"Trans is Hot Right Now": On Cisgender Writers and Trans Characters in Jeanette Winterson's *Frankissstein* and Kim Fu's *For Today I Am a Boy*

Ana Horvat, University of Alberta, Canada

Abstract

Trans is "hot right now" (Winterson 1226). But who gets to write about trans issues? Winterson's and Fu's books follow in the upsurge of trans visibility in the mainstream media referred to as the "transgender tipping point" and marked by Laverne Cox's appearance on the cover of *Time Magazine* and prominent trans celebrity interviews on the Piers Morgan and Katie Couric shows in 2014. However, visibility can also be a "trap", as Gossett et al. have argued, in that they "accommodat[e] trans bodies, histories, and culture only insofar as they can be forced to hew to hegemonic modalities" (xxiii). Mia Fischer explains that "the popular assumption that the increased visibility of trans individuals in public discourse automatically translates into improvement in transgender people's daily lives" needs to be challenged (5). In addition to the disparity between visibility and real-life problems, the question of how trans people are represented is also problematic. As Brynn Tannehill put it, "when nearly every media portrayal of a transgender [person] is as someone who is incapable, sad, and/or pathetic, it makes it that much harder for us to be taken seriously and dig ourselves out of the hole we're in". I take Kim Fu and Jeanette Winterson as two recent examples of cisgender writers taking up trans characters, representing them in outdated and offensive ways, and basing their research about transness on sources – traditional trans memoirs, medical facts, and mainstream media – that replicate patterns which trans authors have identified as harmful. Following Jacob Hale's "Suggested Rules for Non-Transsexuals Writing about Transsexuals, Transsexuality, Transsexualism, or Trans," I propose five new rules cis fiction writers should adhere to when writing trans characters.

1 Trans is "hot right now" (Winterson 1226). But who gets to write about trans issues? Winterson's and Fu's books follow in the upsurge of trans visibility in the mainstream media referred to as the "transgender tipping point" and marked by Laverne Cox's appearance on the cover of Time magazine and prominent trans celebrity interviews on the Piers Morgan and Katie Couric shows in 2014. However, visibility can also be a "trap", as Gossett et al. have argued, in that they "accommodat[e] trans bodies, histories, and culture only insofar as they can be forced to hew to hegemonic modalities" (xxiii). Mia Fischer explains that "the popular assumption that the increased visibility of trans individuals in public discourse automatically translates into improvement in transgender people's daily lives" needs to be challenged (5). In addition to the disparity between visibility and real-life problems, the question of how trans people are represented is also problematic. As Brynn Tannehill put it, "when nearly every media portrayal of a transgender [person] is as someone who is incapable, sad, and/or pathetic, it makes it that much harder for us to be taken seriously and dig ourselves out of the hole we're in" (n.p.). I take Kim Fu

and Jeanette Winterson as two recent examples of cisgender writers taking up trans characters, representing them in outdated and sometimes offensive ways, and basing their research about transness on sources – traditional trans memoirs, medical facts, and mainstream media – that replicate patterns which trans authors have identified as harmful. Following Jacob Hale's "Suggested Rules for Non-Transsexuals Writing about Transsexuals, Transsexuality, Transsexualism, or Trans," I propose five new rules cis fiction writers should adhere to when writing trans characters.

2 Fu's and Winterson's approaches are different. Fu writes a compassionate but tragic Chinese-Canadian coming-of-age novel which places much of its focus on the tropes of suffering and being born in the wrong body. In *Frankissstein,* Winterson creates a trans character, Ry Shelley, as a logical addition to her portfolio of gender-bending characters, but Ry's fate in this novel is to be subjected to medicalization, sexual violence, and constant verbal abuse. Both Fu and Winterson embrace what I call the "transness as tragedy" approach and manifest characters who have little agency in the face of the near-comical amount of abuse which they stoically bear without protest. I will argue that these kinds of trans representations are problematic because both trans fiction and trans literature have moved on such approaches and Fu's and Winterson's characterizations perpetuate harmful stereotypes about trans people rather than portraying them as complex and multi-dimensional. Through an analysis of two different approaches to writing trans protagonists, one imagined as a novelization of a trans memoir and the other juxtaposing transness and transhumanism, I will map out the main problems cis writers run into when imagining trans characters.

