Trefusis' lover. Yet much of the characterisation of Julian, his sense of honour and duty, his violent love and obsession with Eve whom he ultimately abandons, stems from Sackville-West's own male identity. She viewed *Challenge* as a 'real experience' because in terms of the relationship between Eve and Julian, it was. The character of Julian therefore was not a tool to sanitise and disguise a same-sex love affair but rather a manifestation of Sackville-West's male identity. The language of conquest, domination and contradiction used to describe Julian's

⁹⁸³ Sackville-West, *Challenge*, 287.

⁹⁸⁴ Johnston, 'Counterfeit Perversions', 133, 136.

love for Eve such as, 'he realised that she could be, if he chose, his own possession' and 'Eve, I sometimes hate you, damn you; but you are the rainbow of my days', echoes Sackville-West's feelings of ownership and conflicting love and hate towards Trefusis.⁹⁸⁵ Her manhood was both more than a lesbian masculinity and less than a potentially trans presentation, and the juxtaposition of Trefusis' ultrafeminine presentation provided recognition and reinforcement of Sackville-West as Julian.

Violet Trefusis on Vita/Julian

In her letters to Sackville-West, Trefusis revealed an insightful awareness of her lover's fluctuating gender identity. While Sackville-West's side of the correspondence was destroyed by Denys Trefusis, it is still possible to discern her male presentation with Trefusis through the latter's responses. Trefusis offered an alternative construction of Sackville-West's dual personality. She recognised the conflicting character traits in Sackville-West and gendered them according to existing cultural discourse. However, whereas Sackville-West represented her female identity as superior, for Trefusis it was the male identity that most fully expressed Sackville-West's nature. In a letter to Sackville-West in 1918, Trefusis included a story that described at length her understanding of Sackville-West's gender fluidity:

Once upon a time, there lived an artist and a woman, and the artist and the woman were one. In the course of time the woman married...irrevocable, changeless contentment descended upon her. The artist was temporarily forgotten...the artist

⁹⁸⁵ Sackville-West, *Challenge*, 216, 162.

slept, and the woman gloried in her womanhood...And the woman perchance will smile when she reads this, and her friends will say what an ideal wife and mother she makes, which is true, but the artist will shrink in horror from the imputation of smugness that these words cannot fail to convey – God knows it is aesthetically incorrect that the artist should be hampered by domesticity[.]⁹⁸⁶

Trefusis here characterised Sackville-West's duality as artist and wife, the artist exemplifying strength, creativity and talent while the wife was subsumed in domesticity and conventionality. Trefusis vilified Sackville-West's marriage and motherhood as stifling and detrimental to her abilities, while the artistic and unconventional life with Trefusis would allow Sackville-West to reach her potential. In her analysis of the story, Kirstie Blair references the artist's female gender as a representation of same-sex desire between women, 'the gypsy artist seek[ing] to separate the woman from her comfortable heterosexual existence.'⁹⁸⁷ Blair highlights the popularity of the gypsy as a symbol of otherness in British writing between 1910 and 1930, and suggests female writers such as Trefusis and Sackville-West may have used the gypsy figure 'as one means...of situating lesbian sexuality within a recognizable cultural framework, while also subverting this framework by using the traditional image of the passionate heterosexual gypsy...to signal same-sex desire.'⁹⁸⁸ Blair has discussed the fascination Sackville-West had with her potentially Spanish gypsy heritage and the use of the Romany language between Trefusis and Sackville-West. Yet this reading does not preclude gender non-conformity. Blair makes the argument that '[c]laiming kinship with gypsies...provided one means for women engaged

⁹⁸⁶ Leaska and Phillips (eds), *Violet to Vita*, 75-6.

⁹⁸⁷ Kirstie Blair, 'Gypsies and Lesbian Desire: Vita Sackville-West, Violet Trefusis, and Virginia Woolf', *Twentieth Century Literature*, 50 (2004), 150.

⁹⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 142.

in same-sex relationships to play with gender roles, particularly by emphasizing their femininity while also consciously representing femininity as a masquerade.⁹⁸⁹ While Blair focuses on Trefusis' ultrafeminine gender presentation, Trefusis and Sackville-West interpreted the gypsy figure as a construct of Sackville-West's wild, unconventional masculinity. Even within the context of same-sex desire in the story of the artist, Trefusis made reference to Sackville-West's gender fluidity in the letter, casting it in a positive light:

The combination of the woman and the artist had produced a species of mentality as rare as it is sublime; an artist whether it be in painting, in music or in literature, must necessarily belong to both sexes, his judgment is bisexual, it must be utterly impersonal, he must be able to put himself with impunity in the place of either sex.⁹⁹⁰

It was this movement that characterised Sackville-West's gender identity. Unable to conceive of attributes as gender neutral, Trefusis and Sackville-West produced discourses based on fluidity in which Sackville-West moved between male and female, embodying both at different times. It is here that nonce taxonomies and the limitations of language become evident. The concept of a non-binary gender model being absent from early twentieth-century Britain, Sackville-West's identity could not be articulated and was consequently unknowable according to Foucault's theory of discourse. As a result, both women created a discourse of movement, in which Sackville-West's gender identity was both male and female, shifting from one to the other at different times. However, for Sackville-West, the transition between identities was never partial; she was either male or female, her dual personalities being strictly segregated. Trefusis occasionally considered androgyny in her

⁹⁸⁹ Blair, 'Gypsies and Lesbian Desire', 143.

⁹⁹⁰ Leaska and Phillips (eds), *Violet to Vita*, 75.

construction of Sackville-West through references to Dionysius and the bisexuality described above, but she overwhelmingly adopted Sackville-West's reading of her duality.⁹⁹¹ Clearly neither woman felt androgyny sufficiently described Sackville-West's gender presentation and continued to subscribe to the culturally and medically constructed discourse on dual personality.

Trefusis' correspondence is notable for its repeated and explicit representations of Sackville-West as male. As well as Julian, Trefusis used other male nicknames (Mitya and Dmitri) to refer to Sackville-West and lapsed into male pronouns on several occasions. Trefusis described detailed fantasies in which Sackville-West embodied male figures including the Count d'Orsay and 'Mitya, with a faun-skin thrown over his shoulders, with little gilded hoofs, its head clothing Mitya's head within'.⁹⁹² Trefusis characterised Sackville-West as the passionate, wild male lover in their relationship while Trefusis was the devoted, dependant female:

We were just Bohemians, Julian and I...I was madly, insatiably in love with you...Julian was a poet...I was Julian's mistress...I worshipped Julian...I lay back in an abandonment of happiness and gave myself up to your scandalously indiscreet caresses, in full view of the whole theatre!⁹⁹³

Trefusis emphasised her femininity in juxtaposition to Sackville-West's male identity. She described her dependence on Sackville-West, at one point asking 'Won't you help me? I

⁹⁹¹ Leaska and Phillips (eds), *Violet to Vita*, 161, 264-5.

⁹⁹² *Ibid.*, 94, 85.

⁹⁹³ *Ibid.*, 115.

have literally no one left but you'.⁹⁹⁴ Trefusis repeatedly threatened suicide if abandoned by Sackville-West – 'Mitya, I *CAN'T* live without you' – and stressed her powerless position as the woman in the relationship, declaring 'If I fail you, you have plenty of other people to fall back upon. If you fail *me*, what have I got? Drink, morphia, prostitution'.⁹⁹⁵

Trefusis also appealed to Sackville-West's chivalry – a celebrated traditional male trait – by calling on her help to escape her marriage to Denys before and after the wedding, in one letter stating '[a]re you going to stand by and watch me marry this man? It's unheard of, inconceivable. I belong to you, body and soul.'⁹⁹⁶ Trefusis' attempt to rouse Sackville-West's jealousy by recounting the praise Denys received from her friends for his 'appearance' and 'manliness' similarly reveals the value both women placed on Sackville-West's maleness.⁹⁹⁷ The contrast produced by Trefusis' unremitting portrayal of her femininity enhanced Sackville-West's masculinity which may have been undermined by her female body. Trefusis constructed an aggressive male identity for Sackville-West, who was 'made to *conquer*...not to be conquered' through repeated expressions of submission: 'I love belonging to you – I glory in it, that you alone...have bent me to your will...made me yours, *yours*, so that away from you I am nothing but a useless puppet!⁹⁹⁸ Trefusis' integral role in Sackville-West's male identity becomes explicit in the correspondence, where Sackville-West is only able to fully embody Julian when paired with the ultrafeminine Violet. When separated, Sackville-West reverted to her wife and mother persona for whom Trefusis expressed contempt, declaring

⁹⁹⁴ Leaska and Phillips (eds), *Violet to Vita*, 267.

⁹⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 176, 96-7.

⁹⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 112.

⁹⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 97, 82.

⁹⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 78, 82.

‘as long as I live I will never deteriorate to the level of a housefleur...a mere instrument of procreation, a matron, a housekeeper...What a life!’⁹⁹⁹ Trefusis distinguished between her lover Julian and Vita the wife and mother as incompatible if not separate beings, in one letter writing, ‘Mitya, my wild free, devil-may-care Mitya no longer. Mitya ousted by someone gentle, affectionate, considerate, nice – someone inordinately fond of their mother, and their children’.¹⁰⁰⁰ In another letter, Trefusis declared ‘They have taken you back to your old life...You will think you are catching glimpses of our Bohemian life...It was Julian, not you, and Julian is dead.’¹⁰⁰¹ Yet, Trefusis did not reject Sackville-West as a woman, only her *womanliness* which for Trefusis equated to conventional domestic life. At no point did wrong embodiment feature in Trefusis’ construction of Sackville-West or any desire for her to become physically male. On the contrary, Trefusis emphasised her sole attraction to women’s bodies, stating ‘there is nothing on *earth* more beautiful than a beautiful woman...I would go a hundred miles to see one...Old men, young men, boys. Pah! I hate them. They fill me with repulsion.’¹⁰⁰² Instead, Trefusis described her ideal reading of Sackville-West’s identity:

...there was something ‘soft and clinging’ about you...feminine and most flagrant, of all inconsistencies. I like you to be rough and uncouth and fierce and untidy!...You get like that when you are with [Harold]. All that is feminine in you mounts to the surface – All that isn’t remains in abeyance. Most scandalously, I prefer *all that isn’t!* To put it brutally, a masculine interior beneath a feminine exterior[.]¹⁰⁰³

⁹⁹⁹ Leaska and Phillips (eds), *Violet to Vita*, 93.

¹⁰⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 102.

¹⁰⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 114.

¹⁰⁰² *Ibid.*, 124.

¹⁰⁰³ *Ibid.*, 207.

Trefusis embraced an antithetical construction of Sackville-West that defied existing terminology, where Sackville-West could be biologically female, mentally male and a Sapphist. Her physicality did not require the transition of wrong embodiment narratives, nor did it evoke the shame and untouchability that often characterise the 'stone butch'.¹⁰⁰⁴ Instead, Trefusis presented Sackville-West's male gender presentation as her most authentic and best self, while her female identity resulted from the constraints of respectability and Sackville-West's desire to please Nicolson. Like Sackville-West, Trefusis did not rely on medical categorisation or an identification with Sapphism in her discourse on her lover's identity. Neither did she find it necessary to definitively ascribe male or female signifiers to Sackville-West, but rather upheld the interchangeability and contradictions of Sackville-West's identity. Whereas Sackville-West emphasised the division between her virtuous female and shameful male identities, for Trefusis the real duality was between body and mind, representing a female physicality and male mentality as the most accurate and desirable reading of Sackville-West's identity.

Virginia Woolf on Sackville-West's gender identity

Sackville-West's relationship with Virginia Woolf provides a strikingly different construction of her gender identity. Leaska, in his introduction to the correspondence between the two women characterises Sackville-West's identity as increasingly male:

¹⁰⁰⁴ Halberstam, 'F2M', 223.

...with trial and caution, Vita moved towards the ground which men customarily trod; and as she did so, a substantial part of the female persona receded, made room for the new male figure she was constructing...and the male self she had created would become the personal myth which would govern the way she lived for the remainder of her life.¹⁰⁰⁵

There are however, at least two weaknesses in this interpretation. Firstly, the construction of the male Sackville-West, most fully realised in her presentation as Julian was arguably a collaboration with Trefusis, and Leaska himself has stated that Trefusis bolstered Sackville-West's male identity. Secondly, after fully renouncing Trefusis, Sackville-West never adopted male attire or presented as Julian again. Furthermore, notwithstanding Woolf's depiction of Sackville-West in the gender-fluid novel *Orlando*, Sackville-West's maleness was far less apparent in her relationship with Woolf than it had been with Trefusis. Though not completely subdued, Sackville-West's predominant identity following the end of her relationship with Trefusis was that of female author, wife and lover of women rather than male. Leaska's theory that Sackville-West allowed the masculine identity that Nicolson disapproved of so vehemently to openly dictate her lifestyle seems questionable. A more accurate interpretation might be that Sackville-West allowed her male identity to surface in her writing career, adventurous travels and certain sexual relationships with women, but with Nicolson, Woolf and in everyday life, her womanhood – though not necessarily her femininity – was dominant.

