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VOICE, CHOICE, AND (MATERIAL) AGENCY: THE SEXUALIZED FEMININE BODY IN YOUNG ADULT LITERATURE

THARINI VISWANATH

214 Pages

My study unites two disparate strands of feminist theory: the linguistic, which emphasizes the relationship between language and power, and the material, which argues that the human body has its own agency. I raise three main points. First, I contend that the sexualized feminine body is the site of neither the linguistic nor the material independent of one another, but *both* the linguistic *and* the material existing in a state of fluidity and interdependency, which combine to grant the young female character agency. Second, I contend that feminist novels should not only have strong female characters, but that they should also portray sustainable female friendships. Keeping in mind the trope of heteronormative female relationships in contemporary young adult literature, I argue that companionship and female friendships are sustainable only when female protagonists have access to both language and the material, as a person needs both for successful social integration. My third and final point is to conclude that, contrary to the arguments of scholars like Lissa Paul and Roberta Seelinger Trites, silencing or the loss of voice does *not* result in a loss of agency; my overarching goal is for our field to better understand this interdependent (if dichotomous) relationship between voice and materiality. Accordingly, the chapters in my dissertation will closely examine the varied aspects of the sexualized feminine body as they appear in contemporary young adult literature and film, with regard to the sexually active adolescent body, the maternal body, the cyborg body, and the transgender body. The final chapter of my dissertation focuses on the practical implications of the confluence of the

discursive and material based on my experiences teaching feminist theory and young adult literature in the General Education classroom.

KEYWORDS: embodiment, female friendships, language, material feminisms, young adult literature

VOICE, CHOICE, AND (MATERIAL) AGENCY: THE SEXUALIZED FEMININE BODY IN YOUNG ADULT LITERATURE

THARINI VISWANATH

A Dissertation Submitted in Partial
Fulfilment of the Requirements
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VOICE, CHOICE, AND (MATERIAL) AGENCY: THE SEXUALIZED FEMININE BODY IN YOUNG ADULT LITERATURE

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INTRODUCTION

I grew up in the 1990s in India, a country where powerful goddesses make up a significant part of the Hindu pantheon, and gender bending is a regular feature of traditional Indian mythology. For example, Goddess Shakti is incarnated as the formidable Durga to defeat Mahisha, an *asura* or demon; in the epic, *The Mahabharata*, the warrior prince, Arjuna, transforms into a eunuch (as a result of a curse and as part of his disguise) for one of the thirteen years of his exile which helps him elude capture by the enemy. Yet another well-known tale is that of Lord Vishnu who transforms into Mohini, a beautiful woman, and tricks a group of *asuras* so that they do not drink the nectar of immortality. Such stories emphasize on the lack of binaries and boundaries in Hindu mythology. Having listened to and read such stories as a child, I thought it ironic that women's and LGBTQ+ rights were not given due importance by traditional Indian society. In retrospect, it is evident that India's binaristic ways of understanding gender and sexuality are largely linked to that of the Western world as an indirect consequence of colonization and globalization. Stories like the ones mentioned above, therefore, became lessons in dexterity of thought and word play and have done little to promote female empowerment, queer sexualities, and/or ambiguous gender identities.

Some of the other literature I read as a child (mostly mysteries and adventure stories) might have had strong female characters, but they didn't actively promote a feminist agenda. In fact, my first conscious introduction to feminism in literature happened during my undergraduate studies when I soon became adept at actively looking for and choosing to read books that not only featured women, but also narrated the story from a woman's point of view. I enjoyed reading about Jane in *Jane Eyre*, Maggie in *The Mill on the Floss*, and Elizabeth in *Pride and Prejudice* (although I admit I didn't understand for a while why Jane Eyre was *not* that feminist and was also rather contemptuous of poor Mrs. Bennet). Inspired by conversations with my friends, I also learned to read between the lines and to identify both

complexities and varying levels of oppression in narratives like Mahashweta Devi's "Draupadi" and *Mother of 1084*, and Alice Walker's *In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens*. Simply put, class discussions in the courses I took highlighted the importance of women – and subsequently, of female characters – not only being represented but also having a voice, which would, in turn, give them agency. To successfully overcome patriarchy, I understood, women need to be able to stand up for themselves, voice their opinions and their grievances, and speak up for what they believe in. As an undergraduate, this made sense to me, given my then rudimentary understanding of feminism. "Afterall," I remember thinking, "no one wants to be treated like a doormat."

Only much later did I think to ask a more pertinent question: what about women who *don't* have a voice? During the course of my class discussions, I had not accounted for women who *cannot* speak up for various reasons, some of which include lack of access to language and/or education because they are from another country or region, being differently-abled, or even because they haven't been given the same opportunities as their male, middle class, or economically more affluent counterparts. Would they have no power or less agency just because they could not articulate their thoughts such that they could be understood by the majority in the societies in which they live? I thought back to the scores of women I grew up around: uneducated women who were the sole bread winners in their families; women who worked daily wage jobs with quiet grit so that their children could avail of opportunities they themselves did not have access to. Arguably, such women literally could not (and still cannot) afford to philosophize about their positions in patriarchal society. Instead, they need to work for their survival. Nonetheless, *not* accounting for the agency generated by these women's bodies would be unjust, because our bodies are, in one way or another, a response to the culture that we live in.

My ideas – about feminism and the importance of having a voice in society – began to cohere while I was doing my coursework in children's and young adult literature at Illinois State University. Three graduate level courses, in particular, made a significant impact on my understanding of feminist theories and subsequently, on my dissertation. The first, a course on twenty-first century feminisms which I took during my first semester explored the interactions of culture, history, technology, biology, and the environment. I thus understood the interactions of the social and the biological, and the crucial role corporeality plays with regard to identity and identity politics. The second course – taken in my second year – functioned as an introduction to psychoanalytical theories in children's literature, specifically Lacan. The discussions in this course raised some significant questions about the importance of language with regard to how one acquires subject position(s) in mainstream society. I was particularly intrigued by the relationship between language and voice, especially in literature featuring girls and young women in children's and young adult literature. Finally, a course on narrative voice and social justice – which I took during my last semester of coursework – highlighted the importance of voice in *humanizing* characters, which in turn helped us – as readers – empathize with them. By the end of my second year, I was increasingly convinced that female characters in young adult texts have agency not because of their access to the discursive *or* the material independent of one another, but because the linguistic and the material are able to coexist in the feminine body in a state of fluidity and interdependency. Together, the multifaceted class discussions and academic readings in these three courses helped me navigate my questions regarding the importance of the body and the lack of voice with regard to agency.

Emerging from these three classes, my dissertation, "Voice, Choice, and (Material) Agency: The Sexualized Feminine Body in Young Adult Literature," addresses three main points. First, I argue that the sexualized feminine body is a site of intersection between

language and the material. Most adolescent bodies change and grow into sexualized beings, and this growth is reflected in young adult literature. While growth and the physical changes that occur during puberty are physical, the ability (or inability) to articulate sexual/romantic feelings and bodily urges relies on language. Arguably, the ability to straddle the linguistic and the material gives young female characters some form of agency over their literary counterparts who do not evoke a sense of the material. Second, I contend that feminist novels should not only have strong female characters, but should also have sustainable female friendships. Several books with strong female characters have been critiqued because although female protagonists have access to voice, choice, and agency, those factors almost always come at the expense of other female characters. For instance, in "The Sow in the House," Daniel Greenstone uses Ian Falconer's *Olivia* series to show that Olivia is free to do whatever she wants (and subsequently, make a mess) *because* her mother is there to look after her (and literally pick up the pieces). Although Olivia is a child character, this argument extends to young adult protagonists as well. In "The Incompatibility of Female Friendships and Rebellion," Ann M. M. Childs has shown that female protagonists in young adult dystopias more often than not sacrifice their female best friends for romantic heterosexual relationships. Keeping in mind the trope of heteronormative female relationships in contemporary young adult novels, I argue that companionship and female friendships are sustainable only when female protagonists have access to both language and the material, as a person needs both for successful social integration.

My third and final point is to question whether silencing or the loss of voice results in loss of agency. Roberta Seelinger Trites has argued that "those who are denied language are also denied their full potential has humans; they are denied community. Language and its articulation provides [female characters] with the strength they need to participate as full members of their communities so that in the future their silences will be self-affirming, not

self-limiting" (*Waking* 62). This assumption—that one needs access to language to belong—does not take into consideration the agency generated by the material body. In their "Introduction" to *Material Feminisms*, Stacy Alaimo and Susan Hekman note that the body itself is an "active, sometimes recalcitrant, force," and that moving away from materiality and privileging the linguistic has had serious consequences for feminist theory and practice: "bracketing or negating materiality can actually inhibit the development of a robust understanding of discursive production itself, since various aspects of materiality contribute to the development and transformation of discourses" (4). It would seem, then, that agency is generated through both voice and materiality, and I intend to examine this interdependent (if dichotomous) relationship between the two.

In young adult literature, the adolescent protagonist's sexualized body usually empowers her as it marks her foray into the adult world; sexuality (or asexuality) is contingent on the material body. Here, I acknowledge that the sexualized female body is *not* the only site of confluence between the linguistic and the material; one can see this confluence in abject bodies, biracial bodies, bodies of transgendered and/or gay men. Given the scope of this project, however, I use the sexualized feminine body as a case study, although similar theories can be applied to other discursive-material bodies as well. The literature review and a chapter breakdown in the following chapter help me situate my study within the fields of feminist studies and children's literature.

CHAPTER I: THE DISCURSIVE MATERIAL OF THE SEXUALIZED FEMININE BODY IN YOUNG ADULT LITERATURE

Contextualizing My Argument: A Brief Review of the Literature

Discussions of gender and sexuality in young adult literature are widespread, and most studies that exist participate either in the discursively-driven "linguistic turn" or corporeal-based "material turn." Herein, the former focuses on the role of language, values, and ideals in the formation of one's social identity, whereas the latter builds on the linguistic turn to examine, among other things, human embodiment. Given that most literary studies are about characters – read: ink and paper people made up of words and images – most studies focus on how language shapes both the larger cultural narrative surrounding these issues or their specific portrayal in a given text.

Feminists have long focused on the role of language to demonstrate how discourse plays a role in the social construction of women. Many feminist analyses have been informed by Lacan's theory of subject formation, which argues that for an individual to gain a subject position, he must become part of the Symbolic order; in other words, "he must both find and create himself, and the only way that is possible is through language" (Coats, *Looking* 4). Language exists as part of a specific culture: therefore, we are implicated in language at multiple levels. It is important to note that for Lacan, the Symbolic, or the Law of the Father, is unequivocally patriarchal, a concept that has been critiqued by several feminist scholars including Luce Irigaray and Hélène Cixous. Irigaray and Cixous argue for the importance of the woman's body with regard to writing. For Irigaray, "alphabetical writing is linked historically to the civil and religious codification of patriarchal powers. Not to contribute to making language and its writings sexed is to perpetuate the pseudo-neutrality of those laws and traditions that privilege masculine genealogies and their codes of logic" ("Writing" 53). In her more recent work, *In the Beginning, She Was*, Irigaray continues her arguments from

previous works and focuses on the ways in which philosophical discourse produces masculine subjects:

> He [read: Man] claims to teach the true when he begins his instruction with: I say. He does not begin his discourse with: she said, even though it is she, Goddess or nature, who inspired him. In fact, he repeats or he transposes the meaning that she, or they, transmit(s). But he appropriates it and presents himself as the master of the message received in secret from her (35).

Irigaray considers the divine to be feminine, and it is she – "nature, woman, Goddess – who inspires a sage with the truth" (2). Here, Irigaray continues to reinforce binaries established in her previous work – male/female, mortal/divine, nature/discourse – thereby privileging (and perhaps even reinstating) cisnormative and heteronormative assumptions about masculine and feminine subjectivities and reiterating woman's (social) inability to access discourse. Along similar lines, Cixous writes:

> Women must write through their bodies, they must invent the impregnable language that will wreck partitions, classes, and rhetorics, regulations and codes, they must submerge, cut through, get beyond the ultimate reserve-discourse, including the one that laughs the very idea of pronouncing the word "silence," the one that, aiming for the impossible, stops short before the word "impossible" and writes it as "the end." (886)

This "impregnable language" would ideally exist outside of, and consequently challenge, the Symbolic order. Feminist critiques of Lacanian thinking condemn the idea of "lack" because it implies that only those with a phallus can be immersed in the Symbolic.

Non-Lacanian feminist scholars, too, emphasize the relationship between language and power, and the importance of having a literal voice. Audre Lorde maintains that "the master's tools will never dismantle the master's house," with regard to women who occupy

positions of intersectionality, including women of color, lesbians, poor, and old women (112). She understands much theory and most academics to be patriarchal when they allow only *some* (read: token) women to have the tools to tackle the patriarchal order even while they discredit others.

This critique of privileging language and voice as empowerment, and, consequently, silence as a method of oppression has been adopted by literary (and children's literature) scholars – such as Susan Gilbert and Sandra Gubar – over the last several decades.[1] In *The Madwoman in the Attic*, Susan Gilbert and Sandra Gubar have argued that the social phenomenon of silencing extends to literature, in which "the male child's progress toward adulthood is a growth toward both self-assertion and self-articulation," whereas "the girl child must learn the arts of silence, either as herself as a silent image invented and defined by the magic looking glass of the male-authored text, or as a silent dancer of her own woes, a dancer who enacts rather than articulates" (43).With regard to children's literature, Lissa Paul in "Enigma Variations: What Feminist Theory Knows About Children's Literature" was among the first to propose that we explore a feminist perspective through children's literature; in an oft quoted passage, she points out that:

> Children, like women, are lumped together as helpless and dependent; creatures to be kept away from the scene of action, and who otherwise ought not to be seen or heard. But women make up more than half the population of the world – and all of us were once children. It is almost inconceivable that women and children have been invisible and voiceless for so long. (187)

---

[1] Of course, scholars (such as Patricia Laurence) have argued that silence can be read as something empowering, rather than as a mark of powerlessness. This idea will be explored in greater detail in Chapter 3.

Roberta Seelinger Trites in *Waking Sleeping Beauty: Feminist Voices in Children's Fiction* uses Paul's argument to explain that "Closely related to the feminist protagonist's agency is the issue of her voice, for voice often serves as a metaphor for female agency" (6). Citing "prefeminist" novels such as *The Little House in the Big Woods*, *Anne of Green Gables*, *Little Women*, and *What Katy Did*, Trites points out that female protagonists lose their articulateness as they learn to "conform to societal expectations," which in turn results in their loss of agency (*Waking* 6-7). A feminist character, on the contrary, recognizes her agency primarily *through* her voice. Indeed, the idea that language and voice are essential for one to find a sense of community is prevalent throughout the early feminist criticism of children's literature.

While many feminist scholars privilege the discursive, others such as Stacy Alaimo and Susan Hekman have argued that the materiality of the human body has its own agency. The body is political in that every move one makes is not *just* personal, but is, in one way or another, a response to the culture one lives in. Susan Bordo and Elizabeth Grosz, were among the earliest feminist theorists to acknowledge the importance of the material, and to critique the Cartesian idea that the mind is somehow separate from and superior to the body. In *Unbearable Weight: Feminism, Western Culture, and the Body*, Bordo uses Foucault's concept of biopolitics to argue that "the body itself is a politically inscribed entity – its physiology and morphology shaped by histories and practices of containment and control – from foot binding and correcting to rape and battering to compulsive heterosexuality" (21-22). In a similar vein, Grosz argues in *Volatile Bodies: Towards a Corporeal Feminism* that the female body is abject in that it is never constant: menstrual blood, breast milk, and other bodily secretions, especially, "flow," "seep," and "infiltrate"; "their control is a matter of vigilance, never guaranteed…. they betray a certain irreducible materiality; they assert the priority of the body over subjectivity; they demonstrate the limits of subjectivity in the body,

the irreducible specificity of particular bodies" (194). The *materiality* of the body has the ability to *not conform to* the Symbolic by its very being, which renders it abject. Nonetheless, there is agency in this abjection, for the abject inspires horrors of being submerged and absorbed "into something which has no boundaries of its own" (Grosz *Volatile*, 194).

More recently, in *The Incorporeal: Ontology, Ethics, and the Limits of Materialism*, Grosz presents an almost historical account of what she calls "the incorporeal": "a tradition that eschews dualism – any concept of the mind or ideality and body or materiality as separate substances – in order to develop a nonreductive monism or a paradoxical dualist monism," although the mind and body have been "construed as contradictory or at least contrary substances or relations, two different types of 'thing,' one mental (or psychological) the other material" (249). Grosz focuses primarily on the works of Western philosophers including Deluze and Nietzsche, arguing that "the incorporeal is the condition under which language becomes more than material, more than breath and trace, the condition under which it connects the world of events to the lie of reflection, thought" (253). Although she advocates against monism, Grosz's arguments focus on the limits of materiality with regard to ontology and ethics rather than on the gendered body.

Cyborg bodies, too, are implicated in the material. Donna Haraway, in "A Cyborg Manifesto: Science, Technology and Socialist-Feminism in the Late Twentieth Century," has argued that the cyborg does not aspire for "organic wholeness through a final appropriation of all the powers of the parts into a higher unity," and therefore the cyborg escapes traditional classifications of woman as child-bearer, of heterosexual marriage, nuclear family, of having fallen from the Garden of Eden, and so forth (292). In Haraway's thinking, "the cyborg is a creature in a post-gender world; it has no truck with bi-sexuality, pre-Oedipal symbiosis, unalienated labor, or other seductions to organic wholeness through a final appropriation of

all the powers of the parts into a higher unity. In a sense, the cyborg has no origin story in the Western sense" (9). Elaine Graham, too, argues that

> by exposing the plasticity of "human nature," cyborgs challenge the givenness of categories of racial diversity and gender difference by which humanity has so frequently been stratified. Cyborgs thus transcend the processes of dualism upon which western modernity, patriarchy, and colonialism has been founded, speaking not of the hierarchy of humanity, technology, and nature, but one which realizes the interdependence and permeability of all these categories. (309)

Both Haraway and Graham emphasize that for cyborgs, there is no clear demarcation of what is natural and what is constructed. Consequently, the cyborg body has agency in its very ontology. Ultimately, each of the theorists discussed above relies almost entirely on either the discursive or the material independent of one another to give the feminine subject agency in a predominantly patriarchal society.

I would argue, however, that the liminal positionality of feminine sexuality creates a unique and fluid space in which both the discursive and the material are mutually implicated: while it is almost impossible to ignore the materiality of the feminine body, one must also be able to integrate herself in language to become part of the Symbolic. Unlike the male body that has traditionally been associated with the mind and rationality (and therefore appears to exude control), women have been negatively associated with the body. To quote Grosz, "Female sexuality and women's powers of reproduction are the defining (cultural) characteristics of women, and, at the same time, these functions render women vulnerable, in need of protection or special treatment, as variously prescribed by patriarchy" (*Volatile Bodies*, 13-14). It is imperative for the feminine body, therefore, to be valued for its materiality, as much as it is to have a voice. Moreover, the sexualized feminine body brings to mind the spatial image of borderlands. As with the geographical areas that are not

completely one country or another *yet implicitly both*, the same can be said of the sexualized feminine body: it is the site of neither the linguistic nor the material independent of one another, but *both* the linguistic *and* the material that exist in a state of fluidity and interdependency. Arguably, the liminality of the borderland that is the feminine sexual body provides the space in which to interrogate the influence of the material on the linguistic and vice versa.

However, although many feminist literary scholars – especially in the field of adolescent literature – deal with the material in one way or another, they do not consciously acknowledge themselves as participating in the material turn. Here, Susan Hekman's observation of twenty-first century feminisms in "Constructing the Ballast" can be applied to a significant amount of scholarship about feminist representations in adolescent and young adult literature: "Instead of deconstructing the discourse/reality dichotomy, [and] instead of constructing a new paradigm for feminism that integrates the discursive and the material, feminism has instead turned to the discursive pole of the discourse/reality dichotomy" (86). Indeed, several feminist scholars, some of whom helped lay the foundation for feminist theories in children's and young adult literature, focus largely on the importance of language over the material. For example, Lissa Paul uses the term "linguistic repression" to talk about the kind of writing women and children typically do; these kinds of writing "are often regarded as insignificant, minor, in the face of the epic, grand-scale writings of Dostoyevsky, Dickens or Hemingway…" (189). In *The Feminine Subject in Children's Literature*, Christine Wilkie-Stibbs applies French feminist theorists – primarily Cixous, Iragaray and Kristeva – to children's literature to read the idea of a *feminine* literary subject. The *feminine*, here, functions as "a consciously corporeal use of language that manifests itself in the physical, psychical, material and textual landscapes" (xi). Wilkie-Stibbs justifies her use of feminist French theorists because "Cixous's idea of '*l' écriture féminine*,' Irigaray's idea of

'*le parler femme*,' Kristeva's interest in the linguistic relations between what she has called the 'Semiotic Chora,' and the 'Symbolic' of the Lacanian definition…all share an idea of the possibility of a language that is spoken characteristically in *the feminine*" " (1, emphasis in original). *The Feminine Subject*, therefore, highlights the significance of language in subject formation. Kimberley Reynolds, too, depicts sex and sexuality in discursive terms in *Radical Children's Literature*. In the chapter, "Baby, You're the Best: Sex and Sexuality in Contemporary Juvenile Fiction," she chooses works that "are concerned both with mapping changes in the sexual content and tenor of writing for the young and with identifying some aesthetically effective solutions to the problems of writing about sex" (118). In *Learning Curves: Body Image and Female Sexuality in Young Adult Literature*, Beth Younger focuses on issues of weight, beauty, body image, pregnancy, homosexuality, and heterosexual romance in young adult literature, all of which relate back to the body. However, Younger explicitly states that the purpose of this book is to "reveal a continuum of complex and complicated depictions of how our culture pictures teenagers and their sexualities" (xvi). Kerry Mallan acknowledges the performativity of gendered bodies in *Gender Dilemmas in Children's Fiction*, but focuses on the representation of subject matter in the text via language. Her aim is to "explore ways in which a selection of contemporary children's texts re-inscribe and resignify gendered bodies within and beyond the discursive limits imposed by their location within culture and through the narrative limits of their creation" (Mallan *Gender*, 25). Sara K. Day's *Reading Like A Girl: Narrative Intimacy in Contemporary American Young Adult Literature* analyzes young, female characters in popular literature, media and films using narrative theory to better understand narrative intimacy. She, too, focuses on what is communicated by the female character to her readers *through language*, and observes that "As young women navigate their relationships, they internalize not only the value of disclosure in establishing intimacy but also the pressure to learn and use discretion in

their dealings with others. Indeed, adolescent womanhood is marked by a growing understanding of what should *not* be expressed or shared" (Day *Reading*, 10). Lydia Kokkola's *Fictions of Adolescent Carnality: Sexy Sinners and Delinquent Deviants* deals with the material "angst-ridden teenagers" in a corpus of about 200 novels and short stories, but as she notes in her introduction, her aim is not to provide an in depth analysis, but "to paint an overview of this topic using the broad strokes of generalization" (17). Therefore, although Kokkola's study deals with the material transformations of the sexually active adolescent body, the focus is on *how* these bodies are depicted in literature (rather than the bodies themselves)—which is, of course, discursively. [2] Moreover, several of the examples Kokkola uses in *Fictions of Adolescent Carnality* depict sex and sexuality to be "problems" that need fixing, which thus privileges conscious thought and the articulation of those thoughts (read: the linguistic) over the body.

Queer theory, too, is concerned with bodies. In "Orientations," Sara Ahmed argues that phenomenology

> shows how objects and others have already left their impressions on the skin surface…. We perceive the object as an object, as something that has integrity and is

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[2] While it is true that literature "can only *represent* the material body," as Trites notes in *Twenty-First-Century Feminisms in Children's and Adolescent Literature*, "Material Feminism…encourages literary critics to keep discourse in perspective as one among many of the factors that empowers and disempowers people; the environment, technology, animals, embodied cognition, microbes that cause illness, and carbon dioxide levels are among the myriad of forces that also shape the human experience" (XVIII emphasis in original, XXI-XXII). Therefore, representation(s) of the fictional characters must include embodied materiality (that is, the bodies themselves) as well as discursive/linguistic constructs.

> in space, only by haunting that very space, by coinhabiting space, such that the boundary between the coinhabitants of space does not hold. The skin connects as well as contains. The nonopposition between the bodies that move around objects and objects around which bodies move show us how orientations involve at least a two-way approach, or the "more than one" of an encounter. (551)

Ahmed goes on to argue that sexual orientation is not something that we "have." Rather, to be straight means "to turn toward the objects given to us by heterosexual culture" and to be queer is to deviate from straight culture (554). This act of turning bodies towards – or away from – other bodies implicates the queer subject in the material. Although they are discursive constructions, queer characters emerge from physical bodies, and the embodied realities of those bodies. While it is nigh impossible to talk about the linguistic without dealing with the material (as we are, for the most part, composed of bodies), existing discussions on gender bending, cross-dressing, and other such material transformations in scholarship dealing with children's and young adult literature are largely restricted to historical analyses, surveys, or theories of performance that do not directly deal with the material. In "Transchildren and the Discipline of Children's Literature," for instance, Jody Norton critiques the existence and maintenance of "the false binary male ('adult,' dominant)/non-male ('child,' subordinate)" (416). Norton argues that "The test of a successful children's text would then become, not its adherence, beneath the whimsy and invention, to a foundling set of realist or idealist assumptions, but its capacity to reflect its characters' phenomenological and psycho-social reality with an intensity that could facilitate the engagement of the child reader's or child auditor's own perceptions, fantasies, and desires" (420). Therefore, while Norton does not deny the "materiality and the psychostructural force of desire," Norton advocates tackling the "reproductive cycle of transphobia through strategies of transreading" (421), once more highlighting the role of the linguistic over the material. Michael Cart and Christine A. Jenkins

offer a comprehensive history of LGBTQ novels for young adults in *The Heart Has Its Reasons: Young Adult Literature With Gay/Lesbian/Queer Content 1969-2004*. Although they make visible nearly 200 novels, Cart and Jenkins "do not engage the concept of queer childhood beyond recovering these novels" (Talbot 390). Rather, the text provides a historical survey and functions as a resource aimed at teachers and librarians rather than at literary scholars. As evidenced above, focusing on historical or contemporary representations (consciously or otherwise) prioritizes the linguistic over the material.

Some studies deal with queer theory by interrogating the theorizing and intersections of queerness and childhood. In *Curiouser: On the Queerness of Children*, Steven Bruhm and Natasha Hurley point out that despite their lack of sexual intention, children are "officially and tacitly assumed to be heterosexual" (ix). Although the primary aim of the essays in this collection is to better understand childhood, the book does not focus exclusively on children's literature. Instead, the essays highlight real and fictional children across a range of cultural forms including life writing, film, music, religion, and geographical and cultural spaces. Here, Bruhm and Hurley privilege concepts such as childhood and heteronormativity to understand how the ideology of cultural texts influences real readers, rather than focus on the materiality of the (real and/or fictional) child's body.

Tison Pugh echoes Bruhm and Hurley's argument about childhood and innocence in *Innocence, Heterosexuality and the Queerness of Children's Literature*, when he contends that children – through the literature they read – are compelled to remain innocent, while learning how to become/grow into heterosexual adults: "This tension between innocence and sexuality renders much of children's literature queer" (1). He goes on to assert that "The fundamental tension between innocence (the ostensibly normative foundation of children's sexual identity) and heterosexuality (the ostensibly normative foundation of adult's sexual identity) renders both perverse within children's literature: children cannot remain innocent

of sexuality while learning about normative sexuality, and heterosexuality cannot stand as normative if innocence is the defining cultural phantasy of children's identity. And thus heterosexuality itself is rendered queer" (8). While Pugh *does* focus on complex gender identities and queers relationships in his readings of series fiction including *Harry Potter*, *A Series of Unfortunate Events*, and *His Dark Materials*, his focus is primarily on the linguistic and/or performative. In a discussion of Violet and Klaus Baudelaires' genders in *A Series of Unfortunate Events*, for instance, Pugh claims that the siblings are hermaphroditic in the most "liberal" sense of the term because both characters remain unaffected by their society's gender rules and engage in gender play. Pugh juxtaposes the siblings' heroic performance of gender play with the evil characters, most notably, Olaf's hermaphroditic henchmen. Herein, Pugh explains that "when Klaus describes the hermaphrodite as 'the scariest' of Olaf's cohorts' (WW 136) and when Snicket refers to the character as a 'despicable creature' (WW 143), moral judgements of the character's actions merge with discomfort about the character's body of indeterminate sex" (104). According to Pugh, Daniel Handler uses hermaphroditism to showcase how "gender play is valorized for protagonists, yet denigrated for antagonists," thereby neutralizing the ethics of gender play (104). This reading is potentially problematic as it does little to account for the protagonists' bodies (although it accounts for the antagonists'), and is therefore possibly *why* gender play in the protagonists is represented in a positive light. Once more, the focus (of Pugh's argument) is brought *back* to the discursive as the text highlights the politics of the adult author writing for a young audience.

Scholars focusing on queer theories and LGBTQ texts also tend to gloss over the material aspects of the body by shifting their focus to the representations of queer bodies. For example, Michelle Ann Abate and Kenneth Kidd's *Over the Rainbow* consists of a compilation of essays that discuss queerness in children's and young adult literature. The

book has three sections: the first revisits historical and classical works of children's literature from a queer perspective; the second focuses on LGBTQ fictions written after 1969 that are meant to "educate" readers about lesbian and gay families; and the third deals with the queerness of readers, writers, and fictional characters in children's and young adult literature. The focus in most of the essays is on the representation and performance of queerness, rather than on the body itself. For instance, Vanessa Wayne Lee's "'Unshelter Me': The Emerging Fictional Adolescent Lesbian" examines "how adolescent lesbian sexuality is articulated by adults for adolescents in popular literature and culture" by proposing "a critical account of how authors have textually constructed specifically adolescent lesbian sexual identities" (165). Other scholarship uses theories of performance – as expounded by Judith Butler – which tends to privilege the discursive over the material, although, performance is linked to the body (after all, one cannot perform effectively without a body); as Caroline New points out in "Feminism, Critical Realism and the Linguistic Turn," although Butler "admits the materiality of the body," in *Bodies that Matter*, "it remains formless, its only causal powers emanating from its discursive construction" (67). While Butler is certainly not the *only* model of performance theory, several feminist literary scholars use it as a springboard and foundation for their arguments. Victoria Flanagan's *Into the Closet*, for example, which deals with depictions of cross-dressing in children's literature, relies heavily on Judith Butler's theories of performativity, "to provide a more comprehensive survey of cross dressing that makes a distinction between female-to-male, male-to-female, and transgendered cross-dressing and which also attempts to theorize the distinctive models of gender construction produced by each of these cross-dressing paradigms" (12). Furthermore, in "Reframing Masculinity: Female-to-Male Cross Dressing," Flanagan views crossdressing as a "form of questioning against socially ingrained and constructed notions of masculinity and femininity" (79-80). Clothing and the body that covers it are material entities; however, Flanagan's main

focus is on *socio-cultural constructions* of masculinity and femininity, which enables her to showcase how crossdressing challenges *discursive* gender rules in (Western) society. As a result, Flanagan does not explain how crossdressing characters are affected by their bodies, and I will address this gap in scholarship in greater detail in Chapter 5.

Of course, not all gender performance ignores the body. A good example is the article "Sissy Boy Mothering: Male Child Mother Figures in Middle-Grade Fantasy Literature" by Danielle Bienvenue Bray, which explains how performance studies theorists like Richard Schechner "explore the power of individual gestures and utterances as well as the cumulative power of a matrix of such acts in the construction of an identity that the subject performs for the world" (162). Here, Bray takes embodiment into consideration (as gestures and utterances depend largely on bodies) as she acknowledges that feminine acts of caring and (food) sharing performed by masculine bodies evoke responses like bullying because masculine bodies are expected to perform traditionally masculine actions. Unfortunately, however, Bray's work helps readers better understand atypical male (and not female) characters in children's and adolescent texts; more work needs to be done especially with regard to feminine bodies.

Scholarship on dystopian narratives – which implicitly and sometimes, explicitly, deal with human bodies – also rarely discuss agency generated by the material. In their "Introduction" to *Female Rebellion in Young Adult Dystopian Fiction*, Sara K. Day, Miranda A. Green-Barteet, and Amy L. Montz point out that "young women in late twentieth- and early twenty-first-century dystopian fiction embody liminality, straddling the lines of childhood and adulthood, individuality and conformity," and that it is this liminality that helps them rebel against the systems they seek to overthrow (4). None of the essays in the collection, however, explicitly acknowledge the relevance of characters' bodies, although several of the essays either directly or indirectly deal with materiality. For instance, Montz

discusses the relationship between surveillance, female empowerment, and dresses without considering the material reality of the latter in "Rebels in Dresses"; in "The Three Faces of Tally Youngblood," Mary Jeanette Moran reads the *Uglies* series through the lens of care ethics, in which relationships are primarily about – and are formed among – bodies, although she does not directly discuss materiality. Finally, although the concept of the posthuman is entrenched in the human/cybernetic body, Victoria Flanagan's focus is mainly on the narrative representation of the posthuman consciousness and the posthuman subject in *Technology and Identity in Young Adult Fiction*. Flanagan's chapter on the female body, "Reworking the Female Subject," is perhaps the only one which deals significantly with materiality because in that chapter, she "examines the ways in which futuristic fantasy fiction explores the effects of technology on human subjectivity and society, with a particular focus on the female body and female subjectivity" (101). Although this chapter addresses the Cartesian mind-body split, it only takes into account the posthuman female body.

The scholarship in children's literature that *do* consciously examine the materiality of female bodies are Trites' *Twenty-First-Century Feminisms in Children's and Adolescent Literature* and select chapters in Roxanne Harde and Lydia Kokkola's collection, *The Embodied Child: Readings in Literature and Culture*. In *Twenty-First-Century Feminisms*, Trites aims "to interrogate the ways that material feminism can expand our understanding of materiality, maturation, and gender – especially girlhood – in preadolescent and adolescent narratives" (*Twenty-First*, xxiv). Kokkola recognizes that "the child's body becomes a carrier of cultural ideology within the cultural imagination" (16) in her introduction, "The Embodied Child"; select essays in the collection – by scholars including Roxanne Harde, Heather Braun, and Julie Pfeiffer and Darla Schumm – highlight the politics surrounding the female body in young adult literature. However, neither study is comprehensive, and both Kokkola and Trites acknowledge a lacuna regarding the study of materiality in children's literature.

My dissertation attempts to fill this gap in the literature by focusing on the linguistic and the material to augment ongoing discussions of gender and sexuality in adolescent and young adult literature by specifically examining the sexualized feminine body.

Establishing a Framework and Outlining the Scope of this Project

As I have explained in my introduction, feminine characters on the cusp of sexual awakening occupy a liminal, borderland space, and this unique position of straddling the discursive and material gives the adolescent character agency. Moreover, access to the discursive and the material enables the adolescent character to make friends and to establish a sustainable community on whom she can depend. Finally, the loss of voice does not mean that the character has no agency; rather, she can rely on her embodiment – however original or idiosyncratic it might be – to give herself power that she otherwise would never have had. The following chapters will closely examine the varied aspects of the sexualized feminine body as they appear in young adult literature and film. These include the sexually active adolescent body, the maternal body, the cyborg body, and the transgender body.

Chapter 2 focuses on the relationship between the adolescent body and language in two young adult novels that deal with girl-animal metamorphoses: Justine Larbalestier's *Liar* and Peter Dickinson's *Eva*. In *Liar*, the protagonist Micah claims she transforms into a werewolf when she menstruates; Dickinson's Eva, on the other hand, is a thirteen-year-old girl who gets transposed into the body of a chimpanzee to ensure her survival. Both novels highlight the unique corporeal transformations that occur during metamorphosis, and the impact it has on the characters' access to language and communication. In this chapter, I examine how the materiality of the characters' transforming bodies gives them agency when they are silenced on the level of the human, and more important, how the liminality of the metamorph's body influences their access to human language, and how this access enables

them to survive in their respective societies. Finally, I explore how each metamorphing character's unique embodiment and their access to language influences their involvement in their respective communities.

The focus of Chapter 3 is on mother-daughter relationships, and I contend that adolescent daughterhood itself is liminal, which affects daughters' relationships with their mothers. Using Disney-Pixar's *Brave* as a case study, I examine the adolescent protagonist's ability to act independently of social restraint with special regard to her mother. The protagonist, Merida, feels the need to silence her mother by turning her into a bear (which is at once masculine, sexual, monstrous, and abject). As a result, the mother is largely dependent on her daughter with regard to human communication and survival, although the body of the bear gives her superhuman strength. Ultimately, the film deals with the individual struggle of mother and daughter to speak each other's language, which results in the two female characters forging a deep bond with one another, and this sense of community is reinforced by rituals of feeding and eating that take place during the course of the film.

While the sexualized feminine body and the maternal body occupy liminal spaces that invoke the material and the linguistic, the cyborg body is even more liminal, for it is both masculine and feminine, organic and inorganic. Chapter four will focus on Cinder in Marissa Meyer's *The Lunar Chronicles*. Cinder's victory over her aunt and nemesis, Levana, can be achieved only with the right balance of language, materiality, and a sense of community. I argue that Cinder must also balance her desires with her embodied reality in order to reach equilibrium, thereby attaining a subject position in Luna's Symbolic order—which will, in turn, make her a good ruler. This balance is attainable only once Cinder *accepts* the materiality of her cyborg body and uses it to care for her friends. The final section of this chapter uses feminist ethics of care to examine Cinder's relationship with her crew. I argue that there are several chains and cycles of caring, and demonstrate how caring is an ongoing

process that helps the cared-for be the one-caring for someone else. Characters can care for their companions only when they are able navigate language *and* accept the agency generated by the materiality of their bodies.

Chapter five is, in many ways, a culmination of ideas and arguments articulated in previous chapters. In particular, I focus on Tobin/ Tamír's transitioning body in Lynn Flewelling's The Tamir Triad. Protagonist Tobin/ Tamír is born a girl, but is disguised as a boy (hence the name Tobin) using magic to ensure his/her survival. Tamír is required to seamlessly perform masculinity (as Tobin), so that s/he is not seen as a threat to the throne. Like most transgender characters, Tobin/Tamír largely "undermine[s] the very question of what it means to be a man or a woman, gay or straight" (Flanagan, *Into* 16). Moreover, being on the transgender spectrum implies metamorphosis on some level, as the transgender characters' clothing and performance cross over and move between socially constructed gender sex/gender boundaries. In this chapter, I examine *how* Tobin/Tamír is a product of the discursive and the material, and also how Tobin's construction of himself as a prince, and later, Tamír's construction of herself as Queen, are a result of language, performance, and embodiment.

I conclude my dissertation by considering the practical applications of feminist theories in the classroom. Chapter six considers the linguistic and the material from a pedagogical perspective, offering insights into teaching feminist theories in general education courses. In this chapter, I will draw on my experiences teaching my internship course, which was titled "Embodiment of Gender and Sexuality in Children's and Young Adult Literature." The primary focus of this chapter will be on empathy in the classroom. Since my embodiment is tied very closely with those of my students' and to the feminist theories that I teach, I contend that empathy – with regard to pedagogy and emphasis on classroom practices – would be one way of tackling some invisible pedagogies, and perhaps even make them

visible. The focus of this chapter includes the role of empathy with regard to engaged pedagogy, which in turn results in developing students' critical thinking skills, and the significance of students' and my respective embodiments while teaching a course on embodiment of gender and sexuality in children's and young adult literature.