Overview of Cis and Trans Approaches to Writing Transness

3 In rule number four, Jacob Hale states: "Don't erase our voices by ignoring what we say and write" (n.p.). Even though this rule was aimed at cis academics such as Bernice Hausman, who theorized trans subjectivity by selectively reading trans memoirs and medical texts only to come to transphobic conclusions, the essence of it works for Winterson and Fu as well. Trans writing is not limited to trans memoirs and medical texts by cis doctors whose only lens of trans people is pathology. A cis writer's toolbox needs to expand to trans writing, both theory, which provides access to debates about trans subjectivity and important guidelines about acceptable terminology and pressing issues, and the growing field of trans fiction and poetry, where one can

find acceptable models for trans representation. It is possible for a cis writer to write believable trans characters. The best such characters emerge when the aim is to construct a non-binary or gender-bending character rather than a trans character. Virginia Woolf's *Orlando* (1928) and Radclyffe Hall's *The Well of Loneliness* (1928) are good early examples of novels in which cross-dressing and a laisse-faire attitude to gender norms give the characters agency. Jeanette Winterson's *The PowerBook* (2000) and Jeffrey Eugenides's *Middlesex* (2002) are two contemporary examples of well-written gender-bending and gender-variant characters. The best example for a cis writer writing a trans character is Felicia Luna Lemus's *Like Son* (2007), in which the protagonist's transness is just a minor detail in their lives and their experience of 9/11 is the true focus on the novel. This can probably be attributed to the counsel of Lemus's former partner, T. Cooper, a trans novelist who takes the same approach in his work.

4 In contrast to what most cis authors are doing, in the past few years, publishing has seen a major shift with Metonymy Press's and Topside Press's efforts to publish trans women's fiction. Trans poetry, along with a proliferation of individual poet collections, is also shifting from mainly autobiographical themes to concerns linking trans lives and larger historical and pressing political concerns. These new trans novels are all set post-transition and prioritize taking up the lives of adult trans characters who already put their transition years behind them and now focus on the rest of their lives – the trans community, issues of discrimination, dating, career, and reconnecting with their families and cultural/ethnic heritage. Jia qing wilson yang's *Small Beauty* (2016) and Casey Plett's *Little Fish* (2018) center around a mourning period, a discovery of queerness in the family, and Chinese-Canadian or Mennonite heritage. Imogen Binnie's *Nevada* (2013) focuses on a road trip and creating a bond between older and younger generations of trans people, while Sybil Lamb's *I've Got a Time Bomb* (2014) is dystopian speculative fiction. Jordy Rosenberg's *Confessions of a Fox* (2018) is a reimagination of an 18th century novel. Variety abounds even with less than twenty novels in the genre.

In an adaptation of Hale's rules to fit cis fiction writers, I propose the following guidelines:

1. An author should focus on the social (rather than familial) injustices the character faces while maintaining a balance to ensure the work does not make the character tragic.
2. A better and safer option would be to make the character's transness just a detail in their lives and add complexity elsewhere – heritage, historical situation, relationships, etc.

3. Make trans characters complex characters with interests other than transitioning. Be familiar with the medical and socio-cultural context, but then disregard it and just write a character as layered and surprising as any cis character you could make up.
4. Know your boundaries. Steer clear of tropes such as half-man/half-woman, transness constructed through medical technology, focusing on the graphic details of surgeries, making transness tragic, and oversexualizing trans people.
5. Choose your sources wisely – if you aim to write contemporary trans literature, then read contemporary trans literature.

Queer literature has matured away from focusing only on coming out narratives and trans literature is doing the same. Cis authors should be particularly sensitive to treading into unfamiliar territory and facing a potential backlash from the very community many probably set out to help. Just as there exists a white savior syndrome, there is also cis savior syndrome, and it is equally as problematic.

Fu and The Wrong Body Narrative

5 In rule number three, Hale writes: "Beware of replicating the following discursive movement (which Sandy Stone articulates in 'The Empire Strikes Back,' and reminds us is familiar from other colonial discourses): Initial fascination with the exotic; denial of subjectivity, lack of access to dominant discourse; followed by a species of rehabilitation" (n.p.). There are two discursive movements that can be followed in Stone's writing: the trajectory from object of fascination to punishment, which Winterson uses, and the movement following all the "suspicious" tropes of trans memoirs that Stone points out and explains the origins of, and which both Fu and Winterson uncritically replicate. Considering that Fu is mimicking a traditional trans narrative, I will explain its origins and relevance. Most theorists (Prosser, Namaste, Butler) recognize that the first format trans life writing took was "the traditional trans narrative" which had to be told to a doctor to qualify for hormonal therapy and/or surgery. For many trans authors, writing an autobiography for the cis readership was the only way to get published, and for "public transsexuals," an autobiography, however sensationalist it turned out to be, meant a chance to tell their side of the story. Viviane Namaste introduces the idea of the "autobiographical imperative," the notion that trans individuals are allowed "to speak, but only insofar as they offer their personal autobiographies, and only as long as they respond to the questions posed by a non-transsexual