¹⁰⁰⁵ Louise DeSalvo and Mitchell A. Leaska (eds), *The Letters of Vita Sackville-West to Virginia Woolf* (London, 1984), 17.

In their letters, Woolf and Sackville-West mostly made use of endearments rather than nicknames and where nicknames did occur, they were either female or desexualised. Woolf's nickname 'Potto' for example, though male, referred to a dog or child. Similarly, Sackville-West's sobriquet 'Donkey West' was used in conjunction with female pronouns. Woolf's letters were far more frequently addressed to 'Darling Mrs Nicolson' or 'Dearest Vita' and female pronouns were overwhelmingly applied to Sackville-West. This repeated reference to Sackville-West's status as a wife was notably absent in Trefusis' letters except as an insult. Woolf on the other hand, accepted Sackville-West's marriage and was on friendly terms with Nicolson. She saw no discrepancies between Vita the wife and Vita her lover. On the contrary, Woolf praised Sackville-West's womanhood and bemoaned her own failings with regards to femininity. On one occasion for example, Woolf wrote 'I only want you to know this fact: that I do talk French: because you will never hear me; and then I get a little more even with you in real-womanliness – All real women talk French, and powder their noses'.¹⁰⁰⁶ A few days later Woolf described her purchase of an ugly hat:

I wanted to see what happens among real women if one of them looks like a pancake in mid air. In came...Mrs Edwin Montagu. She started. She positively deplored me. Then hid a smile. Looked again. Thought Ah what a tragedy! Liked me even as she pitied...You see, women can't hold out against this kind of flagrant disavowal of all womanliness.¹⁰⁰⁷

Woolf positioned Sackville-West as a representation of 'real' womanhood that was superior to Woolf's facsimile of femaleness. Here, it is Woolf who embodies otherness, while

¹⁰⁰⁶ DeSalvo and Leaska (eds), *Letters*, 274.

¹⁰⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 276.

Sackville-West is indisputably female. Woolf overwhelmingly presented Sackville-West as a woman and no convincing equivalent to Julian or Mitya existed in her image of her lover. Unlike Trefusis, who reaffirmed Sackville-West's male identity, reconstructing it in a positive light, Woolf encouraged the female aspects of Sackville-West to flourish. In expectation of a visit from Woolf for instance, Sackville-West declared that its prospect had temporarily transformed her, stating 'I am not as solid as usual, - not quite such an oaf'.¹⁰⁰⁸ Later, Sackville-West admitted to Woolf 'I *can't* be clever and stand-offish with you: I love you too much for that. You have no idea how stand-offish I can be with people I don't love...But you have broken down my defences. And I don't really resent it.'¹⁰⁰⁹

In addition to this softening of her behaviour, Leaska points out that Sackville-West adopted a maternal role towards Woolf, as '[w]hen Virginia addressed 'dearest Vita' she was appealing to the loving, protective maternal figure. When 'Donkey West' was summoned, she sought the haughty and glamorous woman who wrote novels and poetry.'¹⁰¹⁰ Although Louise DeSalvo has argued that '[i]nstead of emphasizing Woolf's sickliness, Sackville-West dwelled upon her health, her energy, her vitality, her accomplishments, her generosity in dealing with others, her gregariousness', there are numerous examples in their correspondence that suggest the opposite.¹⁰¹¹ Sackville-West constantly expressed concern for Woolf's delicate health and desired to personally nurse and protect her as a mother would, rather than the chivalrous rescuer Trefusis envisioned. For example, on one occasion

¹⁰⁰⁸ DeSalvo and Leaska (eds), *Letters*, 166.

¹⁰⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 98.

¹⁰¹⁰ Interestingly neither of these personas are male despite Leaska's argument that Sackville-West's male identity was predominant at this time; DeSalvo and Leaska (eds), *Letters*, 27.

¹⁰¹¹ Louise A. DeSalvo, 'Lighting the Cave: The Relationship between Vita Sackville-West and Virginia Woolf', *Signs*, 8 (1982), 199.

Sackville-West wrote, 'Oh Virginia, I'd do anything to make you well. I wish to God that if you had got to be ill, it had happened here, and then you'd be obliged to stay, and I could have looked after you.'¹⁰¹² Woolf in turn reciprocated by adopting the role of brave but vulnerable dependant. She stressed her need of Sackville-West through phrases including '[i]ts odd how I want you when I'm ill. I think everything would be warm and happy if Vita came in' and '[I]ike a child, I think if you were here, I should be happy'.¹⁰¹³ In one letter Woolf admitted her intentions: 'Oh dear, Sibyl has given me a headache...It isn't bad: but I tell you, to get your sympathy: to make you protective'.¹⁰¹⁴

Whereas Trefusis represented her continued existence as dependant on Sackville-West's remaining her lover and leaving her family, Woolf had the more modest requirement of a sympathetic caregiver. Such a role was key to the cultural constructions of womanly behaviour and did not come naturally to Sackville-West. Regarding her own children, Sackville-West was rather dismissive and uninterested. In *Portrait*, she admitted 'I think with tenderness of...[Benedict] sometimes, of...[Nigel] very rarely'.¹⁰¹⁵ During their illnesses, Sackville-West was impatient and far more concerned about the repercussions for Woolf, stating 'Ben has now got influenza...I *hope* I didn't give it to you on Monday...I was horrified thinking I might have given it to you – did I? I'd have avoided you, if I'd known'.¹⁰¹⁶ This was another area in which Woolf cultivated Sackville-West's female identity, previously only inspired by her husband and may partly explain his approval of the relationship. Trefusis had

¹⁰¹² DeSalvo and Leaska (eds), *Letters*, 224.

¹⁰¹³ *Ibid.*, 328, 210.

¹⁰¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 161.

¹⁰¹⁵ Sackville-West, 'Part One' in *Portrait*, 18.

¹⁰¹⁶ DeSalvo and Leaska (eds), *Letters*, 248.

aroused the wild, aggressive, masculine lover in Sackville-West and threatened to usurp Nicolson. Woolf on the other hand, visited the Nicolson family, respected the marriage and reaffirmed Sackville-West's female identity.

In spite of *Orlando*, Woolf viewed Sackville-West as a woman, even using the term lesbian in reference to Sackville-West, categorising her as a woman who loved women. Woolf wrote: 'A woman writes that she has to stop and kiss the page when she reads O[rlando]: Your race I imagine. The percentage of Lesbians is rising in the States, all because of you.'¹⁰¹⁷ However, Sackville-West never identified with the term and her female gender did not become unambiguous to her as a result of the relationship with Woolf. Nor was the relationship characterised solely by maternal affection and platonic friendship. Sherron Knopp has asserted that 'the extent to which Vita and Virginia did love each other – profoundly and, in every sense of the words, erotically and sexually...is something that continues to be resisted, denied, ignored, qualified out of significance, or simply unrecognized'.¹⁰¹⁸ She stresses Woolf's desire for and pursuit of Sackville-West and cites Woolf's response to their first sexual experience at Long Barn – '[p]lease come, and bathe me in serenity again. Yes, I was wholly and entirely happy' – in support of her argument.¹⁰¹⁹ Knopp presents Sackville-West as more reticent due to her comments to Nicolson in a letter where she stated 'I am scared to death of arousing physical feelings in her, because of the madness. I don't know what effect it would have, you see: it is a fire with which I have no wish to play.'¹⁰²⁰ Whether

¹⁰¹⁷ DeSalvo and Leaska (eds), *Letters*, 336.

¹⁰¹⁸ Sherron Knopp, "'If I Saw You Would You Kiss Me?': Sapphism and the Subversiveness of Virginia Woolf's *Orlando*", *Journal of the Modern Language Association of America (PMLA)*, 103 (1988), 24.

¹⁰¹⁹ DeSalvo and Leaska (eds), *Letters*, 168.

¹⁰²⁰ Sackville-West, 'Part Three' in *Portrait*, 188-9.

Sackville-West's comments were an attempt to reassure her husband or whether she genuinely wished to avoid a continued physical relationship, her correspondence with Woolf included the passionate language of lovers. It is at these times that Sackville-West's maleness resurfaced. As with Trefusis, Sackville-West expressed her desire in terms of conquest, longing 'to steal Virginia' and portraying their sexual encounter as ravishment.¹⁰²¹

...how right I was...to force myself on you at Richmond, and so lay the train for the explosion which happened on the sofa in my room here when you behaved so disgracefully and acquired me forever.¹⁰²²

However, Sackville-West's male lover role was repeatedly thwarted by her perception of Woolf as either too frail or too exalted by her to submit to a prolonged physical relationship.

In one fantasy Sackville-West described her frustrations:

Do you know what I should do, if you were not a person to be rather strict with? I should steal my own motor out of the garage...throw gravel at your window, then you'd come down and let me in; I'd stay with you till 5 and be home by half past 6. But, you being you, I can't; more's the pity.¹⁰²³

Sackville-West's sexual promiscuity with other women strengthened her resemblance to a male lover. Her apology to Woolf after confessing her affair with Mary Campbell was reminiscent of an unfaithful lover pleading with his mistress:

¹⁰²¹ DeSalvo and Leaska (eds), *Letters*, 103-4.

¹⁰²² *Ibid.*, 252.

¹⁰²³ *Ibid.*, 229.

I have been so really wretched since last night. I felt suddenly that the whole of my life was a failure, in so far as I seemed incapable of creating one single perfect relationship...Darling forgive me my faults. I hate them in myself, and I know you are right. But they are silly surface things. My love for you is absolutely true, vivid, and unalterable[.]¹⁰²⁴

Yet Sackville-West's maleness did not receive the affirmation from Woolf that Trefusis provided. Instead, Woolf was firm in her characterisation of Sackville-West as female regardless of cultural stereotypes, stating: 'I always said you were a promiscuous brute – Is it a Mary again; or a Jenny this time or a Polly?... Am I to be wearing my heart out for a woman who goes with any girl from an Inn!'¹⁰²⁵

Aside from Sackville-West's sexual behaviour, the only other instances where her male identity was acknowledged in the correspondence with Woolf was in reference to the creation of *Orlando*. Here again, despite Woolf's portrayal of Sackville-West as Orlando who magically transitions from male to female, it was the latter who identified herself with the character in their correspondence. Sackville-West signed herself Orlando on several occasions during the year that *Orlando* was written and published. Unlike Julian however, Sackville-West treated her personification of Orlando more as a private joke with Woolf rather than a manifestation of her identity, at one point writing '[y]our loving...Orlando – ha ha!'¹⁰²⁶ After the publication of the book, Sackville-West described the public's interest in seeing her 'perform' as Orlando, writing '[w]e dined last night with [Mrs Thelwall]...She bore

¹⁰²⁴ DeSalvo and Leaska (eds), *Letters*, 256-7.

¹⁰²⁵ *Ibid.*, 283.

¹⁰²⁶ *Ibid.*, 266.

down on me after dinner. 'Oh, *won't* you come and sit in the next room? We're all dying to talk to Orlando.'...But Orlando wouldn't play. Was sulky and disobliging.¹⁰²⁷

The construction of Orlando as a masquerade for Sackville-West is belied by her strong identification with the character. Sackville-West's reaction to reading *Orlando* revealed her affiliation with Orlando. She wrote 'It seems to me the loveliest, wisest, *richest* book that I have ever read...after all it does touch me so personally' and described her love for Orlando as 'a new form of Narcissism'.¹⁰²⁸ Even Nicolson, so wary of his wife's maleness stated '[i]t really *is Vita*'.¹⁰²⁹ As was the case with *Challenge*, Woolf wrote *Orlando* as a narrative on Sackville-West's life that incorporated her same-sex desire and gender non-conformity. Rebecca Jennings describes *Orlando* as 'treating the subject of lesbianism in a much more positive light' and '[t]he ambiguity of Orlando's gender enabled Woolf to allow him/her to have sexual experiences with and to feel sexual desire for women without explicitly portraying sexual acts between women.'¹⁰³⁰ Jennings also acknowledges that 'popular ideas about the links between gender and sexual identity continued to lack clarity of the period.'¹⁰³¹ It was in this ambiguous space that Sackville-West's identity was located, and Woolf was able to portray her as gender non-conforming, male, female, heterosexual and a lesbian in *Orlando*. The debates as to Woolf's motivations in writing are discussed in an earlier chapter but whatever her reasoning, Woolf chose to include a transition from male to female. While Woolf may have largely ignored the male side of Sackville-West in their

¹⁰²⁷ DeSalvo and Leaska (eds), *Letters*, 337.

¹⁰²⁸ *Ibid.*, 304-5, 306.

¹⁰²⁹ Knopp, "'If I Saw You Would You Kiss Me?'" , 32.

¹⁰³⁰ Rebecca Jennings, *A Lesbian History of Britain: Love and Sex Between Women Since 1500* (Oxford, 2007), 122, 127.