Since my dissertation seeks to highlight the fluidity and interdependency of the linguistic and the material in sexualized feminine bodies in young adult literature, I have chosen to work with texts that portray feminine protagonists who are strong and competent; indeed, my aim is not to evaluate whether or not the primary texts are feminist. Rather, I hope to better understand the protagonist's (female) friendships (or lack thereof) generated by her access to voice, choice, and agency *and* her acceptance of the often unique materiality of her body because I contend that the presence of a feminist community is *as important as* a character's voice or embodiment in making a text inherently feminist. While there are some notably feminist characters in realistic young adult fiction who derive agency from a confluence of the discursive and material (including Willowdean Dickson in Julie Murphy's *Dumplin'*, Starr Carter in Angie Thomas' *The Hate U Give*, and Maya Aziz in Samira Ahmed's *Love, Hate and Other Filters*), I choose to focus primarily on speculative fiction in my dissertation because such fiction problematizes and *makes visible* the fluid borderland between the discursive and material. The human-animal metamorphosis, in chapters 2 and 3, for instance, highlight physical changes that parallel mental and emotional changes that shape the characters' respective identities. Similarly, the cyborg and transgender bodies in Chapters 4 and 5 allow readers to see how the characters' unique bodies and "scientific" or magical transformations determine who they are and who they will become. In each of the texts discussed in this dissertation, the presence of supernatural elements aids the characters' growth, as they are not restricted by the rules of realistic fiction. Instead, they give characters

the freedom to test their limits, which in turn allows us, as readers and scholars, more room for exploration and examination.

CHAPTER II: GIRL-ANIMAL METAMORPHOSES: VOICE, CHOICE, AND (MATERIAL) AGENCY OF THE TRANSFORMING FEMALE BODY IN YOUNG ADULT LITERATURE

The discourse of young adult literature dealing with sex and sexuality is directly linked to the materiality of the adolescent body. One underlying assumption is that if adolescents know how to read situations and signals and can vicariously gain knowledge about the "adult" realm of sex and sexuality, then fewer adolescents will feel the need to go out and experience it for themselves. Discourse in the form of literature actively tries to control and manipulate the materiality of the adolescent body based on the adult understanding of what is considered socially acceptable. A frequent method deployed by adult authors writing for a juvenile audience is to use the metaphor of adolescent-animal metamorphosis to convey the initiation of adolescent protagonists into adulthood in coming-of-age stories; according to Lydia Kokkola, the ambivalence a character feels during transformation is "an expression of the *adult writer's* perceptions and concerns about the onset of adolescent carnal desire and teenagers' maturation, whether acknowledged overtly or not" (144, emphasis original). Maria Lassén-Seger takes this observation further in *Adventures into Otherness* when she argues that it is these "allusions to untamed (potentially sexual) wildness" that resulted in the late appearance of girl-animal metamorphoses in mainstream children's literature (46). She further notes:

> Possible explanations for why girl metamorphs have been in a minority for so long may be found in the gender power imbalance reflected in myths and fairy tales, where female-animal metamorphosis typically is framed as a punishment for sexual pollution or an escape from abuse, rather than as a successful initiation into society.…
>
> Another reason … can be sought in the tradition of late nineteenth- and early twentieth century girl's fiction, in which initiation into womanhood usually meant growing into passivity, silence and invisibility. (Lassén-Seger 46)

In the second half of the twentieth- and the beginning of the twenty-first century, however, there has been a marked increase in texts that deal with girl-animal transformations, including Melvin Burgess' *Lady, My Life as a Bitch* (2001), Peter Dickinson's *Eva* (1988), Mary Hooper's *The Peculiar Power of Tabitha Brown* (1999), Patrice Kindl's *Owl in Love* (1993), Annette Curtis Klause's *Blood and Chocolate* (1997), and Justine Larbalestier's *Liar* (2011). In each of these texts, the female protagonist's transformation into an animal highlights the relationship between ambiguous power and sexualized teenage body. This ambiguity of power – because it remains unclear whether carnal desires and experiences are those of the teenager or the animal – results in numerous complications regarding the metamorphing characters' embodied agency and her manipulation of human language. In this chapter, I examine how the materiality of the characters' transforming bodies gives them agency when they are silenced on the level of the human, and more important, how the liminality of the metamorph's body influences their access to human language, and how this access enables them to survive in their respective societies.

I focus in particular on two young adult novels that feature girl-animal metamorphosis: *Liar* and *Eva*. In *Liar*, protagonist Micah Wilkins lies to everyone – parents, teachers, peers, the police, and even the reader – about practically everything, even as she promises to tell the truth. Micah's biggest secret – one that she admits to the reader only in the second half of the book – is that she is a werewolf and that she transforms into a wolf when she menstruates. It is worth noting that the werewolf narrative is perhaps the only thing Micah is consistent about.[3] Throughout her narrative, Micah oscillates between the temporary

[3] Since the entire book is about deception versus truth telling, there is no way of knowing whether or not she is lying about the wolf or about anything else. I use the word "perhaps" mostly because it is difficult to keep track of the numerous contradictions in the

agency generated by her lies and the brute physical strength she has as a wolf. Although *Eva*, too, features a protagonist who undergoes human to animal metamorphosis, Eva differs from Micah in that her change is irreversible. Thirteen-year-old Eva is in a coma following a car accident and awakens to find her consciousness transposed into the body of Kelly, an adult chimpanzee. Since the vocal cords of a chimpanzee are not sufficiently developed for human speech, Eva communicates with the human world through a computerized keyboard that she carries strapped to her chest. Eva occupies an interesting position even in her futuristic world, as she consciously learns to live and function in her new body, despite feeling the presence of her (phantom) human limbs. *Liar* and *Eva* have intrinsic similarities: both texts grapple with the idea of changing bodies, as neither Micah nor Eva actively chooses to metamorph; Micah and Eva occupy liminal spaces, as they are at once human and non-human, adult and child—which in turn results in them having a complex relationship with language and communication; finally, both protagonists depend on the materiality of their non-human bodies to give them physical strength and power.

This study has therefore been divided into two sections. The first section will focus on the overtly sexual body and the transformation into a wolf which gives Micah *some* agency, although wolfish behavior is unaccepted in civilized society. I also examine the human to animal metamorphosis in *Liar* to better understand Micah's complex use of human language that is (at least in part) influenced by the wolf. The second section explores the fluidity and interdependency of human cognition and embodied agency, in particular, their relationship to language in *Eva*. Specifically, I focus on how Eva-the-chimp is able to strike a balance between her human and chimp identities, which in turn enables her to lead her tribe of chimps

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narrative. In other words, it is possible that Micah is consistent about the other things and also contradicts herself regarding the werewolf narrative.

to freedom. Both texts, at some level, deal with the intricacies of communication and the confluence of the linguistic and material, albeit in different ways: Micah demonstrates the power of the material with special regard to the body of the wolf which and her manipulations of human language which grant her agency, whereas Eva represents a more ideal sort of agency because she is able to strike a balance between the linguistic and material, which helps her create a sustainable community.

Becoming the Beast: Contextualizing Adolescence and Lycanthropy

Cultural representations of the werewolf have undergone transformation in the last few decades morphing from the much feared into the more accepted. However, while male lycanthropes in the twenty-first century are portrayed as desirable and heroic – if the Twilight series and *Teen Wolf* are anything to go by – female metamorphosis is (still) seen as a metaphor for deviant sexual desires. Such literature both objectifies and romanticizes woman's connection to the monstrous through biology, as April Miller has shown in her reading of *Ginger Snaps* and *Unleashed*, two twenty-first century films that deal with female lycanthropy. Although lycanthropy is a very specific form of metamorphosis, I use both terms interchangeably in this section, as they are symbolic of repressed sexuality particularly with regard to female adolescent characters. Herein, I will explore the relationship between agency of the transforming material body and the influence of that agency on language in *Liar*. Before I proceed, however, it is important to highlight the complexities *Liar* offers readers, and also to situate the metamorph as a recurring trope in literature with regard to the agency generated by the material and language.

Liar is a complex narrative that effectively combines lies and truth telling. As mentioned above, Micah is an unreliable narrator who lies about her identity as much as she lies about her actions. For instance, Micah first tells some of the other characters that she is a

boy, and later, a hermaphrodite; Micah lies several times about her relationship with her "after hours" boyfriend, Zach, first to Zach's girlfriend, Sarah, and later, to her parents, the police, and even readers; towards the end of the novel, Micah leads readers to believe that she might even be telling her story from a correctional facility or mental institution. When Zach is found dead in Central Park, all evidence for his murder seemingly points to her. Since she constantly lies, it is unclear – to characters and readers alike – whether or not Micah was involved in the murder. What ensues is a constantly changing narrative and a character that evades binaries: Micah claims that she is at once male and female, biracial, bisexual, and perhaps most significantly, human and wolf. Given the scope of this study, I choose to focus primarily on how Micah's overlapping identities encode feminine sexuality, although the liminality of Micah's character (and her narrative) allow for numerous interpretations of her embodiment including (but not restricted to) the queer, biracial, and disabled body. Moreover, although Micah's claim that she is a werewolf as a result of a family illness is not very plausible in an otherwise realistic narrative, it becomes very difficult to unravel lies from truths. The unreliable narrator and the suspicious narrative allow readers to decide for themselves whether or not they believe Micah's claims of lycanthropy. I would argue that believing Micah's claims of lycanthropy gives the female adolescent character power to which she would otherwise not have access. (In other words, if she is delusional about being a wolf, she is not at all empowered by her own narrative.)

Here, it is important to understand the figure of the werewolf in literature and film. Several scholars including Lydia Kokkola, April Miller, Maria Lassén-Seger, Kimberley McMahon-Coleman and Roslyn Weaver, and Alison Waller have unanimously agreed that there is a clear link between physical changes that occur at puberty and metamorphosis. Both April Miller and Alison Waller note that lycanthropic changes also parallel the changing adolescent's body: physical transformations like alterations in posture, voice, and body hair,

emotional and physical alienation from society, severe psychological stress and anxiety, and bestial sexual urges associated with the animal. The wider implication, as Waller notes, is that "puberty itself indicates the start of monstrosity" (50). The werewolf parallels what Leonard G. Heldreth in "The Beast Within" considers as "hormone imbalances in teenagers [that] lead to wild emotional swings, destructive actions, and homicidal desires" (119). People subject to lycanthropy have little control over their transfigurations into beasts, and once adolescents metamorph into werewolves, they lose rational control and rarely remember what happened to them as a wolf. The symbolism behind the werewolf's bite is also fairly obvious: as Heldreth points out, "the penetration, loss of blood, carnal satisfaction for the werewolf and a non-reversible change in the victim" all indicate loss of virginity (119).[4]

Historically, werewolves have been linked to menstruation through their reliance on the cycles of the moon and bodily transformations. In turn, this parallel between lycanthropy and menstruation has become a prevalent theme for stories (Du Coudray 122-123). While blood is considered sacred, menstrual blood is perceived to be abject (Kristeva 71). Indeed, generations of women have internalized the understanding that menstruation is taboo and menstrual blood polluting. Moreover, menstrual blood is viscous and unpredictable and its unstoppable crossing of a boundary makes it terrifying. Building on Julia Kristeva's theory of abjection, Elizabeth Grosz argues that the female body is one that leaks, bleeds and is "at the mercy of hormonal and reproductive functions" (204). It falls outside the boundary of that which is "clean" and "proper" and, therefore, threatens social order. The horror that is

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[4] Although Heldreth's study focuses primarily on male werewolves and their female victims, the "carnal satisfaction for the werewolf" and "non-reversible change" experienced by the victim are gender non-specific, and can therefore apply to both male and female lycanthropes.

attached to menarche represents “the fear of being submerged into something that has no boundaries of its own” (Grosz 194). Like menstrual blood, the werewolf represents a danger issuing from within one’s identity. Chantal Bourgault Du Coudray notes in *The Curse of the Werewolf* that the werewolf has been constructed as an alien “Other”; in effect, the werewolf is “the negative of a normalized social identity” that threatens social order from within (44).

Despite its abject status, much agency is derived from the human's transformation into animal form. On the one hand, metamorphosis is an escape from the restrictions of human cultures: the female metamorph is powerful precisely because she speaks the truth of repressed desire. According to Barbara Creed, the werewolf, like any other monstrous creature “speaks the unspeakable, defies order and system, flaunts morality and the law” (“Dark,” 120). There is a relationship between power, sexuality and the material body of the animal, regardless of how monstrously it has been portrayed. By assuming the role of the wolf, the adolescent female character literally and figuratively becomes empowered. As a lycanthrope, the female character has the choice of breaking away from traditional gender roles and of being portrayed as independent and active, which I will demonstrate below.

Du Coudray clearly supports the view that lycanthropy can be seen as an escape from human-made restrictions: “the werewolf’s monstrous boundary crossings suggest new possibilities for the constitution of subjectivity and identity” (131). Indeed, lycanthropy is seen as an opportunity for revenge and survival, and the werewolf saves the female adolescent character from being just human.

On the other hand, metamorphs are often characterized by the loss of language and, by implication, of reason. (In other words, the material takes over.) When characters are in their respective animal forms, they rarely have any control over their senses; they usually come out of their transformations unable to remember what happened in their animal states. This is paralleled by adolescent and adult women silencing themselves, allowing “moral

language" to enforce certain cultural norms, as demonstrated by Lyn Mikel Brown and Carol Gilligan in *Meeting at the Crossroads*. In their study involving real adolescents, Brown and Gilligan found that "the developmental progress goes hand in hand with evidence of a loss of voice, a struggle to authorize or take seriously their own experience" (6). Interestingly, many of the adolescents Brown and Gilligan interviewed were aware of the elements of their selfhood, and of the society that restricted them from expressing their selfhood (126-40); similarly, although lycanthropes are aware of their changing subject positions, they, too are unable to voice their complex selfhoods because of the restrictions of the (human) society they live in as demonstrated below. As I have already explained in the previous chapter, scholars such as Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar, Lissa Paul, and Roberta Seelinger Trites have explained how the social phenomenon of silencing extends to literature. If it is true that "those who are denied language are denied their full potential as humans," as Trites has argued, then metamorphosis in general and female metamorphosis in particular are disempowering despite the metamorphs' ability to break boundaries in animal form (*Waking* 62). Therefore, although metamorphosis provides the character with a chance to express her sexual potency, the metamorph's lack of language can be interpreted as an act of silencing by society, and the very presence of sexuality becomes something deviant that cannot be talked about.

The following sections examine the agency generated by Micah's transformation into a wolf, and the ways in which her power is curbed by sociocultural restrictions placed on the feminine body. I also focus on the implications metamorphosis has on Micah's access to human language, and subsequently, on her need to lie constantly which frustrates characters and readers alike. Unlike the traditional metamorph exemplified above, Micah grants herself agency through her lies, and analyzing Micah's human to animal transformations and the gradations of lying interspersed with "truth telling" will help me demonstrate the same.

“[T]he wolf that I am”: Material Agency in *Liar*

As I have explained in the previous chapter, the agency generated by the materiality of the body cannot be ignored (Alaimo and Hekman 4). In *Liar*, Micah’s material agency is represented as both physical prowess as a human and as a wolf, and the carnality that is associated with the wolf’s body. Indeed, Micah’s body is the key point of interest throughout her narrative—so much so that it is difficult to ignore the materiality of the change that takes place. Although she never explicitly says so, Micah is dissatisfied with the changes her body is going through, and this discomfort is personified in the figure of the werewolf; her descriptions of the bodily transformations are both uncomfortable and disturbing, as much trauma and pain are inflicted upon the human mind and body when the change takes place: “My muscles ache, my bones. My teeth shift, get bigger, move. My jaw is breaking” (Larbalestier 361). Unshackled, the body of the werewolf becomes the site of enormous power, and assuming the form of a wolf allows Micah to express desires that must be curbed as a human. Moreover, by privileging the other-than-human aspects of lycanthropy, the female adolescent character becomes physically very powerful. For instance, as a wolf (and even as a human), Micah claims to have a heightened sense of smell and hearing. She also claims to possess superhuman strength and speed, both of which are reduced but not completely absent in her human form.

Of course, the wolf is not seen as a positive transformation by either Micah or her family. When Micah’s parents catch her kissing Zach, they ground her, “afraid that it would unleash the wolf, afraid that [Micah would] get pregnant and make more beasts” (Larbalestier 274). Micah’s parents ban her from dating boys, alcohol, and caffeine, as they are “triggers” that might start off the change. In the same chapter, Micah says, “Sex is beastly, animal, out of control. The feeling I get from fucking is not so far from how I feel when I hunt, when I

bring down prey. The two are too close. Too intimate. Too likely to get confused. Not by me, by *you*" (274, emphasis original). Micah, therefore, is aware that her sexuality is seen (by society) as something that is bestial, wild, and untameable, and consequently something that needs to be repressed. She seems to give the reader the false impression that she is in control of herself when she is a wolf, although we know from the events of the book that this is not true. It is also hinted that "loss of control" of any sort might result in bestiality. Micah admits that "going into heat, rutting" can bring on the change, and when Zach kisses her, "[running] his fingers lightly along [her] flank," she feels it "down deep inside [her], where the wolf lives" (Larbalestier 208, 270). The body of the wolf therefore provides Micah with what Trites would call "a locus of power," despite the conflicting views imposed on her by society (*Disturbing*, 85). Put another way, although her deviant sexuality might disempower (and perhaps even ostracize) her from society, the sexuality reimagined and embodied as a wolf allows Micah to challenge and resist formerly accepted social norms; it momentarily allows Micah to discard human notions of propriety and decorum, and to embrace and enjoy the sexual agency that society attempts to tame. The wolf can therefore be read as Micah's way of taking control, and of resisting dominant patriarchal systems of power by providing an arena for feminine agency.

Although morphing into a wolf to escape society's gaze gives Micah freedom to perform her (non-conforming) sexuality as she sees fit, it is worth questioning exactly how much agency the material really has. The following sections will thus focus on the restrictions placed on the wolf in civilized society, and its effects on Micah's access to human language.

“Does a wolf need to read?” Or, How Much Agency does the Material Have?

While it is true that metamorphosis allows the adolescent to experience desires that are traditionally considered taboo, it does not necessarily mean sexuality and promiscuous sexual activity are embraced. *Liar* makes it clear that not controlling rampant sexual desires leads to severe consequences, such as death. As Heldreth observes, death is a common theme in most werewolf films, wherein the afflicted human seeks to kill the person (of the opposite gender) he or she loves the most (120).

When Zach is murdered in *Liar*, the police suspect he has been killed by dogs while he was out running in Central Park. Micah hints that she was a wolf the weekend that Zach died, and although she was grounded, readers know she spent the weekend in Longwood as a wolf. This makes her seem responsible for Zach’s death, although she swears to her parents that she loved him and would never have killed him. Micah does acknowledge that Zach might have been killed by a homeless white boy, Pete, who is also a werewolf. Pete, being male, cannot turn into a wolf unless a female wolf is physically near him. Since Pete could not have turned into a wolf unless Micah turned into a wolf, Micah still feels responsible for Zach’s murder. It is significant that male wolves cannot change into wolves by themselves – they change only when girls become wolves, reinforcing the age-old stereotype that feminine sexuality stimulates sexual urges in males. As Micah explains, “it’s the females who cause the change. A male werewolf who grows up alone, far from his own kind, never becomes a wolf” (182). The subtext of the novel is quite clear – women are responsible not only for themselves, but for the predatory males as well, a subtext that the novel portrays without condoning it. Despite Micah’s physical prowess and nonconforming sexuality demonstrated in the previous section, the discourse surrounding the wolf’s body – and it’s influence on other bodies, both human victims *and* male wolves – ultimately result in a loss of agency.

Moreover, since sexually active feminine characters are considered to be responsible for the predatory males, not being in control (of feminine embodiment and sexuality, which in turn negatively affects male sexuality) will result in the former's punishment. When Micah is critiqued by the other "mainstream" characters, she internalizes these critiques: "Mom is right," she realizes, even as she tries to convince her parents that she is not responsible for Zach's murder. "The white boy changed the same time I did…. This means I killed Zach." (289) Micah is therefore punished both by and because of her wolfishness, whereas Pete is well taken care of, first by Micah's parents, and later by her family upstate despite having committed murder. He is given a bath, food to eat, and a sense of community. Both Micah's grandmother and great aunt consider Pete a necessity. Although Micah takes Pete Upstate in the hopes that her family will kill him because he killed Zach, her great aunt refuses to hurt him. "He's breeding stock," she says. "A new *wolf* bloodline. He's gold, Micah" (329, emphasis original). Although he is considered "breeding stock," Pete's wolfishness is embraced, and he is treated much better than he ever was as a human. In other words, Pete's metamorphosis gives him more value despite his crime (although he doesn't necessarily have more agency), whereas Micah's transformations are "dangerous" and therefore decreases her value, and consequently, her agency.

This reading of the wolf's body is highlighted throughout the narrative which goes so far as to break down the metaphor of the wolf. When Micah confesses her wolfishness to her biology teacher, Yayeko, the latter understands the confession as Micah's rejection of her feminine body. "What is more masculine than a wolf?" she asks Micah, reminding her that "there's nothing wrong with being a girl" (353). Yayeko tells Micah that she is denying her femininity by wearing her hair short and lying to the whole school about being a boy. In a confrontational scene with Micah, her biology teacher says, "You have to stop suppressing the girl parts of yourself. Is that why … you never wear skirts or dresses? Why you don't

have any girlfriends?" (Larbalestier 353). Yayeko seems to imply that biologically female adolescents should strive to portray traditional femininity characterized by long hair, effeminate attire, and female companionship. By "pull[ing] away the werewolf bullshit" and "read[ing] between the lines," as Micah recommends, we understand sexual potency and transcending binaries to be weaknesses that can only wreak havoc for everyone involved (370). Although transforming into a wolf is symbolic of liminality, the wolf itself becomes something that Micah needs to control and discipline, despite its obvious potential for power. Therefore, Micah feels the need to lie about who she is in order to manipulate both the people around her and the readers, in an attempt to give herself some agency in her unyieldingly patriarchal world.

"Would I lie to you?": Unravelling the Lies in *Liar*

Micah's howls as a wolf and her compulsive lying as a human signify her ability to survive. On the one hand, metamorphosis is characterized by the loss of human language. As Bruce Clarke explains, the metamorph "attempts to escape the possession of language itself, the language of an Other" in its refusal to "identify with a communal body or with the given norms of a system" (55). He goes on to add that metamorphosis "undercut[s] imposed identities and assert[s] a nonverbal level of individual authenticity" (Clarke 55), implying that the lack of speech and language serve to protect the human. With regard to the carnal and/or deviant adolescent desires in children's and young adult literature, Kokkola notes that "In their metamorphosed state, the characters' sexual activities no longer seem threatening to the aetonormative powers as they would in their unchanged state. The "real child" within the tiger's or dog's body is protected from view as the animal gives way to "instincts" and "mates" leaving the childself protected" (145). In *Liar*, the lack of human language acts as a shield, as the monstrous exhibition completely conceals the female self from society,

allowing expression of deviant sexualities or urges that would otherwise bring the human character shame. Here, the wolf can be interpreted as a materialization of Micah's unconscious, a powerful image to protect the sexually devious adolescent human from the gaze of society. Moreover, since sexual activity triggers her change into a wolf, Micah's howls can be interpreted as a celebration of freedom and the pleasure of fulfilling natural urges even as they highlight the taboo.

Metamorphing into a wolf influences communication at the level of the human as well. Micah begins her narration by promising to tell the truth: "I will tell you my story and I will tell it straight. No lies, no omissions" (3). However, in the very next line, she says, "*This time* I truly mean it," implying that Micah has attempted – likely unsuccessfully – to tell the truth before (3, emphasis mine). The narrative itself is divided into three sections: "Telling the Truth," "Telling the True Truth," and "The Actual Real Truth" (1, 169, 213). According to Kerry Mallan, "these gradations of truth telling provide further grounds for readers to suspect the veracity of Micah's accounts" (142). Micah drops the reader clues to make it seem as if she has made slips in her tale. The situation is further complicated by not having an objective narrative, or a more reliable narrator with whom one can cross check the events of the tale. Micah's denials of murder carry no weight – precisely because Micah is a liar and an unethical character, which makes us not want to believe her – although, I agree with Mallan that as the focalizer and narrator, Micah controls both the point of view and the narrative. Micah feels the need to lie because she does not fit into normative society as someone who claims to be a bisexual, biracial, gender non-conforming werewolf.

According to Kokkola, "the abject is the primal fear that cannot be expressed through language, and so it is expelled or repressed within the subconscious. But it cannot remain repressed; it re-emerges as disturbances in language" (64). Kokkola uses the example of euphemisms, but this definition can be extended to pathological lies as well. The

transformation into a wolf is the only implausible occurrence in an otherwise realistic narrative and makes the reader not want to believe Micah about her lycanthropy in particular, although becoming a wolf is the only thing about which she is consistent. Therefore, one way of interpreting Micah's lies would be to read them as a symptom of her "disease," of escaping classification; that is, lying is an extension of being denied language and a place in society. Moreover, if Micah's claims – that her family lies as much as she does, and that she has learned to lie from her family – are to be believed, then readers could conclude that the adolescent is being conditioned to reject and repress her sexuality rather than accept it. However, Micah's lies *do* give her temporary agency. After all, she gets the opportunity to tell her story, and whether or not readers are empathetic or frustrated, they become involved in her narrative. Put another way, Micah's lies function as an armour or wall of defence around her, for readers never know what is "true" or real. Regardless of how one chooses to interpret the narrative – the werewolf as "the bigger and better" thing that Micah has invented to explain "the bad thing" (her non-conformity), or as a shield to deflect social critiques—Micah's words make it possible for her to survive in a predominantly patriarchal society (217).

Micah, therefore, demonstrates that the material has agency, as being a wolf allows her to move over and beyond the restrictions placed upon her by human society, although the transformation itself is feared and hated. However, both the transformation into a wolf and the narrativizing of this transformation – even if its riddled with lies – gives Micah protection from the rigid rules of her patriarchal world, and consequently, more agency than what she would have had as a human. Unfortunately for Micah, her agency comes at a price: loss of family and friends.

Not all girl-animal transformations, however, result in a loss community. Peter Dickinson's Eva embraces her subject position as a liminal being who is at once human and

chimp, and, as a consequence, is able to strike a balance between her two disparate worlds. The following section will closely examine Eva's ability to communicate with humans and non-humans by exercising the agency generated by her unique embodiment, which allows her to establish sustainable relationships with members of both groups.

"[N]ot Eva, not Kelly – both, but one": Finding a Balance in *Eva*

Eva is set in a futuristic world, amidst the marvels of newly evolved scientific methods. Eva understands that "What *you* are is a pattern, an arrangement, different from any other pattern that ever was or will be," and that the "pattern" that makes you "so sure you are you" is made up of the individual's thoughts, memories, and understandings of the world (Dickinson 21, italics original). Top scientists in Eva's world, including her own father, have discovered a way to transfer one's consciousness into an "empty" brain through a process involving one's "neuron memory" in order to ensure one's survival, and so Eva's mind gets transposed into the body of Kelly, a female chimpanzee who is raised primarily for research purposes (Dickinson 21). What ensues is a complicated relationship between Eva's human consciousness and Kelly's chimpanzee body, for although Kelly's mind is supposedly "empty," there is a direct correlation between Eva-the-girl's absent human body and Kelly's present chimpanzee one. As Robyn McCallum explains in *Ideologies of Identity in Adolescent Fiction*, "Eva/Kelly effectively has the mind of a human being, the body of a chimpanzee and an unconscious corresponding to both, the coexistence of which puts into question conventional mind/body binarisms as well as notions of the subject as either essential or as simply constructed" (84-85). Eva-the-girl is a mind without a body and she quickly understands that in order to function successfully – to stay alive, no less – she must, in McCallum's words, "allow Kelly's unconscious or instinctive emotions expression" (85).

It is equally important to note that Eva's absent human body becomes a physical aspect of her human memory, if only in the form of a phantom limb:

> The ghost of a human arm still trying to work, to reach and touch at the mind's command. You couldn't see it but it was there, moving slightly out of synch as the chimp arm moved, with the elbow wrong and the invisible fingertips wavering among the chimp knuckles. When she closed her eyes, she saw in her mind the pale slim fingers, helpless, trapped in this strange, hairy place, lost. (Dickinson 34)

According to McCallum, Eva-the-girl is "present through her memories of her past body" (85). Kelly is present, too, not as an individual chimp, but as a collective memory, which, (among other things) causes Eva to dream about trees:

> not like any of the dreams she usually had. There was … only the idea, the images, the feelings – herself, moving among branches, reaching with long arms, swinging, holding…
>
> Holding with her feet if she chose. (Dickinson 23)

Eva-the-chimp, therefore, occupies several liminal positions: since Eva-the-girl occupies the mind and body space of Kelly the chimp, two can rarely (if ever) be separate; Eva-the-girl is prepubescent although Kelly's body is that of a sexually mature adult; Eva-the-chimp has the distinct ability of communicating with both chimps – through her body and chimp sounds – and humans, by typing into a keyboard that replicates her voice complete with a myriad of tones and emotions. Even her legal status is contested: since the advertising agencies paid for her surgery, Eva-the-chimp is legally owned by the Honeybear Corporation, while Eva-the-girl (is human, and so cannot be owned, but) is still a minor who requires the legal guardianship of her parents.

In her study of subject formation, McCallum interprets the existence of Eva-the-chimp as Eva being stuck in Lacan's mirror phase, wherein "the child identifies with its

mirror image which it perceives as a stable whole, but it experiences itself as fragmented, partial and changeable," because "Selfhood for Eva is a form of otherness" (88). She goes on to argue that Eva:

> remains different from the other chimps, but the approximation of wholeness that she achieves means the rejection of aspects of her humanness and of her human self…. she comes to identify with the specular image and to reject or repress the fragmentation of self she experiences as a subject within human society. (McCallum 89)

Several other scholars have echoed this idea that Eva rejects the human in favor of the chimp world. In "Beyond Human: Escaping the Maze of Anthropocentrism in Peter Dickinson's *Eva,*" Aliona Yarova and Lydia Kokkola argue that

> To become a whole being, Eva has to "exorcize" her human ghost which, she admits, "haunted her" (Dickinson 36). Eva refuses to wear clothes because she is no longer human ... although she still understands that the primary purpose of the clothing is to hide her genitalia, particularly when they are enlarged during oestrus…. Her acceptance of her animal desires signals her departure from both her human identity and from the child-adult binarism. (46)

Millicent Lenz, too, claims that "Choosing the chimp world means dying to her human ties, betraying her father's trust [and] sacrificing her individuality" (177). While it is true that Eva does not treat her chimp body as a shell and remain human like her mother and the scientists who created her expect, I argue that she does not – and indeed, *cannot* – completely reject the human when she trades human society and human language for the chimp world, as Lenz, McCallum, and Yarova and Kokkola contend. On the contrary, Eva's human and chimp, adult and child (or sexually mature and prepubescent) selves exist in a state of fluidity and interdependency. To be a successful leader of her tribe and more important, to *function*, Eva

must find a way for the seemingly incongruent aspects of her identity to coexist. In this section, I will examine Eva's gradual success regarding her human and non-human interactions by using the theory of cognitive narratology as expounded by David Herman and by examining the material agency exhibited by Kelly's body. I argue that Eva's unique subject position – a liminal entity who is at once Eva *and* Kelly – allows for the facilitation of communication between – and consequently, community formation within two groups who previously never interacted: the humans and the chimps.

Thinking (like a) Human: A Cognitive Approach to Eva-the-Chimp

Suzanne Rahn observes certain similarities between real and fictional chimpanzees in "A Note on the Sources of *Eva*." According to Rahn, it is not uncommon for baby chimpanzees and gorillas to be "'adopted' by human parents and raised as though they were human children, even dressed in human clothing" (182). She cites the example of Lucy (1964-87), a human-raised female chimpanzee, who not only thought of herself as human, but could communicate with her human "parents" using American Sign Language (ASL) (Rahn 182). Since human language is not distinctly human (as some aspects of language can be taught across certain primate species as evidenced above), I am compelled to agree with Rahn's observation that "Eva's ability to communicate by computer is thus only one step – though a large one in terms of language complexity – beyond what real-life chimps can do" (183). Apart from being able to communicate with humans, Eva inherently understands how to approach certain human tasks that would otherwise be elusive to chimp minds. To thrive in the wild, Eva teaches her tribe these tasks – to make fire, sew leaves together with a bone needle to make litters, bury dead, and so on – and in turn, these skills are passed on from one chimp generation to the next. While it can be argued that the skills Eva teaches her fellow chimps are inherently "human," the chimps' actions mirror the behavior of chimps in the wild

who teach their offspring not just to use, but more significantly, also to *modify* tools to procure food. Much like Eva's ability to use computer generated words, Eva's tribe's newfound dexterity with tools is only slightly more advanced than what real chimps can be taught to do. In other words, although the fictional chimps' methods might be inspired by human ideas, the fact that Eva's chimpanzee family can master certain tasks and pass them on to future generations highlights the fact that these skills are merely a response to certain stimuli that can be taught to the primate species. By creating chimps who can perform actions hitherto considered human, Dickinson seems to intentionally blur the lines between human and chimp in the novel, especially since the chimps exhibit more signs of humanity than the primarily self-serving humans. Given the scope of this project, however, it is not my intent to debate what it means to be human. Instead, I examine *how* Eva's liminality – highlighted by her cognitive ability to construct and navigate narratives – sets her apart from other chimps and humans.

According to Ellen Spolsky, "narratives are themselves the processes that human beings have evolved to understand, express, and meet the need for revised and revisable behavior in an unstable world" (181). Most neurotypical human beings rely on their ability to create, manipulate, and understand narratives – fictional or otherwise – to deal with their real-life situations. In *Story Logic: Problems and Possibilities of Narrative*, David Herman uses the term "storyworld" to "suggest something of the world-creating power of narrative, its ability to transport interpreters from the here and now of face-to-face interaction, or the space-time coordinates of an encounter with a printed text or a cinematic narrative, to the here and now that constitute the deictic center of the world being told about" (14). Put another way, making sense of narratives involves complex cognitive actions including understanding that the narrative is different and distinct from the world one inhabits, imaginatively transporting or relocating oneself to different times and spaces, and being able

to organize information based on their perception and interpretations of the outcome of a given narrative.

As a chimp, Eva frequently uses and adapts narratives in order to make sense of her increasingly complicated worlds, both human and chimp. From the very beginning, Eva is aware of the complexities surrounding her existence, and her ability to understand herself as "not Eva, not Kelly – both but one" stems equally from empathy and her ability to comprehend the intricacies of the narrative situation in which she has been placed by the scientists and her parents (38). First, Eva understands her position in relation to the other human and chimp characters in the narrative. In fact, when Eva's parents discuss the pros and cons of the media rights regarding Eva's story with a legal representative, Ms. Callaway, Eva is the only one who thinks to ask whom she legally "belong[s] to," something even her mother has not considered (69). Eva also demonstrates human cognition as evidenced by her ability to "think tidy" (Dickinson 34). When she is given some colored bricks during her period of recovery at the lab, for instance, Eva is able to build a tower "straight and slim and far higher than a chimp could have ever done" because "It wouldn't enter their heads to square up the edges of a pile of blocks" (35). Eva uses her "human mind to tell the chimp fingers what she wanted, and check by touch that they'd got it right" (36). This dexterity of thought and action and more importantly, the *self-awareness that guides these thoughts and actions* highlights Eva's ability to narrativize her own life, which in turn seems to fit in with Dickinson's definition of what it means to be human. This ability to narrativize allows Eva to manipulate linguistic *and* narrative patterns to facilitate her own agency as exemplified below.

In "The Narrative Construction of Reality," Jerome Bruner has argued that narrative "operates as an instrument of mind in the construction of reality" (6). Bruner notes that social

cognition, or the construction and representation of "the rich and messy domain of human interaction" is:

> well buttressed by principles and procedures. It has an available cultural tool kit or tradition on which its procedures are modelled, and its distributional reach is as wide and as active as gossip itself. Its form is so familiar and ubiquitous that it is likely to be overlooked … we organize our experience and memory of human happenings mainly in the form of narrative – stories, excuses, myths, reasons for doing and not doing, and so on. (4)

Bruner maps properties of stories onto forms of cognition enabled by stories, which David Herman explains in "Stories as a Tool for Thinking." Herman gives the example of an interlocutor telling a story incriminating a mutual acquaintance, wherein one can understand the story only based on what one already knows about the storyteller's past relationship with the person being incriminated. Moreover, Herman points out that the storyteller will likely tailor their narrative in accordance with the amount of background knowledge they assume their listener to have, and that "attributing intentions and drawing on background knowledge are also crucial features of the process by which people make sense of the words and deeds of others" ("Stories" 164). Herman's argument is worth quoting here in full: "stories provide crucial representational tools facilitating humans' efforts to organize multiple knowledge domains, each with its attendant sets of beliefs and procedures. Relevant domains include not only those standardly subsumed under social cognition … but also a variety of other problem-solving activities" ("Stories" 165). Here, Herman builds on Bruner's study to argue that narrative supports core problem-solving abilities in human beings. They include the following: chunking experience, or, the ability to "organize experience by enabling people to select from among the total set of sequentially and concurrently available inputs … and then use those temporally structured segments as a basis for further cognitive operations on new

experiential inputs"; imputing causal relations between events, wherein narratives function as "an assemblage of rules of thumb for interpreting experience, with attendant *biases* whose effects warrant closer scrutiny"; balancing expectation against outcomes; sequencing behaviors (what should be done, where, and in what order); and distributing intelligence, which can be better understood as "the inextricable connection between *trying to make sense of* and *being within* an environment that extends beyond the self" ("Stories" 173, 176, 183, all emphases in the original). Herman concludes that stories can be understood as a tool for thinking, and that they can be used as a resource for making sense of the world. Simply put, the ability to narrativize our situations helps us with problem solving and coping with very real situations on a day-to-day basis.

Eva demonstrates complex cognitive abilities which highlights her human side; indeed, she is different from other chimps not merely because of her ability to use language, but because of what that ability *signifies*. Eva is human because she can think and process information like one, and can, as demonstrated by the text, think ahead and think critically from multiple perspectives. For example, when Eva's friend, Giorgio "Grog" Kennedy shows her a giant shaper (hologram) image of a jungle that presumably exists in a place called Cayamoro, Eva is able to piece together a deeper understanding of what Grog tells her although Kelly's body reacts instinctively to her surroundings (112-17). Several types of cognition and narrativization seem to be happening at once: even as Kelly's body is filled with yearning, Eva understands – or rather believes – that it would be impossible to lead a bunch of chimps into the wild; she also finds it difficult to process her feelings about Stephan and Yasha, two other humans who would be transposed into the bodies of chimps (Caesar and Angel, respectively). Finally, Eva contemplates her own inhibitions about living in the wild. Grog's last act is to show Eva the choice she will have to make for herself and for the chimps, a choice between the jungle and a city in ruins. Instinctively, Eva uses her narrative

and linguistic skills to create scenarios that will result in both endings. Although Eva disagrees with Grog's arguments, she comprehends what would be required of her as someone occupying a liminal space that is at once both human and chimp.