interviewer" (46). Prosser notes that "the nontranssexual readership that sustains the market for these autobiographies is surely motivated primarily by fascination, an interest in the transsexual precisely as prodigious other" (129). The "wrong body narrative" has been critiqued by Susan Stryker, Jay Prosser, Dean Spade, and others through arguing an alternate discursive framework. Trans novelists have embraced this progressive and logical approach, while the trans memoir genre and cisgender writers' depictions of trans characters mostly opt for the problematic outdated approach. In replicating the model of the trans memoir, Fu also replicates the idea that trans people (or in this case characters) are only allowed to speak if they speak about topics that satisfy cis curiosity.

6 Cisgender scholarship about Fu's book showed similar problematic dynamics of cis writers having conversations about trans characters placed in either queer or mainstream frameworks with no reference to trans studies or regard for trans voices. For example, Andrea Ruthven argues that Fu's novel "traces the process of gender dis-identification" instead of "lauding the achievement of a recognizable gender identity" (2). From Ruthven's perspective, Fu provides a delightfully queer trans contrast to the mainstream media coverage of trans celebrities who have succeeded in overcoming obstacles. However, this is a flawed argument because both the mainstream media directors of reality shows and Kim Fu are cisgender people curating their own versions of a trans perspective made by and for cis people. Trans literature and trans history did not start a few years ago when cisgender people started paying attention. Trans literature, predominantly in the form of memoir, can be traced back to the 1931 memoir by Lili Elbe, to 1950s pulp novels, to the novels of Leslie Feinberg, to the myriad of contemporary trans memoirs, and to the recent trans novel boom of the 2010s. The fact remains that the vast majority of trans literary production *is* about the process of dis-identification, or, in trans terms, dysphoria. Almost every trans memoir is full of familial rejection, bullying, and depression. In this light, Fu presents a very stereotypical image of a trans person rather than an innovative one. Ruthven argues that "rather than being a celebratory narrative of over/be-coming, Fu's novel wallows in the negative feelings, the rage, frustration, and sadness that characterize the protagonist's relationship with their body" (5). However, wallowing in dysphoric feelings is hardly progress in the portrayal of trans characters; it is a step backwards. Ruthven's arguments, as well as Fu's depiction of Audrey, only serve to show that cisgender narratives about trans people still prefer the trope of the long-suffering trans tragic hero as

somehow more “authentic” than a character like Fu’s other trans character, John, a well-adjusted, politically active trans person, who represents a growing number of trans people in the West.

7 Fu’s novel follows some aspects of the traditional trans memoir structure such as a dysphoric childhood, a move to the big city, and the image of the unhappy balding middle-aged man who puts on dresses in front of a mirror, but does well in challenging others, such as the predominant whiteness of trans memoir and the focus on medical transition. Traditional models of trans memoir generally follow a similar “basic outline” made up of three “acts”: “a “gender-dysphoric childhood,” a “move to the big city and the transformation,” and “the aftermath of the sex change” coupled with self-acceptance (Ames xii). In the first act, a staple of trans memoir is the first time a trans child, usually transfeminine, is discovered by an adult in the act of trying on dresses and putting on make-up. In Fu’s novel, Audrey, the youngest of four sisters, adopts the same attitude: in kindergarten, she draws herself as a mommy, and she desperately wants to become like her sisters. While Audrey’s father’s toxic masculinity threatens her very existence, the company of her sisters provides an environment of comfort, belonging, and acceptance.

8 Audrey’s path to womanhood again resembles traditional trans memoirs in that despite growing up with sisters who she strived to emulate, Audrey is depicted as being ignorant of how to make herself a “passing” woman and has old-fashioned ideas about what a woman should be. Although old-fashioned ideas about binary gender, manhood, and womanhood are often present in the childhood sections of trans memoirs, as they are in the childhood thoughts of any cisgender child, such problematic tropes should not be left unattended and unexplained in cisgender writing because they run the risk of becoming petrified ideas about how trans people view gender. For example, in Aleisha Brevard's second memoir, the author reflects on her ideas of femininity influenced by growing up in the 1950s, when her greatest fear was that she would “never be considered 'woman' enough to be a good wife” (49). At that time, Brevard had “no concept that the terms *feminine* and *independent* could be synonymous . . . like much of society, straight and gay, [she] thought a good woman must also be docile and long-suffering” (49). Fu’s novel is set in 1980s Canada and Audrey’s models of womanhood are her relatively traditional and submissive mother and her sexually adventurous sisters so the combination of both culminated in Audrey’s view of femaleness in terms of feminine clothing, loving domestic chores, and the desire to be objectified.