¹⁰³¹ *Ibid.*, 109.

relationship, she clearly recognised and to some extent accepted Sackville-West's perception of herself as a dual personality. Interestingly, Woolf portrays Trefusis in the character Sasha with whom Orlando falls in love with while male and continues to think of after the transition. Thus, consciously or not, Woolf represented the Julian part of Sackville-West's identity as a facet of her lived experience rather than merely a fictional character. Her maleness was inextricably part of Sackville-West's construction of her identity, and while Woolf may have pursued her relationship with Vita the woman, she did not deny Julian the man as a fundamental part of her lover.

Conclusion

The study of gender non-conformity, particularly before the genesis of modern terminology cannot be neatly categorised despite attempts at creating what Halberstam has called 'the fiction of clear distinctions.'¹⁰³² However, this does not preclude gender non-conformity from being a valuable area of historical research. Researchers must rather resist the temptation to adopt a single approach when examining cases of gender non-conformity. By its very nature, gender non-conformity encompasses a vast range of experiences that do not conform to specific classifications. It is for this reason that a collaboration between the histories of sexuality and gender is vital in gaining a more complete understanding of differing concepts of gender variance. The one unifying element in cases of gender non-conformity is some form of movement, either between genders, physical characteristics or sexualities. Thus, a correspondingly fluid approach is required in which the distinction between definitions of sexuality and gender identity are

¹⁰³² Halberstam, *Female Masculinity*, 153.

maintained, but their interaction is equally accepted. This chapter has sought to demonstrate the benefits of a collaborative, adaptable methodology through the example of Vita Sackville-West. Notwithstanding her use of the sexological concept of dual personalities, Sackville-West's discourse was consistent only in its contradictions and lack of definitive categorisation. Even after the increased awareness of lesbianism following the publication of *The Well of Loneliness* in 1928, Sackville-West never identified with the term despite Woolf's use of it to define her. However, she interpreted her relationship with Trefusis in terms of same-sex desire while simultaneously presenting as male and Trefusis using male nicknames and pronouns. Equally, her sexual relationships with women and maleness co-existed with Sackville-West's identity as female and wife and mother.

Foucault argued that nothing can exist outside of discourse, making the ineffable unknowable.¹⁰³³ While there is value in this theory, as demonstrated by the reciprocal power Gillies and Dillon experienced in constructing the language around transition, it is not applicable to all examples of gender non-conformity. For Sackville-West, the fact that she could not be clearly categorised allowed her the freedom to construct a discourse on her identity that incorporated her dual gender identity without compromising her sexuality. She resisted attempts by her lovers to classify her while both encompassing and transcending existing taxonomies. She was male, female, lesbian and bisexual. To limit Sackville-West to definitive categories is inappropriate and inaccurate. If Sackville-West is only examined in terms of her same-sex desire or bisexual relationships, her gender

¹⁰³³ Foucault, 'The Order of Discourse', 54-5.

fluidity is lost. Conversely, if her dual gender presentation is considered exclusively, this diminishes the role her relationships played in the construction of her gender performance. Thus, the most comprehensive understanding of Sackville-West's discourse on her gender identity can only be reached through a cooperative consideration of sexuality and gender. This method is not applicable to all cases of gender non-conformity; for Dillon his sexuality had little if any bearing on his male gender presentation. Nevertheless, in cases where movement between genders, sexual preferences and embodiment is continuous, the examination must be equally fluid.

Chapter 6: 'There are no "men" or "women" in Urania': *Urania* and the quest for a genderless society

Urania denotes the company of those who are firmly determined to ignore the dual organisation of humanity in all its manifestations. They are convinced that this duality has resulted in the formation of two warped and imperfect types. They are further convinced that in order to get rid of this state of things no measures of "emancipation" or "equality" will suffice, which do not begin by a complete refusal to recognise or tolerate the duality itself...There are no "men" or "women" in Urania.¹⁰³⁴

The above quote was the manifesto of *Urania*, a radical journal privately printed and circulated between 1916 and 1940. Predominantly a feminist publication, the editors sought equality through an abandonment of the gender binary. Their stance was a sharp departure from other contemporary feminists who worked to achieve greater rights for women within established societal institutions such as marriage, and in some cases emphasised the distinctions between men and women as part of an 'equal but different' strategy.¹⁰³⁵ In contrast, *Urania* proposed a single, genderless ideal that all should aspire to. Consequently, as well as promoting women's equality, *Urania* provided a space in which gender non-conformity gained visibility and was not only legitimised but celebrated.¹⁰³⁶ However, *Urania's* attempts at presenting an alternative to the western two-gender model were limited by existing discourse and ultimately reaffirmed the gender binary.

¹⁰³⁴ 'To Our Friends', *Urania*, 14, March-April 1919, 1.

¹⁰³⁵ Sonja Tiernan, "'Engagements Dissolved:": Eva Gore-Booth, Urania and the Challenge to Marriage', in: Mary McAuliffe and Sonja Tiernan (eds) *Tribades, Tommies and Transgressives: Histories of Sexualities Volume 1* (Cambridge, 2008), 139. Alison Oram, 'Feminism, Androgyny and Love between Women in *Urania*, 1916-1940', *Media History*, 7 (2001), 65.

¹⁰³⁶ Sonja Tiernan, "'It should not be so easy to Construct a Man:": A History of Female to Male Transsexuality', in: Sonja Tiernan and Mary McAuliffe (eds) *Sapphists and Sexologists: Histories of Sexualities Volume 2* (Newcastle, 2009), 57.

This chapter will argue that *Urania's* inclusion of numerous Japanese stories of gender non-conformity served the dual purpose of providing global examples and presenting a more fluid alternative to the two-gender western construct. Similarly, the primary editor of *Urania*, who themselves presented as male under the name Thomas Baty and female under Irene Clyde wrote a novel *Beatrice the Sixteenth* (1909) which presented a fictional foreign land inhabited by a genderless society, and her advice on how to abolish gender in her later book *Eve's Sour Apples* (1934) was structured around a communal setting similar to Buddhist monastic communities. The journal favoured this approach over constructing an explicitly androgynous narrative, of the type seen in *Orlando*. However, no real attempt was made to translate these eastern constructions of gender to a western setting which reduced *Urania's* ability to disrupt the British binary gender model. Nor, as will be seen, were these fluid gender constructs representative of the realities of Japanese culture in the early twentieth century. Filtered through the western gaze of Irene Clyde/Thomas Baty, the Japanese articles retained elements of orientalism and othering that limited their impact on British gender norms.¹⁰³⁷ Indeed, *Urania* itself continued to gender characteristics and their ideal individual was largely based on culturally assigned female traits. Thus, while the journal's ideals were radical and allowed positive representation of gender non-conformity, through the reliance on reprinted material and a lack of commentary *Urania* remained constrained by existing language and British constructions of gender even as it strove to escape them.¹⁰³⁸

¹⁰³⁷ Fred Dervin, 'Discourses of Othering', *The International Encyclopedia of Language and Social Interaction*, [website], 2015, https://search.credoreference.com/content/entry/wileyasi/discourses_of_othering/Q?

¹⁰³⁸ The first twelve issues of *Urania* have been lost.

***Urania*: Ethos and Creators**

Urania was created by four members of the Aëthnic Union as well as its founder Irene Clyde/Thomas Baty (1869-1954). Formed in 1912, the Aëthnic Union's intention was to ignore sex and gender distinctions in order to improve society. *Urania* followed these principles, persistently stating the belief that 'sex is an accident'. This phrase was coined by suffragist, activist and poet Eva Gore-Booth (1870-1926), who together with her life partner suffragist and social campaigner Esther Roper (1868-1938) were key to the inception of *Urania*. In 1891, Roper achieved a First-class honours degree in Latin, English Literature and Political Economy from Owen's College in Manchester, being among the first women to study there in 1886; served as secretary of the Manchester National Society for Women's Suffrage from 1894 to 1905 and was dedicated to furthering the rights of working-class women. She met Gore-Booth in 1896 and the couple lived together until Gore-Booth's death in 1926.¹⁰³⁹ Gore-Booth became co-secretary of the Manchester and Salford Women's Trade Union Council and during World War I, she supported pacifism through joining the Women's Peace Crusade in 1915 and the No-Conscription Fellowship in 1916. The pair campaigned tirelessly for women's voting and working rights, their efforts including the establishment of the *Women's Labour News* in 1900 and the Lancashire and Cheshire Women's Textile and Other Workers Representation Committee in 1903.¹⁰⁴⁰ The other two cis female founders were Dorothy Cornish (1870-1945), a suffragist and Montessori educator who advocated for the

¹⁰³⁹ Oxford Dictionary of National Biography, *Roper, Esther Gertrude (1868-1938)*, [website], 2004, <https://www.oxforddnb.com/display/10.1093/ref:odnb/9780198614128.001.0001/odnb-9780198614128-e-50081?rskey=rqA4Sw>.

¹⁰⁴⁰ Oxford Dictionary of National Biography, *Booth, Eva Selina Gore- (1870-1926)*, [website], 2004, <https://www.oxforddnb.com/display/10.1093/ref:odnb/9780198614128.001.0001/odnb-9780198614128-e-37473?rskey=f3GI9j&result=1>.

removal of gendered education for children, and Jessey Wade (1859-1952), a fellow suffragist and founder of the Cats Protection League in 1927.¹⁰⁴¹

This chapter will focus on the gender non-conforming editor of *Urania* Thomas Baty/Irene Clyde. Assigned male at birth, Clyde/Baty was a lawyer and writer who specialised in international law. As Baty, they applied for and were given the role of foreign legal advisor to the Japanese government in 1915 and moved to Tokyo in 1916 to take up the post. Baty secured a permanent position working for the Japanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs in 1928 and supported Japan's position throughout World War II, narrowly avoiding a charge of treason in Britain and instead losing their British citizenship. Clyde/Baty remained in Japan until their death in 1954. They published works as Baty and Clyde during this time and contributed many Japanese articles to *Urania*.¹⁰⁴² Clyde presented as female in their editorial role and published the works discussed here under their female identity. They also stated that they 'longed passionately to be a lady—and have continued to do so', and used female pronouns within *Urania*.¹⁰⁴³ Consequently, they will be referred to as Clyde and by female pronouns henceforth.

The title of the journal was based on Karl Heinrich Ulrichs' construction of a category of homosexuality, Urnings, whom he described as female souls in male bodies and Edward

¹⁰⁴¹ Jenny White, 'Jenny White reflects on the legacy of *Urania*', [web blog], 18 May 2021, <https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/lseviewofbooks/2021/05/18/jenny-white-reflects-on-the-legacy-of-urania>.

¹⁰⁴² Ealasaid Gilfillan, 'Thomas Baty', [web blog], 7 June 2020, <https://lgbtcumbrialanguageandarchives.wordpress.com/2020/06/07/thomas-baty>.

¹⁰⁴³ Oram, 'Feminism, Androgyny and Love between Women', 62.

Carpenter represented as an intermediate sex.¹⁰⁴⁴ For *Urania's* editors, the latter usage was most applicable. As Sonja Tiernan states, the 'academic appropriation of Uranian to refer to an intermediate gender thus reflects the ideal of the journal *Urania*: a society with one intermediate, albeit feminine (unlike other users of the term), gender.'¹⁰⁴⁵ The journal's ethos was based on the belief that the perpetuation of gender norms was harmful to society. Despite celebrating diverse forms of gender non-conformity, *Urania's* stance was feminist in seeking greater rights for women who suffered most from the gender stereotypes in British culture. The journal championed equal treatment regardless of gender in education, employment, and clothing, as well as rejecting relational feminism's calls for rights that recognised the distinct abilities of men and women.¹⁰⁴⁶ The abolition of gender was then, primarily intended to create a more equal society based on individual abilities not gender, rather than constructing a new discourse for gender non-conforming individuals. Nevertheless, *Urania's* positive representation of gender non-conformity allowed for an affirmation of those who transcended the western gender binary and highlighted how prevalent these identities were.

In an article entitled 'Urania's Meaning', Clyde summarised *Urania's* principal beliefs:

It is clear to everybody that "boys" are brought up with one ideal, and "girls" with another...What we say, *first*, is that the two images are faulty. We go further, and say that they are not equally faulty. But what we insist on is that the defects of either

¹⁰⁴⁴ Karl Heinrich Ulrichs, *The Riddle of "Man-Manly" Love: The Pioneering Work on Male Homosexuality Vol. 1*, trans. Michael A. Lombardi-Nash (New York, 1994 reprint of original 1864-1880), 58-91. Edward Carpenter, *Love's Coming-of-Age: A Series of Papers on the Relation of the Sexes* (London, 12th edn. 1923), 134-47.

¹⁰⁴⁵ Sonja Tiernan, 'Challenging Presumptions of Heterosexuality: Eva Gore-Booth, A Biographical Case Study', *Historical Reflections*, 37 (2011), 63.