Following Grog's trip to Cayamoro, Eva makes him a tape:

> On one side she put the reasons why she wasn't going to help him in his campaign to get the chimps to move to Cayamoro…. She had plenty of reasons – reasons to do with chimps. (How could you let chimps loose in a jungle when they didn't know a poisonous berry from a safe one, or what a leopard was? How could you cope with males like Tatters and Geronimo? How could you hope for any of them to follow Eva's lead, so junior, such an outsider? And so on.) Reasons to do with humans. (How would you raise the funds? How would you persuade people like Dad to stop what they were doing? How would you get the people who looked after Cayamoro to let you put a lot of chimps in their jungle? And so on.) And Eva's own reasons… (Dickinson 126, ellipses in the original)

Eva's thought process exemplified above highlights her ability not only to *construct* narratives and explanations as to why moving to Cayamoro would be a bad idea, but also to demonstrate her ability to chunk experience, impute causal relation between events, manage expectations against outcomes, sequence behaviors, and distribute intelligence. Eva preempts arguments and oppositions not only from her perspective (and her enjoyment of human things such as cooked food, surfboarding, and travel) but also from the perspective of other actors, both human and chimp (Dickinson 126-27). Upon careful thought, Eva articulates several issues she and Grog will face if they were to rescue the chimps and take them to Cayamoro. Here, Eva constructs a storyworld, a sequence of events, based on the information Grog has shared with her, even as she keeps in mind the two possible outcomes: the jungle and ruined civilization.

Eva changes her mind about helping Grog only after she witnesses first hand scientist Joan Pradesh's failed experiment that is Stephan/Caesar and Yasha/Angel. Despite Stephan and Caesar rejecting the other, Joan is insistent about doing more experiments. Here, Eva not only empathizes with Stephan/Caesar, but understands human cognition on a much deeper level: "These humans, they couldn't know. They cared, they were sad, but they couldn't understand. This is what humans did to animals, one way or another. This is what they'd always done" (Dickinson 134). Through her human cognition, Eva understands that the experiments the scientists conduct are part of a larger narrative. Unlike the scientists who are completely involved in their research, Eva discerns themes of social hierarchy and ecocriticism in the former's actions. Eva also understands that, as someone who is at once chimp and human, she is inscribed in the narrative (whether or not she likes it), and that she needs to take charge of her narrative in order to lead the innocent chimps to freedom. In this moment, Eva fully comprehends the larger picture from competing (human, chimp, and human-chimp) ways of understanding her world. Eva's dexterity – with understanding her position in a larger narrative scheme and constructing and manipulating these narratives – allows her to be, in Spolksy's words, "flexible in the face of the new" (181). As the novel proceeds, Eva becomes more adept at foreseeing or constructing narrative patterns from both chimp and human perspectives, a skill that is invaluable when it comes to escaping from humans and surviving in the wild.

Since human cognition is hardwired into her existence, it is not possible to exorcize Eva's human mind from the chimp body she occupies; Eva-the-chimp – as a scientific experiment and as a concept – is successful only *because* Eva's mind and Kelly's body coexist in a state of fluidity and interdependency. The following section will first examine the unique embodiment of Eva-the-chimp, followed by the agency generated by the chimp body (over and above the agency of the human mind). Here, Eva's material agency includes not

just her chimp strength but also her bilingual ability to communicate with both chimps and humans. Unlike most other human to animal metamorphs who lose language following their transformations, Eva's communicative abilities are heightened following her surgery. Consequently, Eva's acceptance of her chimp body and its corresponding agency allows her to form sustainable communities at significant points of the novel.

Embodied Agency and Community Formation in *Eva*

What sets Eva apart from other characters in the novel (and most of the characters examined in this study) is the fact that her body is rarely her own. Although the scientists who perform Eva's surgery expect her to merely *occupy* Kelly's body, Eva recognizes that Kelly is, in reality, *sharing* her chimp body with her. As noted above, the liminal position of sharing a body causes Eva to have chimp dreams and chimp memories that do not belong to Kelly the individual, but to a collective chimp consciousness. Eva explains,

> Kelly was dead, gone, would never come back, but something was still there. Not a particular chimp with particular memories of a large cage with a cement floor and a steel-and-plastic climbing frame and perhaps a human who took her out to greener places on a leash, but a chimp, still, with older, deeper memories. You couldn't just invade a chimp body and take it over with your human mind, like a hero in a history book – you'd never get to be whole that way. Eva's human neurons might have copied themselves into Kelly's brain, but … that left a sort of connection, an interface, a borderland where human ended and chimp began. (37)

This "borderland where human ended and chimp began" is what allows for Eva's success.[5] She understands instinctively that the body she occupies has "older, deeper memories," which in turn temper Eva-the-girl's experiences and reactions to a considerable extent. Although Eva directs Kelly's body to perform inherently "human" actions such as wearing clothes and typing on the keyboard to produce human speech, a lot of Eva-the-chimp's primal and basic reactions remain chimp. For example, when Eva sees the shaper snake in the forest, she can barely control Kelly's embodied fear (denoted by bared teeth, and the impulse to leap away and chatter in fright), despite the fact that her human mind is able to recognize that the snake is not real (Dickinson 112). There is evidently a distinct relationship between landscape, memory, and knowledge that make up Eva's corporeality. Here, Eva's knowledge is not

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[5] It is also worth noting here that the fact that she was reared alongside Kelly plays a significant role in allowing her to connect and empathize with the chimps. In her study of real children, Doris Bischof-Köhler observes that children, at an early age, "have access to the inner experience of other people, and they are socially competent to intervene in another's favor" (270). She adds that although children cannot articulate their impressions, they can bodily "transform their empathetical response into social action" (270). What Eva feels towards Kelly and the other chimps, then, is prelinguistic, embodied empathy learned as an infant, which is what makes her successful when compared to Joan Pradesh's other experiments. In other words, cross-species empathy is part of Eva's embodied memories.

learned human knowledge but embodied communal knowledge that is at once instinctive and impulsive. Eva cannot always suppress Kelly's impulses; at times, the best she can do is to direct or channel her actions using a combination of strength and tactics to manipulate situations to suit her needs.

When Eva dreams of trees or reacts to images of snakes, it's not merely Eva accommodating Kelly's self, as McCallum suggests. Rather, the dreams highlight Eva's ability to access this different consciousness through her chimp body, as chimp memories and discourses – of mothers and daughters – have been beaded together generation after generation in the form of embodied memory. Consequently, Eva's hybrid positionality within Kelly's chimp body directly affects how she perceives and experiences the human world. Indeed, when she visits the Pool for the first time as a chimp, Eva finds her surroundings "weird," because although she had seen her surroundings before, it had been "with human eyes" (Dickinson 87). Eva notes that "the trees had been iron pillars…the boulders had been beds for heavy machinery; the surrounding caves had been offices and storerooms" (Dickinson 87). Here, human knowledge (that the trees are really iron pillars, and so on) is eclipsed by the chimps' muscle memory fueled by association and yearning. Consequently, Eva sees trees in the place of pillars, boulders instead of beds for heavy machinery, and caves instead of offices and storerooms. Perceiving the world through Kelly's eyes and experiencing it through Kelly's body enables Eva to not only empathize with the chimps around her, but to truly understand the lived reality of being a chimp.

Eva's ability to (literally) see things from chimp and human perspectives is instrumental in her ability to communicate across species. Communication and language are in no way restricted to the human world. As Haraway explains in "The Promises of Monsters: A Regenerative Politics for Inappropriate/d Others," the politics of theory surrounds the natural world. The world is made up of actors, and "Actors are entities which do things, have

effects, build worlds in concatenation with other *unlike* actors" ("The Promises" 86). Although certain human actors "can try to reduce other actors to resources – to mere ground and matrix for their action," the unhuman actors have agency regardless of their embodiments (Haraway 86). For Haraway, language is merely the effect of articulation, and one does not *need* human language – or indeed need to *be human* – to be able to articulate. She maintains that

> Nature may be speechless, without language, in the human sense; but nature is highly articulate. Discourse is only one process of articulation. An articulated world has an undecidable number of modes and sites where connections can be made…. In obsolete English, to articulate meant to make terms of agreement…. To articulate is to signify. It is to put things together, scary things, risky things, contingent things. (Haraway "The Promises" 106)

Due to her unique positionality – as neither human, nor chimp but *both* – Eva can communicate with both her human and non-human counterparts, and instinctively understands what prompts human and chimp decisions. During Eva's commercial shoot, for instance, a male chimp named Bobo, scared and confused, throws a tantrum and climbs up a lighting tower. Rather than allow Mr. Coulis, the person in charge of the chimps, to tranquilize Bobo, thereby delaying shooting by another day, Eva manages several levels of communication at once: she uses her keyboard to tell Grog to turn off the bright lights to distract Bobo; having left her keyboard with a woman on the set, she physically stops Mr Coulis from using his stun gun (by standing in front of him and lowering the barrel) and uses her hand to signal to him to wait; she communicates to Nin and the other female chimps using chimp gestures to please help her with Bobo. Eva also interprets Bobo's screeching and jumping differently from the humans: "Eva knew it wasn't as terrifying as it sounded to human ears. To the chimps it meant something different – Bobo himself was scared"

(Dickinson 100). Once Eva and the other female chimps climb up the lighting tower, she crouches down and gives Bobo quick pants of submission, reaffirming that he (as the only male chimp in the room) is the boss. Once Bobo sits down, Eva begins to groom him, a sign of social bonding among primates. When Mr. Coulis climbs up the lighting tower, Eva holds up her hand towards him to indicate five minutes.

> By the time the five minutes were up they were a group, understanding one another and fitting comfortably together. Bobo was the official boss and got the little signs of respect and submission, but he knew and so did the others that the sensible thing was to follow Eva's lead. She was the one who'd settled things, calmed Bobo down by giving him what he wanted but didn't know how to get, calmed the humans down too, and stopped their screeching, made the mad world sensible for a moment, and known the signal to send the dominant human back down the ladder. (101)

It is important to note that even as Eva uses her human brain to strategize the best possible course of action and to deal with humans in a way that they can understand, she uses the material agency of her chimp body to communicate with the chimps. She signs, climbs the lighting tower, postures and gesticulates, and perhaps most important of all, grooms Bobo to calm him. Eva adheres to the social codes of chimps, allowing Bobo to be the "official boss" although he and all the other chimps know to follow Eva's lead. In other words, even as the human brain understands what needs to be done, a chimp body needs to do it. Haraway would argue that Eva can "'articulate' with humans and unhumans in a social relationship, which for us is always language mediated" (89).

Eva is successful in her endeavors only because she is able to embrace her unique borderland position as a human-chimp. By following the primate social codes and by bridging the communication gap between the two species, Eva forms a sustainable

community and a support system with the other chimpanzees in the chaotic human (and later wild) world.

Conclusion

In both the texts discussed above, the female characters use the unique materiality of their metamorphing bodies – albeit in different ways – to channel their access to human (and in Eva's case, unhuman) language. In *Liar*, Micah is unable to clearly express her embodied sexuality, which is represented by her transformation into a wolf. Her wolfish howls and narrative riddled with lies, however, serve to at least partly deflect society's gaze. In *Power, Voice and Subjectivity*, Maria Nikolajeva explains that "Language is a vehicle of power, and whoever possesses this power can also suppress and govern other people" (27). The act of lying challenges the rules of language, especially since characters and readers have no way of knowing whether Micah speaks the truth, or if her words are empty and devoid of substance. In other words, since the normal logic of language and communication no longer exist, Micah is able to give herself some agency by willfully directing her narrative. This is especially significant because the loss of control of her body during metamporphosis means she has little control of her subject position as a teenager on the brink of sexual awakening.

Liar's concluding pages are open to interpretation. In one possible ending, Micah takes hormone injections once every three months, which we are told are better than the birth control pills. Micah also claims that now she can attend college on an athletic scholarship to study her own biology further. In an alternate ending, the wolf isn't real, and Micah is locked up in a padded cell because she may have murdered not just Zach, but also Yayeko and her family. Depending on how one chooses to read the narrative, either Micah is able to successfully control the wolf's body and use it to pursue her dreams, or her deviancy invariably results in more death. The very last line of the novel – "Would I lie to you?" –

makes it impossible to know what to believe (Larbalestier 371). The complex narrativizing of Micah's story is an attempt at identity formation, and to communicate her experiences despite the restrictions placed on her by her society, although her refusal to communicate honestly results in loss of community and kinship with other "civilized" human beings. Nonetheless, unlike traditional female metamorphs in late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century fiction, Micah's wolf form and her monstrous lies keep her from being passive and invisible.

Dickinson's *Eva* takes a markedly different approach to metamorphoses. When Eva wakes up as a chimp, she realizes the dual nature of her identity, but the duality of her being does not make her in any way incomplete. Eva embraces her embodiment even as she thinks with her human mind, rather than rejecting one in favor of the other; after all, for Eva to reject the human, as McCallum, and Yarova and Kokkola suggest, human and non-human perspectives would have to remain separate. It is Eva's ability to retain both aspects of her identity that makes her a successful human-chimp metamorph.

Eva's ability to narrativize the situations she finds herself in – much like a neurotypical human – directly influences the dexterity of her thoughts and actions. Towards the end of the novel, Eva subtly manipulates the humans in charge of the Madagascar expedition (by telling Maria, the person in charge of the video shoot, that she might get some excellent pictures of the chimps weathering a storm), which enables her to lead her tribe of chimps to freedom. She also succeeds in securing the chimps' survival in the wilderness because she can preconceive and calculate the moves of both human and chimp parties well in advance. Moreover, Eva's chimp body facilitates her communication and secures her position of authority within the chimp community. As a chimpanzee, she can instruct and facilitate learning from the inside such that the chimps can survive the wild. In turn, her communication and embodiment ensure her a strong, sustainable chimp community who

depends on her, and on whom she can depend. Eva-the-chimp is therefore, in a sense, almost a direct flip of the Jane Goodall story, that is, a human saving chimpanzees: Eva as a chimp will save the rest of her kind, and along the way, will save nature as well.

Although animal transfiguration is typically used in young adult narratives as a response to sexual awakening, my study highlights how materiality forms a complex substrate for the adolescent female character that includes but also extends beyond more simplistic ways of conceiving the relationship amongst sexuality, language, embodiment, agency, and identity. Language and the material are closely intertwined, and one cannot exist without the other. The adolescent female character *needs* to accept her embodiment even if she does not fit any labels in "civilized," heteronormative society, because only when she accepts her embodiment can she negotiate the liminality of her existence and manipulate different aspects of her identity to establish her subject position as a successful amalgamation of the human and non-human. More important, accepting the agency generated by her embodiment allows the female character to actively communicate with those around her, resulting in the formation of a strong and sustainable community.

CHAPTER III: “SORRY, I DON’T SPEAK BEAR”: VOICE, AGENCY, AND THE MOTHER-DAUGHTER RELATIONSHIP IN DISNEY-PIXAR’S BRAVE

In Chapter 2, I focused on the metamorphing teenage body as the site of confluence between the linguistic and the material. Since adolescent daughterhood itself is a liminal stage, this chapter will shift my focus to the relationship between the adolescent daughter and her mother’s constantly morphing maternal body in children’s literature. Here, it is essential to acknowledge that western civilization has a double standard about parenting. As Mary Pipher notes in *Reviving Ophelia: Saving the Selves of Adolescent Girls*, relationships with fathers – in literature and film – are almost always portrayed as being productive and growth oriented, while relationships with mothers (especially for children during their adolescence) are considered regressive and dependent. Mothers cannot be involved too much or too little – their involvement has to be precisely the “right” amount. Distant mothers are scorned, even as their close and loving counterparts are criticized for being smothering and overprotective. Dawn Heinecken supports this argument in her own observations about motherhood with regard to current trends in popular culture such as women’s magazines that “promote the values of ‘intensive mothering,’ an ideology of unachievable standards of perfection” (68). According to Pipher, the messages to mothers are most contradictory with regard to their teenage daughters: “mothers are expected to protect their daughters from culture even as they help them fit into it. They are to encourage their daughters to grow into adults and yet keep them from being hurt” (103). Upon “growing up,” daughters are expected to reject and break away from the person with whom they have, until then, closely identified. Predictably, the expectations placed upon fictional mothers seem to mirror their real-life counterparts. Over the last decade or so, there has been a marked increase in the number of texts that address the complexities of mother-daughter relationships including Disney-Pixar’s *Brave* (2012), Greta Gerwig’s film *Ladybird* (2017), Cynthia Kadohata’s *Outside Beauty* (2008), Julie Murphy’s

Dumplin' (2015) which was later made into a film (2018), Isabel Quintero's *Gabi: A Girl in Pieces* (2014), and Erika L. Sanchez's *I am Not Your Perfect Mexican Daughter* (2017). This chapter will focus on *Brave* – with special regard to voice, choice, and the agency of the female characters—to the subject formation of the adolescent protagonist as daughter and princess, and to the community building between women; *Brave* represents a contemporary relationship between a mother and her adolescent daughter, although the setting is historical and fantastical. This study is especially relevant because there exists relatively little scholarship on contemporary mother-daughter relationships in young adult literature.[6]

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[6] Holly Blackford analyzes the intergenerational "foodchains of power" that are constructed by food consumption and production in women's writing for girls on the threshold of adulthood in "Recipe for Reciprocity and Repression: The Politics of Cooking and Consumption in Girls' Coming of Age Literature" (41). Hilary S. Crew's *Is It Really Mommie Dearest?: Mother-Daughter Narratives in Young Adult Fiction* focuses primarily on the discourse of mother-daughter relationships in young adult literature published between 1965 and 1998, and largely deals with socio-cultural behaviors that shape gender discourse. Lisa Rowe Fraustino and Karen Coats' *Mothers in Children's and Young Adult Literature: From the Eighteenth Century to Postfeminism* provides readers with an extensive understanding of the "theoretical paradigms within which representations of mothering can be understood and applied to a range of topics," including the following: the maternal instruction in early children's literature, shifting cultural perspectives regarding motherhood in the twentieth century, the ethical dimensions of mothering, and postfeminist motherhood in a variety of texts ranging from realism to dystopia (13). Marilyn Francus' *Monstrous Motherhood: Eighteenth-Century Culture and the Ideology of Domesticity* analyzes motherhood in eighteenth century British literature, highlighting the inconsistencies among

In Disney-Pixar's *Brave*, both mother and daughter spend more than half the movie renewing their strained relationship. The protagonist, Merida, is at odds with her mother, Queen Elinor, because she prefers traditionally "masculine" activities to performing the duties of a princess. When Elinor invites the sons of neighboring clan leaders to compete for her daughter's hand in marriage, a fight ensues between mother and daughter. Incensed, Merida buys a spell from a witch to change her fate; as a result of Merida's actions, Elinor turns into a bear. Elinor and Merida then try to reverse the spell by "mend[ing] the bond torn by pride," which Merida interprets to mean sewing together a tapestry she tore during their worst fight (*Brave,* 2012). Meanwhile, Fergus, the King and Merida's father, has a vendetta against bears, and will not rest until he has avenged the leg he lost in a bear attack.

Robyn McCallum argues that "individuals' consciousness and sense of identity is formed in dialogue with others and with the discourses constituting the society and culture s/he inhibits" (3). If it is true that the formation of subjectivity is shaped by social ideologies, it follows that one of the ways in which one can achieve agency is by speaking/working against dominant social ideologies. Indeed, a person has power when they establish a sense of individuality and the capacity to act consciously, independent from their social group. Following Paul Smith's *Discerning the Subject*, McCallum understands the terms "subjectivity" and "agency" as follows: "subjectivity is an individual's sense of personal identity as a subject – in the sense of being subject to some measure of external coercion – and as an agent – that is, being capable of conscious and deliberate thought and action" (4).

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domestic ideology, narrative, and historical practice. Although the texts mentioned above focus on myths, fairy tales, and even historical perspectives of mother-daughter relationships, they do not consider the materiality of the maternal body or the various intersections of the material and the discursive.

At first glance, at the very beginning of the film Princess Merida does seem to have agency as she is a strong, independent character. Unlike the Disney princesses before her, who are "traditionally" pretty (read: extraordinarily small-waisted with enormous eyes and a delicate countenance), Merida has untamed red hair, a temper to match, and utter disregard for the way she looks. She disagrees with her parents' decision to find her a husband; in an attempt to escape marriage, she even competes for her own hand (and wins hands down), which embarrasses her family and the members of the other clans. Not only is Merida adept at using weapons, which can easily be interpreted as phallic symbols, but she is very vocal about her impending betrothal as well: "I suppose a princess just does what she's told!" she says with derision, when her mother tells her that the Lords have accepted the invitation to fight for her hand (*Brave* 2012). Later, when Elinor tries to placate Merida and explain that becoming Queen is what she has been preparing for her whole life, Merida vehemently argues, "No! That's what *you've* been preparing me for my whole life! I won't go through with it! You can't make me!" (*Brave* 2012, emphasis in original).

Merida, therefore, clearly has a voice early in the film. And by standing up to her parents and refusing to go through with the betrothal, it does seem as if she has both agency and an established subject position as a headstrong tomboy. She uses her mother's language – "That's what *you've* been preparing me for" – against her, to establish her own position on the issue. Merida represents the capacity to act independently of social restraint: her vehemence at the idea of marriage does, in a way, make the viewer question dominant social ideologies, especially as Merida opposes the marriage plot trope. More important, Merida's anger shows her resisting learning the social codes expected of her as a princess. The focus of the film, however, is more upon the nature and development of the mother-daughter relationship than it is upon Merida's independence. Despite the fact that Elinor is a bear for almost half the film, I argue that the maturity and subjectivity of the adolescent protagonist as

daughter and princess come not just from a sense of agency, but also as a result of the bond she shares with her mother. Since adolescent daughterhood itself is liminal, Merida's relationship with her mother morphs and changes as the body of her mother morphs first from human to bear and then back again. Accordingly, I begin by examining the queen's transformation into a bear and considering what that entails for both Merida and Elinor. I then go on to analyze the process of female community building, both with regard to speech (and consequently, silencing), and to the rituals of feeding and eating. Much like Eva in the previous chapter, the transition from a human body to an animal one gives the characters the freedom they need to overcome social and linguistic barriers to establish a community.

"Twelve feet tall with razor sharp claws": The Bear Body and Abject Motherhood

Lydia Kokkola contends that "fictional children and adolescents are far more likely to undergo metamorphosis than their adult counterparts, suggesting that ... the beastly nature of the youngster is an omnipresent source of uncontrolled power that can be unleashed at any minute" (145). This is true of most fiction featuring metamorphs: as exemplified in the previous chapter, "there is a clear correspondence between metamorphosis and the physical changes at puberty, as well as more oblique metaphysical changes to other developmental transformations in physical and social realms," and teen transformations traditionally reflect anxieties about becoming "the wrong kind of adult" (Waller 44). Interestingly, however, in *Brave*, the adolescent protagonist does *not* undergo metamorphosis; rather unusually, the witch's spell transforms the adult mother into a bear.

The figure of the bear is symbolic of that which is abject. In "Horror and the Monstrous Feminine," Barbara Creed uses Julia Kristeva's theory of abjection to explain the abject as

> "the place where meaning collapses," the place where "I" am not. The abject threatens life; it must be "radically excluded" from the place of the living subject, propelled away from the body and deposited on the other side of an imaginary border which separates the self from that which threatens the self. (37-38)

The concept of abjection is closely linked to the changing, "metamorphizing" adolescent body, as both "[breach] and [challenge] boundaries" (Coats, *Looking* 143). It is important to note that despite (or perhaps *because* of) Merida's adolescence, it is her mother's body that evolves. During transformation, Elinor's body signifies the collapse of the boundary between human and animal. Moreover, as long as she's in the bear's body Elinor occupies a special position: she cannot speak yet is able to express herself quite clearly to her daughter; she thinks like a human and even believes she is one (she continues to wear a crown, and uses a bedspread to cover herself, although, as Merida points out, she has fur and is therefore not naked). Finally, she does not know instinctively how to survive in the wild, and demands that her food be cooked before she tries it. This puts Elinor in the unique position of both being and not being a bear *and* being and not being a human. As Creed notes, abjection "occurs where the individual fails to respect the law," and abject things "highlight the 'fragility of the law' and … exist on the other side of the border that separates out the living subject from that which threatens its extinction" (39). Through her very existence, then, Elinor-as-bear literally challenges the law of Merida's father: no bears.

As a woman, Elinor had always signified the human potential to return to a more primitive state of being, but as a bear she is able to restrict the shaping, manipulation and stereotyping of the female body. Indeed, the female body is almost always abject because "unlike the male body, the proper female body is penetrable, changes shape, swells, gives birth, contracts, lactates, bleeds. Woman's body reminds man of his 'debt to nature' and as such threatens to collapse the boundary between human and animal, civilized and

uncivilized" (Creed "Lesbian," 87). More important, Creed uses Kristeva to argue that all individuals experience abjection at the time of their earliest attempts to break away from the mother, and that the archaic maternal figure (in the absence of the father) is constructed as the monstrous feminine, especially in horror movies: "By refusing to relinquish her hold on her child, she [the monstrous feminine] prevents it from taking up its proper place in relation to the Symbolic. (Creed, "Horror" 42) In *Brave*, too, it would seem that Elinor is overbearing (pun intended) as she attempts to mold her daughter in her own likeness so that Merida may one day be a good wife and queen. Although Merida is outspoken and independent, Elinor is anxious to guide her daughter, rather than allow her to find her own way into the Symbolic order. However, Merida is unlike the child in traditional horror films who, as Creed notes, is "Partly consumed by the desire to remain locked in a blissful relationship with the mother and partly terrified of separation, [and therefore] finds it easy to succumb to the comforting pleasure of the dyadic relationship" (42). Instead, she feels the need to be independent of her mother, which in turn helps mother and daughter establish a strong relationship with one another. One interpretation, therefore, is that the bear-as-body represents a brutality that requires overcoming, so that both mother and daughter can repair the bond that was broken so that Elinor can become human again.

Material feminists – including Stacy Alaimo and Susan Hekman, Karan Barad, Susan Bordo, and Elizabeth Grosz – however, have critiqued the Cartesian split of the body and mind, demonstrating how the materiality of the body produces certain types of knowledge, which in turn influences one's identity. Barad, in particular, argues that "The world is an ongoing open process of mattering through which 'mattering' itself acquires meaning and form in the realization of different agential possibilities" (135). Here, "mattering" refers to the discursive and the material which intra-act with one another in a dynamic and ongoing process which produces agency. In *Brave*, both Merida and Elinor are in a constant state of

flux and change with regard to the materiality of their bodies, access to language, and socio-cultural discourse. Indeed, in the absence of a common tongue, Mother and daughter turn to their bodies to give themselves and each other agency, as I will discuss below. The following sections examine the seemingly conflicting roles of the bear, both as an abject body, and as a functioning mind inside the abject body.

The fact that Elinor gets turned into a bear comes as no surprise: the witch's cottage Merida stumbles upon is full of bear carvings. On a superficial level, the viewer is expected to read the figure of the bear as a threat to the ("civilized") body. On a deeper level, the bear can be read as being synonymous with the primitive body, which is what makes it so threatening in the first place; the bear is unruly, large, disruptive, and in need of direction, and the character, Mor'du, the demon bear, supports this description. Mor'du was the legendary Prince who broke away from his family and bought a spell from the witch. He asked for the strength of ten men and was turned into a bear. Since he did not break the spell by making up with his brothers, Mor'du remains a bear until his death. Marina Warner points out that, historically, "the bear figures as the totem of the wild man, the dweller in the untamed forest, all natural appetite and ferocity" (300); here, too, the bear is coded male and is symbolic of brute force and uncontrolled strength. In other words, Mor'du is the consequence of "too much freedom" that Elinor warns her daughter against, although paradoxically, it is also what she is in danger of becoming if the spell isn't broken by the second sunrise. It would seem that Elinor is being punished for being an overly controlling mother. She has to literally live in a wild body for a few days in order to appreciate Merida's desire for freedom. However, Merida is *also* being punished for her hasty decisions, irresponsibility, and for figuratively and literally breaking familial bonds (especially since her mother-as-bear is in danger of being murdered by her bear hating father). Therefore, Merida

has to learn to take responsibility for her actions and keep her mother alive if she is to turn her back into a human.

Mor'du also shares a history with both Elinor and her husband, Fergus. The film begins with Elinor playing with a much younger Merida, and watching as she learns to use a bow; only after Mor'du attacks for the first time does she become increasingly restrictive of her daughter's actions. The king, too, is changed by the bear attack. He stays behind to fight Mor'du as his wife flees with their daughter. Fergus loses his leg in the fight, and this castration anxiety makes him want to "avenge [his] leg" by killing any bears he sees (*Brave* 2012). The bear, therefore, by the very being of its existence, expresses insatiable needs and desires.

Reduced to her body through the loss of her voice *and* the loss of her subject position as queen, the once articulate Elinor is defined by her animalistic needs. Elinor-as-bear embodies monstrous motherhood. She is physically overwhelming, monstrous in shape and size, and dominates space and situation; in short, she is too large and too powerful to ignore. As Marilyn Francus observes in *Monstrous Motherhood*, "the fecund female and her parasitic progeny evoke the uncontrollable nature of femininity and maternity, and not surprisingly, the image functions as a locus of male disgust with, and fear of, female sexuality and reproduction" (19). Having bears on the loose in his castle, then, challenges the law of the father and shakes the sense of security that King Fergus has in regard to his own hold on power. "Since the monstrous mother refuses to be sexually or socially passive, she violates the codes of proper female behavior," (Francus 26) and this inevitably leads to a bear hunt organized by the King. *All* the men in the castle go on a massive bear hunt, in an attempt to find and kill that which threatens their existence. King Fergus refuses to accept that the bear in his castle is actually his wife: even when Merida throws herself in front of Elinor-as-bear and says, "I refuse to let you kill my mother," (*Brave* 2012) Fergus merely asks her to step

aside. It does seem that Francus' observation, "what constitutes strength in the female weakens the male, and therefore female power must be reinterpreted in order to be subjugated," holds true here (27). Only Merida is able to see that the bear is her mother, and with good reason: Elinor's inability to control her body makes her "monstrous" in male eyes.

The bear also functions as a metaphor for uncurbed carnality that threatens male authority and patriarchy. Being a bear gives Elinor a great deal of physical strength and power. She protects her daughter almost as much as her daughter protects her. In the final scene with Mor'du, for instance, the castrated father is swiped aside by the angry bear. Elinor-as-bear breaks free of the ropes that bind her and attacks Mor'du in order to protect her child. Interestingly, by pushing Mor'du against a menhir, she uses two seemingly binary aspects of her self – brute force and human thought – to conquer and kill her foe. By killing Mor'du and releasing the spirit of the Prince that had hitherto been trapped in the bear's body, Elinor-as-bear metaphorically kills the bear in herself. Put another way, Elinor uses her human mind in her monstrous body to combat the (literally) all-consuming animal body that is Mor'du, which in turn releases the human in her. The "winning" of the human over the animal, then, is clearly linked to a sense of community because Elinor primarily thinks of her daughter's wellbeing over her own. While this invariably brings to mind a variation of the trope of the maternal sacrifice, it nevertheless also allows Elinor an opportunity to establish a bond with Merida. This sense of community building is further exemplified with regard to speech and silencing, and relationships with food.

"Sorry, I don't speak Bear": Speech and Silencing in *Brave*

More often than not the human to animal metamorphs' lack of human speech represents their resistance to the law of the father, which in turn gives them some agency. As explained in the previous chapter, animal transformations are a form of self-preservation, and

represent the act of refusing to identify with a communal body or given norms of a system. Arguably, metamorphs "are engaged in protecting themselves from the demands of public communication, from the requirement that they utter, and that they fit into a verbal social order by confessing to a name" (Massey 32). The metamorph, therefore, traditionally attempts to *escape* the possession of language. The subject, on the other hand, is constructed in and through language, and individual growth is considered possible only once the adolescent character separates from parental authority, as explained by Karen Coats, Roberta Seelinger Trites, and Alison Waller. Merida, feeling a threat to her freedom and independence, gives her mother a spell to turn her into a bear to actively punish her. Despite Merida's desire to acquire agency by silencing her mother, Elinor-as-bear *needs* Merida to authenticate her existence since she cannot speak. (Merida is the only person in the film who recognizes her mother despite the latter's embodiment as a bear.) Merida's presence authenticates Elinor-as-bear as the latter's is, as Creed would say, "an existence which needs validation because of her problematic relation to the symbolic realm" ("Horror," 41).

Moreover, unlike traditional adolescent protagonists who try to break away from parental authority, Merida, too, needs Elinor. Although Elinor is transformed into a bear for most of the film, Merida still needs her mother to navigate situations that involve both humans and bears. For example, when Merida is attacked by Mor'du, Elinor-as-bear saves her (despite being tied down by members of various clans). Elinor also saves her daughter from social situations like committing to a marriage she doesn't want, which I will demonstrate below. This potential lack of a mother – what Lacan would call the symbolic break from the dyad – frightens Merida more than the bear does.

Susan Bordo notes that disciplining of the female body occurs from within. Quoting Foucault, she argues that "power works from below, prevailing forms of selfhood and subjectivity" (Bordo 27). Notably, it is Elinor, and not Fergus, who upholds the rules of

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patriarchy, both with regard to how the land is governed and establishing guidelines for how her daughter should (or should) not behave in order for her to remain ladylike. Moreover, Elinor is able to give in completely to her bear body only after she has removed her crown, which functions in this reading as a panopticon. In other words, Elinor can only be a companion to her daughter when she can completely let go of being Queen, and is no longer under the direct gaze of the patriarchal Symbolic order. Lack of language in this regard does not mean complete silencing. Elinor is a human occupying a bear's body: she walks on two legs, understands human language, communicates with grunts, charades, and intentional eye movements, and is aware of complex human relationships, both personal and communal. Elinor's inarticulacy, then, is far from a simple "silencing"; instead it represents the lack of patriarchal "royal" language that had originally distanced mother and daughter.

Women are socialized into ways of talking: prior to her transformation, Elinor speaks like a Queen, and trains Merida to do the same. In the first ten minutes of the movie, we see Merida speaking to an empty hall, while her mother paces and provides comments, preparing her to be part of the Symbolic order:

> Merida: Aye Robin, jolly robin, and thou shalt know of mine–
>
> Elinor: Pro-*ject*!
>
> Merida: – AND THOU SHALT KNOW –
>
> Elinor: Enunciate! You must be understood from anywhere in the room! Or it's all for naught. (*Brave* 2012)

Elinor also writes official letters, speaks to the Lords, and handles other important matters of State. She has been socialized into speaking like a queen, especially since she does not have the brute strength of her husband, for this is the only way she can be part of the patriarchal system. In the above excerpt, we see one of the many ways in which Elinor trains her daughter (but not her sons) to do the same.

Moreover, Merida and Elinor constantly speak over one another in an attempt to be heard, even as each accuses the other of not listening. Elinor, especially, either ignores her daughter's stories because they are not princess-like, or talks over her daughter. In the scene, after Merida storms off during dinner, Elinor talks to Fergus while Merida talks to her horse, Angus. The viewer gets both characters' perspectives on the subject of betrothal, as the camera intercuts between the castle and the stables:

> Elinor: All this work, all this time spent in preparing you, schooling you, giving you everything we never had. I ask you, what do you expect us to do?
>
> Merida: Call off the gathering! Would that kill them? You're the queen. You can just tell the lords the princess is not ready for this. In fact, she might not ever be ready for this. So that's that. Good day to you. We'll expect your declarations of war in the morning.
>
> Elinor: I understand all this might seem sudden – unfair, even. I faced reservations when I faced betrothal. But we can't just run away from who we are.
>
> Merida: I don't want my life to be over. I want my freedom.
>
> Elinor: But are you willing to pay the price your freedom will cost? (*Brave* 2012)

Read/viewed together, it almost seems as if mother and daughter are on the same page both because they seem to be responding to each other although they are holding different ideas *and* because each thinks the other should understand and accept her approach to the situation. But since the characters are not in the same scene, neither is able to communicate to the other what she really feels, although both conversations occur side by side. While mother and daughter are able to talk about their feelings to practically everyone else, they are unable to confide in each other for a variety of reasons. In fact, both of them finish with these lines:

> Elinor: I think you'd see if you could just...
>
> Merida: I think I could make you understand if you would just...

Elinor: Listen.

Merida: Listen. (*Brave* 2012)

"Listen," uttered by Merida and Elinor is delivered almost simultaneously, and emphasizes the idea that both characters have the same goal: being heard by the other. It is not surprising, then, that Merida's spell silences her mother, given that what Merida really wants is to be listened to. (In a previous scene, we see Merida describing her adventures, and the Queen hardly listens.) However, "silence" as a noun is not necessarily a bad thing. In "Women's Silence as a Ritual of Truth," Patricia Laurence notes that women sometimes adopt "a stance of silence" through which they are able to find their voices (157). Moreover, "women's silence, viewed from the outside, is a mark of absence and powerlessness"; however, if "the same silence is viewed from the inside, and women's experiences and disposition of mind inform the standard of what is real, then women's silence can be viewed as a presence, and as a text, waiting to be read" (Laurence 157-158). [7] Indeed, speech cannot exist by itself; in order for speakers to be effective, they must be heard. The speaker and listener come together, then, in creating what Laurence would call a "ritual of truth," and "there is a power in listening or in not listening, as well as in speaking or in not speaking" as evidenced by Elinor's transformation into a bear (158).

Since Elinor-as-bear cannot use human language as a medium of communication, both Merida and Elinor need to work harder at understanding and being understood. Although Merida uses her mother's lack of human speech as an opportunity to not heed her

[7] The "stance of silence" is complicated here by the fact that Elinor is silenced by another woman. However, the silencing of human speech does not negatively affect Elinor's relationship with her daughter. On the contrary, it only applies to her role as a mouthpiece for the patriarchy.

pedantic advice – “Sorry, I don’t speak Bear” – it is significant that she is the only person who is able to recognize the bear as her mother and, consequently, communicate with her nonverbally. Hélène Cixous has argued that since women exist outside the Symbolic Order, they “must write through their bodies,” and “must invent the impregnable language that will wreck partitions, classes, and rhetorics, regulations and codes” (Cixous 886). Denied the masculine language of the king and the clan(s), both mother and daughter turn *to* their bodies and create a (sign) language inaccessible to others.

A clear example of forging a bond despite the language barrier and of working together occurs when Merida and Elinor-as-bear sneak back into the castle to mend the tapestry. The disappearance of the princess causes a rift between the clans, and the men – all quick to anger – are fighting in the dining room. Merida emulates her mother, walks amidst the warring lords, and begins her speech. To stall for time, she begins with the legend that her mother told her of the Prince Mor’du, repeating it almost exactly word for word. She talks to the lords about how they joined their forces together and saved each other’s lives. In the second half of her speech, however, Elinor-as-bear (who is in the process of sneaking up the stairs) stops her daughter from committing to a betrothal she does not want. Instead, she decides to break tradition and allow both her daughter and the Lords’ sons a chance to choose their own partners. Merida speaks to the lords as Elinor-as-bear mimes from behind them. Elinor-as-bear’s miming is akin to a game of charades. Although both the film’s audience and Merida can see the gestures, only Merida is able to interpret her correctly and in her very first try.