9 The idea of trans women as mindlessly adopting outdated stereotypes about femaleness has been at the forefront of trans-exclusionary radical feminist (TERF) arguments from the 1970s. Janice Raymond argued that gender confirmation surgery, which she saw as the technology through which trans women were created from men, endorsed "a femininity which, in many transsexuals, becomes a caricature of much that feminists have rejected about man-made femininity" (Raymond xviii-xix). Fu's portrayal of a transfeminine character who revels in cleaning and imagines being submissive to violent men is in line with the most damaging critiques of transness as a legitimate gender identity. Butler, among others, has dismantled the idea that trans women want to become caricatures and argued that "the transsexual desire to become a man or a woman is not to be dismissed as a simple desire to conform to established identity categories" (*Undoing* 4). Paraphrasing Kate Bornstein, Butler notes that transness "can be a desire for transformation itself, a pursuit of identity as a transformative exercise, an example of desire itself as a transformative activity" (*Undoing* 4). It is harmful to depict trans people as being "dupes of gender" not intelligent enough to decipher that there is more to womanhood than dresses and cleaning (Prosser 7). Audrey's desire to embody this passive femaleness through making herself feminine and submissive also results in some very risky and non-consensual sexual encounters.

10 Fu's choice of ending was pleasantly devoid of the surgical ending in Ames's formula and also veers away from what Raaz Link calls "the stereotypical progress narrative in which our hero finds queer salvation and 2.2 partners in an alternative community" (652/653). Ruthven similarly argues that "the novel willingly explores the possibility for an open-ended gender identity, one that rejects the homecoming narrative in favor of a more transnational concept of belonging" (2). However, it is critical to note that a cisgender writer like Fu is not the first person imagining trans endings alternate to medical transition or placing transness in a transnational context. Open-ended narratives independent of a transition narrative already exist in trans literature. Leslie Feinberg's *Drag King Dreams* (2006) maps out a trans identity inflected with Jewish heritage and resistance movements. Elliott Deline's *Show Trans* (2014) explores the possibility of a transmasculine character embracing elements of femininity after transition. Vivek Shraya, jia qing wilson-yang, and Kai Cheng Thom also place transness in a transnational context. In fact, trans authors of color regularly opt for the transnational as a way of escaping the constraints of the still predominantly white trans memoir. As Aren Aizura shows in *Mobile Subjects* (2018), even many trans memoirs have a transnational component in that the protagonists often travel in search of affordable surgery.

Open-endedness is also a definitive characteristic of trans novels, which begin post-transition and thus open up the possibilities for trans lives not bound up in dysphoria and medicalization. Audrey's trip to Germany to meet her sisters is also symbolic of a journey to a new identity which Prosser calls "transition as a geographic trope" (5). Although road trips are most often used as either a "symbolic representation of dysphoria" or post-transition identity quests common in trans novels, Fu's novel omits the process of travel altogether and instead paints a meeting of sisters in Germany as the beginning of Audrey's new life (Keegan 3). The focus on the affective community of sisterhood, albeit a non-trans one, is a commendable ending and one similar to the focus on trans sisterhood communities in trans novels such as Ryka Aoki's, Casey Plett's, and Kai Cheng Thom's but also presents a rare choice of ending in which a biological family accepts their trans relative.

Transgender as Transhuman

11 Just as Fu's Audrey remains isolated for much of her adulthood, Winterson's Ry is a trans character isolated in an unwelcoming cisgender world. While Audrey is pre-transition and divorced from medical discourse, Ry is steeped in the medical, technological, and transhuman. Both are equally harassed – Audrey as a child and Ry as an adult – and both make choices related to their sexuality that betray a lack of self-worth that makes them overly tragic. And yet the story set in the 1980s has a much happier ending than the technologically advanced present-day story. Winterson has been writing non-binary characters most of her career, but this is the first time she called a character trans. In *The Power Book*, Winterson's narrator wrote dozens of stories for her lover, imagining the two of them inhabiting different genders and time periods. In *Written on The Body* (1992), the narrator was also a nameless, genderless voice writing to their female lover. This worked well because Winterson could transcend lesbian literature while also crafting beautifully queer fantasies that allowed for gender play without being overtly heterosexual. If she had called her *Frankissstein* (2019) character trans and not tried to tackle trans-specific experiences about hormones and surgeries and bathrooms and sex, it would have resulted in a complex and out-of-the-box trans representation; however, the addition of details about Ry actually made the narrative transphobic. *Frankissstein* is set in two parallel worlds: the 19th century world of Mary Shelley and her process of imagining *Frankenstein*, and contemporary United States, where Ry Shelley, a trans doctor, falls in love with Victor Stein, a transhumanist AI scientist who is trying to download