¹⁰⁴⁶ Karen Offen, 'Defining Feminism: A Comparative Historical Approach', *Signs*, 14 (1988), 136.

ought to be replaced by the attractive features of the other...We arrive at the position that the perfect union of all good qualities in an ideal for every individual is possible and desirable. And we find that the great obstacle to this lies in the dual ideal grounded in sex. To eliminate the influence of a dwarfed ideal on the mind, it is imperative, therefore, to get rid of the consciousness of sex...So long as one thinks of oneself as a "man" or a "woman" one opens one's soul to the characteristic male or female defects.¹⁰⁴⁷

Clyde argued that any acknowledgement of sex – used in the sense of what would now be termed gender throughout the journal – was a permanent barrier to equality for men and women.¹⁰⁴⁸ Consequently, Clyde maintained that marriage – in the context of heterosexual couples – was harmful, supporting as it did the duality of gender roles and expectations. For Clyde, 'no one will stoop to marriage who passionately desires to eradicate a system which tinges character with "manly" or "womanly" defects.'¹⁰⁴⁹ However, these defects were decidedly more prevalent in the 'male' character rather than the 'female'. In an article disputing the veracity of complementary genders, Clyde deemed the female 'type' to be preferable. Clyde stated '[i]t is *a priori* improbable that of two types one should not be distinctly preferable to the other. It is my view that the feminine type of character is undeniably so...Sweetness and love are the most valiant and the most prevailing things in the world.'¹⁰⁵⁰ Thus, although the gendering of characteristics was unavoidable to some extent, Clyde presented a future reconstruction in which male and female no longer existed

¹⁰⁴⁷ Irene Clyde, 'Urania's Meaning', *Urania*, 123 & 124, May – August 1937, 2.

¹⁰⁴⁸ Tiernan, "Engagements Dissolved", 140.

¹⁰⁴⁹ Irene Clyde, 'Marriage', *Urania*, 107 & 108, September – December 1934, 1.

¹⁰⁵⁰ Irene Clyde, 'The Megatherium', *Urania*, 14, March – April 1919, 4.

and the 'ideal type' was largely defined by virtues *previously* categorised as female traits, now rendered genderless.

Clyde acknowledged the difficulties involved in creating an alternative to the binary construction of humanity, commenting that 'sex being so pervasive a thing...it turns up even in one's handkerchiefs and umbrellas! – it has got to be utterly pushed aside in all its manifestations'.¹⁰⁵¹ Clyde though, went on to make the cryptic remark that:

The consciousness of sex might be far more severely felt by a "woman" who suddenly went among all her acquaintances in coat and trousers than if she kept to her accustomed costume. But, *within those obvious limits*, if we want to liberate the spirit, the trammels of sex have got to be discarded. [Emphasis added].¹⁰⁵²

This statement somewhat contradicted the notion of abolishing *all* manifestations of gender if a gendered reading of clothing was to remain and reveals the issues faced by *Urania's* editors in completely rejecting gender in society.

The above article also demonstrates *Urania's* attempt at undermining the immutability of gender in discourse. As Alison Oram explains, *Urania* began to put the word 'woman' in inverted commas from the 1930s, highlighting the constructed nature of gender categories.¹⁰⁵³ However, the instances of this were sporadic due to the verbatim reprinting of other materials. Consequently, in order for *Urania's* beliefs to be understood and gain

¹⁰⁵¹ Clyde, 'Urania's Meaning', 2.

¹⁰⁵² Ibid.

¹⁰⁵³ Alison Oram, 'Feminism, Androgyny and Love between Women in *Urania*, 1916-1940', *Media History*, 7 (2001), 58.

support, the journal needed a more consistent, clear illustration of how this new genderless society would function. The concept of androgyny had been discussed in British cultural publications before *Urania*. The British author Charles Reade (1814-1884) for example, in his article 'Androgyny, or woman playing at man' published in two instalments in *The English Review* in 1911 discussed his interpretation of Kate Tozer's gender non-conformity. Reade narrated the events of Tozer's life and their decision to present as male to obtain work with their husband. Reade vacillated in his construction of Tozer, at one point declaring 'Kate remained to the last line of the chapter in essence a woman.'¹⁰⁵⁴ Yet notwithstanding his changeable understanding of Tozer and disapproval of gender non-conformity, Reade provided a more explicit androgynous reading of Tozer than *Urania's* cross-dressing accounts:

She stands now before her appalled spouse no longer to outward view feminine, but androgynous, sartorially epicene...Such a being – in whom it is not easy to recognise either womanhood or manhood – occupied a quasi-neutral position...This, however, stands out in bold relief as a unique instance of androgynism, where the part simulated merged in realism.¹⁰⁵⁵

However, despite Reade's assessment of Tozer as neither male nor female, he consistently used female pronouns to refer to Tozer, demonstrating the difficulties in conveying this concept to western audiences as well as Reade's own ambivalence over Tozer's gender. Androgyny may also have been unhelpful in conveying *Urania's* ideals given its reliance on the gender binary in its definition. As Kate Bornstein asserts:

¹⁰⁵⁴ Charles Reade, 'Androgyny, or woman playing at man', in: Heike Bauer, (ed.), *Women and Cross-dressing, 1800-1939. Volume III Fiction and Lives (Part 2)* (London, 2006), 13.

¹⁰⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 8-13.

Androgyny assumes that there's male stuff on one side of a spectrum, and female stuff on another side of that spectrum. And somewhere in the middle of this straight line, there's an ideal blend of "male" and "female." However, by saying there's a "middle," androgyny really keeps the opposites in place.¹⁰⁵⁶

Urania chose not to construct their discourse around androgyny and instead offered examples of alternative gender narratives from science and medicine as well as eastern and particularly Japanese culture. Prior to the journal's commencement, Clyde used a fictional foreign setting to convey the possibilities of other genders outside the western binary narrative in her novel *Beatrice the Sixteenth*.

***Beatrice the Sixteenth* (1909)**

The plot of *Beatrice the Sixteenth* centres on Mary Hatherley, a British explorer who, following an accident with a camel awakes on another astral plane in the desert. Hatherley is rescued by a group of individuals from Armeria, a genderless society ruled by Queen Beatrice the Sixteenth. Hatherley's stay in Armeria allows her to discover much about the society and culture. The novel ends with Hatherley choosing to remain permanently in Armeria and enter into a 'conjux' with Ilex, an inhabitant of Armeria with whom Hatherley has fallen in love. Initially, the novel skilfully avoids gender pronouns, using genderless names and phrases such as 'a particularly intelligent-looking subject' and '[m]y friend of the horses' in reference to Armerian characters.¹⁰⁵⁷ The language of Armeria – a combination of

¹⁰⁵⁶ Kate Bornstein, *Gender Outlaw: On Men, Women, and the Rest of Us* (New York, 1995), 115.

¹⁰⁵⁷ Irene Clyde, *Beatrice the Sixteenth* (London, 1909), 4-5, 15.

Latin and Greek – also does not include gendered pronouns and the citizens do not comprehend Hatherley’s attempts to explain the gender binary:

“How *do* you distinguish,” I observed, in despair, “between the people who – who fight and wear whiskers and moustaches?” But it suddenly occurred to me that none of them did wear them...“Do you mean to say, then, that you do not recognise any division of people into two classes?” “Free and slave, do you mean?” said Brytas hopelessly. “No; in every rank, in every class. Two complementary divisions, each finding its perfection in the other.” “I have never heard of such a thing,” Brytas answered coolly. “Nor I,” returned Ilex.”¹⁰⁵⁸

Daphne Patai has highlighted the disconcerting effect upon the reader achieved by Clyde, who would be ‘straining to place these beings within social paradigms which absolutely require gender specifications.’¹⁰⁵⁹ The novel provides a strong example of a society in which gender played no role in domestic responsibilities, professions or clothing, precisely representing the later principles of *Urania*. Yet, as Patai states, Clyde quickly abandoned the androgynous construction of the characters in favour of ‘feminine pronouns...and a marked tendency to valorise so-called feminine characteristics.’¹⁰⁶⁰ This potentially all-female society aligned with the feminist agenda of *Urania* which Tiernan describes as ‘proposing to reform the categories of men and women into one ideal feminine form’, and reflected Clyde’s belief that the ‘feminine idea[.]...is immeasurably superior.’¹⁰⁶¹ It also challenged the dominant

¹⁰⁵⁸ Clyde, *Beatrice the Sixteenth*, 77-8.

¹⁰⁵⁹ Daphne Patai, ‘When Women Rule: Defamiliarization and the Sex-Role Reversal Utopia’, *Extrapolation*, 23 (1982), 66-7.

¹⁰⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 67.

¹⁰⁶¹ Tiernan, ‘Engagements Dissolved’, 3.

default use of male pronouns. However, the eventual reliance upon female characterisations did undermine the gender-neutrality. The change in the novel's gendering of the characters reflected the difficulties in rendering individuals who transcended the gender binary comprehensible to a British audience. As Judith Butler argues, '[g]ender...figures as a precondition for the production and maintenance of legible humanity', and this was true of early-twentieth-century Britain.¹⁰⁶² This illegibility is not the same as invisibility. Marjorie Garber's work on cross-dressing helps to illustrate the distinction. She writes:

The "third" is that which questions binary thinking and introduces crisis – a crisis which is symptomized by *both* the overestimation *and* the underestimation of cross-dressing. But what is crucial here – and I can hardly underscore this strongly enough – is that the "third term" is *not a term*...By "category crisis" I mean a failure of definitional distinction, a borderline that becomes permeable, that permits of border crossings...¹⁰⁶³

The non-binary individual is thus presented as being 'other' than the dual categories of male and female while not constituting an articulated term in themselves.

This is not to suggest that Clyde completely abandoned the genderless ideal intended. For example, when Hatherley asks 'how do you distinguish between the parties to a marriage?' in Armeria, Ilex responds:

Just *conjux*, or sometimes *synzycë*. Quite enough, do you not think? Both of them mean 'a joined *person*.' That is the definition of marriage, 'The community between

¹⁰⁶² Tiernan, 'Engagements Dissolved', 11.

¹⁰⁶³ Marjorie Garber, *Vested Interests: Cross-dressing and Cultural Anxiety* (New York, 1993), 11.

two *persons* of all human circumstances.’ They are appropriate names, I think.

[Emphasis added].¹⁰⁶⁴

Clyde created characters who did not identify themselves as female, but possessed traits and virtues constructed as female in early- to mid-twentieth-century British culture which Clyde viewed as preferable. Consequently, the characters of the novel became intelligible to contemporary readers without fully compromising the genderless ideal advocated by *Urania*. Within the journal itself, alternative, more fluid gender constructions were also presented, but the use of verbatim reprinted materials obscured their efficacy in the creation of a genderless system.

***Urania*: Scientific and Medical Gender Non-Conformity**

Urania employed medical and biological accounts as evidence of the fallacy of the gender binary which offered potential terminology outside of ‘male’ and ‘female’. The medical articles covered bisexuality in animals, the possibility of human bisexuality and scientific and medical experts’ refutation of the duality of gender.¹⁰⁶⁵ One typical example of these accounts was the celebration of the findings of Dr. F. A. E. Crew, who concluded after studying water beetles that ‘[t]here are human intersexes which are neither male nor female, but definitely intermediate, and it is a mistake to label them as either male or female, for they belong to a third sexual category’.¹⁰⁶⁶ In the same way, the work of Dr Steinach was presented as a validation of *Urania*’s core beliefs:

¹⁰⁶⁴ Clyde, *Beatrice the Sixteenth*, 80.

¹⁰⁶⁵ Tiernan, “‘It should not be so easy to Construct a Man’”, 58.

¹⁰⁶⁶ ‘Sex An Accident’, *Urania*, 47 & 48, September – December 1924, 7.

Some seven years ago Eva Gore-Booth formulated a concise statement which we have adopted ever since as the neatest and clearest expression of our views. It declared that sex was an accident and formed no essential part of an individual's nature. And now comes science with the most astonishing proofs...Dr. Steinach's researches are said to have produced male guinea pigs, who, "behaved like ladies in every respect"...Now that these differences are seen to be accidental and variable, it will be comparatively easy for the "practical" person to rid himself of his *á priori* prepossessions.¹⁰⁶⁷

Foucault's theory of the power of medical and scientific experts to construct 'truth' is palpable here. *Urania* repeatedly employed medical discourse on sex and gender to legitimise their views without having to create their own narrative, thereby reaffirming the authority of medical and scientific experts. *Urania's* narrative thus became empowered by the veneer of medical corroboration, while simultaneously becoming subsumed into the existing discourse through the absence of the journal's own construction. These medical accounts provided the closest approach to an alternative western gender narrative. As well as the above reference to a 'third' category aside from male and female, an article by William A. White, M.D. succeeded in presenting a genderless discourse without a reliance on gendered terminology:

It used to be imagined that a straight line could be drawn between the sexes and that it could be said: "Everything on this side is masculine; everything on that is feminine." This applied not only to physical characteristics; mental and emotional qualities were also indexed as "manly." To-day science knows that everybody is, both physically and psychologically, bi-sexual, and that the proportions in which the so-called

¹⁰⁶⁷ 'Science Confirms Intuition', *Urania*, 29 & 30, September – December 1921, 1.

characteristics of each sex are blended varies in every person...When the combination is balanced we have our greatest types of personality.¹⁰⁶⁸

White's use of 'masculine' and 'feminine' as opposed to 'men' and 'women' demonstrated a shift away from the essentialist language of the gender binary and his subsequent use of gender-neutral language is a prime example of the possibility of a non-binary narrative within the confines of early twentieth-century discourse.