Until Elinor transforms into a bear, the two women talk past each other, and may be speaking two languages as different as English and Bear. As McCallum points out, “meanings are always, to some extent, culturally constructed, and the learning of another language entails learning the cultural codes through which a linguistic community represents

and makes sense of the world" (110). Both Elinor and Merida need to learn to speak each other's "language" in order to communicate, a task they are able to achieve only when faced with dire consequences. Arguably, this language difference is also one of intergenerationality. Although Merida does initially find it difficult to understand her mother's gestures, she acquires and gains competence in following her mother's signs. Significantly, the bodily language Merida learns is the bodily language with which Elinor begins to challenge the patriarchy. In the scene described above, Merida's subject position as a princess is possible only when she listens to her mother's advice and begins to understand herself in relation to not just her family, but also her Scottish community: "I have been selfish," she concedes, towards the end, and this acts as the beginning of bringing about a change (*Brave* 2012).

"How do you know you won't like it if you don't try it?": The Rituals of Feeding and Eating

Another instance of community formation between mother and daughter occurs in relation to food, its functions and consumption (or lack thereof). In their introduction to *Critical Approaches to Food in Children's Literature*, Kara Keeling and Scott Pollard argue that food does not simply satisfy hunger. They explain that "[food] is a highly elaborated social artefact – [it] is produced, bought, cooked, prepared, consumed in a mannered form – and this transcends the demands of hunger and inexorably functions symbolically" (Keeling and Pollard 3). More important, food is "an intergenerational matter between mothers and daughters" and plays a large role in the socializing process (Blackford 42). In "Recipe for Reciprocity and Repression," Holly Blackford goes on to point out that in many girls' novels, female adolescent characters "apprentice" with their mothers in the kitchen, where the ritual of serving food is emphasized over and above eating. We see this transition or role reversal with regard to Elinor and Merida in *Brave*.

Images of food and feasting abound from the very beginning of the narrative. Viewers are introduced to teenage Merida as she bites into an apple just as the door to the throne room opens, much to the exasperation of her mother. Most revealing is the dinner scene after Merida returns after a day in the wild when she "[doesn't] have to be a princess" (*Brave* 2012). She steals food from the kitchen, and walks into the dining room, carelessly tossing an apple core behind her. She carries in a plate of cakes, although the table is strewn with a lot of other dishes. Fergus' plates are piled high with meat which he alternately eats and waves around with gusto, until his hounds leap onto his lap and eat from his plate; her brothers play with their food, sculpting it into funny faces or throwing it on each other. Elinor alone does not eat. Instead, she reads several letters and attends to matters of State. She also tries to control her family's eating: she begins to tell her husband to not allow the dogs on the table but gives up halfway through her sentence; she disapproves of the fact that Merida's plate is full of cakes and exclaims, "Fergus! Look at your daughter's plate!" (*Brave* 2012) in an attempt to invoke the paternal law; she tries to coax her sons to eat their food and not play with it. Indeed, "food has significance for women because it is a means of nourishing, sustaining and protecting – and therefore controlling – the bodies into which it is instilled" (Purkiss 108). Although we don't see her cooking the food, Elinor plays the role of the traditional mother, establishing socialization rituals and attempting to set boundaries between what is acceptable and not by determining what can be eaten, and how it should be eaten. In fact, Elinor's body is the embodiment of control in the above-mentioned scenes, especially when compared to Merida's: she dresses formally, always wears a crown, and significantly, her dark hair is constantly tied down in two long braids.

Merida, on the other hand, has a more destructive relationship with food. Blackford's observation that "in fairytales that signify intergenerational dynamics, we find that the young make a Prometheus stand against elders who control food and thus hold power" holds true

with regard to this film as well (42). Not only does Merida disrupt the meal described above by barging in late, but her father knocks over the dining table (thereby destroying the whole meal) when she storms out; by feeding her brothers sweets under the table and later, bribing them with dessert, she challenges the family hierarchy, especially as Elinor tries unsuccessfully to get her sons to eat a healthy meal. Moreover, eating the wrong foods (cake) and eating at the wrong times (during official duties) only serve to distance Merida from her mother as the former attempts to assert her own authority over both family and country. Merida's most calculated and disastrous act in the film, however, is when she buys a spell in the shape of a cake from a witch. Here, the cake represents not just a deceptive truce between mother and daughter, but also Elinor's subsequent disembodiment.

The figure of the witch, complete with a bubbling cauldron, serves "as [a] cannibalistic [inversion] of the mother" (Blackford 43). Purkiss supports this reading of witches, especially since providing the child with its first sustenance is crucial to the identity of the mother. Therefore, when Merida buys a spell, the significance of the food changes: "the witch's food reverses this positive charge [of the mother's food]; instead of sustaining, it destroys" (Purkiss 108). The witch's spell is abject, for although the cake itself is solid, its properties are neither here nor there.[8] Both the abject cake and the process of making it represent "rage at rituals that ask girls to ingest the maternal body and internalise its role, as if it were their own inner desires" (Blackford 43). Indeed, that is how Merida introduces the viewer to her mother: "My whole life is planned out," she says in the voice over, "preparing

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[8] The cake is made in a cauldron, and comprises of ingredients as various as a spring of herbs, and a single hair from Merida's head. A thunder storm brews in the cauldron during this process, and, following a brilliant flash of light and steam, the witch uses a pair of tongs to pull out a single cupcake (with frosting on top).

for the day I become.... Well, my mother" (*Brave* 2012). Before she tears the tapestry and flees her home, she tells her mother, "You walk around telling me what to do, what not to do, trying to make me be like you. Well, I'm not going to be like you! [...] I'd rather *die* than be like you!" (*Brave* 2012). Following their fight, Merida gives her mother the cake as a "peace offering" when Elinor tells her that a "decision needs to be made" regarding the Lords waiting in the hall upstairs (*Brave* 2012). Here, Merida arranges the cake on a plate with some fruits and a thistle on the side, but puts it down when her mother tells her how worried she has been. She offers her mother the cake only when Elinor talks about the Lords upstairs, which highlights the fact that Merida would do *anything* to not be like (or transform into) her mother. Giving her mother the abject cake, then, not only literally changes her mother into a bear, but that action also reverses roles and power structures.

In traditional fairy tales, "the mother figures that cook the food have omnipotent powers over the young" (Blackford 42). In this case, however, because of the abject nature of the food, and the person who made the food (the witch), Merida gains power over her mother. This power is transient, although the spell *will* become permanent (and the mother, a real bear) unless they break the spell by the second sunrise. Here, Merida not only has power over her mother (which she has longed for), but also has to take responsibility for her actions, or risk losing her parent for life.

Merida now has to provide for Elinor, feed her and find her shelter, in much the same way as a mother would provide for her offspring. Even in the wild, Elinor-as-bear retains human eating habits for a short while: she lays out a table for breakfast, does not allow Merida to put her bow on the table, and proceeds to cut her berries (arranged on a flat plate-like stone) with twigs shaped like a fork and knife. When working with the makeshift cutlery proves futile, she proceeds to eat the berries very daintily with her claws. Not surprisingly, Elinor-as-bear needs to eat, although the human Elinor apparently did not. Unfortunately, she

does not know what she is eating, or how to fend for herself in the wild. Even when Merida informs her that she's eating nightshade berries, Elinor-as-bear does not stop until her daughter tells her, "They're poisonous" (*Brave* 2012). Merida then provides for her mother by not just catching her fish from a nearby stream, but also cooking it for her. It is worth noting that Merida does not eat during these scenes; she only catches the fish, cooks it and feeds her mother, thereby echoing what Blackford notes about adolescent girls: "cooking at the expense of eating, partaking in the politics by which girls learn to curtail their own desire and sacrifice for others" (Blackford 42). Although Merida is not self-sacrificial in the traditional sense, cooking for her mother becomes a form of self-control, especially since cooking is at the center of socialization rituals for young women like Merida. Therefore, procuring and cooking food prepares her for repressing her otherwise unrestrained emotions, both desire and anger. Merida goes on to teach her mother to fish, and consequently, to feed herself. In other words, a role reversal happens: the mother-as-bear is infantilized, and her daughter becomes the provider. Feeding, then, puts Merida in a position of much wanted authority: her mother has to listen to her if she is to survive. Merida is a gentler provider, however, who does not enforce the food rules her mother previously imposed on her including, "[a] princess does not scarf" (*Brave* 2012). Cooking, feeding, and eating begin the process of repairing the bond between the mother and daughter; if Merida is to repair the bond that was broken by feeding her mother abject food, she must do so by procuring and cooking good, nutritious fare.

"We both have [changed]": Rebirth and Re-awakening

According to Michelle Boulous Walker in *Philosophy and the Maternal Body*,

> the pre-verbal bond between mother and daughter is awakened in women's literature when the daughter gives birth herself. In this act, she recaptures the intense

> attachment to her own mother's body, an embodied memory that exists prior to, and beyond, language. (160)

Here, Elinor's metamorphosis can be interpreted as rebirth: in trying to change her fate, Merida unknowingly changes both her mother and herself. Transforming her mother into a bear, Merida symbolically "gives birth" to a newer, more responsible version of herself, as she learns traditionally maternal acts to provide for and feed her mother. She learns not only to speak like a princess, but more importantly, to listen and to communicate in a meaningful way. Reduced to the pre-verbal infantile body ruled entirely by needs, Elinor too, learns to use language differently, and to entrust her daughter with the reins. As Walker might say, "daughters become mothers, and mothers remember themselves as daughters in a process that blurs the stability of distinction" (161). Independence and rebirth, therefore, seem to go hand in hand.

I have shown how Merida uses her knowledge to survive in the forest while she also physically looks after her mother. She teaches and trains Elinor in the ways of being a bear, in much the same ways as her mother trains her to be a princess. Merida, however, is unaware of the fact that she is mirroring – and in some ways *becoming* – her mother, despite her earlier reluctance to do so. Moreover, Merida not only learns to speak her mother's language, as shown above, but also to speak like a princess, thereby commanding the respect of the other characters who are predominantly males. Silencing the Queen leaves Merida no choice but to take on the role herself. She single-handedly gets the clans to stop fighting with one another – an act her father, the King, has been unable to accomplish. She walks into the hall regally – much like her mother – and attempts to salvage the situation, putting the kingdom's needs ahead of her own. For Merida, speaking for her mother (literally) and speaking for herself become intertwined as she writes herself into the symbolic domain. Using human language to her advantage even as she interprets her mother's gestures, Merida demonstrates

her ability to be part of both feminine and masculine worlds through the pre-verbal knowledge that Elinor-as-bear represents, and the human language needed to access (and even control) the Symbolic (patriarchal) order. Arguably, Merida needs access to both to survive.

Trites notes with regard to *Brave*, despite the fact that Elinor "quite literally enacts the [clichéd] script of the 'Mama Grizzly,'" that "for the first time, Pixar has created a film that manages to avoid the Pixar maturity formula" in which fathers grow as much as their children do (*Literary*, 94). This is possibly because unlike traditional Disney-Pixar films, it is the *mother*, not the father, who is flawed and allowed to grow. Before her transformation, Elinor exudes a sense of rigidity and a penchant for following rules. Admittedly, demeanor plays a significant role in allowing a woman to keep her place – and control – in a male dominated world. A clear contrast here occurs with her husband, Fergus, who copes only because of his brute strength. Getting turned into a bear, therefore, puts Elinor in a compromised position for two reasons: she loses access to verbal human language, and consequently, the patriarchal system, and she now has to give in to all the needs of the body that could hitherto be controlled. Elinor-as-bear, however, is able to experience certain freedoms and the bear body becomes symbolic of rebirth and re-awakening. Becoming a bear is not just Merida's punishment for her mother, but also a resurfacing of both Elinor's and male society's repressed anxieties regarding "too much freedom," as Merida herself struggles to transform her mother back into her human self, and also keep her alive. Moreover, the bear body gives Elinor access to physical strength; she uses her body as a weapon in her fight with Mor'du, thereby revising her original opinion that "a princess should not have weapons" (*Brave* 2012). Admittedly, brute strength is not the solution to social issues: it is a combination of human relations and force that enables Elinor to protect her daughter and break the spell. Finally, with regard to food, Elinor-as-bear is forced to relinquish control and allow her

daughter to feed her. Unknowingly, Elinor-as-bear empowers Merida by giving up her maternal role and entrusting in her daughter a role traditionally reserved for the adult.

While *Brave* is no doubt an empowering movie (mostly for Merida), it does seem as though adolescent empowerment can happen only at the expense of female adult sacrifice: Elinor spends the first half of the movie trying very hard, with little success, to make her daughter behave like a princess; she gets turned into a bear for her efforts and – despite the happy ending – is entirely dependent on her daughter for both her survival as a bear, and her chance to turn back into a human. Moreover, since Fergus seemingly supports a feminist agenda by giving his daughter weapons and letting her do whatever she wants, the mother inherently becomes "the villain." Further, although the movie attempts to step outside the brand of "perfect mothering" advertised in most other films and novels, it leads us to question whether women have a language outside of the patriarchal symbolic order. The fact that both Merida and Elinor have access to a pre-verbal semiotic knowledge suggests that they do. Their relationship with food suggests that the roles of "mother" and "daughter" are reversible, and that the boundaries between the two are fluid. As difficult as it is to ignore the fact that the mother has to be metamorphosed for such a relationship to occur, Elinor's new material existence removes her from the purview of the patriarchy, as the men in the film literally cannot see Elinor once she turns into a bear.

Nonetheless, *Brave* is a rare children's text that explores female bonding and community building between a mother and her daughter in a positive light. Mother and daughterhood are important to any study of the feminine body; chapter 2 discusses how many young adult narratives sexualize the teenage body, which, as Kokkola goes on to demonstrate, can also be a maternal body (55, 59-67). *Brave*, on the other hand, puts mother and daughter directly in conversation with one another because Merida knows she will eventually take her mother's place in ruling as queen. Moreover, while books like *Gabi: Girl*

in Pieces show the interaction between a feuding, pregnant maternal body and her daughter in an unresolved conflictual relationship, *Brave* demonstrates a bridging that can occur when the roles are reversed, with the mother being infantilized in the form of a bear such that the daughter must assume the role fulfilled by the maternal body. Most importantly, perhaps, it reminds audiences that agency comes not just from brute strength and weapons, but also from the ability to manipulate language to challenge the patriarchal system from within.

CHAPTER IV: THE MAKING OF A REVOLUTIONARY: DISCOURSE, MATERIALITY, AND FEMALE FRIENDSHIPS IN THE LUNAR CHRONICLES

In Chapters 2 and 3, I discussed the liminality of the body of the metamorph and the agency generated by human to animal transformations. This liminality can be extended to female bodies in dystopian fiction. Sara K. Day, Miranda A. Green-Barteet, and Amy L. Montz note in their introduction to *Female Rebellion in Young Adult Dystopian Fiction* that young women in late twentieth and early twenty-first century dystopian fiction "embody liminality, straddling the lines of individuality and conformity, of empowerment and passivity" (4). Arguably, it is this very liminality that allows these young female characters to actively resist and rebel against their tyrannical societies, and recent young adult dystopian fiction has been praised for the same thing: Katniss Everdeen is "hard as nails" and "tough, hostile, calculating – and lethal," but is still dearly loved "for inspiring a revolution" in *The Hunger Games* series (Ellis "Why"). In the *Divergent* trilogy, Tris Prior is praised for "giving readers a daring rough-and-ready heroine with action hero qualities" that one doesn't often see among female protagonists (Fallon "14"). Tally Youngblood, in the *Uglies* series, is "so darn stubborn," and will "fight like hell to get [her agency] back," so much so that she is able to "cure" herself of brain lesions (Pless "Strong"). These female characters take on traditionally masculine roles such as fighting their opponents and providing for their families, even as they deal with problems that parallel contemporary events: climate related catastrophes, violence against minorities, and extreme inequalities in wealth and power. Such female rebels more often than not demonstrate physical and mental prowess and a sense of individuality that invariably leads to their gaining agency, which in turn helps them work to overthrow totalitarian regimes.

Although many rebellious female protagonists (including the ones mentioned above) challenge gender roles and expectations, they have often been critiqued for not being feminist

enough. Balaka Basu, Katherine R. Broad, and Carrie Hintz remind readers that strong female characters "learn their own limitations" even as they fight the system: "While the political awakening that YA dystopias associate with coming of age might inspire rebellion against a stultifying status quo, it might also teach their protagonists to strike a compromise between change and acceptance" (7). Scholars have also argued that many female characters' revolutionary acts are more often than not initiated by heterosexual romance and sexual awakening: according to Sara Day, the young female protagonist's "emerging sexual confidence corresponds with a newfound willingness to seek justice for herself and those around her" (81-82). Ann M. M. Childs takes this argument a step further when she points out that female characters favor their heterosexual relationships over and above connections with their female friends, despite being "pulled into rebellion by [the] female friend's agency" (188). Finally, as Katherine R. Broad observes with regard to Katniss in *The Hunger Games* trilogy, regardless of how smart or resourceful the character might be, "growing up involves removing herself from the political sphere and retreating to the domestic sphere in order to raise children" (127).[9] Allegedly strong female characters invariably "tend to accept that they cannot change every aspect of their societies' controlling frameworks, particularly

[9] Although this chapter deals specifically with young adult dystopia, this phenomenon can be seen in other genres as well, most notably the Harry Potter series. While it can be argued that this is a "teen" phenomenon rather than a gendered one, male characters like Harry Potter are not broken and/or powerless towards the end of the series unlike most female protagonists in young adult dystopia.

as these relate to violence and sexuality" (Day, *et al*. 4); despite their promising beginnings, personal rebellions taper off into social conformity or renunciation.[10]

Marissa Meyer's *The Lunar Chronicles*, however, seems to be an exception to this rule. The series is comprised of a radical retelling of four fairy tales—*Cinder* (2012), *Scarlet* (2013), *Cress* (2014), and *Winter* (2015)—which are reworkings of *Cinderella*, *Little Red Riding Hood*, *Rapunzel*, and *Snow White*, respectively. In *Cinder*, the title character is a cyborg (and a mechanic) and consequently in this society, a second-class citizen. When her stepmother enrolls her against her will into a cyborg draft (to test the antidote for a devastating plague, called letumosis), Cinder finds out that she is not just Lunar, but also the long-lost Princess Selene, the rightful heir to the Lunar throne. She thus begins her quest to overthrow her aunt, the tyrannical Queen Levana, who is in the process of using diplomatic force to marry Emperor Kai of the Earthen Commonwealth so she can take over the planet. In *Scarlet*, *Cress*, and *Winter*, readers are introduced to other strong female characters – Scarlet, Cress, and Winter – who are rescued by Cinder and one another from Levana's clutches. Like other revolutionary women in young adult dystopian fiction, Cinder, too, straddles several liminal (and socially disadvantageous) positions by virtue of being cyborg, Lunar, female, and adolescent. Nonetheless, Cinder and her friends not only successfully stage a coup, uniting the different Lunar districts in a revolt against Levana, but Cinder also goes on to be crowned Queen of Luna, dismantling Levana's reign of terror and establishing a more

[10] For instance, in *Mockingjay*, Katniss retreats into herself, and becomes a wife and mother after the revolution despite her previous claims to not want children; Tris dies in *Allegiant*, sacrificing herself for all the "right reasons"; Tally decides she is done with the interventions and manipulations of civilization, and abandons her family and friends in an effort to conserve nature in *Specials*.

equal and just system in its place. It would not be unfair to claim that Cinder is perhaps one of the *first* revolutionary heroines to take control of her people and her country (in this case satellite) and govern them in a way that *she* feels is right, rather than give in to her "societies' controlling frameworks" like the rebellious heroines before her. I contend that Cinder can rule over Luna because of her physical prowess and the materiality of her body (much like Katniss and other female rebels in dystopian fiction), but also because she has the unwavering support of her companions and access to the Symbolic order she wants to overthrow.

Cinder occupies a unique position (with regard to other revolutionary dystopian characters) in that she has access to both language in the Symbolic order and the material as human and as machine, as she is a Lunar cyborg. In other words, Cinder is able to access power in a number of ways: through language in the Symbolic order, through her cyborg material nature, and by displaying her humanity. Victoria Flanagan points out that "Cinder's hybridised identity – as a cyborg, as a foreign 'alien', as a woman – renders her an 'othered' subject on multiple counts," especially since Cinder is constantly associated with the plague: "cyborgs are compulsorily drafted as test subjects for plague-related research and, when her identity is ultimately revealed to be Lunar … she is then being suspected of being a carrier of the disease[,] typical of the way in which racist discourse constructs racial or cultural 'otherness' as both dirty and diseased" (*Technology* 66). On the Moon, however, Cinder's identity changes because she is the satellite's long-lost Princess Selene and the rightful heir to the Lunar throne. In order to succeed, Cinder must challenge and defeat Levana *on Luna*, and this can be achieved only with a balance of the discursive and materiality, including a sense of community. Stacy Alaimo and Susan Hekman define "material feminists" as those who "explore the interaction of culture, history, discourse, technology, biology, and the 'environment,' without privileging any one of these elements" (7). In Cinder's body, too,

language and materiality are not set up as binaries, but as mutually interdependent entities. The following sections will deal with a close examination of Cinder's entrance into Luna's Symbolic order through the use of her Lunar gift, the agency generated by the materiality of her cyborg body, and the friendships she forms with the other characters that are based on the ethics of care.

Language and Luna: A Lacanian Reading of the Lunar Gift

The Lunar gift, or the ability to manipulate people, is an interesting concept. As one character, Dr. Erland, explains it, the Lunar gift is "the ability to use your brain to output and control [other people's] electromagnetic energy" to make them feel, say, and/or do things regardless of what they may desire (*Cinder* 238). In other words, Lunars' manipulation of other people's bioelectrical energy is a discursive tool, which they use as Earthens use language: to detect others' presence, to communicate thoughts and ideas, generate emotions, to lie, brainwash, convince, give orders, punish, and protect, among other things. However, while Earthens *only* have language, Lunars are a lot more powerful as they have both language and the Lunar gift. Consequently, it makes sense to read the Lunars' use of their gift as discourse, and attempt to understand it through a Lacanian lens.

For Lacan, language is the means by which an individual becomes part of the Symbolic order. In Lacanian thinking, the subject is an effect of language; language is performative, in that it does not have to refer to something that already exists, but instead creates, to some extent, that which it names; finally, language has much power, and we need language to become a subject in the Symbolic order. That is, everyone has to use language to become a subject, but those who recognize that the power actually lies within language are better able to function within it. Rejecting language is not an option for the subject, for if she does, "she will be caught in a paralyzing fantasy space" (Coats 65). Arguably, everyone has a

different relationship with language. In *How to Do Things With Words*, J.L. Austin explains that for a phrase to convey a certain meaning, certain conditions need to be met. Using the word "good" as an example, he states "we shall not get really clear about this word "good" and what we use it to do until, ideally, we have a complete list of those illocutionary acts of which commending, grading, &c., are isolated specimens–until we know how many such acts there are and what are their relationships and inter-connexions" (163-64). Language, therefore, does not exist by itself; the authority of the speaker, when and where the speech act takes place, and the truth-value of the spoken word are all as important as the content of the sentence or phrase. Emperors and other world leaders, for instance, do not merely have access to language through education, but, because of their socio-political positions, are expected to maintain peace through diplomatic relations, empower their nations through their words, and perhaps even reward and/or punish through their use of language. Those without access to education, on the other hand, might not be able to accomplish as much as those in positions of power because of the social roles they play. In turn, they may have less awareness of and control over how they might use language, which would, once more, limit the social opportunities created through language.

Correspondingly, on Luna, the subject is an effect of bioelectric energy as it is used in lieu of language: bioelectric energy is the medium through which desires are expressed, lacks covered, manipulations performed, and subjects controlled. Coats explains that

> desire is inaugurated with the subject's assumption of lack… In simplest terms, the word is not the thing, so when we use words to talk about objects or experiences, there is always a gap, a mediation of the referent through language that necessarily makes the referent other than what it is. Lacan uses a bar between the signifier and the signified to symbolize this gap; think of this bar as a little guillotine that severs (castrates) being from meaning, thus assuming as a condition of her identity this

symbolic castration. Our physical drives get displaced into a rhetoric of desire that can never completely satisfy. (*Looking* 79-80)

Lack, therefore, is something fundamentally missing from our beings, that we try to satisfy through our desires to make us "complete" once again. It is through the pursuit of desires – and language as a mediator of these desires – that we can actively pursue a subject position in the Symbolic.

On the Moon, people are segregated based on their skill with bioelectric manipulations, much in the same way that skill with language conveys power in our world. Levana is by far the most powerful user of the Lunar gift, and her socio-political position as the Queen of Luna ensures that she has more authority over her gift than her subjects. Levana's thaumaturges (equivalent to army commanders on Earth) are other skilled users, as each thaumaturge can mentally control several guards and/or warriors at once. The guards have little power and can therefore be easily manipulated, whereas the lupine soldiers (also known as the Special Operatives because they are humans whose genes have been modified with genetic material from wolves) have been genetically modified, which means they cannot manipulate *anyone*.

Children born without the Lunar gift (which in turn protects them from being manipulated) are called "shells." Shells are supposed to be put to death by the tyrannical Queen Levana, as she considers people she cannot control to be potential threats, but she instead secrets them away and manipulates them genetically to create her lupine soldiers. Finally, not using one's gift is not an option for Lunars; as Dr. Erland explains, "the gift is such a fundamental part of our internal makeup that tempering it can create devastating psychological side effects – hallucinations, depression... even madness" (*Cinder* 240, ellipses original). In this section, I will focus on the three distinct uses of bioelectrical manipulations

as represented by Levana, Cinder, and Winter, and I will interrogate what each entails for the individual and the country.

Queen Levana uses her Lunar gift extensively—to veil as well as to manipulate. Like similarly power-hungry tyrants in other dystopias, Levana constantly lies and manipulates in order to achieve her desires and cover her lack. Levana has many desires. She desires to be Queen of Luna, to be desired and loved by her subjects, to be desired by Emperor Kai, to become Empress of the Earthen Commonwealth, and to be loved and welcomed by the Earthens on Earth, among other things. Most of Levana's desires are primarily fueled by power or knowledge, and stem from her lack of beauty and from knowing that she is a pretender to the Lunar throne. Since Levana constantly (mis)uses her Lunar gift for pleasure, knowledge, or to even satisfy a basic need or want, it is not possible to discuss each and every one of her transgressions given the scope of this study. Instead, I will focus on her three major forms of manipulation: the glamour that makes her appear beautiful to everyone around her, the veil she wears when she appears on screen because cameras cannot be "tricked," and finally, her active control of other peoples' bioelectrical energies that enables her to manipulate what they say, do, and feel, regardless of their allegiances.

Readers first get a glimpse of Levana's beauty as focalized by Kai, when the former visits Earth for the first time following Emperor Rikan's (Kai's father's) death in *Cinder*:

> She was indeed beautiful, as if someone had taken the specific measurements of perfection and used them to mold a single ideal specimen. Her face was slightly heart-shaped, with high cheekbones barely flushed. Auburn hair fell in silken ringlets to her waist and her unblemished ivory skin shimmered like mother-of-pearl in the sunshine. Her lips were red red red, looking like she'd just drunk a pint of blood….
>
> She was unnatural. (182-183)

Levana's "unnatural" beauty is undeniably the result of her glamour and is a clear commentary on the problem with "lookist" societies: Levana finds it easier to convince people of their (false) love for her *because* of her looks. Undeniably, however, her beauty has a tinge of darkness to it. The image the young Emperor has of blood when he sees her lips reminds him that this is a woman who cannot be taken lightly; "A chill shook Kai from the inside out," reminding him – and readers – that the perfection is merely meant to offer a façade for something both sinister and highly volatile (*Cinder* 184). When Levana smiles, however, everything changes. A "sweetness lit up her face – an innocence to match a child's," and her "lilting voice ... thrummed along Kai's spine" (*Cinder* 184). Minutes after he digs his fingernails into his palms "in an attempt to keep the sneer from his face," Kai feels desperate adoration for her: "Tears pricked at the back of his eyes. He loved her. He needed her. He would do anything to please her" (*Cinder* 183; 185). Levana is able to manipulate people into loving her primarily *because* of her beauty which disarms or distracts onlookers regarding her true nature. Levana's beauty provides a screen – or a stage – for her to use her bioelectric manipulations; later in the novel, the Queen manipulates Earthens who protest her visit in much the same way, and their shock and terror give way to Levana's gift: "She was warm. Welcoming. Generous. She should be their queen. She should rule them, guide them, protect them...." (*Cinder* 205, ellipses in the original). Levana's glamour, then, veils the viewer from the truth, which in turn allows her to manipulate them. In other words, her incandescent beauty allows the people around her to see what they desire, which in turn enables her to show them what they want to see. One stems from the other, and the pattern that emerges is cyclical. The veil of Levana's glamour, therefore, *protects* her from the gaze, as much as it conceals secrets, especially her imperfections and blemishes.

In fact, Levana's glamour and lies are so much a part of her being that she believes them. "Why, Selene?" she asks Cinder towards the end of the series, "Why do you want to

take everything from me?" (*Winter* 740). When Cinder reminds her aunt that she (Levana) tried to kill *her*, and that Levana is sitting on *her* throne, and married *her* boyfriend, Levana seems to not be listening. Instead, she miserably recounts all her hard work and blames Cinder for "ask[ing] my people to hate me... and fill their head with your lies" (*Winter* 740, emphasis in the original). Levana's desires hinge on her sense of incompleteness: her lack of beauty, kindness, and even her lack of ownership (of planet Earth). Coats has argued that the child manages her lack "through an active pursuit of a subject position in the Symbolic order where she can assume and pursue her own desire" because the Law tells the subject what is permissible, what is not, and *how* one may achieve one's desires (*Looking* 80). Levana, too, understands that bioelectric manipulations will help her cover over her lack, and achieve her desires. Rather than being told what can or cannot be done by the society in which she lives – Levana establishes – and consequently, controls – *how* the Lunar gift is used on the moon. Put another way, Levana is fully aware of her own lack, which enables her to ensure that her subjects have a fantasy to latch on to that covers over their own lack so that they don't have to confront the lack in the Other (because that would destabilize Levana's power). As queen, she not only bends the Law to suit her desires, but also manipulates others' bioelectric energy to get what she wants. Unchecked, however, Levana's desires become her embodied reality, and she begins to believe her lies.

In fact, Levana depends *so much* on the illusion that her desires are real that she bans mirrors and other reflective surfaces from the palace because reflections cannot lie or be tricked; by refusing to be seen *directly* through any lens (mirror or camera), Levana avoids being rebuffed by the gaze of the O/other. When forced to be in front of a camera – for instance, when she video conferences with Kai and the other Earthen leaders, when she makes public announcements to her nation, and during her wedding and coronation – Levana wears a veil that is practically opaque. People directly in front of her can make out bits of her

glamour under the veil, but those watching on a screen can only see white or gold cloth.[11] For the people directly in front of her, then, Levana is more tantalizing, as her glamour performs the role or function of her true or real face. The gaze of the O/other– in the form of a camera lens or mirrors – symbolizes a lack, and she hides this with a veil. It is important to note, however, that although the reflective surfaces and cameras negate her glamour, few suspect a lack, because they all *believe* that she is really beautiful. Seeing Levana's veil on the screen elicits the other's desire to *believe* that what lies behind the veil is indeed beautiful. Levana's multiple veils and screens, then, complicate vision, and consequently, the gaze; put another way, "vision is destabilized; it becomes less sure, precisely because it is subject to desire" (Doane 63).

Finally, Levana uses her Lunar gift to actually torture people and perform her will. For example, she has the ability to make people amputate their own limbs or execute themselves. In effect, she controls her subjects' bodies, emotions, and desires and uses the cameras as a strategic form of control by live streaming the executions of those who do not obey her. Therefore, although the people of Luna cannot see the true form of their Queen, they can see the atrocities she commits and the power she has over her subjects through her clever use of technology. In "Colonizing Bodies: Corporate Power and Biotechnology in

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[11] Using varied examples of the veil from religious texts (the veil covering the female body symbolizes sexual modesty in Islam and Christianity) to the seductive dance of the seven veils by Salome, Kerry Mallan explains that the veil "is a material object as well as a trope that evokes multiple interpretations. It hides a mystery, and signifies a host of oppositional binaries: difference or recognition, exotic or traditional, freedom or oppression. Thus, a seemingly innocent piece of clothing is capable of provoking diverse reactions" (*Secrets* 15-16).

Young Adult Science Fiction," Stephanie Guerra has argued that in many dystopias, "corporations are depicted as using biotechnology to colonize the human mind and body for fiscal gain" through their advertisements and marketing tactics (282). Although there is no "market" on Luna, Levana uses biotechnology through the clever and simultaneous use of glamour, cameras, and screens to enslave her people, coerce them to conform to her ideas, and use their labor for fiscal gain. The Earthens, too, are constantly watched and manipulated, through judicious use of Levana's biotechnology, although in markedly different ways. By closely monitoring their fears and desires and ensuring that no one can ever see that she has a lack (by veiling her embodied reality), Levana ensures that both her subjects and the Earthens she comes into contact with are incapable of critical thought.

Levana's veils – comprised of glamour and cloth – therefore complicate her subjects' gaze. The viewers' desires and fears (fueled by her glamour) allow Levana to control what they see (or do not see); such excessive surveillance strips her people of much of their agency. Therefore, Levana is in control of both every subject *and* every situation. Levana, through her Lunar gift, inscribes herself on Luna's Symbolic order as the object of the other's fear or desire. Being both the controller *and* object of her peoples' desires and fears gives Levana power in practically any situation, because the people of Luna know no other reality. Put another way, because the people of Luna know no other reality, Levana can not only convince her subjects that she is at once their greatest fear and their hearts' desire, but she can also manipulate their fears and desires.

Unlike Levana, Cinder does not have much practice manipulating other people's bioelectrical energies.[12] In fact, Cinder consciously learns how to use her gift only as she escapes from Earth and has only a few months to practice before she stages her revolution on Luna. Arguably, Cinder has a fresh perspective on the Lunar gift, compared to many of her fellow citizens who have grown up with it. This perspective becomes increasingly important because Cinder, as Princess Selene and heir to the Lunar throne, also represents a new form of government (as Cinder aims to make Luna a democracy).

In *Secrets, Lies, and Children's Fiction*, Kerry Mallan asks and answers a very important question regarding a government's use of lies and secrets, especially if "secrets and lying are ubiquitous to human behaviour": "Should governments (and those who serve them) be above human failing? Moralists might argue that those who have the power to rule should never lie or deceive. Realists might reason that at times it is necessary and justifiable to not tell the truth" (94). Cinder tries to strike a balance between these two seemingly opposing desires, as she struggles to be both moral and practical. Cinder's identity as a revolutionary and as a Princess of Luna can never be separated from her identity as a cyborg who has lived on Earth for most of her life. Cinder, therefore, is not corrupted by the misuse of her Lunar gift, and she understands ethical concepts such as justice, kindness, and mercy that Levana (and other Lunar leaders) cannot always seem to grasp. Therefore, although she appreciates the need for secrecy – especially while fleeing Earth as a wanted criminal aboard a stolen spaceship, called a Rampion – Cinder feels an overwhelming sense of responsibility with regard to *how*, *when*, and *where* she uses her Lunar gift. Cinder's use of her gift, then, relates

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[12] Cinder has a bioelectrical lock inside her neck, a device created and set in place by her stepfather, Linh Garan, before he died. The lock allows her to live on Earth without being detected as Lunar, as it prevents her from going mad despite not using her gift.

back to her understanding of not just her lack, but also how her desires (to be human, to defeat Levana) are based on her lack.

There are certain instances, however, when Cinder does not use her gift. After the first instance at the royal ball (in *Cinder*), when her insecurities about her cyborg body result in a subconscious glamour that transforms her to look a lot like her beautiful mother, Queen Channary, Cinder vows never again to manipulate bioelectricity to cover up who she is. Aboard the Rampion in the second novel in the series, however, Cinder briefly gives into the fantasy of wondering what it would like to be "fully human" (*Scarlet* 195). Even without consciously thinking about it, she begins to glamour her metal hand:

> An electric current traipsed down her nerves and her cyborg hand began to morph in her vision. Little wrinkles appeared in her knuckles. Tendons stretched beneath her skin. The edges softened. Warmed. Turned to flesh….
>
> An almost giddy laugh fell out of her. She was doing it. She was using her glamour.
>
> She did not need gloves anymore. She could convince everyone that *this* was real.
>
> No one would ever know she was cyborg again.
>
> The realization was stark and sudden and overwhelming. (*Scarlet* 196, emphasis original)

Even as she makes her hand look more human, Cinder realizes that what she sees is a lie, and that her glamour "was not real, would never be real" (196). Not only is she "disgusted at how easily the *desire* had come to her," but Cinder is able to see how easy it would be to abuse this power, by thinking about Levana's manipulations: "She ruled with fear, yes, but also with adoration. It would be easy to abuse a person when they never recognized it as abuse" (196, emphasis mine). Moreover, although there is no explicit Law prohibiting her desires (for the Law, as established by Levana, encourages the use of as much of the gift as one

desires as long as it does not interfere with her own use of her gift), Cinder is able to check/rethink her position with regard to the Law based on the needs of the other. It is significant that Cinder's first successful *conscious* glamour involves overcoming something she has always been made ashamed of – her lack of some of her human limbs. Once she comes to the realization that abuse is abuse, even if the one abused does not recognize it as such, Cinder knows that her first decision as Princess Selene is an easy one: "She would never be like Queen Levana" (197). Using Levana as a benchmark of what she would and *should* never become, Cinder is able to come to terms with her lack. She is able to (literally) *see* her desire (through the use of her glamour as a way of being accepted in society despite being a cyborg) and recognize it as just that, a desire, which in turn allows her to focus on that which is material. It is this ability to separate desire from her embodied reality that allows Cinder to focus on unveiling the truth rather than be caught up in a web of lies that covers up who she really is. It is also important to note that Cinder's ability and determination to reveal what is true is contingent upon her cyborg body, which I will discuss in the following section.

The realization that manipulation amounts to abuse poses an ethical dilemma for Cinder, as controlling other people's bioelectric energy comes as second nature to Lunars. When Cinder and fellow escapee Thorne briefly land in France in their quest to find Michelle Benoit in *Scarlet*,[13] they are recognized by the local police and by members of Levana's lupine army. When a wolf-soldier attacks, Cinder instinctively makes a female officer jump in front of her, "her arms spread out wide in protection. Her face completely, entirely blank" (*Scarlet* 357). The officer dies, and Cinder is racked with remorse and guilt immediately

[13] Michelle Benoit was Scarlet's grandmother. She was instrumental in keeping Cinder/Princess Selene safe (and alive) after she was rescued from Luna.

afterward. Once aboard the Rampion, she equates her usage of the gift to monstrosity: "Having this gift. It's turning me into a monster! … Just like Levana" (*Scarlet* 367). Later in the series, Cinder uses her gift to attack Thaumaturge Sybil Mira, as she and her friends are apprehended on the palace roof in their attempt to kidnap Kai before his fated wedding to Levana. Cinder tortures Sybil's mind, which causes the latter to go mad and jump off the roof (*Cress* 489-490; 498). She confesses to Kai that she's afraid that "the more I fight [Levana] and the stronger I become, the more I'm turning into her" (*Cress* 547). When Kai tries to reassure her that she is not turning into Levana, she recounts the times she's used her gift to hurt others:

> I manipulated your adviser today, and countless guards. I manipulated Wolf…. I killed a police officer, in France, and I'd have killed more people if I'd had to, people in your own military, and I don't even know if I would feel bad about it, because there are always ways to justify it. It's for the good of everyone, isn't it? Sacrifices have to be made…. Today, I tortured her thaumaturge. I didn't just manipulate her. I *tortured* her. And I almost *enjoyed* it. (*Cress* 547-48, emphasis original)

Cinder becomes more aware than ever of the dangers of overusing and/or abusing her gift, especially since there are ways to "justify" whatever she does through the gift and through language. Cinder also understands why Levana hates mirrors so much; the gaze through the lens of the mirror provides her with a constant reality check –not just with regard to who she is (a cyborg), but more important, who she is in danger of becoming (Levana).