the contents of a human brain. Each of the characters in Shelley's posse on Lake Geneva has a doppelganger in the 21st century and Ry's is Mary herself.

12 Ry's naming and deadnaming are harmful practices that continually undermine Ry's gender. Ry explains to random strangers he meets for the first time that Ry is short for Mary, thereby exposing himself to 300 pages of jokes and jeers. In a crowd of potentially unfriendly strangers, it is very unlikely that a trans person would so openly offer their dead name, "the name that a transgender person was given at birth and no longer uses upon transitioning" ("Dead name"). The repeated revelation of Ry's dead name by Ry himself functions as a reminder of the connection to Mary Shelley, but it is also an unlikely invitation to stares and offensive comments about him not being a real man—something no trans person would openly invite from hostile cis strangers. Winterson also follows in the path of cisgender journalists who still, as Fischer notes, "continue to rely on nontransgender 'experts' as proxies rather than letting trans people tell their own stories, which often individualizes struggles and failures but does not address the systemic nature of intersecting oppressions" (17). Although Winterson tries to get around this issue of expertise by making Ry a doctor as well, that decision also cements the contentious connection between transness as based in medicine and ignores the social context of trans people's lives. Although Fu refers to Audrey as Peter during almost the entire novel – an approach that resonates strongly with cis reactions to trans people in its insistence of framing Audrey as a boy who felt he was a girl – at least one could argue that the transition narrative and the presence of the family somehow justify it. In contrast, Winterson's deadnaming functions as a punchline.

13 In a *Guardian* interview with Lisa Allardice, Winterson responds to the "trans question" with: "Transgender is interesting because gender is so annoying and so boring and has caused so much trouble . . . I don't really think of myself as female or male, I just think of myself as me. I'm not even sure I see myself as human. I don't feel particularly human." But the issue with Winterson's embracing of gender-fluid or perhaps even non-binary or trans gender identity is that although she knows the discrimination that comes from growing up gay, she cannot transfer that to another context such as trans or African-American, because her understanding of those other contexts is limited. In a similar interview, Kim Fu, a first-time author and Chinese-Canadian cis woman, responds more cautiously about appropriation: "Whenever I'm asked about that disconnect, I think about books by white writers that feature Asian characters – the questions I have, as an Asian-Canadian, for those writers: about appropriation, authenticity, and the

responsibilities that come with portraying underrepresented people" ("Kim"). Fu argues that she wrote "a singular, individual character, one who feels real and true to [her], with no intention of representing the experiences of a diverse, heterogeneous group of people as a whole" and that she doesn't think "there is one core, unifying trans narrative" ("Kim"). Nevertheless, a cisgender person's "truth" of a marginalized person and their experience is a problematic place to start.

14 Winterson's "truth" of transness is similar to TERF notions of transness as constructed through technological advancements, an outdated idea of trans people as half man/half woman, and an overt focus on and exoticization of trans genitals. There is evidence that Winterson did do some research about trans terminology because she knew to have Ry identify as "trans" instead of transgender and used the correct term for "top surgery" rather than calling it a sex change (although she says "lower surgery" instead of "bottom surgery"). However, Ry says things a cis person might think a trans person would say, such as "when I was entirely a woman" (Winterson 1472), "when I was female," "as a woman," "I am fully female. I am also partly male" (Winterson 1222), and "I am a woman. And I am a man" (Winterson 1517). Ry is a man in his 30s or 40s living in the UK. He has no background at all, but we do know he is a doctor and well-educated, although he does not seem to read much outside of his field. It is unlikely this trans man who changed his name and his pronoun, had top surgery, and has been on testosterone for years would be saying "I am/was female". If they believed that, it is more likely that they would identify as non-binary or gender-fluid. The man/woman idea continues through a focus on Ry's genitals and how they changed through taking testosterone. Winterson, as many cis people who are curious about trans people, places too much focus on genitals. In one of the most well-known examples of well-meaning cis journalists asking invasive questions of their trans guests, Katie Couric kept insisting that actress Laverne Cox and model Carmen Carrera talk about if they had bottom surgery even after Carrera cautioned her the topic was too personal (Steinbock 51). Similarly, in Piers Morgan's interview with Janet Mock, he kept insisting on the stock phrase "born a boy" even though Mock's memoir attempted to dismantle this phrase as problematic and "sought to capitalize foremost on the sensationalism of surgical transition" (Steinbock 52). In many ways, *Frankissstein* is a combination of these two cis-focused ideas of transness as epitomized though genitals and betweenness. While newspaper stories covering trans issues show some progress "including a decrease in misgendering, focus on genitals, and deadnaming," Winterson makes these three negative practices the focus of her descriptions of Ry, thereby showing her lack of knowledge