In issues dating from the mid-1930s, *Urania* also began publishing accounts of medical transitions.¹⁰⁶⁹ These included intersex cases as well as those who identified as a gender other than that assigned at birth. While this followed the wider trend in the press of reporting on medical or allegedly 'spontaneous' transitions, *Urania* presented these cases specifically as evidence of a physical dimension to the mutability of gender. However, the decision to incorporate medical transition accounts into the journal's quest for the erasure of gender was problematic. Firstly, as was typical of early accounts of sex-related surgeries, the journal conflated intersex cases with those whose sex was defined as unambiguous at birth, thereby confirming Ben Vincent's point that 'trans people share a problematic history of being *collectively* relegated to a third gender category.'¹⁰⁷⁰ Secondly, the narratives were subject to the original writers' constructions of gender non-conformity which reinforced the gender binary. In cases of medical transition most individuals adhered to a 'wrong embodiment' narrative either as a valid reading of their experiences or as the only means of obtaining medical procedures. Part of the 'wrong embodiment' construction involved an

¹⁰⁶⁸ William A. White, M.D., 'The Vanishing Sex Line', *Urania*, 113 & 114, September – December 1935, 5-6.

¹⁰⁶⁹ Tiernan, "It should not be so easy to Construct a Man", 59.

¹⁰⁷⁰ Ben Vincent, *Non-Binary Genders: Navigating Communities, Identities, and Healthcare* (Bristol, 2020), 32.

essentialist concept of gender that contradicted *Urania's* beliefs. Suzanne Kessler and Wendy McKenna have explained how such individuals reaffirm rather than disrupt the two-gender model:

How is transsexualism reconcilable with the “fact” that gender is invariant and there are no transfers?...it is easily reconcilable if we think of the transsexual not as changing gender but changing genitals. Gender remains invariant. For example, one is and always has been a female. It is merely the sign of the gender (the genitals) which must be fixed.¹⁰⁷¹

The January – April 1936 issue of *Urania* was a case in point. The front page was dedicated to an article on Zdenk Koubka, an athlete who transitioned from female to male. The account constructed the narrative as a unidirectional movement from a female physicality to a male, enabled by the medical profession. Koubka was stated to have ‘decided to submit to a minor operation and become a man.’¹⁰⁷² The writer presented Koubka as having actively sought out a permanent removal of any ambiguity regarding their gender, potentially implying the inherent complexities of the liminal stage which Jay Prosser describes as ‘the most difficult time for the transsexual, representing the uninhabitable space – the borderlands in between, where passing as either gender might prove a challenge, where both bathrooms are outlaw zones.’¹⁰⁷³ However, one sentence in the article clarifies the journal’s use of medical transitions as evidence of their position. The article states ‘[d]octors

¹⁰⁷¹ Suzanne Kessler and Wendy McKenna, *Gender: An Ethnomethodological Approach* (Chicago, 1985), 121.

¹⁰⁷² ‘Authentic Change Of Sex’, *Urania*, 115 & 116, January – April 1936, 1.

¹⁰⁷³ Jay Prosser, ‘No Place like Home: The Transgendered Narrative of Leslie Feinberg’s *Stone Butch Blues*’, *Modern Fiction Studies*, 41 (1995), 488-9.

informed Miss Koubkova that she had the option of being either a man or a woman.’¹⁰⁷⁴ At first glance this statement is a reinforcement of the gender binary as Koubka must be male or female, these were the only conceivable categories. It was the fact that there was an *option* that interested *Urania*. Koubka’s ability to *decide* his gender confirmed the journal’s argument that gender was culturally constructed. The medical profession’s ability to *reconstruct* an individual’s assigned sex meant sex as well as gender could no longer be represented as an essential truth, thereby validating *Urania’s* ethos. An article following on the second page of this issue clarified *Urania’s* position:

The enormously important intelligence which we print on our front page must strike everyone as a clinching corroboration of our main thesis:- that sex is an accident...The present case of Zdenka Koubkhova [*sic*], openly and fully stated, with a well-known name involved, and with every particularity of time, place and circumstance, removes all doubt and difficulty and entitles us to point with some pride to our former leader Eva Gore-Booth’s illuminating saying: – SEX IS AN ACCIDENT!¹⁰⁷⁵

Numerous accounts of medical transitions were presented in *Urania* to demonstrate the prevalence of such cases. In another article discussing the transition of British athlete Mark Weston, reference was made to Weston’s surgeon, L. R. Broster who ‘has performed several operations on women who find themselves changing into men...Many remarkable sex operations have been carried out at Charing Cross Hospital, including, it was recently stated,

¹⁰⁷⁴ ‘Authentic Change Of Sex’, 1.

¹⁰⁷⁵ ‘Lightning!’, *Urania*, 115 & 116, January – April 1936, 2.

no fewer than twenty-five on women who were changing into men.¹⁰⁷⁶ Broster also featured in another article that reported that:

Twenty-four English men and women have had their sex changed in the past few years. The man who has brought new hope and happiness into those baffled lives is Dr. Lennox Ross. [sic] Broster, surgeon at Charing Cross Hospital, London. Most of his operations are successful. A number of his patients have married and had children.¹⁰⁷⁷

This praise for Broster served a specific purpose in the journal. Rather than seeking to exalt the medical profession as the determiners and creators of sex and gender – though this was an unintentional side-effect of maintaining the original wording of the articles – *Urania* was concerned with demonstrating that sex could be medically manufactured and thus as mercurial as gender.

Urania presented medical transition articles as the most convincing proof of their contentions despite the construction of these individuals as seeking medical intervention to *remove* the ambiguity over their gender. The ability to physically transition was sufficient challenge to the immutability of gender, which in turn made feasible a single human ideal that could be adopted by all. However, the limited commentary on the concept of a third sex left the reader to interpret the definition for themselves, leading to the same problem highlighted by Christine Overall in reference to modern gender discourse:

There is almost no conceptual space for a third sex/gender; in order to be, and be intelligible as, a person, one must belong to one or the other of the two recognized

¹⁰⁷⁶ 'Another Extraordinary Triumph!', 1-2.

¹⁰⁷⁷ 'Changes of Sex', *Urania*, 129 & 130, May – August 1938, 11.

sex/genders. As a result, any attempt to self-present as an exemplar of a third sex/gender will almost inevitably be subject to reinterpretation by others who will attempt to perceive the individual as a member of one or the other of the two “real” sex/genders.¹⁰⁷⁸

The rigidity of the British gender binary therefore made *Urania*'s inclusion of gender non-conforming examples from East Asia and the implicit potential for more fluid Japanese readings of gender all the more important.

***Urania*: Japanese and East Asian Gender Non-Conformity**

Urania's editors drew heavily on Japanese examples of gender non-conformity throughout their issues. While Clyde's residence in Japan may explain the proliferation of articles, their use implicitly suggested an alternate discourse to the British two-gender model. Clyde's admiration for Japanese culture was evident in their defence of Japan's military actions and refusal to return to Britain during World War II. Clyde's persistent work for the Japanese government and consequent loss of British citizenship further supports the possibility that the Japanese articles were more than just examples of the global presence of gender non-conformity. As with Michael Dillon's experiences with Buddhist monasteries in India, Japanese culture had a more established recognition of non-binary identities than could be found in Britain.¹⁰⁷⁹ In the major religion Shintoism, the deity Dosojin was represented as

¹⁰⁷⁸ Christine Overall, 'Sex/Gender Transitions and Life-Changing Aspirations', in: Laurie Shrage, (ed.), *"You've Changed": Sex Reassignment and Personal Identity* (Oxford, 2009), 22.

¹⁰⁷⁹ Mark McLelland, 'Living more "like oneself": Transgender identities and sexualities in Japan', in: Fritz Klein, Karen Yescavage and Jonathan Alexander (eds) *Bisexuality and Transgenderism: InterSEXions of the Others* (New York, 2004), 205.

non-binary as was the popular fox-god Inari.¹⁰⁸⁰ This gender non-conformity was even more pronounced in Buddhism, where deities possessed the ability to present as male or female through the process of *henshin* (transformation).¹⁰⁸¹ The prominent Buddhist deity Kannon for example, has been represented as male, female and androgynous at different times.¹⁰⁸² Similarly, Daoism in China also held that each individual possessed fluctuating female and male energies within the concept of yin and yang.¹⁰⁸³

Outside of religious tradition, gender non-conformity was well-established in Japanese performance. Within kabuki theatre, actors assigned male at birth who performed women's roles (*onnagata*) were also expected to live as females in their private lives in line with the philosophy of *onnagata* Yoshizawa Ayame. Simultaneously, *onnagata* often married women and had children.¹⁰⁸⁴ Clyde included articles praising the abilities of *onnagata* to present as female. In one such account, 'Mr. Sonnosuke's acting as Asa was so remarkable that one not knowing his sex would never have entertained a suspicion that he was not a woman of the streets, such as he was depicting. His make-up, his carriage, his gesture and his voice, were absolutely convincing.'¹⁰⁸⁵ Clyde also included articles on *nandan*, the Chinese equivalent of *onnagata*, who, while not living as female offstage, underwent rigorous training in the emulation of women.¹⁰⁸⁶ One example described the abilities of 'Me Lang Fan, the famous Chinese actor in female parts...[who was] described as beautiful and possessing in private

¹⁰⁸⁰ Saskia E. Wieringa, 'Silence, Sin, and the System: Women's Same-Sex Practices in Japan', in: Saskia E. Wieringa, Evelyn Blackwood and Abha Bhaiya (eds) *Women's Sexualities and Masculinities in a Globalizing Asia* (New York, 2007), 29.

¹⁰⁸¹ McLelland, 'Living more "like oneself"', 205.

¹⁰⁸² Wieringa, 'Silence, Sin, and the System', 29-31.

¹⁰⁸³ McLelland, 'Living more "like oneself"', 205.

¹⁰⁸⁴ Ibid.

¹⁰⁸⁵ 'Dress', *Urania*, 27 & 28, May – August 1921, 9.

¹⁰⁸⁶ Siu Leung Li, *Cross-Dressing in Chinese Opera* (Hong Kong, 2003), 179.

life all the manners of a well brought up lady.¹⁰⁸⁷ Despite coming from very different cultural contexts – Chinese opera was policed due to concerns over the disruptive effects of cross-dressing – both examples served to demonstrate the absurdity of attributing physical and behavioural traits exclusively to a particular gender based on biology.¹⁰⁸⁸ The notion that gender could be learned and assimilated into an individual's identity regardless of their physical body allowed for the adoption of the genderless ideal *Urania* championed.

As well as these theatrical examples, *Urania* presented articles on gender non-conformity in Japanese society. As with the theatrical articles, the successful passing of the individual as another gender was key for *Urania's* purposes. One article portrayed the potential for individuals outside of the performing arts to identify as another gender regardless of their assigned sex. It examined the lives of eight individuals in Tokyo assigned male at birth guilty of shoplifting, 'four of whom preferred to lead a feminine existence, even wearing women's clothing, as "wives" of the other four.'¹⁰⁸⁹ While the account mentioned the relationships between the couples, stating that the wives 'could not live without their "husbands[,]'" the majority of the article concentrated on the wives' gender non-conformity.¹⁰⁹⁰

The three effeminate members...began to take an interest in posing as girls when about 16 years old. They watched their language, their gait when they walked, their gestures and the movements of their heads. All the outward signs perfected, they learned to sew, to wash kimono and tabi and to do other housework. The next step

¹⁰⁸⁷ 'Dress', *Urania*, 14, March – April 1919, 9.

¹⁰⁸⁸ Li, *Cross-Dressing in Chinese Opera*, 3.

¹⁰⁸⁹ 'A Strange Eight', *Urania*, 109 & 110, January – April 1935, 3.

¹⁰⁹⁰ *Ibid.*

was a change of attire. Their minds, if not originally feminine, also underwent a transformation.¹⁰⁹¹

As with the *onnagata*, the depiction of the training the wives underwent supported the performative aspect of gender and undermined the link between physical sex and gender identity. An article on Shiyoko Iida provided another less permanent example of Japanese gender non-conformity. The article made careful distinction between their 'true' female identity and the male disguise they adopted:

Shiyoko Iida...[was] well-known to the police for her ability to appear as a woman or *masquerade* as a man. She has the habit...of obtaining a job as a café waitress (feminine) and in a few days walking out with the choice apparel of the other employers...The finger of suspicion first pointed to the accused *girl*...when in the course of the street fight a wig slipped from her head to disclose close-cropped locks. It seems that she had to wear her hair short in order to be able to *appear as a young man* at short notice. [Emphasis added].¹⁰⁹²

The success of Iida's male performance despite their apparent female gender identity again confirmed the fallacy of the gender binary. Thus, to use Butler and Garber's arguments, *Urania* utilised a variety of forms of gender-crossing behaviour to substantiate their call for the abolition of the dual gender construct. As Butler states:

Inasmuch as "identity" is assured through the stabilising concepts of sex, gender, and sexuality, the very notion of "the person" is called into question by the cultural emergence of those "incoherent" or "discontinuous" gendered beings who appear to

¹⁰⁹¹ 'A Strange Eight', 3.