Unfortunately for Cinder, immediately giving her people full autonomy is not an option. She realizes – more than once – the dangers of not controlling the people who have pledged their allegiance to her: they get controlled and manipulated by thaumaturges and by Levana to do their bidding, rendering them not only helpless, but also dangerous. Scarlet, Thorne, and Kai, being Earthen, are especially easy to manipulate. The lupine soldier, Wolf,

when controlled by a thaumaturge or by Levana, becomes a liability to her side, as his "animal urges" can be easily re-directed towards his friends. Cinder's responsibility on Luna extends towards the people in the districts who offer to fight by her side as well. This moral dilemma is highlighted in a conversation between Levana's Head Thaumaturge, Aimery, and Cinder, after the former manipulates the Lunars to regain control over an entire mining district seconds after they revolt:

> "Imagine how quickly this would have gone," he said … "if you had chosen to claim the minds of these people before our arrival. Instead, you left them adrift on the ocean of their own weaknesses. You turned them into targets and then did nothing to protect them. You are not suited to be a ruler of Luna."
>
> "Because I would rather my people know freedom than constant manipulation?"
>
> "Because you are not capable of making the decisions a queen must make for the good of her people." (*Winter* 356-57)

Despite her bravado and self-sacrifice, Cinder knows that she has, in a way, failed her people. Her constant failure highlights her lack and reflects her constant internal struggle: the desire to manipulate her people and save them or do what is ethically right and not become like Levana when fighting her.

In the final siege of Levana's palace in the capital city, Artemesia, Cinder decides on a compromise and uses her gift to protect her army from being attacked by Levana and her thaumaturges. Rather than manipulate them, her gift functions as a shield, or a protective layer, under which her people and her friends have the freedom to fight for their independence. Not only does Cinder accept her lack, but *her desires are tied in with the desire of the other* (her people), thereby allowing her to achieve a balanced subject position – as an individual with a conscience *and* a ruler – in Luna's Symbolic order. Cinder, therefore, has to master the Lunar gift and become adept at using it so that she can *choose* to protect,

and decide *how much* to control. Only when Cinder comes to understand what her Lunar gift is capable of and what can be done with it (including the abuse of gift as with torturing Sybil), *and* has command over her gift (so that she does *not* manipulate the helpless), can she become the queen. Moreover, once Cinder masters her gift, she ensures she asks her friends for permission before she accesses their thoughts in order to protect them, highlighting her acute awareness of the difference between self and other. For instance, Cinder uses the code word ("wire cutters") she and Kai decide upon, when she glamours herself and her friends in order to get onto Kai's ship as part of their plan to get to Luna; she also asks Thorne and Wolf for their permission to take control of their bodies (and significantly not their minds) so that they don't become liabilities to her side (*Winter* 145, 169).

It is imperative that Cinder find and maintain equilibrium between her desires and material reality: she has to decide *how much* to control so that *she* isn't controlled, in order to take over the Lunar throne. Not using the Lunar gift is not an option for a ruler of Luna (or indeed, any Lunar). As demonstrated by Winter, not using one's gift – even for a good cause – results in hallucinations and even madness; indeed, the Princess Winter has visions of turning into ice, of the palace walls that bleed, and of becoming a wolf (*Winter* 5-11; 152-154; 493). In Winter's own words, she is "broken" and "destroyed" because she chooses not to use her gift (*Winter* 480; 776). Winter despises Levana, and rejects bioelectric manipulations so as to not be like her. This rejection, however, offers her no peace: Winter has no sense of control over herself and/or others. Coats would argue that by rejecting her gift, Winter "will lose any sense of her own lack, thinking that she has been filled in by the big Other" (*Looking* 66). While Levana ensures that her subjects don't ever confront the lack in the Other by exercising absolute control over her people and while Cinder's awareness of her lack makes her a benevolent ruler, Winter experiences no lack despite her quickly deteriorating health. Winter is so caught up in being a good princess and a good Lunar and

not hurting other people that her identity as Winter-the-person literally disintegrates as symbolized by her madness. Moreover, Winter's lack of control ensures that she does not achieve her desires, including but not restricted to romantic feelings towards Jacin, freedom for her people, and her own health and safety; finally, not using her gift makes Winter lose her sense of self as she becomes subject to other Lunars' manipulations. Despite her good intentions, therefore, Winter is little more than a cautionary tale: by rejecting the bioelectrical manipulations, she rejects the Law, and consequently, finds it impossible to become a subject – or even establish a self – in Luna's Symbolic order.

Cinder, therefore, has to strike the right balance – between the two extremes as represented by Levana and Winter – with regard to how she uses her bioelectric manipulations, to be able to control and protect her citizens, in order to give them their freedom. Arguably, it is Cinder's unique composition that enables her to distinguish between real and desire, and between mastering and being mastered, that helps her attain subject position.

Posthuman Cinder: The Manipulations of the Cyborg Body

It is difficult to talk about Cinder's use of her Lunar gift without taking into account her cyborg body. For Donna Haraway, the cyborg breaks down binaries between male and female, machine and organism, organic and inorganic, thereby challenging conventional categories of gender, race, nature, and humanity. Cinder occupies a liminal space, as she transcends several binaries – between human and machine, being able-bodied and disabled, Earthen and Lunar[14]– largely because of her cyborg identity. Arguably, it is Cinder's

[14] One can think of Cinder as a diasporic Lunar, who has spent most of her life on Earth.

transcendence of these binaries that makes her a powerful leader. This section will focus on the cyborg body with regard to the Lunar gift and the agency generated by its materiality, for Cinder's internal computer is perhaps her greatest defense –and weapon – against Levana's powers.

The first part of this section will deal with Cinder's role in (literally) unveiling the truth. Mallan notes that "[t]he thematic approach in a typical dystopian narrative is to contrast the benefits of openness with the evils of secrecy and absolute control" (*Secrets* 95). She goes on to explain: "Whereas an individual action may be condemned as unlawful or immoral, the same action by the state is legitimated according to the esoteric rationale. The rationale for such government control is protection of the population; but often protection entails surveillance, tracking, and loss of privacy and freedom" (Mallan, *Secrets* 95). As a series, *The Lunar Chronicles* is no different, as Levana blatantly veils, lies, and manipulates in order to get what she wants, even as she makes it seem that her actions are for her subjects' benefit. And although she is never seen by any of the cameras in her realm, the queen ensures that the entire country is being watched at all times. In such an oppressive system, where even thinking about escape amounts to treason, questions such as "who is able to tell the truth?", "about what?", "with what consequences?", and "with what relations to power?" become extremely pertinent (Foucault 170). It is worth noting that perhaps the only person who is not susceptible to Levana's lies is Cinder, and as a result, potentially only *she* can overthrow Levana as a direct result of her cyborg vision.[15]

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[15] While Lunar shells cannot be tricked by bioelectric manipulations, Levana ensures that they are not a threat by feigning their deaths and locking them away and harvesting their blood for the plague antidote. Moreover, although Cress is a shell who technically works for

The first time Cinder sees the queen occurs when she stands outside the palace gates in New Beijing amidst a group of protestors. Even as Cinder is being brainwashed by Levana, her "retina display flashe[s] a warning at her" (*Cinder* 205). And although Cinder is "annoyed by the distraction," and "want[s] to look upon the queen forever," the illusion fades away, and her cyborg body brings her back to reality (*Cinder* 205). The orange light that flickers at the corner of Cinder's vision in the presence of a lie (verbal or Lunar glamour) is reminiscent of the flashing orange light in traffic signals that asks one to "slow down" and increase one's awareness. Cinder's ability to tell when someone is lying gives her much agency in her quest to become queen, because it plays a significant role in helping her differentiate desire (her own and of the other) from embodied reality. Her ability to distinguish lies or desire from truth allows her to gauge whom to trust and how much, and keeps her grounded with regard to what she can and cannot do. For instance, in the example discussed above when Cinder fantasizes about using her Lunar gift to make her body seem more human, it is once again "an orange light [that] flicker[s] in the corner of her vision" that warns her that what she is seeing is a lie (*Scarlet* 196). More important, in this instance, the orange light also functions as a reminder that she is using her glamour for the same reason that Levana uses hers, which in turn prompts Cinder's decision to be honest – with herself, her crew, and her country – about who and what she is.

In addition to being able to detect lies, Cinder's cyborg vision can also discern the reality behind illusions and record the same. This ability to not be fooled and to *see* the truth – that is, Levana's embodied reality – is instrumental in overthrowing the evil queen. It is also interesting that Cinder can control what data she sees and when. When her machine

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Levana, she is forced to live in a satellite halfway between the Moon and the Earth for most of her life, and never directly interacts with the queen.

elements show Cinder her reality, it is Cinder taking control of the situation. The machine elements are *part of* her subjectivity, so much so that not having various data available at her fingertips makes her feel handicapped. This is clearly demonstrated when Cinder is brought into the throne room for her execution soon after Levana's coronation. The cyborg part of Cinder's brain cannot be influenced by bioelectricity because "It was all machine, all data and programming and math and logic" (*Winter* 447). When Cinder stops fighting the data being pieced together by her brain-machine interface, "every glamour in the room was replaced with the truth," much like "bringing a camera into focus" (*Winter* 448).

Cinder's control of several of her human and mechanical functions is voluntary and she can *choose* to focus on one over another. Regardless, it is Cinder's decision to privilege her cyborg vision over the human that enables her to literally *see* what the rest of the world is not. In this scene alone, different aspects of Cinder's multifarious identity work together to help her achieve her goal: Cinder uses her Lunar gift to soothe Kai's anger to prevent him from doing something stupid; she uses her human brain to formulate a plan to overthrow Levana; Cinder's computerized vision – which enables her to see through (or under) Levana's glamour – is instrumental to the success of her plan. Moreover, Cinder's computerized body helps protect the data she has procured. When Cinder's internal computer shuts down following her plunge into a lake (as part of her escape), for instance, Cress and the android, Iko, are able to extract this recording from her hard drive and copy it onto a portscreen (which performs functions similar to the current day tablet). The liminality of Cinder's cyborg body implicitly means that she is not restricted by human or technological constraints. The truth that Cinder's cyborg vision enables her to see is then aired over the dome of Aretemesia strategically when the final battle commences, which momentarily shocks and disempowers the queen:

> Then there was Levana, but not Levana. She was recognizable only by the red wedding gown.
>
> Beneath the glamour, her face was disfigured from ridges and scars, sealing shut her left eye. The destroyed skin continued down her jaw and neck, disappearing beneath the collar of her dress. Her hair was thinner and a lighter shade of brown, and great chunks were missing where the scars had reached around to the back of her head. More scars could be seen on her left arm where her silk sleeve didn't hide them. (*Winter* 692).

The implications of Cinder reappropriating Levana's primary tool of colonization – the screen – to overthrow her are clear. Cinder's screening of the truth not only forces the queen to see "the truth beneath her own glamour," but also forces her to relinquish her position of "Master" with regard to both her glamour and her country (*Winter* 693). In other words, it does not matter that Levana maintains her glamour and lies once everyone has seen her lack: the illusion, and with it, Levana's power over her people, get broken once and for all. It is significant that the gaze of the O/other (Earthens and Lunars alike) can penetrate Levana's glamour only when they see her through Cinder's cyborg eyes. Cinder's status as a second-class citizen is, to an extent, redeemed, as society at large comes to understand her cyborg identity and the mechanization of her body parts as non-threatening. It is important that Cinder has agency *because of* – and not despite – her mechanized body.

The sense of lack created by Cinder's non-human/mechanical elements become a positive influence with particular regard to her humanity. Cinder is "36.28 percent not human," which includes "her control panel, her synthetic hand and leg, wires that trailed from the base of her skull all the way down her spine and out to her prosthetic limbs," "the metal vertebrae along her spine," "four metal ribs," "synthetic tissue around her heart," and "metal splints along the bones in her right leg" (*Cinder* 82). Cinder's mechanization undoubtedly

makes her more powerful than a regular human body, but she still sees her nonhuman elements as a lack. It is ironic that *because* Cinder acknowledges her mechanized limbs to be a lack (in that she does not "fit in" with regard to human society), she becomes more human in that it inspires in her feelings of empathy, compassion, and friendship. Cinder's lack also allows her to behave ethically and establish a community – of friends, subjects, and finally a government – based on care, which I will discuss further in the following section. Unlike Levana who covers up her lack (which in turn makes her power brittle), Cinder's dependence on her embodiment as opposed to her illusion only strengthens her powers, both personally and politically. Although she initially considers her mechanization to be a lack and desires to be completely human, Cinder's cybernetic body has agency as a symbol and as a weapon.

In "Rebels in Dresses," Amy Montz reminds readers that since Cinder is a cyborg (and a ward of Linh Adri), she "can literally belong to someone else," which "sets her socioeconomically at odds with her stepsisters" – and indeed, with other humans – which makes her rebellion all the more significant (115). Flanagan, too, highlights the feminist implications of Cinder sawing off her "[too-small] foot that was responsible for her marriage to the prince in the conventional versions of the [*Cinderella*] fairytale" (62). (Kai later humorously deconstructs the patriarchal fairytale further when he tells Cinder in *Winter* that he kept her too-small foot after she left it behind at the ball because he thought that finding the cyborg that fit the foot "must be a sign that we were meant to be together…. But then I realized it would probably fit an eight-year-old" (819).) Flanagan goes on to point out that the significance of Cinder removing her foot at the beginning of the series:

> is strengthened by the setting of the novel in New Beijing, a futuristic city of China. Female foot binding (which involved each toe being broken before they were tightly wrapped in bandages and forced into small shoes) was a cultural practice in China for centuries, as small feet were a symbol of female beauty. The practice literally limited

> female movement, and in this context, Cinder's violent act in freeing herself from a patriarchal symbol of feminine subordination is a powerful symbol about the construction of cyborg subjectivity in this novel. (62-63)

The fact that Cinder's body is constantly subject to change and modification allows her to defy traditionally patriarchal (and even totalitarian) structures about what a female, differently abled, racially hybrid body can and cannot do. Cinder is racially hybrid because she is both Earthen and Lunar; she is a cyborg because she is both human and robot. In other words, it is Cinder's non-conforming cyborg body that allows her to defeat the absolute, unfair authority of her stepmother and Levana. For example, when stepmother Adri takes away her new, better-fitting foot as a cruel punishment, Cinder is not completely restricted by her "empty ankle"; instead, she dons the "old foot that Iko had saved" and rushes to the ball to warn Kai that Levana intends to kill him (*Cinder* 323).

Alaimo and Hekman have argued that "Political decisions are scripted onto material bodies; these scripts have consequences that demand a political response on the part of those whose bodies are scripted" (8). Although Alaimo and Hekman build their argument on Karen Barad's discussion of the political consequences of using technology on the (human) female body, this argument can be extended to the cyborg as well: Cinder, as cyborg, has to necessarily strategize her body politically in order to defeat Levana. Cinder's cyborg arm *is* a weapon: the new arm that Dr Erland gifts her in *Cinder* is made of titanium, and contains a hidden flashlight, a stiletto knife, a projectile gun, a screwdriver, tranquilizer darts, and a universal connector cable (377). In fact, Cinder uses the weapons stored in her arm almost as much as her Lunar gift in her escapes and battles; the tranquilizer darts, in particular, save her on many occasions. Cinder also uses her body as she would a machine: she has a computer in her brain that enables her to download and access all sorts of information including instruction manuals, restricted data and blueprints; she uses her own energy to jump start

Thorne's ship and is literally recharged (via the control panel in her neck) when she passes out; she also has a retina scanner and display in her left eye that allow her to watch newsfeeds and send messages instantly; moreover, since Cinder is part machine, she can also be repaired, updated, and rebooted like one (*Scarlet* 51, 57; *Scarlet* 104-07; *Cress* 542-46; *Winter* 519-28). Cinder's cyborg body is powerful partly *because* of her body politics (given her distinct social positions as a Lunar princess *and* a second-class citizen) and partly because she does not face the same restrictions her completely human and android friends face. Moreover, the "political decisions" (of the type that Alaimo and Hekman discuss) influence Cinder more than they do some of the other characters, because Cinder's cyborg identity is closely tied to the fact that she is also Princess Selene. In each of the examples mentioned above, therefore, the actions and reactions of the cyborg body directly affect (and in some cases, challenge) Cinder's relationship to the Law, and consequently, to the Symbolic order.

Cinder's cyborg body also protects her as only a machine could: every time she is angry, scared or upset, her computerized brain registers the hormones flooding her system, often flashing warnings; when Cinder jumps into the lake in Artemesia to escape from Levana, her body shuts down to prevent extensive damage; most important, in the final showdown with Levana, Cinder's cyborg components save her life. Cinder is tricked because her lie detector crashes when her body becomes waterlogged in the lake, so the queen is able to stab her in her heart. However, as Kai later explains, she lives because "the knife penetrated one of [her] prosthetic heart chambers, which drove [her] body into survival mode. That chamber shut down while the rest of [her] heart was able to keep functioning" (*Winter* 768). Rather than impeding the human, the mechanized parts of Cinder's body helps support and protect the human, thereby enabling Cinder to achieve her goals.

Cinder's body, therefore, has agency just by being. It is also important to remember that Cinder can become Queen only because she is the biological offspring of Queen

Channary and the niece of Queen Levana. Her DNA is even tested to prove that she is indeed the lost Princess Selene (*Cinder* 379; *Winter* 771). Moreover, Cinder's cyborg body saves her and her friends on multiple counts *because* it breaks all sorts of binaries and boundaries: it can, on will, function as a computer, a charger, a lie detector *and* a weapon. Most important, however, although she is quite literally what Hayles would call an "amalgam, a collection of heterogeneous components … whose boundaries undergo continuous construction and reconstruction," Cinder retains her integrity, as each of her body parts – mechanical and organic – function individually and collaboratively to defeat Levana (3). Her success, therefore, is contingent not only upon knowing when to use and not use her Lunar gift, but also upon her cyborg body that constantly keeps her desires in check and protects her – from the gift, from enemies, from her own fantasies.

This ability – to manipulate as well as to protect with both mind and body – helps Cinder keep her friends safe. Cinder's crew comprises a tight knit community founded on trust and friendship, and plays a significant role protecting her and in taking down Levana's reign, as demonstrated in the following section.

Chains of Caring: Ethics of Care and Community Formation

Female friendships in revolutionary dystopian fiction can be highly problematic. More often than not, the protagonist's female best friend suffers dire consequences, usually to "demonstrate the destructive and evil powers of an oppressive society"; despite the presence of strong, empowered female protagonists, therefore, "insidious stereotypes wind through the novels' structure negating rather than empowering the young female readership" (Childs 188). Adrienne Rich points out in "Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence" that focusing on heterosexual relations at the expense of female relationships is an expression of patriarchal oppression; "in the absence of choice," women do not have the power or the

opportunity to form female communities, and consequently, "will have no collective power to determine the meaning and place of sexuality in their lives" (Rich 141). Echoing Rich, Childs argues that the stereotype of young women valuing romance over platonic friendship "when extrapolated privileges females' heterosexual relationships as the only important ones and, therefore, males as the most important social connections" (188). Montz, too, highlights the "trappings" of competitive femininity, arguing that the original "Cinderella's major rebellious moment comes when she is dressed up, in public, and in competition with other girls" (114). She goes on to equate Cinder to her namesake, arguing that wearing Peony's dress,[16] the too small-foot and ruined gloves render her still "suitable enough to attend the ball … and *to save the prince and the country*" (115, emphasis in original). Montz compares Cinder's determination to save Kai from marrying Levana to the original Cinderella saving her prince "from a false marriage an awful woman, and thus polluting his bloodline with their 'inferior' stock as she [Cinderella] was once aristocracy," by pointing out that Cinder is, in fact, Princess Selene (115).[17] What Montz fails to mention, however, is that Cinder's close friendships – first with Peony and her android companion, Iko, and later with the other characters including Scarlet, Cress, Winter, Thorne, Kai, and Wolf – completely differentiate her from the traditional Cinderella, and subsequently, from other strong female dystopian protagonists as well.

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[16] Peony is Cinder's half-sister, whose untimely death caused by the plague drives a lot of the plot in *Cinder*.

[17] Interestingly, Montz does not address the fact that Levana is an aristocrat, as she is the biological sister of Cinder's mother, Queen Channary. Nonetheless, Levana is considered a bad match for the prince, as she is marrying him for the wrong reasons.

Feminist ethics of care relies on the materiality of bodies to establish connections and relationships although it does not expressly say so; indeed, it would be difficult to be deeply involved in and affected by personal relationships without bodies. The following section applies feminist ethics of care to The Lunar Chronicles to better explain Cinder's relationships with her companions, both female and male, Earthen and Lunar – for Cinder is able to stage a revolution to overthrow Levana, not just because of her lunar gift and her cyborg body, but because her friends care about her as much as she cares about them. Moran has argued that the ethics of care challenges "assumptions about the autonomous coherent self that are basic to many masculinist theories about self and other," because it is about embracing otherness ("Making" 79). I contend, however, that the ability to care for or empathize with the other implies one's ability to recognize lack in the other, and to help the other achieve their desires.

Moran also explains that:

> While patriarchal modes of ethics assume that individuals exist in isolation from one another and that the most ethical decisions use abstract principles to prevent these individuals from infringing on each other's rights, feminist ethics recognizes that human beings develop a sense of self through their relationships with others rather than by separating themselves from those connections and argues that the most ethical choices are those that create and maintain relationships. ("Three" 129-30)

Ethics of care, then, is a "feminine" approach to matters of morality, although it does not mean that men cannot perform acts of caring (Noddings 8). Noddings explains that she uses the word "feminine" "in the deep classical sense – rooted in receptivity, relatedness, and responsiveness," and does not imply that "all women will accept it, or that men will reject it; indeed, there is no reason why men should not embrace it" (23). To care is not merely to express anxiety or concern about something or someone, or to be charged with their

protection or well-being. For Noddings, ethics of care is the relationship between the "one-caring" and the "cared-for," where the one-caring is the person doing the caring, and the cared-for is the person receiving care; for caring to take place, the one-caring must be able to see the cared-for's reality as a possibility for herself/himself (9; 114). Desire is often implicated in caring, as the one-caring must desire something on behalf of the cared-for. In *The Lunar Chronicles*, the act of caring takes place on multiple levels: caring for the self, caring between friends, intergenerational caring, and even members of the royal family caring for their subjects. In fact, it would not be amiss to say that a large part of the series is built on friendships and on acts of caring.

The following are but a few examples of Cinder and her friends performing variations on the role of the one-caring. Some instances of caring involve heterosexual relationships and heteronormative gender roles. For instance, when Cress risks her life to warn Cinder that Kai is in danger, Cinder risks her own life by going to the ball to warn Kai about Levana's plan to kill him in *Cinder*. Scarlet not only rescues Wolf from being a special operative (at great risk to her own life) in *Scarlet*, but is also the first person to show him affection. In *Cress*, Cress and Thorne look out for each other during and following their time in the Sahara desert, especially when Cress is socially awkward and Thorne blind. In each of these instances, the acts of caring performed by characters reinforce heteronormative stereotypes, even as intertextual references to traditional fairy tales subvert gender norms.

Other instances of caring reinforce the sense of female community: when her sister Peony contracts the plague and is quarantined, Cinder visits and comforts her as often as she can in *Cinder*; in the same novel, when Adri heartlessly dismantles Cinder's android, Iko, to sell her parts, Cinder steals and keeps her personality chip because she cannot bear to let her friend go. In *Winter,* Winter risks Levana's wrath and hides Cress (and subsequently saves the rest of the Rampion crew) from her stepmother's watchful eyes; following this, Cress

sacrifices her own safety and freedom to help Scarlet and Winter escape from Artemesia. Caring is not restricted to human/cyborg characters, either: Iko the android constantly puts herself in danger – as android, the Rampion, and escort droid – to help Cinder and Winter although doing so is not part of her programming. Regardless of whether they are Earthen or Lunar, machine, cyborg or human, the act of caring performed by the characters is unique to the materiality of their bodies. For instance, Cinder protects her friends through the use of the Lunar gift *and* her cybernetic body, and Iko donates a finger and some wires from her escort droid body to help fix Cinder following the latter's immersion in the lake. It is abundantly clear that the friends care very deeply for each other, almost always at the expense of their own lives and safety. Chains of caring are therefore established, as one act of caring inspires the cared-for to be the one-caring with regard to her friends.

Noddings maintains that just because one person is caring for another, the act does *not* mean the person is necessarily being selfless. On the contrary, ethics of care "advocate[s] a deep and steady caring for the self" (Noddings 114). Noddings' argument is worth quoting here in full:

> Thinking guided by caring does not seek to justify a way out by means of a litany of predicted "goods," but it seeks a way to remain one caring and, if at all possible, to enhance the ethical ideal. In such a quest, there is no way to disregard the self or to remain impartial, or to adopt the stance of a disinterested observer. Pursuit of the ethical ideal demands impassioned and realistic commitment…
>
> When we accept honestly our loves, our innate ferocity, our capacity for hate, we may use all this as information in building the safeguards and alarms that must be part of the ideal. We know better what we must work toward, what we must prevent and the conditions under which we are lost as ones-caring. *Instead of hiding from our natural impulses and pretending that we can achieve goodness through lofty*

abstractions, we accept what is there – all of it – and use what we have already assessed as good to control that which is not-good. (115, emphasis mine)

Cinder's ethical ideal is to overthrow Levana, not because she wants to be Queen, but because she wants to free her people from years of tyranny. In other words, Cinder's desire is not only to satisfy her own lack with regard to her cyborg identity or second-class citizenship, but also to address the lack in the other. Cinder's "ethical ideal" requires her to overthrow Levana and set up a fairer system of governance, and not necessarily rule over Luna herself. Although Cinder has some very vague ideas about being queen (which mostly involve not being like Levana), and is initially doubtful as to whether or not she wants the crown and the responsibility that comes with it, she truly begins to understand what it means to be Princess Selene only when she reaches the North-African town of Farafrah in *Cress*. Farafrah is a town that has a large population (almost 15%) of Lunars, who have come to Earth as refugees from the Moon. The people of Farafrah are eager to help Cinder in any way they can. They accept her despite the fact that she's a cyborg and constantly bring her gifts of food; the children paint their arms and legs black and pretend to be cyborgs; most important, perhaps, the townsfolk of Farafrah – Earthens and Lunars alike – die in their attempt to protect Cinder and her crew from Levana. This is a significant incident in the series, because it is the first time Cinder feels a connection with her people and more important, a sense of belonging, that makes her want to avenge their deaths.

The second time Cinder feels this sense of being cared-for occurs when Levana's soldiers attack the townsfolk who shelter Cinder – this time in a mining sector (RM9) on Luna. Thaumaturges and guards surround the district and line people up in the town square to question them about Cinder. One by one, people are shot when they refuse to volunteer any information. Different levels of caring happen in this scene: Cinder displays traits of the one-caring for her people in RM9 and orchestrates a revolution to overthrow Levana; the people

of the mining sector, the cared-for, act as the ones-caring when they don't give away Cinder and her crew's location for a very long time; when Cinder and her friends hide in an old warehouse to avoid capture, Scarlet hugs Cinder, and Thorne and Wolf stand around her, "all three of them acting like her jailers and her life raft," as much to show their solidarity as to prevent her from running out into the square and being captured (*Winter* 353). In that moment, Cinder really understands what she is fighting for: "She knew [her friends] shared her horror, but none of them could understand the responsibility she felt clawing at her from the inside. These people trusted her to fight with them, to give them the better future she'd promised" (*Winter* 353). Arguably, part of Cinder's caring is motivated by her awareness of the lack in the other (in this case, her people in RM9 and her friends). In other words, Cinder realizes that there is no way she can remain impartial or "adopt the stance of the disinterested observer" if she is to overthrow Levana; in fact, the townsfolk as ones-caring help Cinder feel a sense of realistic commitment to her cause.

In both Farafrah and in RM9, the one-caring and the cared-for at once intertwine, and what begins as Cinder's revolution transcends into "the people's revolution" (*Winter* 355). Inspired by Cinder, the townsfolk actively address their lack of and desire for a new government, and begin the fight for their freedom. Although Cinder admits that she is scared of Levana and her army, and even the very idea of being Queen and fulfilling all the people's fantasies in *Cress*, the multiple instances of care performed by the townsfolk – as much for her as for themselves – help Cinder realize that she does not need to "achieve goodness through lofty abstractions" (Noddings 115). Instead she *develops* as the one-caring *because* of being cared-for by her people and learns to "accept honestly [her] loves, [her] innate ferocity, [her] capacity for hate," and to use this information to give her subjects a better life. Being the one-caring and the cared-for help Cinder separate desire and fantasy from that

which is real, especially since her acceptance of herself (as cyborg *and* as the rightful Queen of Luna) goes hand in (cyborg) hand with her people's recognition of her as their true ruler.

As demonstrated above, the one-caring and the cared-for repeatedly take each other's place in ethical instances of caring. Arguably, the cared-for can take on the role of one-caring only because she or he has been cared-for by someone else. Moreover, in The Lunar Chronicles, different characters who perform the roles of one-caring either directly or indirectly affect Cinder's revolution. Princess Winter, for instance, continually cares for her friends and her country despite the threat doing so poses to her life. Unlike her stepmother, Winter is known not just for her beauty, but also for her kindness and compassion. She often visits people in the outer sectors, making personalized gifts for the "shopkeepers, clerks, household servants…. The overlooked machine of Artemesia" (*Winter* 108). She knows many of the working-class laborers personally, which makes her markedly different from the other nobles who live in the city, where the only focus is pleasure and revelry. Most important, Winter's refusal to use her Lunar gift – at the expense of her own health and sanity – is in itself an example of one-caring for others. On the way to RM9, Scarlet asks Winter to use her Lunar gift, if only to save herself, pointing out that not using the Lunar gift "makes *you* worse. Why can't you just… do *good* things with it?" (*Winter* 268, emphasis and ellipses in original). Winter refuses on the grounds that all those who use their gifts "believe they are doing good…. We think that if we choose to do only good, we are good. We can make people happy. We can offer tranquility, or contentment or love, and that must be good. We do not see the falsehood becoming its own brand of cruelty" (*Winter* 268). She tells Scarlet about a servant she tried to save from committing suicide: "I forced her to change her mind. I made her *happy*…. But all I did was give her more time to be tortured by Aimery" (*Winter* 269). She adds that the next time the servant tried to take her life, "she succeeded. Only then did I realize I hadn't helped her at all…That day I swore never to manipulate anyone ever again.

Even if I believed I was doing good – for who am I to presume what is good for others?" (*Winter* 269). This type of caring disallows Winter from using her people – even without the Lunar gift – even when her own life is on the line. Winter displays instances of what Noddings terms "feeling with" the other, rather than merely empathizing with her subjects and/or objectively putting herself in their shoes (49). Winter recognizes that manipulating the other – even in a positive sense that involves feeling happiness or satisfaction – will not satisfy people's desires or give them a sense of completion, even if it satisfies *her* desires of wanting to help or make a difference. Noddings explains one-caring as "set[ting] aside my temptation to analyze and plan" and also, to help; Winter does not project – she "receive[s] the other into [herself], and [she] see[s] and feel[s] with the other" (49). Indeed, it is the fact that she was willing to suffer through the Lunar sickness rather than manipulate others for her own benefit that earns her people's adoration, and consequently, helps raise armies across the land. Even when Winter contracts the plague, and dark bruises form over her skin distorting her beauty, the people put her in a suspension tank outside the hospital. As one of the special operatives, Alpha Strom, explains, she becomes "a reminder of what [the people are] fighting for" (*Winter* 542).

Caring is a reciprocal and cyclical chain: Winter would not be able to help others if they did not help her in turn. In Winter's friend Jacin's absence, Scarlet is constantly by Winter's side, protecting her and helping her when she has hallucinations. No matter how delusional Winter's plans might seem (such as talking to Levana's lupine army consisting of men who have been genetically programmed to be predators), Scarlet does not ever leave her alone. When Winter tells her that she (Scarlet) is not "a hundred scattered pieces blowing farther and farther away from each other," Scarlet tells her of her own crazy past, concluding that she has "a fair amount of scattered pieces herself" (*Winter* 480, 481). She adds that she accompanied Winter on her potentially suicidal mission because "ever since my grandma

took me in, I've heard people tell me she was crazy…. That crazy old woman risked everything she had to protect Cinder when she was a baby, and in the end, she sacrificed her own life rather than giving up Cinder's secret" (*Winter* 481). There is, therefore, a chain of caring – the cared-for and the ones-caring are not restricted to just Cinder and her friends, but to all the lives they touch. As Scarlet points out with regard to her grandmother, the chain of caring extends from one generation to the next, giving more and more people a reason to care and to become involved.

Cinder and her friends could not have raised an army and staged a successful revolution had these chains of caring not been established in the first place: Cinder is able to perform the role of the one-caring only because she is constantly being cared-for by the citizens of Luna and her friends. Moreover, no act of caring is mutually exclusive; Cinder, Kai, Scarlet, Wolf, Cress, Thorne, Winter, Jacin, and Iko all care for one another on multiple levels, and each and every act of caring plays a significant role in cementing personal relationships and consequently, in overthrowing Levana.

The Making of a Revolutionary

The discursive and the material do not exist on separate planes, and indeed, to separate them would be a fallacy. For Cinder to take over the Lunar throne *and* establish her rule, she needs access to Luna's Symbolic order through the use of her Lunar gift, to accept the agency generated by her cyborg body, and most important, to work with a group of people she can trust. Primarily, Cinder is a successful revolutionary because she is able to understand that her desires stem from a sense of lack, and that attaining the illusion of a human body cannot be equated to a sense of completion. In other words, she attains her subject position(s) because she realizes early on that "desire does not have an object that will satisfy us once and for all, because its main task is to keep circulating" (Coats, *Looking* 82).

Cinder is not only aware of her lack (of a human body, the inability to rule over Luna, and initially, her lack of control over her Lunar gift), but she also embraces this lack because doing so keeps her grounded, despite her temptation to evade all responsibility. She also has to master the Lunar gift (just as many children master language) so that she can choose to protect her people from outside influences that might harm them.

Levana, on the other hand, is the opposite of Cinder. She succumbs to her own desires and avoids the gaze of the O/other that will identify her lack. However, this means that nothing about her is substantial enough for her people to depend on her. The image of perfection that Levana prioritizes is only a tool of colonization, which she constantly reinscribes with her glamour, veils, and screens. Moreover, her lack of a beautiful body, real feelings, or even real loyalty results in Levana being completely alone; her refusal to admit her own lack and consequently, the lack in others as something to be protected (rather than exploited) paradoxically leaves her vulnerable. This lack of a lack then becomes a chink in Levana's armor, a flaw that Cinder learns to target.

Cinder's ability to differentiate desire from embodied reality and her awareness and acceptance of lack – in both herself and others around her – depends largely on her cyborg identity. Moreover, her cyborg body is instrumental in (literally) conveying Cinder's vision – of Levana's deformed body, and the possibility of a better future – to all of Luna. And although her metal hand and foot might represent a lack – to human society in general and in Cinder's mind in particular – Cinder's body itself is equipped with complex technology that gives it agency by just being. In fact, the cyborg body – with its ability to access practically any information and to send messages with just a thought, fire tranquilizer darts from a finger, and replace body parts in an instant – is extra-abled, rather than merely differently abled. Admittedly, Cinder would be in a precarious position if her technology were to suddenly fail (as it does for a while in *Winter*), but Cinder's body is, for the most part, as

potent as a loaded weapon, and its non-conformity allows her to overcome restrictions that would confine a human body. Moreover, by not conforming to the binaries that exist in society, her body breaks traditional stereotypes of femininity and defies patriarchal and/or totalitarian structures.

Finally, and perhaps most important, Cinder's acknowledgement of her own and others' lack informs her caring throughout the series. As discussed above, the one-caring and the cared-for are mutually dependent on each other: Cinder and her friends constantly help themselves by helping each other, an act that becomes possible *because* of their individual abilities (which include access to the Lunar gift) and the unique materiality of their individual bodies, such as the computer in Cinder's brain or Cress's ability to see the truth behind bioelectric manipulations. The nature of caring itself is cyclical, and in each instance, there are multiple levels of caring that take place: the Lunar people perform the role of the ones-caring when they shield Cinder from Levana's army; they then become the cared-for when Cinder promises them a better life and leads them into battle. Even when there is no direct act of caring that happens, various characters benefit because someone has performed an act of caring in the past (which comes to light much later), as when Cress has helped deflect radars from intercepting the Rampion, allowing Cinder and Thorne to avoid detection when in space. The acts of caring are intertwined, especially when the actions of the one-caring are constantly informed and influenced by the cared-for. It is also telling that none of the female characters put their romantic interests over and above their friends in the entire series. The minimizing of love triangles and petty female competition helps negate the idea that heteronormative relationships are the most important and are worth the sacrifice of female friendships. Undeniably, these chains of caring forged at different levels with different people throughout the course of the series help Cinder not only defeat Levana but also establish a peace treaty between Earth and Luna.

Unlike her fellow revolutionary protagonists, Cinder is able to reinstate a successful new government on Luna because she embraces both the discursive and the material for herself and for others. Rather than resisting, she integrates herself into Luna's Symbolic order and takes precautionary measures so that the Lunar gift cannot be misappropriated. Even as she infiltrates the System from the inside, Cinder depends on her body to prevent her from getting caught up in the System she is trying to dismantle. Moreover, she can protect her friends and her people *because* of her ability to simultaneously exist in the Symbolic order while resisting Levana's totalitarian Law. To dismantle the master's house, therefore, one must not merely have access to the master's tools *but also learn to use them*, all the while resisting their corrupting influence through one's multiplicity of being.