¹⁰⁹² 'Dress', *Urania*, 81 & 81, May – August 1930, 13.

be persons but who fail to conform to the gendered norms of cultural intelligibility by which persons are defined.¹⁰⁹³

For *Urania*, these 'discontinuous beings' represented the need for a genderless society.

Articles discussing Japanese waitresses revealed the farcical nature of gendered work. One article concerned waitresses who were:

...men in disguise, wearing women's clothes and imitating the voice of the opposite sex...Some of the men, facing starvation, are forced to assume the role of women for their daily bread, for women workers are now in greater demand than men.¹⁰⁹⁴

The implication was that were careers to become genderless, these individuals would no longer feel compelled to adopt the clothing of another gender. Another similar article went further and presented potential language for a genderless discourse. The article began by using male pronouns for the protagonist:

"A rag and a bone and a hark of hair," is what they say most women are, but Tomiko Kuwabara, twenty-six year old man of Tsugagori Tochigi, added to this some clothing, plenty of powder and paint and an imagination, and transformed himself sufficiently to get employment at café in Nagataki, Chichibu, as a decidedly pretty waitress.¹⁰⁹⁵

¹⁰⁹³ Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (London, 1990), 17.

¹⁰⁹⁴ 'Tokio Men Waitresses', *Urania*, 73 & 74, January – April 1929, 4.

¹⁰⁹⁵ 'Disguises', *Urania*, 55 & 56, January – April 1926, 7.

Tomiko's beauty and use of cosmetics were what enabled their categorisation as female and again stressed the acquired nature of gender. Later in the article, the success of Tomiko's female identity was compounded by a change in pronoun:

Tomiko (certainly a feminine name) was so fetching that Sankichi Yamada, son of the local money magnate, fell madly in love with her/him and insisted on an immediate wedding. Tomiko led him on with guiles and at last consented on condition that the love-sick swain give her/him three thousand yen to purchase a wedding outfit. This Sankichi did, and as soon as the money was safely in hand, Tomiko revealed her/his sex.¹⁰⁹⁶

Even following the revelation of Tomiko's assigned sex, the article continued to use the more gender-neutral 'her/him'. Although not explicitly stated, this use of her/him allowed for a new term in framing gender discourse. Using familiar pronouns and combining them to create a new category provided a tentative example of possible genderless phraseology, though still framed within the male/female binary.

The greater representation of androgyny in Japanese – and to a lesser extent Chinese – culture presented a potential alternative to the rigid British gender binary discourse. Such exchanges between western and Japanese culture were already taking place within narratives of female same-sex desire, as Japanese feminist writer and activist Hiratsuka Raichō (1886-1971) established Seitōsha (The Blue Stocking Society) in 1911. As Beverley Curran and James Welker state:

¹⁰⁹⁶ 'Disguises', 7.

The evocation of English blue worsted stockings, in lieu of Japanese *tabi*, had an impact on a burgeoning lesbian identity in Japan by taking a Western image to shape its own. At the same time, the “grim figure in tweeds” which Terry Castle has identified as the prototypical image of the Western lesbian was being translated and refashioned into a more cheerful (if not downright gay) *akarui rezubian*, a version of the clothes-conscious dandified aesthete.¹⁰⁹⁷

Thus, *Urania* had the potential to present a westernised version of the Japanese understanding of androgyny. However, there were two problems that undermined the use of Japan as a template for *Urania*'s genderless narrative. Firstly, the journal's process of reprinting verbatim articles meant that no attempt was made to translate the Japanese model of androgyny into a western context. The articles included elements of orientalism and othering such as the lack of clear distinctions between different East Asian cultures. This is evident in the article entitled 'WOMAN MARRIES WOMAN':

[A] certain Chinese woman [*sic*] in Calcutta, Ching by name, who posed from her girlhood up as one belonging to the masculine section, married a “Kinkhali” girl...The fun is that the “Kinkhali” girl who easily came to know that her so-called “husband” belonged to the same sex as she does, still retained her fidelity and devotion to her “husband.” ...The “wife” did not care to give out the secret. In course of time the wife died. Ching took the death of his (?) wife to heart so much so that Ching was practically knocked down by the sad bereavement of the wife.¹⁰⁹⁸

¹⁰⁹⁷ Beverley Curran and James Welker, 'From *The Well of Loneliness* to the *akarui rezubian* Western translations and Japanese lesbian identities', in: Mark McLelland and Romit Dasgupta (eds) *Genders, Transgenders and Sexualities in Japan* (London, 2005), 71.

¹⁰⁹⁸ 'Woman Marries Woman', *Urania*, 57 & 58, May – August 1926, 10.

Here, Ching's status as a Chinese immigrant in India did not provoke discussion of the differing understandings of gender non-conformity. Ching was also subject to othering by the original author both in terms of their culture and gender identity. The inverted commas around Kinkhali and absence of a definition emphasised the mysterious and exotic elements of the story, classic tropes of orientalism. Similarly, the use of inverted commas around the words husband and wife both undermined Ching's manhood, framing the situation as a 'joke', and distanced their relationship from heterosexual norms. Consequently, the East Asian articles were subject to the problems of overgeneralisation and boundaries that result from othering.¹⁰⁹⁹ While this may have been the unintentional result of valuing the volume of examples over specifics, it nevertheless undermined the East Asian articles' potential to disrupt the western gender binary by emphasising their separateness and difference from British culture.

Secondly, the representation of Japan in the journal articles was idealised and did not reflect the contemporary Japanese attitudes to gender non-conformity. While Clyde admired Japan, her view as an outsider was necessarily through a western lens and led to a selective approach in her portrayal of Japanese culture. As Mark McLelland has stated, in the 1930s, 'sex and gender roles became increasingly polarized, with women being cast as mothers whose purpose was to breed sons for the emperor and men being seen as fighting machines'.¹¹⁰⁰ Prior to this, the 'Modern Girl' image – Japanese women who were financially independent and following World War I adopted western clothing and lifestyle – was also

¹⁰⁹⁹ Dervin, 'Discourses of Othering'.

¹¹⁰⁰ McLelland, 'Living more "like oneself"', 207.

criticised in part for its masculinity.¹¹⁰¹ Similarly, in terms of androgyny in religion Saskia E. Wieringa argues that ‘Buddhist clergy masculinized Kannon, as they did in the Inari cult’ instead of emphasising their gender fluidity.¹¹⁰² Thus, the reality of Japanese attitudes to gender was far more rigid and less accepting of gender non-conformity than *Urania’s* ideal required. Nevertheless, the acceptance of gender non-conforming *onnagata* both on and off the stage and the understanding of gender fluidity as a concept was greater than that experienced in Britain. Therefore, the use of Japan – at least aspects of that culture – were still valuable in developing a western genderless discourse.

***Urania*: British and European Gender Non-Conformity**

Urania contained numerous examples of British and European gender non-conformity that served to illustrate their diversity and prevalence. What is also apparent in these articles is how entrenched the binary gender model was in the west and the difficulties in constructing a more fluid discourse. In line with their belief in the absurdity of gender norms, *Urania* attempted to challenge the necessity of gendered clothing through the inclusion of articles that reported women wearing trousers and the similarities between men’s and women’s fashions. However, the clothing was still discussed in terms of the gender binary. For example, in a quote from *Paris Through an Attic*, Madame Dieulafoy’s apparel was sufficiently masculine to cast doubt on her gender even following her marriage. Dieulafoy ‘with the permission of the police...wore trousers everywhere and all the time – ordinary, fashionable men’s trousers... it was somehow disconcerting for others; and so difficult to

¹¹⁰¹ Wieringa, ‘Silence, Sin, and the System’, 36.

¹¹⁰² *Ibid.*, 31.

remember that this apparent man was really a woman all the time.’¹¹⁰³ More frequently, the individuals’ clothing elicited disapproval despite their female gender not being questioned. One particularly extreme reaction was reported from Munich where ‘an advanced woman, who appeared in the streets of Munich, yesterday, dressed in riding breeches, legging, a sports coat, and a cloth cap, was mobbed by immense [*sic*] crowds, who hooted her and declared she had disgraced her sex. She was rescued by some chivalrous men...’.¹¹⁰⁴ Casting the woman in question in the role of a victim in need of male protection solidified her female identity that was compromised by masculine attire.

Wearing clothing that was culturally constructed as male imbued the individual with a potential male identity and as such rendered the cis woman in the Munich article a ‘disgrace’. Left without comment by the editors, their criticism of the disapproval demonstrated in such articles remained implicit. There was also no real attempt by the editors to redefine gendered clothing and individuals were frequently described as wearing ‘men’s’ suits and trousers. Even in an article discussing the similarities between recent men’s and women’s fashion, the limitations of existing binary terminology were apparent:

Young men and young women wearing much the same dress will be a feature of seaside promenades and riverside resorts this summer, double-breasted grey flannel suits having become popular with both. The simple double-breasted coats are cut in almost exactly the same way for men and for women, while the woman often wears with it a light grey silk jumper collar, and tie resembling a man’s shirt collar and tie.

¹¹⁰³ ‘Dress’, *Urania*, 20, March – April 1920, 8.

¹¹⁰⁴ ‘Dress’, *Urania*, 29 & 30, September – December 1921, 1.

Soft grey felt hats, worn by man and woman alike, increase the similarity of costume, and the woman's shingle or Eton crop completes her manlike aspect.¹¹⁰⁵

The article made an attempt at remaining neutral by stressing the similarities in cut and style, but ultimately reverted to a dual-gendered reading in which the woman becomes 'manlike' rather than androgynous.

While *Urania's* lack of an original genderless discourse and reliance on reprinted articles may have undermined their attempts at abolishing the gender binary, the journal provided crucial evidence of the diversity of gender non-conforming identities and the dominance of the two-gender model in early-twentieth-century British discourse. This diversity was particularly prevalent in articles concerning cross-dressing. Throughout its circulation from 1919 to the late 1930s, *Urania* consistently printed numerous accounts of cross-dressing, often under a dedicated section entitled 'Dress'. The articles covered a range of motivations for the gender non-conforming behaviour, from criminal activities, competitions and a particular focus on economic necessity. The inclusion of multiple forms of gender non-conformity shifted the narrative from a singular construction of cross-dressing to one in which the complex diversity gained recognition. At the same time however, *Urania's* use of such differing accounts of cross-dressing as examples of the falsity of the gender binary potentially undermined the validity of gender non-conforming identities. As has been seen, Havelock Ellis' Eonists were anxious to differentiate themselves from music hall acts who cross-dressed as part of their performance.¹¹⁰⁶ For gender non-conforming individuals to be

¹¹⁰⁵ 'Dress', *Urania*, 71 & 72, September – December 1928, 10.

¹¹⁰⁶ Havelock Ellis, *Studies in the Psychology of Sex. Volume VII: Eonism and Other Supplementary Studies* (Philadelphia, 1928), 71-91.

included alongside those who presented as another gender to escape prosecution or as part of a joke potentially discredited their attempts to distinguish between identity and masquerade. For example, under the heading 'NO DIFFERENCE' a 1928 issue of *Urania* published the following story:

How two men won second and third prizes respectively in an ankle competition for women is being retailed with considerable gusto at Watford...the elite of Watford, including two hundred girls, were present...a hundred shapely ankles, were shown beneath a curtain...To the astonishment of everybody...two of the three prize winners were revealed as men. They had borrowed silk stockings and high heeled shoes from their sisters and entered the competition as a joke.¹¹⁰⁷

This is not to suggest that *Urania* had no understanding of the nuances of the cases they printed, but rather that in their quest to provide numerous examples of gender non-conformity the journal focused on the commonalities between the articles instead of attempting to draw distinctions.