CHAPTER V: "SHEDDING THE OLD SKIN LIKE A SNAKE IN SPRING": THE TRANSITIONING TRANSGENDER BODY IN THE TAMÍR TRIAD

The presence of gender non-conforming characters in children's and young adult literature addresses, in part, the need for diverse representations of and perspectives on multiple gender identities. The majority of books that attempt to represent gender as a spectrum, however, do little to challenge the presence of socially constructed gender binaries. While there are a few exceptions – such as Steve Brezenoff's *Brooklyn Burning* (2011) – a large number of novels including *Jess, Chuck, and the Roadtrip to Infinity* (2016) by Kristin Elizabeth Clark, *Being Emily* (2012) by Rachel Gold, *Spy Stuff* (2016) by Matthew J. Metzger, *If I Was Your Girl* (2016) by Meredith Russo, and *Parrotfish* (2007) by Ellen Wittlinger focus on either Male to Female or Female to Male transitions. In each of these novels, the transitioning character has to choose a gender based on what they identify as and their bodies are modified accordingly. Put another way, the material is de-emphasized in many young adult novels because it is modified only as a response to the discursive. However, as Susan Stryker explains in "(De) subjugated Knowledges," transgender studies "is as concerned with material conditions as it is with representational practices, and often pays particularly close attention to the interface between the two" (3). The material, then, is *as important as* identifying as a particular gender, and choosing a gender identity different from the one assigned at birth partly stems from the material because the transgender person's identification does not coincide with their embodiment. Ignoring or devaluing the material aspects of being a transgender person, therefore, does little to account for complex gender identities and experiences that are rooted *in* the body. In this chapter, I use Lynn Flewelling's The Tamír Triad to exemplify how the transgender body is the site of *both* the discursive *and* the material and not merely the discursive *over* the material as propounded by wrong body discourse. The novel helps me establish the importance of valuing the body and

its discursive context in conversation (rather than either in opposition or in the absence of one).

According to Bernadette Barker-Plummer in "Fixing Gwen: News and the Mediation of (trans)gender Challenges," wrong body discourse "is an account of gender nonconformity that sees it as the (accidental, biological) result of an individual's brain or psyche being misaligned with their anatomy so that an individual may identify being one gender while living in the body of the 'other,' thus being in the 'wrong body'" (711). In wrong body discourse, the gender non-conforming body becomes a "problem" that needs to be "fixed." Given that transgender identities can be a lot more complex than choosing one conventional gender identity over another, Barker-Plummer's question becomes an important one to ask: "Why, given the wide range of possible gender discourses we might draw from, has [wrong body discourse] been taken up by popular culture as the apparently only one to explain what is surely a much wider range of gender identities than can be accounted for in 'wrong' and 'right' bodies?" (713). One possible explanation is that gender non-conformity is considered a "problem" that can be contained within conventional gender categories, and this is reflected in literature as well. Coming of age novels with transgender characters are usually considered to be problem novels that revolve around a character's struggle to transition, and the transgender character is contained within binaristic categories, asserting that the individual is "really" a boy or a girl. Here, transitioning is seen as a solution which highlights the gender versus body dichotomy, wherein gender is representative of culture, and body representative of the individual's genitalia. Invariably, to live as a man or a woman, the character must have the "correct" genitals.

Using wrong body discourse as an overarching (if convenient) explanation for gender challenges can be problematic for multiple reasons. As Mary Catherine Miller observes in "Identifying Effective Trans* Novels for Adolescent Readers," transgender narratives that

present transitioning as a "solution" tend to "ostraciz[e] readers who may not wish to fully transition"; moreover, such novels "also mak[e] the assumption that one's adolescent experience is entirely rooted in gender" (84). Jennifer Putzi echoes similar sentiments in her reading of Rachel Gold's *Just Girls*:

> In what seems to be an effort to delink sex (associated with the body here) and gender (associated with the mind) – to mark transgender as being about gender rather than sex – Gold actually *naturalizes* the notion that one's gender identity should properly be mirrored by one's sex. The problem with the transgender individual … is that the body and gender do not correspond; gender is seen as immutable, and therefore the body must change. (424, emphasis mine)

The transgender experience, then, is only momentarily disruptive as the transgender individual's embodiment is ultimately "corrected" so that they fit in with gender binaries; as Putzi notes, "Surgery is the most invasive intervention, but it is normalized because it reinforces the gender binary that governs 'real life'" (427). Most authors writing for a young audience, therefore, underplay the complexities that surround the construction of the transgender body, and books that aim to queer gender usually result in a simplistic gender swap reinforced by notions of "right" and "wrong" bodies rather than an exploration of the gender spectrum. Put simply, young adult narratives represent either cultural constructions of gender (read: discourse) that determine the sex of the body based on genitalia (read: materiality) or vice versa; neither coexists.

Lynn Flewelling's The Tamír Triad is one of the few exceptions to this rule. Although the series is not marketed as a transgender text – or perhaps *because* of it – The Tamír Triad begins to queer gender in a robust way, highlighting the interdependence of the discursive and the material in creating a complex, non-conforming gender identity. In this fantastical series, the fictional land of Skala is traditionally a matriarchal land ruled by queens as per the

prophecy of the gods: “So long as a daughter of Thelátimos’ line defends and rules, Skala shall never be subjugated” (*Bone* 11). When the first novel in the series, *The Bone Doll’s Twin* begins, King Erius has killed his mother and usurped the throne. The King also kills all his female relatives – adults and children alike, with the exception of his beloved sister, Ariani – so that they will not be a threat to the throne. The King’s greed results in the land being afflicted by drought, disease, and war, and an oracle proclaims that a girl child born in the royal line will restore Skala to its former glory. In keeping with the prophecy, when Ariani gives birth to fraternal twins, a wizard and a witch kill the male child and graft his skin onto his sister’s body to protect her from the King’s wrath. Tobin, as the girl child is now called, is effectively disguised and brought up as a prince until Tobin is ready to take over the throne. In fact, Tobin is completely unaware that his underlying biology is female until he begins to menstruate towards the end of the novel. In *Hidden Warrior*, the second novel in the series, Tobin experiences gender dysphoria and struggles to come to terms with the fact that he is indeed the future Queen of Skala. While the series is far from perfect and goes on to support a very cisgender, heteronormative agenda in the final book, *Oracle’s Queen*, both *Bone Doll’s Twin* and *Hidden Warrior* complicate readers’ binaristic understandings of gender. Here, it is worth noting that although Tobin is a complex character who is at once *both* male *and* female, I use “he/him” to refer to the character’s male identity, and “she/her” with regard to her female form in accordance with the gender pronouns used by Flewelling with regard to Tobin and Tamír respectively.

In the following sections, I will first explain Tobin as a product of the discursive and the material with special regard to the magics that were used to create his unique identity *after his birth*. Second, I explore the construction of Tobin’s body as a transgender subject; here, I examine Tobin’s ghostly double, Brother, and Tobin’s construction of himself as a prince and later herself, as a Queen, as a result of language, performance, and complex

embodiment. In the final section of this chapter, I reiterate some of the key ideas explored in previous chapters demonstrate how Tobin's transgender body is the site of the linguistic and the material with regard to (metamorphic) transformations as he literally transitions into a woman in front of his people. Next, I examine the bonds of caring established between Tobin and his sibling and later, Tobin and his people, both of which are imbedded in the material. Lastly, I analyze Tobin/Tamír's subject position as a successful ruler when compared to his/her mother, Ariani. My main aim in this chapter is to explore the effectiveness of using binaries to queer gender in transgender coming of age narratives.

Paternal Will and Maternal Bonds: Discursive and Material Magics in *The Tamír Triad*

To understand Tobin's transgender personhood and his transition into Queen Tamír, it is imperative to examine the two strands of magic that create Tobin/Tamír's complex identity: Illior's will and the Goddess's magic as represented by the wizard, Iya, and the witch, Lhel, respectively. In the novels, religion functions as one of the cornerstones of Skala, and Illior, the Lightbearer, is one of the most revered gods. As his name suggests, the Lightbearer is the god of knowledge and wisdom, and is therefore also the patron deity of wizards. Renowned for his foreknowledge and foresight, Illior conveys his will through an oracle (not unlike the Greek god, Apollo, who offered guidance through the Oracle at Delphi). As mentioned above, the trilogy opens with the god's most famous prophecy, "So long as a daughter of Thelátimos' line defends and rules, Skala shall never be subjugated," being proven right: King Erius has usurped the throne, and, as a consequence, the land is plagued by war, famine, and disease (*Bone* 11).

If Illior's will is interpreted as the Symbolic order in Skala, then human rules and regulations are made in accordance with the god's messages; those who challenge the god's will invariably suffer. The wizards are considered to be touched by Illior, and their magic –

including the ability to touch others' minds at close quarters, the ability to scry, and perform illusions – stem from their mental prowess. In fact, the wizards privilege knowledge and learning over their physical bodies, so much so that they reserve all their vitality for magic (*Bone* 24). Among the wizards, Iya is chosen to do Illior's will and understands what is expected of her based on the vision she had when she visited the oracle; almost all of Iya's actions – including living as a messenger so that Tobin/Tamír might one day rule over Skala with an army of wizards at his/her disposal – are a direct result of her visions. Iya's understanding of Illior's prophecy is instrumental in structuring her own (and Tobin's) identity, as Iya's visions – passed on from the god himself to the citizens of Skala – function similarly to written rules and regulations in present society.

With regard to young readers' relationship to the written word, Karen Coats writes:

> To learn to read, to enter into a relationship with a written text, is to enter into a relationship of unequal power. The text is mute, unresponsive, and often resistant. That children embrace this relationship so willingly and exuberantly is largely because they are used to relationships of unequal power. Their job is to figure out what the Other wants of them, how they can make themselves desirous to those in power over them. Learning to read is an acceptance of the arbitrary power structure of the dominant culture. ("P is for Patriarchy" 89)

Although the child reader is not always less powerful than the written word, some striking similarities cannot be ignored when comparing the fictional prophecy with written text in the real world and the fictional adult character to the real child reader. Illior's words – both when etched in jasper by the first Queen and when conveyed to Iya through an oracle – are more powerful than those who read or interpret them. "[M]ute, unresponsive, and often resistant," the prophecies – much like written words in books which initiate the young reader into the Symbolic order – depend on the interpretation and understanding of the wizards (especially

Iya) who in turn work to reestablish this Symbolic order for the collective good of the land. In other words, by *correctly* interpreting the visions and doing as they are bid, wizards in general and Iya in particular (through her leadership and her actions as a messenger) accept and uphold the "arbitrary power structure" of the culture that they live in (which in this case is matriarchal) for the benefit of the land. If not for Illior's prophecy supported by Iya's vision (which involves killing Tobin's twin so that Tobin might live and one day, rule), Tobin would not be alive, much less have a chance at becoming Queen.

The second important strand of magic used to create Tobin's transgender identity is the magic of the Mother. Its practitioner, Lhel, however, is ostracized by mainstream Skalan society for being a witch, and is accused of being "unclean, handler of the dead, a necromancer who called up demons and ghosts" (*Bone* 27). Although Lhel's status as a social pariah is a result of a misconception about witches as performers of dark magic (an accusation she constantly maintains is not true), Lhel's magic is entrenched in the material and cannot be separated from the body. That is, she uses her connection with nature – herbs, trees, animals, and blood, among other things – to weave her spells. Lhel's body, too, is connected to the magic she creates: when she performs complex spells, for instance, "tattoos [appear] on her hands, breasts, and belly [and] seem to crawl across her skin" (*Bone* 522). In *Volatile Bodies*, Elizabeth Grosz uses Alphonso Lingis' explanation of bodily inscriptions such as scars and tattoos in what Lingis considers the "primitive" (read: non-Western) body: "Primitive inscriptions on the body surface function … to intensify, proliferate, and extend the body's erotogenic sensitivity" (138-39). Grosz goes on to explain that "These puncturings and markings of the body do not simply displace or extend from already constituted, biologically pregiven libidinal zones; they constitute the body in its entirety as erotic, and they privilege particular parts of the body as self-constituted orifices. They make the very notion and sensations of orifices and erotogenic rims possible" (139). Lhel's "primitive,"

magical tattoos, then, at once signify her power, sexuality, and the link between her sexual body and its ability to invoke the maternal goddess. This link between sexual energy, the body, and magic is important, because unlike the cultural image of witches in Western patriarchies, Lhel's magic is used to create rather than seduce and destroy. However, since it uses and manipulates the body and bodily fluids (such as skin, hair, bone, and blood), Lhel's magic breaches boundaries between bodies and represents transgressive and insatiable female desires that threaten (Illioran) social order, which is perhaps what makes it both terrible and terrifying for wizards and Skalans alike.

Since the magic of the Mother is about "the power of [blood], and flesh, and bone, and the dead," it is Lhel who performs the complex magic using material objects like a knife and a needle to bind together Tobin's (originally female) body and her dead twin's skin in order to disguise Tobin as a boy (*Bone* 322). Lhel also helps to care for Tobin's dead twin, Brother, who haunts the living world in the form of an unrestful spirit as a direct result of his untimely death. First, Lhel binds Brother's spirit to a doll, giving him a physical form, and once their mother dies, she entrusts the doll to Tobin and teaches him to care for Brother. She also ties a lock of Tobin's hair around the doll's neck thereby protecting the children from one another. Most important, perhaps, is that when Tobin undergoes menarche and the original bindings on his male body come loose, Lhel stitches a piece of Brother's bone into Tobin's chest in order to keep him from transitioning into a girl. Each of Lhel's spells, therefore, is entrenched in the material and demonstrates a power that cannot be written off, contained, or easily controlled as it stems from the deeply rooted powers of the sexualized female body.

It is important to acknowledge that the fantasy mother that the Goddess represents is not all-encompassing; instead, it is merely another approach to magic – that is, materiality in the face of Illior's visions. Tobin, therefore, is the site of confluence between two seemingly

opposing forms of magic, the discursive and the material, as represented by Illior's will and the maternal goddess's binding. He stays alive because both magics are instrumental in his female body not being detected by the king and his entourage of (evil) wizards. Accordingly, Tobin's transgender form is a site of confluence of the discursive and the material, wherein one cannot exist without the other. The following section will therefore examine Tobin's subject position (as a prince who is raised to become the Queen) especially with regard to his twin, Brother; the subtleties of language that allow Tobin to pass as masculine and Tamír as feminine; Tobin and Tamír's performance as a prince and as Queen respectively; and finally, Tobin/Tamír's complex embodiment as a transgender person.

"You are She": Tobin's Complex Transgender Identity

Understanding Tobin's subject position, a young boy who will one day become queen helps explain the relationship between Tobin and Brother. As explained above, Tobin/Tamír is created by complex magics which coexist in his/her body in a state of fluidity and interdependency. Tobin's survival in the guise of a male child has some serious consequences, the most significant of which is Brother's death. Since Brother is bound to Tobin's body to ensure the latter's safety and survival, the spirit exists in a liminal space between the living and the dead and can only be released when Tobin assumes the form of a woman. It is important to note that Brother grows as Tobin grows – physically if not emotionally – and the two children look so identical that some of Tobin's closest companions (including the wet nurse who raises him and his best friend and squire, Ki) mistake Brother for Tobin at least once during the course of the narrative. Robyn McCallum's reading of the *doppelgänger* as a narrative strategy holds true here: "the double, or *doppelgänger*, is used to represent intersubjective relationships between self and other as an internalized dialogue and the internal fragmentation of the subject – the split subject" (68). In other words, the

doppelgänger "explore[s] the idea that personal identity is shaped by a dialogic relation with an other and that subjectivity is multiple and fragmented" (McCallum 75). In The Tamír Triad, Brother haunts Tobin and their childhood home, and functions as a constant reminder that Tobin is not *in*, but *wearing* a body that is not his. In other words, Brother's presence is a reminder of Tobin's split subject position, and Tobin has to *transition from a male to female body* for Brother to find peace *and* so that he can become the rightful ruler of Skala. Neither Tobin nor Brother, then, are merely reflections of one another. Instead, since "the double is a mirror inversion of the subject which is located externally," as McCallum has argued, Brother *is* Tobin in as much as Tobin *is* Brother (76). Since Brother and Tobin can be interpreted as dimensions of the same person, Brother's reluctance to share his male body coupled with Tobin's reluctance to live as a woman serve to complicate Tobin's experience in a traditionally gendered body.

Since Brother represents the internal division of Tobin's subject position, Tobin can become a complete or full subject only when he transitions into and becomes a woman and Queen as determined by Illior's prophecy. In an enactment of the mirror phase, Lhel, and Iya's student, Arkoniel, guide a pubescent Tobin to look at his "true face" with the help of the Mother's magic:

> Fearfully, unwillingly, he looked down to see what stranger would peer up at him.
>
> She was not so different.
>
> It was a girl – there was no mistaking that – but she had his dark blue eyes, his straight nose and pointed chin, even the same scar…. [T]his one had nothing soft about her. Her cheekbones might be a little higher set that his own, the lips a hint fuller, but she met his gaze with the same wariness he'd so often seen in his mirror at home – and the same determination. (*Bone* 516)

Coats would argue that when Tobin looks into the pool, he "apprehends the fact that her body is a distinct and coherent entity unto itself, that there are boundaries between what constitutes herself and what constitutes Other," much like a child looking into the mirror for the first time (*Looking Glasses* 19). Tobin is able to see his resemblance in the girl in the reflection, and in his mind, he, Tobin, and the girl in the pool remain separate entities. The girl in the pool remains just that – the girl in the pool, although she has "his dark blue eyes, his straight nose and pointed chin, even the same scar". Even when Arkoniel and Lhel – acting as the surrogate of the mother – mediate Tobin's experience, Tobin finds it difficult to associate the signifiers for the girl with himself, although Arkoniel tells him, "Not 'she,' Tobin…. You. You are she" (*Bone* 516). Only when Tobin understands the linguistic shifters "You" and "she" in terms of himself, "I" and "me," can he attain a more complete subject position as a woman and as the Queen. The following sections will examine Tobin's transition into Tamír with regard to the linguistic, the performative, and the material.

According to Kerry Mallan in *Gender Dilemmas in Children's Fiction*, "we need to be alert to the subtleties of language and the discursive positionings that a text offers its readers and its characters" (127). The assignation of gender appropriate pronouns *depending on what Tobin/Tamír needs to pass as, and not necessarily based on what Tobin/Tamír's gender happens to be at a particular moment in time*, helps complete his/her embodiment and performance both as a prince and as Queen. Names, too, are instrumental in this change. For instance, when a girl child is born in a land where women are considered a threat, she is disguised as a boy, and her father gives her a masculine name, Tobin, to keep the disguise intact. When the same child who is raised as a boy ascends the throne, she takes the name Tamír II after her great-great-grandmother. The names and corresponding pronouns – he/him for Tobin and she/her for Tamír – are no longer descriptive words, partly because of the King's dictum to kill all female children of royal descent. Instead, they become performative

speech acts as they undertake the performance of an action – bestowing a gender and a new subject position upon an individual – much like christening bestows a name upon a child (Austin 44). Shoshana Felman uses J.L. Austin's examples of performative speech acts such as "I promise" and "I apologize" in *The Literary Speech Act*: "I am not describing my act but accomplishing it; by speaking, by pronouncing these words, I produce the *event* that they designate: the very act of promising, swearing, apologizing, so forth" (16, emphasis original). By pronouncing his girl child (who is disguised as his son) "Tobin," therefore, Tobin's father effectively reinforces the "fact" that his child is a boy. Similarly, when Tobin cuts away the stitches on his skin that make him male and literally transforms into a woman in *Hidden Warrior*, she renames herself Tamír II, and the cultural inscription of the name (with regard to both gender and the reference to a former queen) plays a role in her being accepted as a woman and consequently, as the future Queen of Skala. Put another way, the gendered names and pronouns reflect the social "truth" of the character's gender identities and influence others' identification of Tobin as male and Tamír as female.

The linguistic referents explained above also reinforce Tobin/Tamír's performance as prince or Queen. In *Bodies That Matter*, Judith Butler explains that "performativity must be understood not as a singular or deliberate 'act,' but, rather, as the reiterative and citational practice by which discourse produces the effects that it names" (xii). Although it is impossible to deny that bodies are material entities, and although it is equally impossible for us to step outside our bodies, Butler argues that one's sex is, or will become, "that which qualifies a body for life within the domain of cultural intelligibility" (*Bodies* xii). As Moya Lloyd explains in her reading of *Bodies That Matter*,

> We recognize certain behaviour as feminine … because it recites those practices that *over time* have come to acquire authority as indications of femininity…. The point is not, however, that the repetition necessary to performativity is 'performed by a

> subject'; it is that 'this repetition is what enables a subject' (*BTM*: 95). The feminine subject is only a feminine subject because of this repetition. Far from being chosen, therefore, femininity is an effect of the 'forcible citation of a norm' (*BTM*: 232). (63, emphasis original)

Although Butler's theory of performativity is problematic in that it leans primarily towards the discursive, Lynn Flewelling seems to echo this understanding of gender. As a result, when he is growing up, Tobin is required to perform actions that reiterate his subject position as a young boy (such as swordplay and riding) so that his borrowed gender might not come under any suspicion. For instance, when Tobin first sets foot outside the protection of his home on his eighth birthday, his father takes him to a marketplace and asks him to choose his birthday present. However, Tobin's father is noticeably upset when Tobin picks up a doll and buys the child a sack of marbles instead. Tobin instinctively understands that he has done something wrong. On their way home, Tobin's father explains:

> "Dolls… They're silly filthy things. Boys don't play with them, especially not boys who want to grow up to be brave warriors. Do you understand?"
>
> *The doll!* A fresh wave of shame washed over Tobin. So that was why his father had been so angry. His heart sank further as another realization became clear. It was why his mother hadn't given him one that morning, too. It was shameful of him to want them. (*Bone* 77)

The reader understands the several complex layers behind this exchange: Tobin's father chastises Tobin to protect him from the King's wrath if his disguise is discovered; Tobin wanting a doll is justified because he has, until now, lived in isolation and is therefore unaware of the rules of gendered society. For Tobin, however, this is a significant moment when he learns what is socially acceptable based on one's gender, and also shapes his future (if simplistic) understandings of what it means to be male or female. Chastised at the market,

Tobin goes on to internalize these hitherto arbitrary (at least for him) gender-based rules, and fears being ostracized for not conforming; moreover, Brother functions as a constant reminder that Tobin is "different." This is further evidenced on the first night Ki shares Tobin's bedroom and Brother shows the latter a vision of his family and friends finding the doll that Lhel made which binds Brother to Tobin using the Goddess' magic, and hating Tobin for keeping it. Although Brother does not seem to deliberately reinforce gender norms because his actions are influenced by self-preservation, Tobin's fears – based in the rudimentary understanding that girls play with dolls whereas boys learn swordplay – reduce gender to merely the performative. In a similar vein, when Tobin first finds out that he is wearing his brother's skin, he experiences gender dysphoria primarily because he believes that girls cannot be strong and that women cannot fight in battles. Although the trilogy attempts to challenge cultural gender-based roles (like when Arkoniel explains that women were allowed to fight in wars until the King banned them from doing so), the novels oversimplify depictions of gender such that they focus primarily on the performative in order to reach a neat (read: cisgender and heteronormative) conclusion.

Bodies, however, are material entities, and in order to perform gendered roles, they need to occupy certain physical and social spaces. In *Queer Phenomenology*, Sara Ahmed uses phenomenology to explain how bodies are oriented in space: "What makes bodies different is how they inhabit space: space is not a container for the body; it does not contain the body as if the body were 'in it.' Rather bodies are submerged, such that they become the space they inhabit; in taking up space, bodies move through space and are affected by the 'where' of that movement" (53). Ahmed goes on to explain that "Spaces are not only inhabited by bodies that 'do things,' but what bodies 'do' leads them to inhabit some spaces more than others" (*Queer* 58). With regard to gender, she uses the example of the act of writing being associated with masculine bodies, which would then mean that masculine

bodies inhabit the spaces wherein writing takes place, and that a designated writing space, like a study, "tends to extend to such bodies and may even take their shape" (Ahmed, *Queer* 58). We see this orientation – or reorientation – of bodies and spaces in The Tamír Triad as well. Tobin's body is oriented by the space of the sparring ground and by the sword in his hand; since the King's rule allows only men to fight, his warrior body is initially coded as masculine. When the King dies, however, Tobin challenges this rule, and women re-enter the battlefield. Objects such as swords and sparring grounds become gender inclusive spaces, as do the bodies that occupy them. In other words, a person who wields a sword is a soldier, and can be either male or female, as the gender orientation can change with shifting cultural perspectives. Moreover, since "Gender is an effect of how bodies take up objects, which involves how they occupy space by being occupied in one way or another," as Ahmed has argued, Tobin's maleness and Tamír's femaleness are as much results of their orientation to the objects around them (such as dolls and thrones, respectively), as they are their culture and performance (*Queer* 59).

Moreover, as Ahmed argues,

> orientations can operate simultaneously as effects and be lived in or experienced as if they are originary or a matter of how one's body inhabits the world, by being oriented toward one side, like being right or left handed [where] "handedness" is also perceived to be about direction…. Understanding the processes of "becoming straight" would be to appreciate how sexual orientations feel as if they are intrinsic to being in the world, and how bodies 'extend' into space by being directed in this way or that, where 'this' and 'that' are felt as being on one side or another of a dividing line. (*Queer* 80)

Being cisgender and straight, then, establishes *vertical lines* of genealogy, from a father to his son, and being a father's son – or, in Tobin's case, being *seen as his father's son* – positions

the child as a follower of his father, because he, too, will become a father in the future. Ahmed would argue that by "aligning sex (the male body) and gender (the masculine character) with sexual orientation (the heterosexual future)," Tobin-as-Rhius'-son would automatically become a traditional subject in the eyes of the people around him; that is, the son, Tobin, would be "'brought into line' by being 'given' a future that is 'in line' with the family line" (*Queer* 83). Put another way, Tobin is, by virtue of being (and/or occupying the body of) a boy, seen as following the genealogically vertical direction established by his father and uncle. Here, Ahmed's argument is worth quoting in full:

> when we inherit, we also inherit the proximity of certain objects, as that which is available to us, as given within the family home. *These objects are not only material: they may be values, capital, aspirations, projects, and styles.* Insofar as we inherit that which is near enough to be available at home we also inherit orientations, that is, we inherit the nearness of certain objects more than others, which means we inherit ways of inhabiting and extending into space. *The very requirement that the child follow a parental line puts some objects and not others in reach.* (*Queer* 86, emphasis mine)

Going back to the previous example, then, Tobin's proximity to swords and to sparring grounds (as opposed to dolls) are a result of being seen as his father's son, and in turn, the objects shape how Tobin inhabits his father's home. As evidenced above, these lines of orientation are not only about material bodies; instead, they turn material objects into discursive rules. For instance, social rules – like women not being allowed to fight in battles – restrict their access to weapons. Tobin, however, uses his morphing body to change social rules and enables women to take up arms. In fact, when he teaches his friend Una to fight, the vertical line itself is challenged, and Tobin's uncle recognizes the same in *Hidden Warrior*. Ultimately, Tobin's unique embodiment, and his ability to change his body as required by the discursive lines of orientation (being father's son to survive in his uncle's patriarchal

kingdom, or mother's daughter to ascend the throne) enables his refusal to follow the lines established for him, finding other lines of orientation while challenging existing ones.

It is also important to consider the complex materiality of Tobin's female body shrouded by Brother's form. As Jay Prosser has pointed out in his critique of Butler's theory of performativity, there are "transgender trajectories" (namely transsexuals)

> who seek very pointedly to be nonperformative, to be constative, quite simply, to *be*. What gets dropped from transgender in its queer deployment to signify subversive gender performativity is the value of the matter that often most concerns the transsexual: the *narrative* of becoming a biological man or biological woman (as opposed to the performance of effecting one) – in brief, and simple the materiality of the sexed body. (32, italics original).

Prosser goes on to note that

> The transsexual doesn't necessarily *look* differently gendered but by definition *feels* differently gendered from her or his-birth assigned sex. In both its medical and its autobiographical versions, the transsexual narrative depends upon an initial crediting of this feeling as generative ground. It demands some recognition of the category of corporeal interiority (internal body sensations) and of its distinctiveness from that which can be seen (external surface): the difference between gender identity and sex that serves as the logic of transsexuality. (43, italics original)

Tobin's body can be read as a transsexual body, as it is, in Stryker's words, "flesh torn apart and sewn together again in a shape other than that in which it was born," by magic, if not by medicine ("My Words" 245). As a result, Tobin's material male body is a complex one. Despite the author's obvious cisgender, heterosexual leanings, Tobin's body demonstrates a level of complexity that challenges what it means to be male, female, or both. This is evident

when Tobin gets his first period. Tobin experiences pain and an "unsettling sensation" which causes him to undo his trousers only to find "a small wet stain where the two legs joined":

> Reaching down with shaking fingers, he felt under his privates, still so small and hairless compared to those of the other Companions. On the wrinkled underside of the sac, he felt a patch of sticky wetness on the skin. He stared at his fingertips in alarm; even in this light he could see that it was blood….
>
> The skin was unbroken. The blood was seeping through like dew. (*Bone* 502-03)

Tobin's "small and hairless" privates embody emasculated maleness in as much as menstrual blood embodies (adolescent and adult) femaleness. Although Tobin has never seen menstrual blood before, his understanding of it echoes historical and cultural reactions of many women: disgust and shame. Tobin even mistakes the blood for the plague, emphasizing the horror the materiality of his body generates, regardless of whether or not he agrees with his material reality. And yet, despite the trauma Tobin feels, menarche is a significant part of Tobin's personal history. In "Hermione in the Bathroom," June Cummins uses Janet Lee and Jennifer Sasser-Coen's study, *Blood Stories*, to articulate how menarche is an event by which girls become part of the heterosexual socio-cultural order: "Arguing that 'it is through the body that women are integrated into the social and sexual order, and it is in part through the discourses and practices of menarche that heterosexuality and "hetero-reality"… are constructed in everyday life' (86), these researchers help us see that menarche is construed as marking girls' entry into a sexualized and subordinated womanhood" (182). Tobin's menarche, too, marks his entry into a sexualized (if not subordinated) womanhood, since menstrual blood signifies the future Queen's functioning reproductive system that will ensure that the royal line continues. It is also worth noting that when Tobin menstruates, Lhel's binding of the siblings' bodies literally comes loose, resulting in Lhel re-binding brother and sister with a much stronger substance: bone. The loosening of Tobin's stitches during

menstruation suggests that the materiality of the body has significantly more agency than the magics that have been wrought on it, which goes against the traditional wrong body discourse of most transgender narratives. Put another way, the counter discourse highlights the importance of the body over and above the gender schema predominantly governed by the mind.

Regardless of whether he/she has been coded male or female, Tobin/Tamír occupies a complex subject position as a young boy transitioning into the Queen. Linguistic performative acts, performance as male or female, orientation towards different gendered objects, and the gendered body are so closely intertwined, that it becomes difficult to separate the discursive from the material. When Tobin as a young boy feels shame for wanting dolls in the example above, for instance, linguistic performatives including Tobin's name and his gendered pronoun are meant to reflect the materiality of his (disguised) male body, which in turn orients itself towards objects such as swords and dolls *because of cultural constructions* of how male and female bodies are supposed to orient themselves towards differently gendered objects. Cultural discourse and language, performance, and the material male body created as the result of a god's prophecy at once reflect, reiterate, and keep in place Lhel's magic which in turn uses bodily entities such as skin, blood, hair, and bone in order to create Tobin/Tamír's complex identity.

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Metamorphoses, Ethics of Care, and the Maternal Body in The Tamír Triad

I have shown how Tobin/Tamír's body functions as a site of confluence of the discursive and the material. Additionally, the transgender body acts as a site of culmination of different ideas discussed in the previous chapters of this study including the metamorphing adolescent body, ethics of care, and the adolescent's relationship with the complex maternal body. Unlike the maternal body in chapter 3, however, Tobin/Tamír's mother, Ariani, is

resistant to change, and therefore acts as a foil to his/her transforming body, as I will explain below.

As I've already mentioned in Chapter 1, being on the transgender spectrum implies metamorphosis on some level, as the transgender characters' clothing and performance cross over and move between socially constructed sex/gender boundaries. In The Tamír Triad, Tobin/Tamír's body, too, moves between sex/gender boundaries as the infant body first takes her brother's form, before morphing back into her "original" female form; here, the transgender metamorphosis occurs as the result of something fantastical, much like Micah's and Eva's transformations discussed in the second chapter.

Although Lhel's magical stitches on the girl child are innocuous, and Tobin wears the disguise of a male body in secret, a more spectacular transformation occurs when Tobin turns fifteen. To contest for the throne, Tobin has to literally undo Lhel's work and transition into a woman in public so that everyone knows that he is indeed the rightful heir to the throne. Standing naked in front of his castle and people, therefore, Tobin first cuts the lock of his own hair from around the doll's neck (to free Brother), and then cuts into his own chest, to remove the "tiny fragment" of bone that is bound to his body, "still sheathed in a pulpy shred of raw flesh" (*Hidden* 484). Once the bone is cut away, Brother disappears, and a "strange skin" covers Tobin's body:

> his skin was in tatters around him, flayed by the horrendous magic he had unleashed. He rubbed gingerly at his left forearm and the skin fell away, exposing smooth, whole skin below….
>
> Shivering, Tobin stripped the old husk away and stared down at her small breasts…. Her boy's genitals had wizened to dried husks. She pulled at the loose skin above them and they sloughed off and fell away. (*Hidden* 485)

At a glance, it would seem that Tobin performs wrong body discourse like many of his/her transgender counterparts, and Prosser would argue that Tobin stripping away the flayed skin enacts "Fantasies of excoriation [that] punctuate transsexual autobiographies" (68). One could also argue that since Tobin literally steps out of one skin and into another, his subject position is bound to change; using Didier Anzieu's concept of "skin ego" – which Prosser explains as "the body's physical skin as the primary organ underlying the formation of the ego … individualizing our psychic functioning, quite crucially making us who we are," – to interpret Tobin's new female form, it would appear that the gender bending character's female skin (characterized by "small breasts" and the absence of male genitalia) results in the throne becoming at once her destiny and her birthright (65). Indeed, things are as they should be on the surface: Skala has a new queen, peace and prosperity prevail once Tobin as Tamír ascends the throne, as Tamír is both heterosexual and biologically female, which will ensure the continuance of the royal line.

Conversely, however, Tobin/Tamír's female body complicates our dichotomous understandings of gender, although the novel uses binaristic terms such as "boy" and "girl" and "prince" and "Queen" to talk about gender. More important, Tobin/Tamír experiences gender dysphoria with regard to becoming a woman *despite being born female*; unlike the traditional transgender experience wherein the gender non-conforming individual wants to get *out* of their "wrongly gendered body," and transition into the gender they associate with *inside*, Tobin experiences her inner body as "wrong" because she has been raised as a boy. This dichotomy is further complicated in the example above, when Tobin expresses disgust at both male *and* female body parts: Tobin's male genitalia become abject like "dried husks" that need to be stripped away, even as the female markers such as breasts function as a source of horror. It is worth mentioning that Tobin is extremely reluctant to transition into a woman, and the fact that he transitions (rather suddenly) for the benefit of his kingdom although he

has no innate desire to do so could lead to the conclusion that gender is reduced to just a plot point in the series. (Indeed, Tobin's acceptance of his female body is oversimplified in *Oracle's Queen* in its haste to conclude with a cisgender, heteronormative, "happily-ever-after" ending.) Instead, the material markers on Tobin's body – namely the crescent shaped scar on his chin, and the birthmark on his forearm that identify him/her as the future Queen of Skala – are given prime importance as they (unlike Tobin's gendered body) do not change during the course of the novels; the scar and the birthmark are considered "signs from Illior" that help identify Tobin as the future Queen regardless of gender.

Ultimately, Flewelling's goal seems to be restricted to rejecting traditional masculine stereotypes, and Tobin being raised as a male child is akin to that of a female-to-male cross-dressing narrative, as it is "almost exclusively used as a form of feminist rebellion against rigid patriarchal social structures" (Flanagan, "Reframing" 82). Moreover, although Tobin is unaware that he is wearing his brother's skin for a large portion of the narrative (and therefore has little active agency), Flanagan's analysis of traditional cross-dressing narratives holds true here: "[Female-to-male cross-dressing] typically happens when a female protagonist finds herself severely constrained by patriarchy. In order to transgress boundaries, she adopts masculine attire – an action which effectively reverses her social capabilities by providing her with potent access to all that had been formally denied to her while positioned as feminine" ("Reframing" 82). In The Tamír Triad, masculine attire is equated to Brother's male body which Tobin effectively wears as a disguise. Although Tobin is never able to speak out against his uncle's tyrannical, patriarchal rule, his ability to seamlessly transition from one gender to the other – first female to male, and then back again – enables him to survive *and* rule. Also, as a prince, Tobin has access to the Symbolic order in the form of lessons on swordplay, warcraft, and statecraft, which would certainly be denied to him if he were a woman. Put another way, Tobin can dismantle the existing system of governance only

because he has access to it. In that sense, Tobin/ Tamír's metamorphing body grants him/her agency.

Tobin/Tamír's materiality also plays a significant role with regard to his/her friendships; unlike the King who rules by instilling fear in his subjects, Tobin has a close-knit community, a group of friends on whom he can always depend including but not restricted to his best friend, Ki, the other Companions, Brother, Lhel, Tharin and his guards, the people of Atyion, and even the wizards. In *Feminist Morality*, Virginia Held argues that

> The self … is seen as having both a need for recognition and a need to understand the other, and these needs are seen as compatible. They are created in the context of mother-child interaction and are satisfied in a mutually empathetic relationship…. Both give and take in a way that not only contributes to the satisfaction of their needs as individuals but also affirms the 'larger relational unit' they compose. Maintaining this larger relational unit then becomes a goal, and maturity is seen *not in terms of individual autonomy but in terms of competence in creating and sustaining relations of empathy and mutual intersubjectivity*. (60, emphasis mine)

Tobin achieves this intersubjective relationship with the people he comes into contact with throughout the series. Since Tobin is brought up in isolation for a large part of his childhood, his lack of socialization (with regard to the complex social hierarchies of the nobility especially at court) works in his favor since he treats everyone around him as his equal, regardless of their gender and social status. Tobin's honesty and simplicity helps him maintain this "larger relational unit" with his friends and companions. As he grows older and is in the process of transitioning into a woman and queen, it is these "relations of empathy and mutual intersubjectivity" developed during the course of the series that come into play. Herein, I'll restrict myself to just two examples: Brother and the people of Atyion.

Among all the people – both human and magical – that Tobin comes into contact with, Brother is perhaps the most important and difficult character the former cares for. Since Brother is an unrestful spirit who exists in a liminal space between life and death, no one but Tobin can see him (unless Brother wills it). After their mother's untimely death, Lhel entrusts Tobin to care for Brother, since the siblings need to be bound together to keep Tobin's disguise intact. There is no love lost between the siblings, however, and when Lhel teaches Tobin the magic that will summon Brother, Tobin asks if he can make the spirit go away forever.

> Lhel gripped his hand, suddenly serious. "No! You need him, I tell you…. Think of how lonesome he be? He miss mama, like you miss. She make this [doll], care for him. She die. No care. You care now."
>
> Tobin didn't like the sound of that. "What do I do? Do I have to feed him? Can I give him some clothes?"
>
> "Spirits eat with [their] eye. Needs to be with folk…. You call him sometime, let him look around with you so he don't be so lonesome and hungry. You do that, keesa?"
>
> Tobin couldn't imagine calling a ghost on purpose, but he understood all too well what Lhel said about Brother being lonesome and lost. (*Bone* 141-42)

Although Tobin does not like Brother, and finds him terrifying for a significant part of his childhood (especially since he has experienced the ghost's violent rage directed towards him in the past), he learns to empathize with, and care for, his brother's spirit, calling him often, when he rides and plays with Ki. More important, perhaps, is Tobin's ability to see Brother's pain and suffering as a result of the magic that keeps the latter tethered to his sibling's body; towards the end of *The Bone Doll's Twin*, especially, Tobin can see Brother crying tears of blood as a result of the binding (*Bone* 524). When Tobin tells Lhel about Brother's pain in

Hidden Warrior, the witch explains that all the suffering Tobin's family and friends have had to endure is so that he can one day become Queen and fulfil his destiny. "For you we all suffer," Lhel says. She adds, "This will end. When you take off Brother skin, you both be free then" (*Hidden* 23). Tobin transitions into a woman – as much as he does not want to give up the body that he has grown up with – as a result of empathy and caring, and because he wants to alleviate Brother's suffering.