The predominant theme in *Urania's* cross-dressing articles was economic necessity. The stories emphasised the competence of the individuals' concerned at performing gendered careers, their successful passing and the consequent absurdity of the artificial segregation of employment. *Urania* made no alterations to the pronouns used by the original authors. In practice, this meant the assigned sex at birth dictated the individual's pronouns in the account, thereby constructing the gender non-conforming behaviour as a necessity for

¹¹⁰⁷ 'No Difference', *Urania*, 67 & 68, Jan – April 1928, 5.

survival. Garber has shown in the case of American jazz musician Billy Tipton the popularity of career choice as an explanation for cross-dressing, particularly in female-to-male cases, as ‘the “explanation” of his (or her) transvestism is *normalised*, by interpreting it in the register of socio-economic necessity.’¹¹⁰⁸ This construction of cross-dressing was maintained in *Urania* despite the journal’s radical ethos of abolishing gender. Many of the accounts cited cases of women seeking military careers, a popular trope in early-twentieth-century newspapers, though the majority were historical.¹¹⁰⁹ One such case was that of Muriel Cavendish who ‘served in the war in the American Army, went to France, and took part in three big battles without her sex ever being discovered...[because she was] [a]nxious to do something more than ordinary war work’.¹¹¹⁰ Examples from Japan were also cited, such as Yoshiko Kawashima “‘The Joan d’Arc of Manchuria,”...[who was] often seen among Japanese army officers in Shanghai and later in Manchuria. She was...once elected commander of a unit of Manchoukuo troops on an expedition to suppress banditry.’¹¹¹¹ In both these cases female pronouns prevailed and the cross-dressing was portrayed as a temporary necessity. Following the Armistice, Cavendish borrowed clothing from a French girl ‘to enable her to resume her identity as a woman,’ and Yoshiko stated that ‘when the “emergency or crisis” is over, she may “become a woman again.”’¹¹¹² This article demonstrated the unassailability of gender attribution in this period. Kessler and McKenna have argued that ‘almost nothing can discredit a gender attribution once it is made. Even the loss of the original criteria used to make the attribution might well become irrelevant.’¹¹¹³ Accordingly, although Cavendish and

¹¹⁰⁸ Garber, *Vested Interests*, 68-9.

¹¹⁰⁹ Alison Oram, *Her Husband was a Woman!: Women’s gender-crossing in modern British popular culture* (London, 2007), 38.

¹¹¹⁰ ‘Woman as a Soldier’, *Urania*, 75 & 76, May – August 1929, 4.

¹¹¹¹ ‘Dress’, *Urania*, 99 & 100, May – August 1933, 10.

¹¹¹² ‘Woman as a Soldier’, *Urania*, 75 & 76, May – August 1929, 4. ‘Dress’, *Urania*, 99 & 100, May – August 1933, 10.

¹¹¹³ Kessler and McKenna, *Gender*, 160.

Yoshiko challenged gender norms through adopting military careers, their masculine clothing and behaviour were not sufficient to alter their female gender. This was denoted by the use of female pronouns despite both authors suggesting a temporary male identity by referencing a *resumption* of womanhood.

Urania's verbatim publishing of articles from other works continued to be problematic in cases of cross-dressing that more clearly represented a person's gender identity. The journal covered the well-known cases of Colonel Barker and Augustine Hull as well as less famous instances of prolonged gender non-conformity. In addition to these contemporary articles, *Urania* established the longevity of gender non-conformity by publishing numerous detailed historical accounts. These instances helped refute any suggestion of gender non-conformity being a recent phenomenon and occupied several pages of a 1928 issue of the journal.¹¹¹⁴ The past and present articles chosen were predominantly sympathetic and respectful of the subject, but the reliance on the original writer's construction led to inconsistencies.

In the same way, the articles *Urania* selected regarding Augustine Hull, who presented as female and was charged with indecency after their relationship with George Burrows, were not those that recounted Burrows' testimony regarding their engagement. They instead centred on Hull's appearance: '[f]ashionably attired as a woman when arrested, wearing a 15-guinea tiger-skin coat, high-heeled shoes, and with his [*sic*] hair bobbed', and the evidence given by Hull and a doctor that 'at home he [*sic*] was treated as a girl, and played

¹¹¹⁴ 'Women as Men', *Urania*, 69 & 70, May – August 1928, 4-9.

with girlish toys. All his life he had wanted to pass as a woman. A doctor said Hull was feminine in his outlook and mentality.¹¹¹⁵ The details of how Hull constructed their female gender brilliantly illustrated *Urania's* point that gender was performative. However, as Garber has argued, 'transsexuals and transvestites are *more* concerned with maleness and femaleness than persons who are neither transvestite nor transsexual. They are emphatically not interested in "unisex" or "androgyny" as erotic styles, but rather in gender-marked and gender-coded identity structures.'¹¹¹⁶ As a consequence, the inclusion of accounts of gender non-conformity where the individuals identify as another gender than that assigned at birth reiterated the gender binary as much as they challenged it. Hull was categorised as a man by the judicial system and a woman by their doctor and (as far as can be ascertained from reported speech) themselves.¹¹¹⁷ Nowhere were they presented as androgynous.

Even in more ambiguous cases of gender non-conformity, the binary was very much in evidence. With regards to Colonel (sometimes known as Captain) Barker for example, the articles chosen by the journal revealed the differing constructions of Barker's gender by their acquaintances, legal representatives, and themselves, yet despite Barker's vacillation on their gender identity, they remained within the confines of the two-gender model. Indeed, one of the two articles concerning Barker made only a brief mention of them in which they categorised Barker as female:

¹¹¹⁵ 'And Many More?', *Urania*, 87 & 88, May – August 1931, 6; 'Dress', *Urania*, 99 & 100, May – August 1933, 10.

¹¹¹⁶ Garber, *Vested Interests*, 110.

¹¹¹⁷ While Hull appears to have identified largely as female, this was never explicitly stated by them so I have opted to use gender neutral pronouns to avoid misgendering as far as possible.

We do not propose to trouble our readers much with the case of “Colonel Sir Victor Barker.” We should like them, however, to note that the mere assumption of men’s dress was never urged as a charge against the lady in question. Indeed, it could not be, as the fact was not an offence known to the law.¹¹¹⁸

The main account covering Barker in the journal was less definitive in its categorisation of Barker and included the oscillating pronouns typical of such accounts. Barker’s recourse to the ‘normalising’ discourse of economic necessity – ‘there was no place for me as a woman. The only way to keep myself and my boy was to become a man’ – was questioned in the article, which speculated that ‘some episodes of her earlier life indicate that the masculine role was not a disagreeable one’.¹¹¹⁹ The article went on to include incidents which validated Barker’s maleness such as ‘smoking and dressing up as a boy’ and ‘his feats of strength and his unusual boxing ability’.¹¹²⁰ Yet notwithstanding the comment that, Barker wore ‘clothes which made it difficult to tell whether she was a man or a woman...and seemed pleased when her sex was mistaken’ the article reinforced the inescapability of the binary discourse in Britain.¹¹²¹ This was very much reflective of most of the reports on the Barker case which were preoccupied with debating Barker’s success or failure in their male identity. One such article in the *Daily Express* recorded the opinions of a member of the staff at a hotel where Barker was employed that ‘[n]ot once did his [or] her conduct give rise to the slightest suspicion...Thousands of people passed through his hands, but not one of them ever

¹¹¹⁸ ‘Colonel Barker’, *Urania*, 77 & 78, September – December 1929, 9.

¹¹¹⁹ ‘Captain Barker’, *Urania*, 73 & 74, January – April 1929, 4.

¹¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, 6.

¹¹²¹ *Ibid.*, 5.

appeared to suspect that our tall, dark “Mr. Barker” was a woman.’¹¹²² Later in the article a neighbour’s statement encapsulated the confusion when she asserted ‘[s]urely it is all obvious. Sometimes he posed as a man, and at other times he must have gone about as a woman...The news that ‘he’ is really a woman has come as a great shock to us.’¹¹²³ These witness accounts confirmed the importance of societal participation in gender assignment. As Teresa de Lauretis states: ‘The sex-gender system, in short, is both a sociocultural construct and a semiotic apparatus, a system of representation which assigns meaning (identity, value, prestige, location in kinship, status in the social hierarchy, etc.) to individuals within the society.’¹¹²⁴ The acceptance of Barker’s male identity by their acquaintances echoes Kessler and McKenna’s point in their discussion of ‘transsexuals’ that ‘[t]he medical profession considers the transsexuals’...success in being “taken for” a man or a woman [an] important facto[r] in the gender membership decision.’¹¹²⁵ Similarly, Barker’s acquaintances affirmed their gender identity to such an extent that they struggled to accept a female construction.

In each of these accounts of more permanent cross-dressing, little if any attention was given to the liminal stage of the narrative. Jay Prosser has discussed the reclaiming of the transitional period by some queer theorists such as Sandy Stone as an identity in itself where the subject is liberated from the gender binary.¹¹²⁶ Such a reading would seem

¹¹²² Anon. ‘Woman’s strange life as a man’, *Daily Express*, 6 March 1929, in: Heike Bauer, (ed.). *Women and Cross-dressing, 1800-1939. Volume III Fiction and Lives (Part 2)* (London, 2006), 82.

¹¹²³ *Ibid.*, 83.

¹¹²⁴ Teresa de Lauretis, *Technologies of Gender: Essays on Theory, Film, and Fiction* (Indiana, 1987), 5.

¹¹²⁵ Kessler and McKenna, *Gender*, 118. It is important to note that Kessler and McKenna themselves argue that ‘(comfortableness and success) constitute gender membership[.]’

¹¹²⁶ Prosser, ‘No Place like Home’, 491, 504.

appropriate for *Urania's* purposes of irradicating gender. Yet the individuals within the accounts were almost unanimously gendered as either male or female, albeit with certain traits of another gender. The explanation for *Urania's* reluctance to produce their own definitive genderless discourse may be found in their response to a correspondent from Pretoria. The correspondent, although in favour of *Urania's* message was concerned that it 'not [be] pushed to extremes...Much more could be done by a steady pushing than by a wildly enthusiastic volcanic upheaval – which always hurts someone.'¹¹²⁷ *Urania* responded to these concerns with the statement that 'we do not set to work in any outrageous fashion which would do our cause more harm than good.'¹¹²⁸ A more moderate approach to destabilising the duality of gender was understandable, given that despite medical reconstructions of gender as a spectrum and discourse on androgyny, the idea of abolishing gender completely was still radical.

Nevertheless, as Vincent observes of modern western societies, 'as one can only pass as man or woman due to the entrenched nature of the gender binary, it is currently impossible for non-binary people to pass as their identified gender, again as a result of the unintelligibility of non-binary as a subject.'¹¹²⁹ Vincent's point can be applied to *Urania's* attempts to remove all discussions of gender from society. While the journal was not seeking to affirm non-binary individuals, their efforts to render everyone as genderless were undermined by the prevalence of binary gender distinctions. Anne Fausto-Sterling's assertion that 'European and American culture is deeply devoted to the idea that there are

¹¹²⁷ 'The Letter-Box', *Urania*, 23, September – October 1920, 4.

¹¹²⁸ Ibid.

¹¹²⁹ Vincent, *Non-Binary Genders*, 39.

only two sexes. Even our language refuses other possibilities', is palpable within *Urania*, highlighting how threatening ambiguously gendered bodies were in early- to mid-twentieth-century Britain.¹¹³⁰

The discomfort evoked by Madame Dieulafoy's ambiguous gender identity in strangers, as well as that directed at Michael Dillon prior to surgery discussed in an earlier chapter, reveal how deeply ingrained the duality of gender was in understanding identities in this period. Kessler and McKenna cited the comment of one of their interviewees that summarises the issue faced by *Urania* in abolishing gender: 'the "in-between state of being a transsexual" was worse than being male or female because "people don't know how to relate to you."' ¹¹³¹ Notwithstanding one of *Urania's* editors, Dorothy H. Cornish's view that 'since masculinity, the cult of forcefulness, is going, and since femininity, the derivative cult of the dependent weak, is going too, it is clear that the double "ideal" that we have so long felt to be false and inadequate, is doomed[,] *Urania* did not really provide a clear description of this new genderless ideal.¹¹³² Instead, the answer was provided in Clyde's book, *Eve's Sour Apples*.

***Eve's Sour Apples* (1934)**

Following *Beatrice the Sixteenth*, Clyde moved away from fiction to write a collection of essays that elaborated on the values and arguments espoused by *Urania*. Published in 1934,

¹¹³⁰ Anne Fausto-Sterling, *Sexing the Body: Gender Politics and the Construction of Sexuality* (New York, 2000), 30-1.

¹¹³¹ Kessler and McKenna, *Gender*, 125.

¹¹³² Dorothy H. Cornish, 'Correspondence', *Urania*, 113 & 114, September – December 1935, 9.

Eve's Sour Apples included proposals for the development of a genderless society that were absent from *Urania*. The work was almost a companion piece to the journal, focusing as it did on how to restructure education and upbringing practices to allow for true universal equality. *Urania* unsurprisingly contained several advertisements and positive reviews of the work, with one stating '[i]t is an important work, and it is everyone's duty to give themselves the pleasure of reading it.'¹¹³³ Several of the essays were devoted to an explanation of the problems with the binary gender model, particularly for women in terms of education, marriage and careers, and reiterated material found in *Urania*. Coupled with these essays were those suggesting methods of irradicating gender, the key one being an overhaul of the current education system. Clyde argued:

If the boys and girls of the future are to be brought up in happy freedom from the distortions of sex, the first necessity is to find the teachers...The teaching requisite here...must be given...by people who are living their lives with the child, and who will show in every action of daily life that sex is a stupid myth: that the soul has no sex. This can only, so far as one can see, be done in monasteries.¹¹³⁴

Reminiscent of Buddhist religious communities, and the training of *onnagata* in kabuki companies, Clyde proposed that these monasteries would provide identical lessons and role models for all regardless of gender.¹¹³⁵ This would resolve the issues Clyde argued existed in co-education which involved 'throwing of sex-distinctions into sharp relief, by herding off children into cookery classes for the one division, carpentering for the other'.¹¹³⁶ The radical

¹¹³³ 'A Feminist Protagonist', *Urania*, Nos. 105 & 106, May – August 1934, 1.

¹¹³⁴ Irene Clyde, *Eve's Sour Apples* (London, 1934), 59-60.

¹¹³⁵ Frank Episale, 'Gender, Tradition, and Culture in Translation: Reading the "Onnagata" in English', *Asian Theatre Journal*, 29 (2012), 95.

¹¹³⁶ Clyde, *Eve's Sour Apples*, 71-2.

nature of this solution may explain why it was not featured prominently in *Urania*, and Clyde acknowledged the logistical problems of monastic living for all. As a result, Clyde suggested that a less than ideal alternative was to implement the monastic model in co-educational schools and universities, while at home parents would refrain from any reference to gender distinction.

The second important issue Clyde addressed was gendered clothing and appearance:

The whole structure of modern dress is so complicated, and each garment is so soaked with sex-implications, that it looks as if centuries at the very least must be allowed for this step. But when “men” and “women” have come to look alike, or much alike, the grand goal of equality will be very near.¹¹³⁷

Clyde stressed the acquired nature of the outward symbols of gender that could and should be adopted by anyone. Clyde wrote:

The abolition of marks of distinction in dress would be of slight service if there remained the dire distinction of the hair. There is no reason why man’s hair should not be long, or women’s short...As for the hard features of men...that is a matter of training and expression. The same may be said of postures of walking and personal carriage.¹¹³⁸

The fact that Clyde stressed the need to establish a uniform style of dress and appearance reveals the importance of visible indicators in ascribing gender and sex. Anne Fausto-Sterling

¹¹³⁷ Clyde, *Eve’s Sour Apples*, 79-80.

¹¹³⁸ *Ibid.*, 80-1.

in citing Suzanne Kessler's critique of her work – and agreeing with Kessler – reinforces this point:

...in the everyday world gender attributions are made without access to genital inspection...what has primacy in everyday life is the gender that is performed, regardless of the flesh's configuration under the clothes.¹¹³⁹

Similarly, in early- to mid-twentieth-century Britain, distinctions between male and female clothing and appearance were even more pronounced and thus a key factor in maintaining the two-gender model. While *Eve's Sour Apples* provided more tangible guidelines as to how to abolish gender distinctions than *Urania*, Clyde's awareness of the difficulties in implementing these ideas and the inclusion of more moderate measures reveal how deep-rooted the gender binary was in Britain. Therefore, attempts to convey a relatable alternative were hampered by the existing western language and construction of humanity.

Conclusion

Urania's radical ethos of abolishing gender made the journal a ground-breaking space for many forms of gender non-conformity to gain recognition and visibility. The journal represented its feminist motivations by seeking a single, genderless ideal that everyone could follow and rejecting any form of relational feminism and gender distinction through these accounts of gender non-conformity. In the process, these diverse cases repudiated the prevailing cultural and medical constructions of gender non-conformity as following a single, immutable narrative in which gender 'confusion' was swiftly 'resolved' either by a physician

¹¹³⁹ Suzanne Kessler, *Lessons from the intersexed* (New Brunswick, 1998), 90, cited in Fausto-Sterling, *Sexing the Body*, 110.

or the revelation of the cross-dresser's biological sex. *Urania* included cases where transition – medical or otherwise – did not always maintain the 'wrong embodiment' construction, but instead could remain fluid throughout an individual's life. This diversity is, I argue, precisely why a fluid, inclusive approach to queer history is the most comprehensive and synchronic. An insistence on rigidly categorising individuals according to certain modern concepts of gender and sexuality as 'either/or' belies the contemporary fluidity of meaning.

The prevalence of the gender binary in British society was apparent throughout the articles printed in *Urania*, where, due to the verbatim republishing of accounts from other press and periodicals, the individuals were swiftly gendered male *or* female. In order to transcend these limitations, *Urania* drew on medical discourse acknowledging the spectrum of sex and the possibility of transition, as well as articles from Japan and East Asian culture where the concept of a third sex, androgyny and gender fluidity were features of cultural and religious discourse. The editors also made some attempts at reinforcing the constructed nature of gender by putting the term 'woman' in inverted commas in the 1930s. The use of foreign cultures to represent more diverse gender possibilities had been employed by Clyde prior to *Urania's* inception in her novel *Beatrice the Sixteenth*, but even in this fictional account Clyde eventually resorted to female pronouns to render the characters understandable to a western audience. Clyde went further in constructing a practical plan for the genderless society advocated in *Urania* through her book *Eve's Sour Apples* where communal living and co-educational instruction would allow for equality and each individual to reach their full potential thereby creating a better society. There was some support for *Urania's* arguments among its readers as one letter from Principal James H. Cousins attests: 'I am always happy

to receive '*Urania*' as its point of view is my own.'¹¹⁴⁰ However, both *Urania* and Clyde's writings were confined by the pervasiveness of the gender binary in Britain. As well as using female characteristics to explain the genderless individuals in her novel, Clyde also acknowledged the difficulties in implementing her ideas in Britain and anticipated the resistance to her plans for monastic living through alternative methods. The dominance of reprinted articles over original writings also undermined *Urania's* challenge to the British gender model as the author's gendering of individuals, clothing and characteristics remained. Furthermore, accounts from Japan were only implicit suggestions of an alternative construction of gender and did not reflect the rigidly gendered reality of Japanese society in the 1930s. Viewed through Clyde's western gaze, the Japanese and East Asian articles were idealised and retained elements of exoticism and othering that distanced them from appearing applicable to a British audience. Whereas in Japan, Raichō took the western concept of 'bluestocking' and adapted it to reflect her cultural experiences, there was no attempt to translate the Japanese examples of gender non-conformity to a western setting. Consequently, while *Urania* demonstrated the mutability of gender through their discussions of gender non-conformity, the journal's struggles over expressing genderless identities reaffirmed the inescapability of the British gender binary despite its attempts to challenge it.

¹¹⁴⁰ 'Appreciation', *Urania*, 107 & 108, September – December 1934, 5.

Conclusion

My intention in writing this thesis was to provide a British-focused, multi-faceted, historical discussion of transgender identities. In doing so, I aimed to produce a new, distinctive account of gender non-conformity in Britain. Hitherto, historians have tended to either treat British examples as a subset of a broader European history, or to consider particular individuals or sources in isolation. Through an examination of British sexological and medical texts this thesis has established that Britain had a unique approach to the discourse on gender non-conformity. While European texts had some influence, the position of Havelock Ellis, the author of the main British sexological work on gender non-conformity as a medical theorist rather than practitioner, allowed for a less pathologised construction of gender non-conformity. The reciprocal influence of cultural and medical discussions on gender was pronounced in British literature, medical texts and newspaper accounts throughout the early to mid-twentieth century. This leads into the second key objective of my thesis: the importance of considering cultural as well as medical sources in order to move away from privileging the dominant, medicalised 'wrong body' narrative, and represent the diverse forms of gender non-conformity that are often ignored in favour of those which include surgical transition. Finally, building on the work of Jack Halberstam and more recently Kit Heyam, this thesis demonstrates the importance of a more fluid, inclusive approach to gender non-conforming identities in producing the most nuanced and valuable histories.

This more fluid approach to transgender identities resulted in a more diverse thesis in which individuals who temporarily presented as another gender and those who were gender-fluid were given equal consideration with those who underwent gender affirming surgery. By

broadening the parameters of the category of transgender identity, this thesis has also included a less uniform representation of class. While upper- and upper-middle-class individuals predominated in the sources – and exclusively among those accessing surgery – a few examples of working-class gender non-conformity were possible, such as Augustine Hull, a haulage hand who presented as female and subsequently received a prison sentence of eighteen months for attempting to marry their male lover. However, the cross section between gender non-conformity and class was not a key thread within this thesis and is a subject in need of further research which will be aided by this more expansive approach.

Through examining more varied representations of gender non-conformity, my research revealed a theoretical hierarchy in terms of different forms of gender non-conformity. Those assigned female at birth (AFAB) were represented more respectfully and as more understandable than their assigned male at birth (AMAB) counterparts. Similarly, those who conformed to a linear medical transition narrative had their gender identity validated as opposed to those who did not access surgery and were characterised as masquerading. On the other hand, non-binary identities were almost completely erased, and even the radical journal *Urania*, which sought the abolition of gender, struggled to articulate a genderless discourse. This hierarchical perception of the differing forms of gender non-conformity becomes visible only by broadening the scope of transgender texts beyond medical sources.

A number of the primary sources included in this thesis that have been discussed elsewhere have been re-examined here with regards to their relevance to British concepts of gender non-conformity. While Havelock Ellis' *Sexual Inversion* has received much historiographical

analysis, at the time of writing, *Eonism* has been relatively underrepresented aside from Ivan Crozier's discussion of the structure of the case studies it recorded. Here, I have focused on Ellis' contribution to the British sexological construction of gender non-conformity that was less pathological than its European counterparts and cemented the reciprocal influence between medical and cultural discourse on gender. Even within the more pathologised discourse of British medical practitioners such as L. R. Broster who maintained the dichotomy of treatment for intersex patients and those who were gender non-conforming, cultural gender stereotypes were constantly cited as evidence for a patient's gender. Similarly, this thesis highlights the unique and previously overlooked position of Michael Dillon as both patient and doctor through his autobiography and correspondence with his surgeon Sir Harold Gillies in which Dillon advised on his own pioneering surgical procedures. Dillon's role in Roberta Cowell's surgery also reveals the discrepancies in treatment for trans men and trans women in Britain where the law of Mayhem made transitioning from male to female illegal.

In terms of the cultural sources examined in this work, many have received minimal attention from historians particularly with regards to their relevance to transgender history. Previously viewed through a lesbian lens, my research emphasises the importance of Vita Sackville-West in demonstrating the complex relationship between sexuality and gender as well as the validity of temporary gender non-conforming experiences. I argue that Sackville-West defies clear categorisation as was the case for many individuals and this complexity should be upheld not erased. Sackville-West's descriptions of herself as a 'dual personality', as the male Julian in *Challenge* and her relationship with Violet Trefusis, and as a 'lesbian' by

Virginia Woolf reveal how gender non-conformity was articulated in Britain prior to modern terminology. Individuals resisted and embraced medical classifications and developed their own diverse language to describe their identities. These manifold forms of gender non-conformity are evident in the articles contained in *Urania* which has predominantly been considered for its contribution to feminist history, aside from Alison Oram's holistic examination of the journal and its impact. This thesis has restored *Urania* alongside the writings of the journal's editor Irene Clyde, as important examples of attempts to challenge the binary gender model and express genderless identities. Finally, in my research on early-twentieth-century fictional representations of gender non-conformity, I have provided the first discussion of the novel *2835 Mayfair* (1907) by Frank Richardson and argue that its account of a partly fantastical transition resonated strongly with the gender non-conforming individuals interviewed by Ellis. The lack of intention on the writer's part of representing gender non-conformity further emphasises the pervasive reciprocal influence of medical and cultural constructions of gender. My research demonstrates how this populist detective novel in many ways surpasses the more frequently studied *Orlando* and *The Well of Loneliness* in its depiction of gender non-conformity, thereby making an important contribution to transgender history.

This thesis is intended as a starting point for research into Britain's history of gender non-conformity, moving beyond the preoccupation with 'reclaiming' and categorising individuals as 'either/or' and instead using an inclusive, expansive approach when discussing transgender history. The time period chosen was intentional as representative of the varying forms of discourse – medical and cultural – as well as the diverse forms of gender non-

conformity under discussion. Further research using this fluid approach has begun through Heyam's research into global transgender identities as well as Halberstam's continued work on genderqueer histories. One important area for further research that has not yet been undertaken is the representation of early British examples of black, Asian and ethnic minorities within transgender identities. Through my own research, I was able to find only one example within the time period, that of Paul Downing, an African American working as a labourer in Kent, who was arrested and institutionalised in the City of London Asylum in 1905 while looking for their wife. While works on the history of black transgender individuals in America continue to be produced, it is to be hoped that a similar body of research will begin on Britain.

This thesis has been intentionally disruptive from its genesis. It disrupts conventions over time period selection, the strict segregation of histories of gender and those of sexuality, the privileging of medical constructions of transgender and it rejects rigid criteria for determining who can and cannot be considered trans. The complexities and contradictions within gender identity are not a new development even in western society, nor should they be simplified to fit a particular narrative. My research serves as a small representation of the legacy of diverse, disruptive gender identities and that there is not and never has been one way to be trans.

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