Another reason Tobin becomes the Queen is because he cares for the well-being of his subjects. While he does not want to go against the wishes of his uncle, the King, and while it pains him to betray his cousin by contesting for the throne, Tobin understands that not following the prophecy and becoming Queen despite the sacrifice by his family and friends amounts to abandoning his country (*Hidden* 23). Here, chains of caring – explained in the previous chapter – are established between generations, and also between ruler and subjects. For example, Tobin's father, Duke Rhius, cares deeply for his soldiers and his subjects at his home in Atiyon, unlike the King, who rules by murdering any competition to the throne, and by instilling fear in his people. This act of caring is reciprocated by the people of Atyion towards Rhius' child in the form of refuge, friendship, and even arms, especially during Tobin's hour of need (*Hidden* 166, 477-79, 482). Tobin/Tamír repays this debt by becoming the Queen, and ensuring the land is no longer plagued by disease, famine, and drought. In other words, since Tobin/Tamír's ascension will heal the land, he/she feels that responsibility to the well-being of the many outweighs his/her personal relationships.

Tobin/Tamír's ability to transform from female body to a male one and then back again, coupled with the bonds of caring and empathy established with other characters in the novel, helps him/her achieve a sense of agency that is denied his/her mother. Tobin/Tamír's mother, Ariani, functions as a foil to his/her character: indeed, the two characters share many similarities. Primarily, Ariani is the King's only other living female relative, and therefore a

direct descendant of the royal line. Ariani is married to Duke Rhius when she is still young, however, and the King spares her life so long as she does not compete for the throne. As a result, she is restricted to the home and hearth instead of taking her rightful place in court. When one of her children is murdered so that the other can live, however, Ariani loses her sanity, her voice, the materiality of motherhood, and any semblance of agency she might have once had.[18] Betrayed by the patriarchal figures in her life – first brother and king, and later, husband, and wizards – and unable to grieve for her children, Ariani locks herself in a tower and haunts the keep where they live, both when she is alive and when she is dead. Here, Ariani's imprisonment and escape (out of a tower window and to her own death) reflect dramatizations of imprisonment and escape that Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar claim represent a uniquely female tradition in the literature of the nineteenth century.[19]Ariani's violent end (by throwing herself out of her tower window and getting impaled on a shard of ice when she sees her brother, the King, approach her home), too, articulates what Gilbert and

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[18] Here, the materiality of motherhood denotes the things that include the interaction of mothers and their children such as feeding, holding, and playing. Because one of her children is murdered (and therefore unacknowledged), and the other is literally wearing the skin of the dead child, Ariani is denied access to either child. Further, following the murder of her son, Ariani makes several dolls – boys without mouths – symbolic of the fact that her innocent son has been killed, but no one is able to understand or interpret her grief or her thoughts because Tobin resembles the sacrificial son, Brother.

[19] Although The Tamír Triad was published in the early twenty-first century, it contains several elements of nineteenth century gothic fantasy including haunted castles, decaying buildings, and prophecies.

Gubar would call “the costly destructiveness of anger repressed until it can no longer be contained” as a direct result of her helplessness with regard to her brother’s will (85).

Indeed, Ariani’s inability to both change according to various situations and deal with the (corrupt) rules of patriarchy even to speak out against her children’s deaths (for she is silenced at every turn) results in her occupying a marginal position in society as the mad queen’s mad daughter. Ariani is in many ways demonized (much like the monstrous mothers Marilyn Francus exemplifies, who “[fail] to enact the ideals of maternal nurturance, self-control, self-sacrifice and deference,”) because she clearly cares for her dead child over her living one (170). Ariani is also villainized because she attempts to kill Tobin in a misguided attempt to protect her daughter from the powers of patriarchy; as a result of her alleged “selfishness,” and her refusal to submit to the existing Symbolic order, Ariani is denied both motherhood and a trusted community on whom she can depend.

Tobin/Tamír is a successful ruler because he/she is able to strike a balance between the discursive and the material in significant ways as exemplified in previous chapters: he/she receives training in statecraft, swordplay, and warcraft because he is a prince; paradoxically, Tobin can ascend the throne as Tamír because Tobin’s male body is (only) a guise he temporarily uses to stay alive. Tobin/Tamír also develops many alliances and establishes chains of caring with other characters regardless of their social standing or gender. Most important, perhaps, Tobin/Tamír represents fluidity, and the ability to change depending on what the kingdom needs, which in turn enables him/her to fulfill the prophecy that a woman should rule.

Finding a Balance in the Paradox of Transgender Coming of Age Narratives

Tobin/Tamír exists because of the confluence of the discursive and the material with regard to the complex magics that create him/her and his/her ability to metamorph and

perform as a man or woman depending on what a particular situation calls for. I have already explained how Tobin's male body and later, Tamír's female one, are a direct result of Iya's and Lhel's distinct forms of magic: the conception of Tobin's creation stems from Iya's visions – representative of language in the Symbolic order – and Tobin/Tamír's male/female bodies are a direct result of material bindings *stitched into his/her skin* and the subsequent removal of those stitches, both of which can be attributed to Lhel. More important, however, Tobin/Tamír's gendered body succeeds as a disguise not entirely because of the magic, but because of his socialization though linguistic signifiers including names, gender pronouns, and royal titles. These affect Tobin/Tamír's (linguistic and embodied) performance, which in turn is engendered largely by the gendered body he/she happens to occupy. It is also worth mentioning that Tobin is considered a queer child – largely due to his lack of socialization in the world – and Tamír, a masculine woman due to her upbringing.[20]At no point in the text, therefore, is Tobin/Tamír "really" male or female, as notions of what is masculine or feminine change depending on the bodies they occupy. Nonetheless, Tamír's embodiment – as a cis-woman in the guise of a man – plays a crucial role with regard to becoming the Queen, because not only must Tobin become a woman to ascend the throne, but, as queen, she must be able to produce heirs to ensure the future of her kingdom. Almost contradictorily, however, Tobin must receive training in war strategies and statecraft in order to access the Symbolic order and change it from within (by becoming Queen and challenging his uncle's rule(s)), although both sets of skills are taught only to men. Finally, as exemplified above, Tobin/Tamír can succeed in the battle for his birthright only because of the intersubjective relationship he is able to achieve with regard to the people he/she comes into contact with.

[20] Herein, the word "queer" represents both that which is odd or uncanny, and gender con-conforming (represented by Tobin's attraction towards dolls).

Unlike his/her mother, Ariani, who positions herself as the madwoman in the tower because of her inability to speak up against patriarchy and because of her resistance to change, Tobin/Tamír's transition – from female to male and then back again – saves her life, and ultimately gives her agency.

Despite Flewelling's treatment of the material and discursive influences on the gendered adolescent body in *The Bone Doll's Twin* and *Hidden Warrior*, her flat and rather abrupt reduction of gender to the performative in *Oracle's Queen* for the sake of a cisgender, heteronormative ending undermines the efficacy of the series in queering traditional gender norms. Instead, the conclusion of *Oracle's Queen* closes down the series' radically queer potential, and Tobin/Tamír's transgender identity plays a role akin to that of the hermaphrodite in traditional gothic literature. According to Claire Kahane in "The Gothic Mirror," the ambiguity of the hermaphrodite's body challenges traditionally established boundaries by its very existence;

> For women, that ambiguity presents a symbolic means of transcending the limitations of feminine identity. In a culture that defines the true woman in predominantly biological terms … the essentially biological image of the hermaphrodite has been extended to signify the range of human identity, and has become a core symbol of androgyny for contemporary women. (350)

In other words, it would seem that the ambiguity of Tobin/Tamír's body symbolizes a way out of socio-cultural imprisonment for women, rather than him/her becoming a transgender character who questions what it means to bend gender norms. As a result, it is entirely possible to read the narrative *without* queering it – as a text that merely reinforces women's empowerment. Privileging the cisgender ending of *Oracle's Queen* over the other queer novels in the series, however, would reinforce the idea that wrong body discourse is (not just one but) the *only* way characters can be transgender. It is important, therefore, to recognize

the queer potential of *The Bone Doll's Twin* and *Hidden Warrior* because they are among a handful of transgender coming of age narratives that provide readers with an alternative to the wrong body discourse by *not* privileging the discursive over the material.[21]

Finally, while it might seem that Tobin/Tamír's transition relies too much on the binaries (reinforcing that male is the opposite of female), it is important to keep in mind that challenging or questioning gender norms begins with the binaries. In novels that attempt to portray gender as a spectrum, it becomes difficult to queer a character's gender identity in a robust way. In *Brooklyn Burning*, for instance, the protagonist – only known to readers as Kid – and their partner, Scout, escape gendered categorization largely due to the narrative's use of first- and second-person pronouns and gender-neutral names instead of gendered pronouns and gender specific names. Also, the lack of descriptors in the text with regard to Kid's and Scout's gendered embodiments not only makes the characters' gender identities even more ambiguous, but also largely ignores embodied experiences. While the text's take on gender is no doubt refreshing in that it reinforces that one's gender identity is part of a spectrum and not an "either/or" choice between two binary opposites, the absence of gendered language results in readers not being able to talk about the character's material agency. Kid's narrative, therefore, becomes less about their gendered identity, and more about romance and about overcoming grief.

Ultimately, it would seem that representations of transgender identities in children's and young adult literature present readers with a paradox: on the one hand, it is difficult to queer gender identity effectively because of the presence of binaries; on the other hand, *not* using gendered terms to discuss gendered bodies takes the text's focus away from gender

[21] Characters like Infinite Darlene in David Leviathan's *Boy Meets Boy* represent a complex transgender identity, but that text is not primarily about being transgender.

bending. Texts that highlight the importance of *both* the discursive *and* the material with regard to the transgender body, therefore, offer a potential solution to this paradox as they offer readers a range of approaches to talk about gender including privileging the fluidity of the changing/morphing body, highlighting the importance of performance, and providing readers with a range of linguistic signifiers to talk about the same.

CHAPTER VI: ENGAGED PEDAGOGY, EMPATHY, AND EMBODIMENT: EXAMINING THE THREE "E'S" OF FEMINIST PEDAGOGY IN THE GEN. ED. CLASSROOM

In the previous chapters of this study, I established how a feminine character's embodiment is as important as her ability to speak out against oppression. This confluence of the discursive and the material that empowers feminine characters is not restricted to literary texts alone. In fact, in their section on "Reading Bodies" in *The Embodied Child: Readings in Children's Literature and Culture*, Roxanne Harde and Lydia Kokkola use Margret Mackey's study, "The Embedded and Embodied Literacies of a Young Reader" to exemplify how "paying 'attention to individual readers' social, cultural, and historical contexts' can contribute to our understanding of how children's affect their capacity to enter the fictional world" (141). The reading body, therefore, is "intimately intertwined with the process of meaning formation, critical and emotional response, and the forging of memories," and the embodied nature of the reading process includes geographical space, cultural/historical identity, emotional responses, the physical body, and cognition (Harde and Kokkola 142).

This observation of the embodied reading process is not restricted to beginning and struggling readers; it extends to the undergraduate classroom as well. Although older and/or proficient readers (such as college level students and instructors) might not read and process information like their less proficient counterparts, embodiments – of the students and the instructor, the geographical space where reading happens, and the cognitive processes, among others – do come into play while engaging with texts. Readers' respective embodiments affect not only how each individual reads a text, but also how the text is understood, remembered, and dealt with critically and emotionally, which, in turn, influence classroom discussions and decisions. Given the "long history of feminist struggles to make higher education more accessible, diverse, and humane," it is especially important for undergraduate and graduate courses in the Humanities to acknowledge different embodied identities in the

classroom, and how they influence students' and instructors' interactions with and understandings of literary and theoretical texts (Bondy, *et al.* 8). It is equally imperative to acknowledge the complex relationships between embodiments (of students and their instructors) and empathy generated in the classroom, both with regard to the texts they read, and with regard to one another. In this chapter, I aim to bridge the gap between the theoretical implications of discourse and materiality of the feminine character, and the practical implementations of engaged pedagogy, empathy, and embodiment when reading such characters, as evidenced by my introductory undergraduate course on feminist theories and children's and young adult literature.

Introductory feminist courses in the 1960s and 1970s incorporated attempts by students and faculty to establish a specific women's studies presence on campus (Winkler and DiPalma 5). Teaching a women's studies course in the 21st century, however, is markedly different because of a false sense of liberation informed by how the media presents women's issues. As early as 1991, Susan Faludi argued that antifeminist backlash in the form of popular myths like the "infertility epidemic" and the "man shortage" were "set off not by women's achievement of equality but by the increased possibility that they might win it" (xx). The fact that the backlash is not an organized movement does not make it any less destructive; Faludi points out that "the lack of orchestration, the absence of a single string puller, only makes it harder to see – and perhaps more effective," especially when "it lodges inside a woman's mind and turns her vision inward" (xxii). We experience this backlash even today. In the 21st century, "feminism" is considered a dirty word that many of my students are, in Tracy Penny Light's words, "vehemently opposed to claiming as part of their own identities, and this idea is often reinforced in the wider culture in which they live" (Light 280). Several of my female students, in particular, tend to believe they have achieved equality with men and that they live in a liberated world perhaps *because* they perceive that can wear

whatever they want and perform their femininities however they choose. As Light reminds us, “this sense of liberation comes without any critical questioning about why they are able to do so, the privilege that is associated with these performances, and the messages that are present in our world that may shape their understanding of it” (280). Counter to the post-feminist point of view, however, ideologies are inscribed within any discourse, and it imperative that all citizens must be able to critically assess situations and draw connections between ideas regardless of who they are and the field(s) they are interested in. Therefore, although I taught a General Education (Gen Ed) course as part of my internship (where discussions of gender are not prerequisite to the course requirements), the purpose of my course was to get students to be able to identify gender-based ideologies embedded in young adult texts, and discuss how these ideologies perpetuate and inform their constructions of gender roles and non-traditional sexualities.

As a Ph.D. student whose main focus is on gender in the humanities, I was excited to be teaching a course on gender and sexuality. Before I began, however, I was apprehensive about a couple of things. My primary fear was teaching feminist theory: one reason was the taboo “F” word; another was that “theory” is considered by many to be vague and abstract ideas that only a certain cadre of people have access to (hooks 64). Indeed, all my prior knowledge and evidence – from teaching introductory courses in children’s literature, reading feminist pedagogy, and discussions with my colleagues – pointed to the fact “feminism” and/or “theory” were dreaded words. My problem, therefore, was twofold – I did not want to alienate my students (even before I got to know them) as much as I did not want them to alienate me. It is also important to remember that various forms of discrimination including sexism, ableism, and racism are inherent in every culture, and many students in American culture accept them as norms. Therefore, although mine is certainly not the “correct” or *only* way of interpreting a text or a situation, it is one way of countering those problematic

ideologies that could potentially deny individuals their basic human rights. During my internship, my primary aim was to teach critical thinking skills, including making students aware of perspectives or standpoints that might be different from their own and reiterating that diverse opinions did not make their positions any less valid, as long as they were not willfully ignorant or hurtful. I, too, was open to listening to my students' varied opinions and to learn from them, as much as I hoped they learned from me.

My second fear – although no less overwhelming – was my fear of young American men. I do not intend to unjustly depict a particular gender or age in a negative light. Instead, I wish to highlight a sense of immaturity combined with a lack of awareness that I was wary of. I admit my own bias based on past experience, but my own embodiment comes into play here. In fact, I expressed some of these fears and frustrations in my journal entries prior to teaching my internship course:

> As a "foreigner" and as [a postcolonial subject], I embody a different subjectivity than most of my ENG 510 cohort (which they don't seem to take into as much consideration as I sometimes feel they should); therefore, I cannot expect certain responses they might take for granted. I occupy a complex position in the classroom: as a non-American woman of color from India, I am quite low in the social hierarchy scale (in the West); at the same time, I am older, a lot more qualified than my students, *and* I occupy a position of authority as the teacher. In such a situation, then, how do I tackle some of the invisible pedagogies in the classroom?

Nicholas and Baroud employ Davis' definition of "invisible pedagogy" to explain that it is a "'manipulative strategy to achieve a more effective form of control' based predominantly on educational assumptions that begin very early and shape students throughout their education" (Nicholas and Baroud 254). Invisible pedagogies abound in almost every classroom; for instance, women of color are doubly discriminated against, as instructors are wont to interpret

their behavior with regard to both gender and racial stereotypes, lower class children are presumed to have an intellectual or linguistic deficit, and so on (see Nicholas and Baroud 254). My question regarding invisible pedagogies would affect discussions on any topic my students would find controversial including (but not restricted to) race, gender non-conforming behavior, non-hetereonormative sexualities, social class, and different abilities.

I anticipated that my embodiment would affect students' understandings of not just my perspectives regarding various concepts and issues, but would also lead them to question my knowledge and/or authority. The same holds true for my students' embodiments: if I were to flatten/ simplify my pupils' varied backgrounds into the generic "student," rather than viewing them as individuals who happen to be in the same class, I would be guilty of pigeonholing them into categories that they may or may not identify with.[22] In the same vein, Nicholas and Baroud call attention to the dominant narrative of "students these days" that circulates unofficially on and off campus, which "laments students' lack of interest, their

[22] It is ironic that in my haste to view students as individuals and not as the generic "student," I flattened myself into a singular vision – the young, immigrant teacher – in their eyes. I am six feet tall, I have lived and studied abroad, and I have heard – from several people – that I code-switch to a British accent, all of which (along with the fact that I am the instructor in charge) undeniably put me in a position of authority. However, my height, my identity, and my speech are such intrinsic aspects of who I am that I did not realize this until it was pointed out to me much after I finished teaching my internship courses. Therefore, my perception of their perceptions might well be a miscalculation on my part because it is human to focus on one's insecurities over one's strengths. Finally, although my authority was never directly challenged, it did not stop me from fearing it would happen because of my embodiment as a non-American woman of color.

inability to work and to meet faculty expectations, and their sense of entitlement and privilege" (247). They argue that

> we see them as students first and people second; as Millennials first and as students facing enormous debt loads and diminished job prospects second; as a generation of cheaters and plagiarizers first and as students in a failed system that refuses to recognize and trust their abilities and intelligence second; as privileged students for having a seat in the class first and as individuals facing complex life circumstances and balancing family health, disease, poverty, violence, and/or multiple social dislocations second. (Nicholas and Baroud 250)

Nicholas and Baroud call for a more humanizing view of students, that takes into account their varied individualities and personalities. This argument is echoed by other scholars as well. In "Writing Time: Composing in an Accelerated World," Jeanne Marie Rose points out that a large percentage of college students are employed in the service economy, and that course work "is contingent upon students' material realities, institutions' funding and facilities, and the complex social relations that converge in first year composition"; although Rose writes with regard to writing and composition courses, her argument can be extended to include the literature classroom as well (49). In "Negotiating a Third Space in the Classroom," Barbara Schapiro argues for the need of a "third space" where both student and teacher can experience their full subjectivity; admittedly, problems are bound to arise when the teacher is under the narcissistic illusion that she is the most important person in the classroom.

A common thread that connects each of these scholars' works is empathy. I understand empathy as not only the instructor's empathy for her students, but also the students' empathy – for their peers and for their work – which in turn stems from a better understanding of theory and the society of which they are a part. Following hooks, I too

understand feminist theory as “liberatory practice” that helps individuals comprehend the world around them, rather than distancing or alienating them (59). Since my embodiment is tied in very closely with those of my students’ and to the feminist theories that I teach, empathy – with regard to pedagogy and emphasis on classroom practices – is one way of tackling some invisible pedagogies, and perhaps even make them visible.

The objectives of my course, and consequently, the focus of this study are as follows: engaged pedagogy that results in developing students’ critical thinking skills; developing empathy – of both students and the instructor – with regard to classroom practices and the course material; and finally, the significance of students’ and my respective embodiments while teaching a course on embodiment of gender and sexuality in children’s and young adult literature. Before I begin, however, an overview of my course structure and students’ expectations are imperative to contextualizing my study.

Methodology and an Overview

My internship course, ENG 125: Literary Narrative, taught in the Fall semester of 2016 and in the Spring semester of 2017, was designed to be a foray into “critical reading and analysis of a variety of literary narratives” that make up the “human experience.” In the fall, my section met on Tuesday and Thursday mornings at 9.35 a.m.; in spring, we met on Monday and Wednesday afternoons at 12.35 p.m. Both semesters, the classes lasted a total of 75 minutes, which gave us ample time for class discussions and sometimes, elaborate activities. Titled *Embodiment of Gender and Sexuality in Children’s and Young Adult Literature*, the course dealt with perceptions of elementary and high school sexuality represented in picture books and young adult novels; it was meant to serve as an introduction to some key concepts and terms in women’s and gender studies. Primarily, the course dealt with concerns about the pre-teen/teenage body, its representations in literature and film,

relationships and sexuality, bodily influence, and the influence of the media, among other themes.

My section of ENG 125 was a reading intensive course in the Fall and in Spring; since it satisfies a Gen Ed requirement for many undergraduates in departments other than English, I had students from different majors enrolled in this course. Many students were not self-proclaimed readers. In one particular instance, a student informed me that he was disinclined to read because "reading fiction [did] not relate back to [his] major." However, I emphasized throughout the semester that understanding and knowledge by themselves do not account for much, and that one must be able to critique ideologies they are confronted with. I went on to present the course as something that would prepare students to evaluate what they read, which in turn would allow them to transfer close reading skills and analytical abilities to their respective fields.

Anticipating students' fear of the dreaded "F" word, I structured the course such that we began with heteronormative texts and discussions of sex and sexuality. Only once students were comfortable with each other and their instructor did we move on to more controversial and/or sensitive topics including race and LGBTQ theory. My choice in primary texts attempted to cover the various ways in which gender and sexuality are embodied in children's and young adult literature. I began with *A Tale Dark and Grimm* by Adam Gidwitz, a retelling of gendered fairy tales, thereby laying the groundwork for how gender is represented in the canon. This was followed by heteronormative romances such as Kody Keplinger's *The DUFF* and Rainbow Rowell's *Eleanor and Park* that provide varied perspectives of what it means to embody "femininity" in contemporary literature. We then read Libba Bray's *Beauty Queens* and Scott Westerfield's *Uglies*: both texts approach the embodiment of "beauty" from a parallel universe/ dystopian angle, parodying Western society's obsession with the media and the body. These texts were accompanied by

explanations of theoretical concepts – such as Foucault's "panopticon" and Donna Haraway's "cyborg" – that were meant to advance students' understanding of themselves and their place in society. This led to discussions on metamorphosis and sexualities, as evidenced in Justine Larbalestier's *Liar* and Disney-Pixar's *Brave*. Finally, we discussed LGBTQ texts: picture books such as *My Princess Boy* by Cheryl Kilodavis and *I am Jazz* by Jessica Herthel and Jazz Jennings confront and challenge gender stereotypes with regard to very small children; Julie Anne Peters' *Luna* focuses on transgender identity for an older audience; Ariel Schrag's *Potential* and David Levithan's *Two Boys Kissing* provide readers with multiple and therefore challenging ways of constructing masculinity, femininity, sex, and sexuality. My aim was to cover multiple literary genres in this course, ranging from graphic memoirs (Ariel Schrag's *Potential*) to dystopias (Scott Westerfield's *Uglies*). I had originally planned for each of the primary texts to be accompanied by a secondary reading, ideally a chapter or an article. However, since some of the books were rather long reads, I used the first half of the class to explain concepts which we would then apply to literary texts. Overall, I made only a few minor changes to the syllabus in the Spring semester as some students found the reading rather voluminous: first, I decided to teach *Brave* in the middle of the semester (instead of during the last week) to give students more time with books like *Two Boys Kissing* and *Potential*; I also removed *Luna* from the syllabus as it reinforced heteronormative stereotypes, and substituted a guest lecture on transgender picture books instead.

Finally, rather than lecturing, I believe in a participatory method: students, through a variety of activities, actively contributed to their own meaning making of various texts. The Literary Analysis Activity, in particular, allowed students to lead class discussions in groups. They had a chance to apply the terms they learnt to a text of their choice. Moreover, some students are better at writing papers and others at exams: therefore, the grading scale included both critical papers and exams to incorporate students' different learning styles. Finally, 20%

of the overall grade was dedicated to participation and reading quizzes to encourage reading and involvement in class activities.

In the Fall semester, out of the twenty-nine students in my section, there were seventeen women and twelve men. With a handful of exceptions, including three female African American students and one male East Asian student, most of my students were – or identified as – midwestern and white. It is also important to note that one of my white female students was visually impaired. None of the other students declared any visible or invisible disabilities that affected their performance in the classroom. In the Spring semester, there were nineteen women and twelve men. Again, almost all the students (without exception) identified as midwestern and white. In this section, only one student claimed to be dyslexic, although she did not avail of the services offered by the Student Access and Accommodation Services Department.

According to the self-assessment sheets I gave my students on the first day of class, many said they expected to learn: "a new way of perceiving the world in terms of gender [and] sexuality;" "different ways of analyzing literature;" "gender and sexuality in children and how society reacts to it;" and, "sexuality and how it pertains to children's/ young adult/ teen literature." They were most interested in: "the books we will be reading because they are novels about teens/characters close to my age"; "the chance to experience literature not seen as the 'norm'"; "the fact that we'll be looking at children's/YA literature because you wouldn't expect to dissect those books for issues regarding gender and sexuality"; "taking notes about observations we have outside of the class [...] b/c we get to apply what we learn to our society." More often than not, my students were interested in seeing how gender roles influenced books for children, perhaps because in their experience, "popular" children's and young adult books are rarely analyzed, or as one student succinctly noted, "we don't notice [gender influences] since we aren't looking for it." Most students were worried about reading

a book a week. One student wrote that while she used to read a lot, “now I rarely read so I am worried I will procrastinate or simply fall behind because I am a slow reader.” Others mentioned that they need to “find the time to read,” or that reading a book a week was “intimidating.”

With regard to questions about their experiences analyzing literature, there were a myriad of responses. Some claimed they were comfortable analyzing literature as they had done so in high school, while others maintained that they had not analyzed books since high school, and that they were “not very familiar” with literary terms. In the analysis section of the self-assessments, however, perhaps three or four out of a total of sixty students were able to frame coherent thesis statements and articulate an argument. Most of the others, despite their claims to be comfortable analyzing literature, merely summarized the text they were given, or, wrote about the “moral of the story.” Accordingly, I modified the structure of the class to first introduce some literary terms, so that students would later be able to articulate more complex ideas.

In the following sections, I analyze three recurring themes that influenced my teaching and my students’ learning. I begin with engaged pedagogy, which acknowledges that theory is not restricted to “grand theorizing,” and instead emphasizes “integrating theory with practice in a reflexive manner” (Nicholas and Baroud 246). Herein, I examine students’ understanding of classroom activities and subsequent discussions in their critical papers. Next, I discuss the role of empathy in the classroom, keeping in mind that the classroom is a site of different genders, races and classes, which would invariably give rise to different individualities and perspectives. The (physical) differences among the different individuals in the classroom leads to my third and final point: embodiment. I am concerned not just with my own embodiment – as a postcolonial woman of color – but also my students’ varied embodiments and performances in the space of the classroom. More relevant to the

discussion is what those embodiments consciously and/or unconsciously signify. In the following sections, I exemplify how engaged pedagogy, empathy, and embodiment are mutually inclusive categories that affect and shape one another.

Engaged Pedagogy as Empowerment

In *Teaching to Transgress,* bell hooks makes a compelling argument that theory is most meaningful when it invites readers to engage in critical reflection on a day to day basis. I agree that theory is futile when students "feel that what they are reading has no meaning, cannot be understood, or when understood in no way connects to 'lived' realities outside the classroom" (hooks 65). Despite this being a literature course, therefore, some of the most important class activities and assignments were designed such that students would be able to relate their learning to real life experiences outside the classroom. I also wanted to provide "resisting" students with an opportunity to see how the concepts they learned could be validated outside of the classroom space, and subsequently, make transcending boundaries a less frightening experience.

For both my students and me, their learning experiences culminated in their reading journals, and consequently, in the three critical papers that they wrote. Students were encouraged to maintain a reading journal for the duration of the course to record their thoughts, reactions and feelings towards our weekly readings. They were explicitly told, however, that they did not need to restrict themselves to just the readings. Instead, they were expected to pay attention to the things around them, from what people said, to how gender and sexuality are represented in movies, advertisements, posters, books, music videos, and so on. I also gave them various prompts including Simone de Beauvoir's famous quote about how one is not born a woman, but becomes one, questions regarding breaking and maintaining gender stereotypes, the placement of restrooms in public spaces, and the various

ideologies that are at play in homes, schools, etc, to name a few. Inspired by Lynda Barry's *Syllabus: Notes from an Accidental Professor*, I also encouraged my students to draw, doodle, or make a collage to simultaneously make their journals more interesting and advance the reflection process.

Although, to prevent censorship, I did not grade the reading journal entries, I tried to gauge how much students wrote in their journals by discussing their observations at least once a week. Some students were more eager to share their experiences than others: in the Fall semester, several female students and one male student noticed that their male counterparts talked over women especially in "male oriented" classes such as politics; one of the female athletes in class was told by her (female) advisor to "let the boys play sports," when the former's athletic training conflicted with her class schedule; both semesters, several female students pointed out that advertisements regarding body image issues found all over campus primarily target women. Furthermore, when we discussed concepts such as the panopticon, students found it extremely easy to draw parallels with instances that occur in real life from Santa Claus to Facebook. Some students were even able to tie together different concepts we discussed in class such as the influence of the panopticon on social constructs of beauty, and clearly articulate their intersectionalities. These intuitive observations were often explored in detail in students' critical papers:

> Universities seem to be the ultimate breeding ground for shallow judgments…. The personal experiences I have witnessed on ISU's quad have been anything but positive…. Just a few days ago I was walking in front of two women sharing their opinions on a friend's appearance. Directly from the student herself, "He got more attractive, but I would still never hook up with him." As if our worth as individuals is based off of how sexually appealing we are to the opposite sex. (Anne)[23]

[23] Names have been changed to maintain confidentiality.

> What people constantly seem to forget though, is how truly unattainable society's standard of beautiful is. Celebrities and models may be naturally pretty, but they have teams of highly qualified makeup artists, hair stylists, designers, assistants, etc. whose job it is to make them look like that. Those who society considers "most beautiful" take hours to become fully prepared for a photoshoot or an advertisement…. It is ironic that the beauty products people buy are advertised by stars who most likely did not apply the product themselves…. The more advertisements people see and the more fame people get for their "attainable" and exaggerated outer beauty, the more normalized this unattainable beauty becomes. (Emma)

Not only did Anne and Emma make astute observations regarding beauty standards in society, but more important, they were aware that people they know (and perhaps even they themselves) were responsible for maintaining the very standards they critique. In fact, Emma went on to argue that what "people do not realize is that society does not simply see these famous stars as beautiful because of their looks—deep down, society also views them as beautiful for their widespread fame and their bulk of money," citing the Kardashians as an example. Both Anne and Emma, at different levels, discussed the normalization of women's looks in Western society, focusing on "inner" versus "external" beauty. As yet another student – Polly – pointed out, the "traditionally" beautiful woman, is "tall, skinny, nice skin, white, blond hair, blue eyes, and so on. [...] That is crazy that 25 of us all had the same idea of a person pop into our heads." Polly called out her classmates and herself, even as she processed *how* she and her peers are affected by social standards of beauty. Theory, therefore, is not vague, abstract and inapplicable: the concepts students learn in class have an obvious effect in the outside world, an effect they can see and (in some cases) identify with. Each of

the students mentioned above – Anne, Emma, and Polly – was able to interpret their class lessons as social issues that need to be addressed. In some instances, students (such as Polly) demonstrated their ability to be self-reflective and highlight certain social biases they might have as individuals, even as they apply the theory and concepts they learnt to fictional texts to the outside world.

As the students became more comfortable analyzing literature towards the middle of the semester, they were able to appreciate (and work with) the intersectionality of critical concepts learnt in class. Further, they were able to apply these concepts to the books they read. This is demonstrated in their second and third critical papers. I actively encouraged students to not just apply the concepts they learnt, but also to examine why their observations might be relevant. In some instances, students found my constant refrain – "so what?" – rather frustrating. (Perhaps this was because they were trying really hard to get the "right" answer.) However, I emphasized multiple times that there was no "right" answer, although there *were* wrong answers. These reiterations seem to have influenced my students' thinking, at least in part. Grace, for instance, attempted to articulate the complicated relationship between intersectionality, privilege, and agency in Scott Westerfeld's *Uglies*. She argued that the groups with most privilege have most agency, and that "intersectionality reflects the interconnected social categorizations within societies."

Another student, Liz, discussed her favorite TV show, *New Girl*, in light of our class discussions. Talking about an episode in which Megan Fox plays a bisexual character whom the male characters in the show become attracted to (once they find out she kissed another woman), Liz admitted that "Before this class I would have thought this was a pretty funny moment in the show, but having studied gender in the humanities really made me feel disappointed in the show … because the show continued to perpetuate bisexual women stereotypes." She pointed out that bisexual women are highly sexualized by the media,

whereas their male counterparts are "seen as 'freaks'." Liz was also able to articulate the "so what" part of her paper, as she linked her analysis of *New Girl* to our discussions of *Luna* and *Potential*:

> We should care about this because we live in a heteronormative society. The show New Girl has had multiple LGBTQ characters, but they were never the main focus. They were the main focus for maybe an episode but not much longer than that. Since this show has a cis gender and heteronormative audience, these stereotypes of bisexual women are going to continue because that is what people watching the show are going to continue to think about bisexual women. If we are not shown LGBTQ people breaking stereotypes shown in media, these stereotypes are going to continue.

Peg, an English major, was not only able to link the concepts back to the literature we read for class, but she also highlighted how the implicit ideologies of certain texts could be problematic regardless of the author's intent. With regard to Kody Keplinger's *The DUFF*, she pointed out that "while Bianca doesn't fit traditional body ideals, it is still disconcerting that the message being portrayed here is, 'it's ok if you think you're ugly because other girls do too!'," which, as Peg noted, "is highly problematic." On reading the following excerpt, it is clear that Peg was able to discern the implicit ideologies of the novel, and articulate how it differs from the explicit ideology, namely that everyone is beautiful in their own way. More important, Peg implicitly understood that young adult literature fosters in the reader socio-cultural values shared by author and audience that are *not* necessarily problem free. Peg argued:

> When hearing about beauty standards throughout Keplinger's book, the reader is to presume that Bianca isn't initially beautiful, or she doesn't believe so, anyways (and since we get her perspective, we are expected to believe this too). This characterization is made to appeal to a larger demographic, therefore being more

"relatable," more approachable. Bianca is, therefore, made the spokesperson for all young girls who feel inadequate. I both like and dislike this concept. I dislike this because it focuses on how the panopticon impacts the beauty ideal, practically making it so that girls monitor themselves for being "lacking" in some way. This only makes young girls feel more insecure about themselves, especially given the complete divide in physical characterization between Bianca and all other females. I like this concept because it gives the option to challenge. Young girls can see that this unconventional beauty is not meeting the norm and maybe see that through the empowerment of the female protagonist, *it's okay*. "Beauty is found within," "don't care what other people think," "Everyone is beautiful in their own way" and all the other after-school special phrases that are actually right. Except that this book doesn't go that way. In Keplinger's model, Bianca is only truly feeling beautiful when affirmed by Wesley that she is. She needs male approval to feel good about herself. And only in regards to her physical appearance.

The journal entries and the critical papers (that more often than not reflect on the journal entries) enabled students to make their own connections and contribute to the class discussions; students' ability to bring their own examples into the "analytical" space of the classroom gave them a voice. Here, my main role as an instructor was to merely direct students' attention to the issues around them, rather than "impart knowledge" in the traditional sense of the phrase. Giving students a voice does not take away from my authority as the instructor of the course; on the contrary, it gives students the agency to see the world around them with a new lens and, consequently, form their own conclusions. Light explains that "the acknowledgement of what students see is an important first step in having them tap into their own experiences so that they can begin to understand that their positionality shapes their view of the world" (282). Subsequently, this understanding helps empower them.

Regardless of students' particular view of the world, what is most important is that students are *aware* of their positions in the world, and have the knowledge that they can – and indeed, *should* – question the ideologies around them, as demonstrated by their in-class observations and critical papers.

Empathy in the Classroom: Classroom Dynamics and the Literary Analysis Activity

In "Negotiating a Third Space," Barbara Schapiro uses Benjamin's reading of Lacan to discuss "the dynamics of interrelating subjects" (424). Instructors, Schapiro argues, cannot force their narcissistic fantasies onto their students, where the students are objects of their desires, fears, angers, and anxieties; in other words, the teacher is not the source of absolute authority. In fact, the teacher's need for recognition in the space of the classroom highlights the following: "the paradoxical nature of the self's independence as a subjective agent is that it is dependent both on the other's recognizing response and on the recognition of the other's equally independent subjectivity" (Schapiro 256). However, it is all too easy to *not* recognize students as independent subjects; almost every one of us (as teachers) – at some point in time or another – has given in to our narcissistic fantasies. This has the potential to give way to domination and submission: we are conditioned to believe that students who are inattentive in class are "students from Hell," or that silence as a symptom of something gone wrong that we *need* to fix by speaking. Instead, Schapiro advocates for empathy towards the student, to treat them as individuals, rather than seeing them as a group or an entity that requires educating. Going back to the examples mentioned above, then, the "student from Hell" could be empathetically interpreted as a symptom of larger social and/or medical problems, or silence in the classroom as that which "forces us to acknowledge all the separate, inner, private thought processes occurring within both students and teacher," rather than viewing them as challenges to be overcome (Schapiro 430). I have tried to implement Schapiro's concepts of

"third space" and empathy in the classroom by consciously recognizing students' individual subject positions in my interactions with them. The following section discusses not just the empathy I have strived to show my students, but equally important, my students' empathy towards their classmates and course content. Perhaps the best place to begin is with the Literary Analysis Activity, as it gave both my students and me a chance to break out of our designated roles of "student" and "teacher."

bell hooks has famously argued that it is crucial that students are "active participant[s], and not [...] passive consumer[s] in the classroom," and that the instructor must strive to "create participatory spaces for the sharing of knowledge" (14, 15). Before creating the "participatory space" that hooks advocates for, however, I asked myself a question that Renée Bondy has articulated so well: "what in my own experience, my own awareness, might I bring to the learning situation?" (131). In trying to answer to this question, I went back to my teaching philosophy: to learn, one must teach; to teach, one must learn. I have always maintained that the best way for one to learn even the most difficult or complex concepts is by teaching them. Accordingly, the Literary Analysis Activity was structured to challenge students' understanding of theoretical texts. Students took turns to lead class discussions at least once a week. The class was divided into eight groups with three to four students in each group; they also chose a text to work on at the beginning of the semester. Groups were expected to lead class discussions for 20-30 minutes, after I introduced a term or concept for the week. (This usually happened on Tuesday mornings in the Fall semester and on Monday afternoons in the Spring semester.) While the group that was presenting did not have to discuss the concept we discussed that day, students could organize their activities based on concepts discussed in the previous weeks. Although I never really enjoyed group work as an undergraduate (as I always seemed to get the short end of the stick), I have come to realize that active participation in a group encourages "*reflexivity*" (Bondy 128, emphasis original). I

hoped that analyzing a book as a group, framing an activity, and then discussing the same with the class would "enable students to make connections between the content of their learning and their lived experiences, including active participation in and personal reflection on the pedagogical process" (Bondy 128). Since a successful activity is one that leads to individual and collaborative learning, the Literary Analysis Activity was divided into three sections to account for both team and individual effort.

The first section involved a detailed description of the group's activity including activity directions, an agenda or plan, and the class set up. The group had to submit a detailed rationale explaining the goals of their class activity, rationale behind their decisions, and what they hoped they would achieve. Groups were encouraged to submit a copy of their rationales the weekend before they led class discussion, as many students were nervous as they had little experience planning class activities. Moreover, reading their agendas beforehand gave me an opportunity to ensure groups were on the right track, and that the activity was accessible to all the students in the classroom. The second section of the Literary Analysis Activity involved the class discussion itself. I assessed the groups based on the following: group members' level of organization and interaction with the rest of the class during the activity; group members' division of roles and responsibilities; how the group in question led the class through the activity, and follow up discussions, if any. Group members were responsible for getting their classmates invested in their activity, as optimum participation was essential to creating a strong learning environment. Finally, each group member was expected to write a discussion post after the activity was completed, and turn in the same online. In this meta-analysis, students were asked to consider whether the activity went as they expected, whether the activity's application surprised them, how successful they thought the activity had been, and how they might consider changing it in the future. Students'

individual reflections gave me a chance to understand their individual contributions to the activity, and more important, how the activity facilitates reflexive learning.

I found that giving my students the floor helped with classroom dynamics. For the half an hour that they were in charge of classroom proceedings, I usually made it a point to ask them whether they wanted me to join the discussion or “sit quietly in a corner.” Usually, they would respond with, a non-committal “whatever you want.” When they gave me a choice, I would make it a point to remind them that they were in charge of the proceedings, and therefore needed to tell me what to do. Both joining in the class discussion (when asked to) and sitting on the sidelines and observing the activities have been illuminating experiences. I noticed a shift in classroom dynamics. If I joined the discussion, I could afford to be less formal: I was still “the teacher” (and therefore know more, as one of my students informed me); however, sitting with them at their level invariably meant they felt more at liberty to tell me their thoughts, or ask for my opinion. Sitting with my students also meant that both they and I got to interact with each other as individuals with personalities, rather than our designated roles as “instructor” and “student.” It helped put on hold the “narcissistic illusion” that everything I said or did in the classroom was important, as I was no longer the focus of attention. When observing, I noticed that some of the students were more willing to talk or voice their opinions when there was less of an “authority figure” in charge. This automatically helped balance the polarity between teacher and student, namely “an obligation to our students, which calls for a supportive, ‘open, accepting generativity,’ and an obligation to knowledge and our discipline, which calls for a ‘tough-minded critical spirit’” (Schapiro 432). In the non-presence of the “all knowing instructor,” group members were forced to be analytical, and consider why their discussions were important. Although I sometimes felt that social politeness got in the way of group members telling their peers that their answers were wrong (despite my repeated attempts to get students to openly acknowledge wrong answers),

the group members' "open accepting generativity" while leading class discussions gave me the opportunity to ask follow up questions, thereby fulfilling (theirs and sometimes my) requirements for critical thinking.

Despite their initial misgivings, most of my students seem to have enjoyed working in groups. With the possible exception of one group, where one of the members did not read for class, most of the groups were well prepared. While some groups focused on "analyzing" the text of their choice in great detail, four (out of eight) groups organized their activities such that it involved movement (and in two instances, treats) to increase class participation. It must be noted that out of twenty-nine students in the first semester and thirty-one in the second, only a handful were education majors and/or future teachers. Nonetheless, the groups did their best to make class discussions interesting. In the Fall semester, the groups made provisions for their classmate's visual impairment; in fact, some of the groups changed their activities significantly, or re-organized the classroom's seating arrangement such that the space was more accessible for their peer who could not see. For the purpose of this section, I will focus on three of the most interesting group discussions – led by Groups 3, 7, and 8 in the Fall semester – as they best highlight students' empathy towards the concepts they discussed and their classmates.

Group 3's activity focused on the second half of *Beauty Queens*, whereas Groups 7 and 8 worked on *Potential* and *Luna* respectively. Each of these groups divided the class into five or six groups depending on the day's attendance. Since the groups were different from the groups originally assigned in the beginning of the semester, students who did not usually interact with each other were able to exchange ideas. As one of the students in Group 8, Esi, explains in her Discussion Post, "we thought that if we split the class into different groups and not into their regular groups assigned for class it would make them have to all participate, instead of having the same person that always talks in their old groups."

Group 3 began with an introductory activity they had designed wherein each of the assigned groups was given "a claim about an idea portrayed in the book." The statements were different from each other, and purposefully vague. Some examples include "Race is the first thing people recognize about you," and "The panopticon has little impact on our real-world society." During this part of the activity, students were expected to examine "the book's presentation and commentary about these claims" rather than "[state] their own opinions." For the second part of the activity, Group 3 rearranged the desks in the classroom, such that there was space in the middle. They got their peers to walk around the classroom, and literally take a stand as to whether or not they agreed or disagreed with a particular notion they had previously discussed with regard to the books. Group 3 explained their rationale as follows:

> our goal was to show our peers how society reflects literature and literature reflects society […] We aimed to reach our goal by providing opinionated, controversial claims about ideas presented in the book [… and once students choose a corner based on whether they agree or disagree with a statement] they can hear new perspectives, see what the majority believes, and possibly perceive these gender/sexuality issues in a new light.

I thought the activity was particularly successful. Walking around the class (as opposed to sitting in one place) got students who rarely talked to voice their opinions and get involved in the discussion. Moreover, groups of people standing in different parts of the class gave most students visual clues as to who supports certain statements and why. In fact, I wasn't the only one who made these observations. In the discussion post following the activity, one of the group coordinators, Emma, wrote:

> I noticed that throughout our activity, there were a couple instances in which someone actually changed their viewpoint after hearing out the opposing argument.

> Seeing someone's opinion (regarding such controversial topics) change right before my eyes was not only fascinating, but a learning experience for me, too.
>
> Additionally, I did not expect to get so much new information out of my classmates…I mean this in a completely positive way! I was surprised at how I walked away from Tuesday's class with even more of an open mind and new levels of understanding for these gender/sexuality issues present in our real-world society. I was also pleasantly surprised at how everyone (including my group members and I) was not only able to state and explain their thoughts, but to take it a step further by providing specific, relevant, and current examples in their lives (ex: mentioning recent Snapchat and BuzzFeed articles, and things students have seen/experienced across campus).

As Emma mentioned, listening to other people's opinions helped change some students' ideas about and perceptions of a particular subject. Her observations regarding having "more of an open mind and new levels of understanding" imply increasing levels of empathy regarding gender and sexuality in the classroom. Another group coordinator, Addison, added that "The Four Corners activity made students realize their stance on an issue or topic that is so very relevant throughout our society [...] Hopefully hearing different standpoints or views on these topics helped to make the student stronger in their beliefs or question their beliefs." Evidently, Group 3 was not only successful in getting their classmates to participate, but as Emma points out, such intense discussions are capable of changing students' opinions. Walking around the classroom also helped change conventional classroom dynamics, as students were able to interact with each other on a more personal level. For instance, when one of my students claimed that the panopticon did not affect him because he did not "care what people say," one of his classmates was quick to point out that he had to be aware of the panopticon, and to be affected by it on some level to decide that he did not care. Harper, the

visually impaired student, also took this opportunity to admit to the class that the panopticon affected her despite not being able to see, thereby demonstrating that no one is really exempt from it. Her statement elicited signs of visual and verbal empathy from her classmates. Such candid interactions were possible only because students were comfortable in the space around them. Standing with groups of people in different parts of the classroom – and in a sense, standing up for what they thought or believed – gave students a safe space in which to interact with others, eliciting confessions and responses that may not have been possible in the traditional classroom arrangement.

Indeed, such fruitful interactions are possible only when students are "active participant[s], and not [...] passive consumer[s] in the classroom" (hooks 14). Groups 7 and 8 chose to play interactive group games such as Kahoots and Jeopardy to increase class participation. As a matter of fact, they even brought candy, cookies and donuts to class in the hopes that their classmates would develop a competitive spirit. Group 7 began their discussion on *Potential* with a "fishbowl discussion." They had the class arrange their desks in a circle and provided a bowl full of questions that a student would pick from. Anne, a group facilitator said that her group "predicted [lack of facilitation] was going to happen before we planned the discussion so we tried to bring candy to bribe them into talking more but it didn't work well at all." Another facilitator, Polly, said, "I feel like the questions we were asking were good solid discussion questions, but they weren't really getting discussed. I feel one of those reason could have been that [Anne] and myself are ones who usually talk a lot, along with [Marty] who did not read the right [version of] potential, so might have been a small reason why the discussion didn't really go as planned." Anne added that she didn't know "if there was anything we could do to fix the lack of participation from our classmates because I noticed that many groups had the same issue." Grace, a student in Group 8, brought donuts to class because she and her group mates "figured that the donuts would be a good

incentive and a great way to wrap up the student led discussion, since [they] were the last group to present this semester." As demonstrated above, group members seemed to be aware of how they function as a class, who talked the most, and what one might have to do to increase participation. While incentives such as food were not as successful in motivating class discussions as the group members wished, each of the groups discussed above *actively* wanted to do something fun and "interactive" that would garner more response. For instance, although Group 8 expressed their disappointment that their peers merely "looked at their phones" and did not respond as well as they thought they would despite the additional incentives they provided, Groups 3 and 7 aimed to counteract the same by changing seating arrangements. Group 3 got rid of the seating arrangement (30 odd tablet arm desks facing the blackboard) entirely, whereas Group 7 got the class to sit in a giant circle and face each other. Moreover, as yet another student noted in his discussion post, small and large group activities "allowed everyone to contribute to the answer without having to voice it to the entire class, which some people are uncomfortable doing." It is evident that even as group members try to get their classmates to participate in class activities, they were considerate of what might work for them and what might not.

The discussion posts occupied a "third space" and served two purposes: on the most basic level, I better understood what my students were thinking, and how they expected their activities to pan out; on a deeper level, however, it allowed my students and me an opportunity to occupy that "third space of intersubjectivity" in which "neither self nor other, teacher nor student dominates because both have surrendered to a process in which the claims of each are held in tension" (Schapiro 437). Not only did I as the instructor get to understand my students' individual subjectivities, but more important, my students had an opportunity to understand my role as the instructor. Schapiro observes that for the student, "idealizing transferences can make the teacher an important, even transformative figure of inspiration

and growth" (436). It is therefore equally important for the student to recognize the teacher as a separate and not "all knowing" entity, rather than as the object of their fears and fantasies because "the idealized fantasy is likely to collapse into its opposite over time — the teacher as the treacherous, rejecting figure who consequently provokes contempt and denigration" (Schapiro 436). The Literary Analysis Activity, therefore, gave students the opportunity to reflect on themselves, their peers, and on their communication of ideas in the classroom, which in turn allowed them to develop a sense of understanding and empathy that are crucial to the learning process.

Embodiment and Empathy: On Race and Abilities Within the Space of the Classroom

Empathy is closely linked to one's embodiment, and, as Betty Smith Franklin states in "The Teacher's Body," we cannot escape our bodies; in other words, "to be possessed of glory in the dynamics of teaching and learning is to be embodied and to honor the embodiment of others" (20). As mentioned above, I went into the ENG 125 classroom aware of my social position as a tall, non-American woman of color attempting to teach primarily white American students about their own society. In fact, my embodiment – possibly because of its non-conformity with the stereotypical "American Professor" – is a question I have been concerned with ever since I taught my first class in an American university. Consequently, I expected not ignorant, but resistant students, reluctant to transgress boundaries. I articulated the same in my internship rationale even as I planned my course on Embodiment of Gender and Sexuality in Children's and Young Adult Literature:

> In recording her experiences teaching about fatness, Amy Gullage raises three points, all of which are applicable here: first, "we understand our bodies through the language we use to describe them" (121); second, as an instructor, my body "[would be] read as manifesting [my] feminist politics and practices," regardless of whether I

> am aware of it or not, or whether I like it or not (121). Read together, then, I imagine that this would lead to some sort of internal struggle for the predominantly straight, white, male ISU student: do they accept what I teach because I'm a woman of color (and should therefore know what I am talking about), or reject it for precisely the same reasons? Finally, Gullage quotes Susan Bordo, who mentions she was critiqued for having lost twenty five pounds, as it was "confirmation that success comes only from playing by cultural rules," which affected how her students and colleagues saw her (Bordo in Gullage 122). Would I be expected to "control" my embodiment in any way, then, for what I teach invariably has practical and political implications that can be read on my body? (Internship Rationale)

I went on to note that universities are sites of intense surveillance for students, as they not only live in and around campus, but also because they spend a lot of time with their peers. Therefore, the space of the University – both physical and abstract – makes certain sexualities "normal" and others "deviant." I was concerned how students would view their own bodies – and subsequently my body – in the light of their experiences and sexualities, and how this would influence their behavior and understanding in the classroom.

I began the semester by talking about sexualities and gender stereotypes so that by the time we got around to discussing the more sensitive topics – such as race and gender non-conformity –students would have developed some sensitivity and appropriate vocabulary. I do think my students were sensitive individuals, who were, for the most part, able to make significant connections between the concepts discussed in class and their lives outside the classroom. However, there were some moments – and some concepts, such as race – which challenged my students and me emotionally primarily because of our respective embodiments.

Anticipating resistance from my predominantly white classroom, I planned my discussions on race well in advance in the Fall semester.[24] I began with several pop culture references such as Beyoncé's "Formation" music video, and SNL's "The Day Beyoncé Turned Black," which parodies white America's response to "Formation."[25] Although watching videos in class was not part of my conventional methodology – especially given one student's visual impairment – I made an exception that week, as I was trying to get the class to acknowledge that racism is a real issue in the country and that it takes many forms. Rather than tell them the racial history of their country (which they find extremely difficult to accept coming from a person of color and a "foreigner"), I attempted to show them some of their own culture's response to blatant and veiled racism. In a similar vein, I showed the class John Oliver's "Hollywood Whitewashing," which calls attention to the fact that white actors often play ethnic roles in movies. The video rightly calls out director Ridley Scott on his racist

[24] It is worth mentioning here that although I expected the Spring to be easier (and, as a consequence, more successful) on account of the fact that I was teaching the course for the second time, I found that in a lot of ways it was more challenging. Given the make-up of students in this particular classroom space, I admit I was uncomfortable and not ready to face the backlash I (think I rightly) foresaw it would receive. For instance, when we were reading *Beauty Queens*, one of my female students strongly believed and argued that racism was no longer an issue because Ms Illinois (in the Miss USA beauty pageants) was an African American. I did not feel emotionally ready or able to discuss race in the space of this classroom.

[25] I provided students with an annotated version of Beyoncé's "Formation" music video as I wanted to be sure the class got the cultural references that "offended" white America (DeMarco "Beyoncé's 'Formation' music video, annotated").

comment, “I can’t cast Mohammed so-and-so from such-and-such” apparently because of his 140 million dollar budget for the film *Exodus* (“Hollywood Whitewashing”). The makers of the video, however, are quick to note this would not be as big a problem if anytime an actor of color took on a traditionally white role, “half the country didn’t go ape shit,” citing the characters of Rue in *The Hunger Games* and Finn in *Star Wars: The Force Awakens* as examples (“Hollywood Whitewashing”). Despite the numerous examples the videos provided, my white male students were quick to argue that movies such as *Exodus* were not racist or biased in any way, because only if a famous white actor played a particular role would people watch it. Arguing that racism was actually a marketing technique seemed to validate their stance. Indeed, the transformation was amazing. Students who, minutes earlier, had laughed uproariously that Tom Cruise could be The Last Samurai, were seriously defending white men wearing blackface in order to play non-white roles. In fact, only one white male student in the class vehemently disagreed with his peers. In retrospect, it was extremely interesting how many white male students were keen to defend their movies and culture, despite how offensive they can be.

In “Decolonial Pedagogy and the Ethics of the Global,” Noah De Lissovoy observes that colonial violence and the civilizing mission of the church “produced the calculations and rationalizations of genocide and cultural annihilation” in the colonies (283). This “master morality” underlines the colonizers’ “refusal to engage the colonized person as an ethical being” and consequently, norms the non-white body as “subhuman” (De Lissovoy 283). Subsequently, the sub-human non-white body is not deserving of empathy. De Lissovoy goes on to explain that this systematic blindness to the actual violence of conquest, and to the fact of philosophy’s historical complicity in the projects of material, epistemological, and spiritual subjugation, results in a crucial gap or failure in the dominant discourses of ethics and politics, even as they congeal into the hegemonic common senses of everyday life. Unable to

confront and comprehend the fact of domination, whiteness and Eurocentrism nevertheless continue to assert themselves as the origin of authentic moral experience and understanding (De Lissovoy 283). This “white guilt” and inability to confront history is carried forward generation after generation, where, rather than be empathetic, students (especially those who identify as heteronormative, white, and male) are more inclined to negate or reflect any blame. It is not surprising, therefore, that the men in my class felt the need to justify everyday racism rather than seeing it as an actual problem. For instance, I pointed out that eroticizing ethnic characters using food metaphors (including but not restricted to “olive skin” and “almond eyes”) was just plain absurd. Here, I referenced a Buzzfeed article, which parodies such food metaphors by ascribing the same to white skin. Examples include “glowing with mozzarella undertones,” “supple cauliflower skin,” and “mayonnaise legs” (Nigatu “If White Characters”). Not surprisingly, my white male students did not find the parody funny. In fact, a student counter- argued that “you can say pasty white skin, and that’s not a good description.” The response of the women, however, was radically different. Anne mentioned that she just realized how absurd it was that white people’s skin was described using words such as “ivory” and “porcelain,” both of which are expensive and delicate materials, as opposed to food comparisons for people of color. Polly wondered aloud why SNL’s parody of white people was not as famous as it probably should be. White women, given their lack of gender privilege, were more open to accepting that racism is/might be a problem, as opposed to (able and straight) white men. White male privilege, then, seems to obstruct one’s ability to learn and think critically; it certainly did so in my classroom. My usually sensitive students seemed to lose empathy when they felt defensive.

Here, it is equally important to note that my embodiment also affected my perception of *myself* as an instructor. As mentioned above, the Spring semester was a bit more challenging to teach when compared to the Fall as the class as a whole was not as responsive.

Moreover, a lot of the students (especially the white men) made several insensitive comments throughout the semester. This included (but was not restricted to) the following: arguing that LGBTQ characters should not be included in literature; implying that other students weren't intelligent enough to understand basic things like citation styles; and egging me on to make offensive comments about the LGBTQ community in class. Admittedly, teaching this group of students was at times frustrating, for I could never be sure whether these comments were meant to elicit a response from me, or whether students really meant what they said. Regardless of the intent, offensive comments – even when shut down immediately – served to alienate or distance many of the students in the classroom. I believed my class was particularly cheeky in part because I am young, Indian, and a woman. A white male student, Jonathan, who was particularly outspoken and who often paid little or no regard to class proceedings surprised me by writing me a personal email:

> Thank you for everything you have taught me this semester. Your class was unlike any class I have ever taken. I was exposed to a variety of topics that I had never talked about on an open platform before. The literature provided me with a new understanding, outlook, and perspective on gender equality and the LGBTQ community.... I apologize for the occasional slip-ups I had, I never aimed to be disrespectful towards you or anyone else. Thank you for working with me and always listening to what I had to say.

While my first response was disbelief (that someone who I had considered to be insensitive at best had allegedly gained something from the course), I realize now that my understanding of Jonathan's behavior was based partly on how I expected young men to react to (young) female authority based on my own prior experience. Therefore, while I believe I did not necessarily misinterpret Jonathan's misbehaviour in the classroom, I am now more willing to accept that perhaps it was not directed at me *as a person*, but at the instructor who was trying

to introduce the student to ideas he was not necessarily comfortable with. While this insight does not excuse bad behavior in any way or make the said behavior acceptable, I am glad that I was able to distinguish between Jonathan-the-student and Jonathan-the-person, which I believe earned me gratitude for "working with" Jonathan, rather than against him. Once again, I came to realize that certain embodiments that I had taken for granted – including "foreign instructor" and "young man,"– are as much states of mind as they are parts of our identities.

Maintaining a balance between students' and my embodiments and empathies was one of my main priorities. In fact, I was so concerned with issues of race and gender (since they doubled as course content) especially in my first semester teaching the course, that I did not take into consideration different abilities in the classroom. Harper was a brilliant and hard working student, although her visual impairment posed some challenges to my style of teaching and to some of the activities I had planned. As I recorded in my teaching journal, "it is not a bad thing, but I realize can't rely on gestures, visual cues, etc, that I take for granted." Having Harper in my class meant I had to review a lot of my teaching methods from the use of videos to the seating arrangement in the classroom. Talking to Harper's advisor, Sally, at the beginning of the semester gave me a better idea as to how best I could restructure my activities, and, to an extent, what I could and could not expect from Harper. For all my worries and concerns, I was lucky that Harper was a perceptive student. In her self-assessment, she mentioned that "books are all about perspective and experiencing different views and personal battles through someone else's eyes other than [her own]" which "[got her] excited." She went on to note that she needed to "refresh [her] brain on literary terms such as those listed on the assignment sheet, but [that she] learn[ed] quickly." Harper's independence or lack thereof, however, was a different question. Harper required a seat by the door for easy access to the classroom. She went to class very early to save herself the

embarrassment of asking other students whether or not the seat was taken. Moreover, while Harper could read using an app on her computer or phone, she relied on her sighted guide to get her to and from class. In particular, there were two instances that occurred towards the middle of the semester that made me reconsider what I thought I had understood about empathy and third space in the classroom. The following incidents closely followed one another and occurred within the span of two weeks.

The first incident occurred around Week 10, when Harper's sighted guide did not arrive to escort her from one class to the next twice in two weeks. The first time that happened, I guided Harper to my office and allowed her to wait there for her roommate to pick her up. The second time, I offered to walk with Harper to her next class (all the way across campus), for I thought it was rather unfair for her to miss her classes on someone else's account. When I informed Sally of the same, she told me that although it might sound harsh, getting to and from class was Harper's responsibility. Contrary to my expectations, I was expected to ask Harper to use her cane and verbally guide her out of the classroom.

Sally explained to me that Harper had her cane for two reasons: first, it functioned as a mobility tool and allowed her to access places independently; second, it helped convey her visual impairment to the people around her. Harper, however, was not comfortable using her cane. Although she would state blatantly that she was blind (as she did on the first day of class), I gathered that she was embarrassed to use her cane as it drew attention to her. In fact, in the 16 weeks that I knew Harper, I never saw her use her cane even once. Nonetheless, Harper was adamant that she be treated like anyone else. Here, Harper's open declaration that she was blind, and her disinclination to use the cane as a mobility tool might seem paradoxical. However, I gathered from different instances during the semester that Harper had lost her eyesight in high school, and that her experiences had been emotionally painful. I also realized that Harper announcing her blindness on the first day of class and not using her

cane had a common link: both save her from embarrassment in some way. By announcing her blindness to the class, she could avoid potentially distressing situations such as instructors and other students asking her to read. Lightly holding someone's arm and not using a cane would also be more inconspicuous while walking around campus. While Harper was accepting of her blindness, I suspect she was extremely conscious of her visual impairment, and consequently, more comfortable passing as someone who could see because that would attract much less attention.

I realized, therefore, that Sally's response (when she asked me to verbally guide Harper) was extremely pertinent to the situation; allowing Harper to wait in my office, or helping her from one class to the next might seem outwardly helpful (to both Harper and me). In reality, however, it merely made me feel better about doing the "right thing." Asking Harper to be independent, on the other hand, might seem harsh; however, it would serve to help Harper be independent, rather than promote an ableist perception of Harper as someone who "needs help." In retrospect, although I was secretly grateful that I never had to be firm and ask Harper to use her cane, I better understood the third space (of intersubjectivity) I ought to have occupied as a teacher.

Nonetheless, when the second instance occurred the very next week, my newfound understanding of empathy seemed to escape me. I made a note of the same in my teaching journal:

> I got a message on Monday morning, around 10:30 from Harper, saying that the SAAS [Student Access and Accommodation Services] Department hadn't made *Potential* accessible to her. Of course, I freaked out, and thankfully had the sense to contact Sally directly. In a phone conversation with [Sally], I realized that Harper who was responsible for getting the book to the SAAS had left her book at her parents' house, and had not talked to either Sally or me about it. And when Sally asked her to

> call one of her friends and borrow the book, she had (for whatever reason) called me. Sally pointed out how frustrating the situation was, as Harper hadn't talked to either of us, and was sitting back waiting, as both of us scrambled in the last minute, trying to make material accessible to her. (Week 12)

What frustrated me the most was that although I thought I had established a good rapport with Harper, and although we talked about *Potential* and whether or not she would be able to access the material on the walk to her class, she failed to mention her needs to me. Moreover, apart from the fact that she had made it seem that she had access to the book, Harper had blamed the SAAS department for her lack of material, without mentioning her role in the whole incident. I struggled with two conflicting feelings at the same time: guilt, for prescribing a graphic narrative, a text that Harper could not read even with the correct software, and a sense of responsibility towards my own research and the other twenty-eight students in the class who presumably had read the book for Tuesday's class. Responsibility won out over guilt after my conversation with Sally. I realized that while it is good to empathize with and defend one's students, situations are often too complex to be reduced simply to "doing the right thing." By deflecting blame, Harper was behaving like any other sighted student who had not done the required work for class. In this particular instance, I learned that objectivity was imperative in any situation; despite my good intentions to be empathetic, my needs (to teach graphic narratives, and be responsible towards my sighted students who had prepared for class) were equally important--just as the needs of my students were equally important. In other words, I learned to distinguish between indifference or negligence (such as playing silent films to a visually impaired student) and students' accountability towards their own work. Although I had clearly established a rapport with Harper – she contacted me when she was asked to contact a friend – I had to remember that I was *not* Harper's friend, but her teacher. Nonetheless, I still felt extremely guilty as I taught

the graphic narrative, although I realized that the events were no fault of my own. Since people with visual impairments cannot access graphic texts (unless someone sits with them and explains what is going on), I finally resolved the issue by giving Harper another assignment to make up for the class quiz. Therefore, while empathy *is* extremely important, the instructor's empathy must extend to herself as much as it does to her students so that she is a sensible teacher (and not a gullible one), and consequently, knows where to draw the line.

The Importance of Engaged Pedagogy, Embodiment, and Empathy

It is evident that engaged pedagogy, empathy, and embodiment, are not mutually exclusive categories. On the contrary, they are intertwined and constantly influence each other. Understanding theoretical concepts and applying them to real life enabled the students in my class to be more sensitive to the world around them.

The self-assessment my students completed on the last day of class provided a concise view of their learning. With regard to the theoretical concepts and their application, many students wrote that "the most important thing [they] learned was critical thinking skills," "the ability to dig deeper on a much greater level than [they] could before," and "how literature is reflective of society [... and how] [they are] now more aware of stereotypes and *concepts* around [them]" (emphasis mine). Here, the use of the word "*concepts*" highlights the students' consciousness of using theory to understand the society they live in. These students are aware of that not only does "literature [reflect] society," but that "society reflects literature" as well. Moreover, several students are more aware that theory relates to issues of social justice "which are important issues that need to be addressed."

Students were able to directly relate our class discussions to empathy: Allie wrote that she learned, "not only the concepts that [...] exist in our society that I can now identify with, but also the idea of respecting other's opinions on these topics. Not everyone agrees and has

the same viewpoint, but sitting in class and debating these topics showed me that we can disagree but respectfully." Emma noted that although "so much of what we learned was brand new for [her]," she "became a more open-minded and understanding person because of this course." Addison said she liked the Literary Analysis Activity because "we were able to get creative and at the same time understand your [read: the instructor's] role in the class." In each of these examples, I seem to have achieved that ideal "third space" that Schapiro talks about: students not only empathize with each other, but they also see their peers as individuals with different opinions and perspectives. It is equally important, as I have shown, for students to perceive their instructor as another socially constructed being, and *not* an all-knowing entity. The former would support students' understanding of teachers as individuals whose beliefs and assumptions are not inherent, but "crafted and recrafted," and consequently, "subject to change" (Robillard 715). In other words, students' knowledge that their teachers "have perspectives shaped by lived attachments," influences their empathy and understanding in as much as it gives them a sense of agency in the classroom (722). Their empathy also made them more aware of (their own and others') embodiments with regard to gender, class, and socioeconomic status.

I have also shown that embodiment and empathy can be viewed from two different perspectives. First, privilege seems to directly correlate to empathy; most of the white men in my first class were not willing to accept that race was an issue, going so far as to claim that acts of violence against people of color (especially African American men) was to "prevent terrorism" and protect the country from ISIS, ideas they seem to have internalized from social media and news media. I noticed that the women in the class – both African American and Caucasian – were silenced, albeit in different ways. Taking into account years of cultural oppression, the African American women (who usually contributed to class discussions) were hesitant to voice their opinions. The white women who did speak, on the other hand, were

more often than not ignored (by the men). In the class discussion mentioned above, they were cut off or dismissed when they expressed opinions that their male counterparts did not necessarily agree with. The female students – both Caucasian and African American – communicated their distress through their body language: their eyes were downcast, their lips were pursed, and some of them stopped talking completely. One of them later confided in me through email that she was "fed up," and that she was tired of trying to "argue reasonably with people who behave like jerks" (email 26 Oct. 2016). Although some racist remarks made me cringe, and although I wanted to correct my students gently (so that I did not seem defensive), I was unable to successfully persuade many of the white male students in the class to be more empathetic to those whose experiences were different from theirs, perhaps *because* of my embodiment. The only person who *was* willing and *able* to argue the unfairness and insensitivity of some of the aforementioned statements (and subsequently stand up to his peers) was a white male student, which emphasizes the responsibility of those with privilege. Indeed, one's embodiment affects not just how one processes information, but also how one allows (or disallows) *others* to process that information. I cannot not help but ponder how differently my students may have responded to this discussion had I been of a different gender, race and/or nationality.

Second, empathy and embodiment can be interpreted differently when there is a differently-abled student in a primarily able-bodied classroom. As the weeks progressed, and as more students got to know Harper, their sensitivity towards her needs increased: activities were planned, and the chairs in the classroom rearranged such that Harper could participate safely. I, too, did everything in my capacity to ensure Harper's comfort and safety. In her end semester self-assessment, Harper wrote about how she really enjoyed the class. She mentioned that "[she] really appreciated all of [my] concerns," and that the class had "made [her] more open and knowledgeable about the world." While her comment that I have been

the “best professor [she has] worked with so far” is no doubt flattering and certainly encourages a narcissistic illusion of myself as a teacher, I have to wonder if I was “too empathetic,” in some situations, and whether or not my decisions – to walk with her to her next class, for instance – will negatively affect Harper in the long run.

Finally, despite the overall success of my class, it is important to note that not all my decisions and recommended readings were met with an enthusiastic response. Some novels, such as Larbalestier’s *Liar*, frustrated students’ reading experiences because the narrator is untrustworthy and constantly challenges the reader’s trust. Other students maintained that “fewer books should be read just because it was hard to absorb and really analyze the literature while also trying to juggle five other classes.” Although I was sorely tempted to teach my students everything (about everything), the students’ point is very valid; it has forced me consider how best to the restructure the coursework such that short/light novels/books follow heavier ones. Perhaps the most insightful feedback I received was Grace’s in the Fall semester. She pointed out that “towards the end of the semester it seems like we weren’t learning as many or complex concepts as we were at the beginning,” and recommended that I should “maybe spread the concepts out or add more.” Evidently, I seem to have underestimated my students’ inclination to learn new concepts. Accordingly, I included a more comprehensive introduction to queer theory the second time I taught this course.

Finally, there were some students’ comments that made me wonder if I had been at all successful with regard to my course goals. For instance, Justin, one of my Caucasian male students, mentioned in his end semester self-assessment that he’d like to change the description of the course, as he “did not know this class was on feministic views in English.” That makes me wonder – would Justin have signed up for the course, had he been confronted with the “F” word at the very beginning? Would many of my male students have, for that

matter? I realize I may never know the answer to that question. What surprised me was that Justin's acknowledgement that "every discussion forced [the class] to think outside the box & break typical stereotypes," which seemed to be at odds with his previous comment. While this comment alone would not have fazed me, I happened to run into Liz at the gym during finals week. While discussing the weather (the day was particularly cold), Liz mentioned that she didn't like going outside in the cold because the frigid temperature made her skin red, and that she looked "awful." Given our in-depth discussions on beauty and the panopticon, I felt a pang of disappointment, and was tempted to question how much my students *really* learned from the course.

However, I have come to realize that social ideologies and inhibitions are deeply ingrained in us. One semester of engaged pedagogy is hardly enough to develop a completely new mindset against dominant cultural notions. It is also difficult for students to embrace certain words or ideas that have, for a majority of their lives, been taboo. What I hope, however, is that the coursework (as demonstrated by the engaged pedagogy), empathy, and an awareness of – their own and others' – embodiments give students at least some tools they need to deconstruct the more dangerous ideologies around them.

Conclusion

When I began the coursework for my Ph.D., I admit I knew very little about what (all) feminist theories entailed. As a result, I sometimes found it difficult to ascertain when a feminine character had agency and how much her agency mattered. I am now convinced that a feminine character is empowered when she has a voice – that is, she is able to speak out against oppression because she is integrated into her community's Symbolic order through language – *and* when she accepts the materiality of her body, however unconventional and/or unique her embodiment may be. Moreover, the feminine protagonist's friendships –

generated by her access to discourse and her acceptance of the unique materiality of her body – are *as important as* her voice and embodiment when it comes to making a text inherently feminist. In novels like *The Hunger Games*, the female protagonists retreat from the political sphere and ultimately become a broken shells of people partly because they lack female friendships and a sense of community. In most of the novels discussed above, however, the presence of strong and sustainable communities – where *everyone* (and not merely the person staging the revolution) is invested in empowering the downtrodden – help make a difference for the better. Ultimately, such novels that promote female friendships result in the characters at least partially eradicating oppressive forms of patriarchy and instilling fairer systems of government.

In Chapter 2, for example, I have demonstrated how Eva is able to bridge the gap between her human and chimp selves and accept that she occupies a unique position in both human and animal worlds. Eva uses her human cognition and her chimp body to manipulate situations around her to not just provide for – but also bring freedom to – her chimp community. In *Liar*, on the other hand, Micah's inability to accept the truth about her non-conforming body affects how she narrativizes her own story. In turn, her lies distance her from the other characters in the novel (including her family and friends) and leave her without a sense of community. Chapter 3 demonstrates not only how adolescent daughterhood is a liminal space, where Merida needs to become more responsible in order to renew her strained relationship with her mother, but also the importance of mother-daughter relationships as the foundation for other communal relationships. Elinor's transformation into a bear is responsible for silencing the patriarchal royal aspects of herself, which paradoxically forces her to better communicate with her daughter. In Chapter 4, I have shown how Cinder is able to overthrow the evil queen Levana, become the ruler of Luna, and sow the seeds of democracy because she is able to integrate herself into Luna's Symbolic order through her

careful use of the Lunar gift. More important, Cinder is able to accept the agency generated by the materiality of her cyborg body and, as a result, is able to make and maintain a close group of friends on whom she can depend. Some of the key concepts discussed in the previous chapters culminate in Chapter 5. In The Tamír Triad, Tobin's body is the confluence of two seemingly opposing forms of magic that represent the discursive and the material. Additionally, Tobin/Tamír can pass as a Prince/Queen because of the linguistic markers such as pronouns, names, and titles that represent the character's social truth, and because of the performance of the gendered body that is rooted in the material. Tobin/ Tamír's complex metamorphosis, relationship with his/her mother, and care reinforce the importance of the confluence of the discursive and the material discussed in previous chapters.

Finally, Chapter 6 focuses on my experiences teaching an introductory course on gender and sexuality in the undergraduate classroom over two semesters. This chapter highlights the implications of discourse and materiality in a classroom setting and reinforces some of the key points in my theoretical study. Discourse – discussed here in the forms of theoretical concepts and ideas such as the panopticon and intersectionality – were better understood by students with regard to the freedoms and restrictions placed on their own (and sometimes others') bodies; class discussions, journal entries, and ultimately, student papers, demonstrated how students were able to make astute connections between theory and social justice issues concerning gendered, sexualized, racialized, and differently-abled bodies. Second, reading about various characters and social situations helped students gain a sense of empathy towards the texts they read. Moreover, the theories students learned – by relating them back to everyday experiences – translated into caring for their classmates in different ways. Most notable were the ways in which students modified their activities when they led class discussions to make them more accessible for their differently-abled peer. Lastly, embodiments – of both instructor and students – played a role in the classroom. Each

individual's embodiment – and their experiences surrounding that embodiment, whether it was positive, negative, or neutral – influenced how they understood, remembered, and/or processed course information, and how they approach novels featuring characters from different gender, racial, and/or socioeconomic backgrounds than their own. This was particularly evident when reading texts such as *Beauty Queens*, where students struggled to identify with (and in one case, was offended by) the diverse perspectives of the characters. My students also understood that young adult books do not exist in a vacuum. Towards the end of the course, by connecting class discussions and readings to their own body politics, students were able to appreciate the need for gender equality.

Young adult novels are read both in and outside the classroom by adolescents and adults alike, and the writing, publishing, reading, and teaching of these texts involve discursive and embodied processes. Because writing for young readers is usually purposeful as John Stephens has noted, and because a culture's future is "invested" in its children, "children's writers often take upon themselves the task of trying to mould audience attitudes into 'desirable' forms, which can mean either an attempt to perpetuate certain values or to resist social dominant values which particular writers oppose" (3). This observation holds true for young adult narratives as well, and several young adult texts that "resist social dominant social values" are used by teachers and librarians to support critical reading goals and to inspire social activism. (A good example is Amber M. Simmons's essay, "Class on Fire: Using the Hunger Games Trilogy to Encourage Social Action," which advocates using *The Hunger Games* to re-sensitize (desensitized) students to world issues including hunger, violence, and brutality.) Since young adult narratives featuring strong feminine characters play such a crucial role in the lives of their readers regardless of whether they are used to promote literacy in classrooms, inspire social change, or create room for reflection, it is imperative that readers are able to identify whether or not the protagonist has agency.

Moreover, creators and promoters of young adult texts (including authors, publishers, educators, librarians, and literary scholars) must be able to determine when a feminine character is truly empowered. Studying the confluence of the discursive and the material in sexualized feminine bodies in adolescent and young adult literature, therefore, not only significantly changes how we approach texts, but also influences what we look for to determine what makes a text inherently feminist, which ultimately challenges the existing status quo.

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