about trans issues (Fischer 17). *Frankissstein* often reads like a cis person's fantasy of what they would want a trans person to talk about in response to invasive cis questions.

15 Unlike Fu's grounding in trans memoir and transition, Winterson follows the technological approach to transness and links it explicitly to transhumanism and posthumanism. The trans in transhuman is the same trans as in transhuman – it was "shorthand for *transitional human,"* a term coined by futurist F. M. Esfandiary (Transhumanist). However, the transition is also in the shift from "the centrality of the human toward making room for more highly evolved forms or species enhanced through technological innovation" (Campbell 282). Posthuman enhancements usually include extending life span, enhancing mental and physical capabilities, and embracing new biotechnologies. The link between posthumanism and transness has been made before, by Martine Rothblatt, a trans transhumanist whose Cartesian and gender-constructivist views reflect Victor Stein's in their total dismissal of the body in favour of the superior mind. Transness could fit into the category of posthuman if we consider posthumans as "'individuals who suppress biological determinism'" by going beyond traditional boundaries of gender, sexuality and species" (Campbell 282, paraphrasing Moore). However, if an enhancement in the posthuman sense is something that potentially help all humans increase the capabilities of their bodies, then trans technologies do not fit that category because they do not translate into the cisgender context. The problem with seeing trans people as posthuman individuals is that they can be celebrated by certain groups of people for being cyborgs and showing the power of technology, they can at the same time be viewed through the lens of technology as dehumanized, as science gone too far.

16 The fraught history of seeing trans subjectivity as inherently tied to technology stems from the radical feminist discourse of trans women as threats to lesbian communities. In early TERF discourse, trans women were seen as men who were enabled to masquerade as women through the use of technology. In "Sappho by Surgery," Janice Raymond argues that "transsexually constructed lesbian-feminists" are still men trying to trick, divide, and destroy feminist communities. Raymond dismisses transsexuality as an identity category and thinks that "since all transsexuals have to 'pass' as feminine in order to qualify for surgery, so-called lesbian-feminist transsexuals either had to lie to the therapists and doctors, or they had a conversion experience after surgery" (134). According to Raymond, trans people use technology to change their bodies and then use them as a tool for deception. Trans studies have embraced feminist and queer theory from their inception and used them to refute TERF arguments. Pointing to Judith Butler's

invocation of the categories of 'butch' and 'femme' as 'not simple assimilations of lesbianism back into terms of heterosexuality' but categories that 'recall the heterosexual scene but simultaneously displace it', Sandy Stone refutes the argument that trans women are imitations of cisgender women (230). Susan Stryker similarly responds to accusations of trans women's 'constructedness' and reclaims 'monster,' a derogatory term used by Mary Daly (244). When Winterson makes the uncomfortable connection between Frankenstein's monster and trans people, she is not the first to do so; she is again writing into a TERF legacy. Stryker calls Daly's characterization of trans women "as the agents of a 'necrophilic invasion'" an "explicit" connection between Frankenstein's monster and transsexuality, while she sees Raymond's claim that transsexuality should be "mandat[ed] out of existence" as a reverberation of Victor Frankenstein's words about the monster who reproaches him with his creation (245). Stryker finds "a deep affinity" with the monster in Shelley's *Frankenstein* because "like the monster, [she is also] too often perceived as less than fully human due to the means of [her] embodiment" (Stryker 245). For TERFs, the unnatural constructedness of trans bodies is proof that they do not belong in the same biological category as women and therefore cannot hope to share women-only spaces.

17 *Frankissstein* is set up so that each character from Shelley's world has a parallel in the contemporary world, but there is no double for the monster, which begs the question: who is the monster? Dr. Stein dabbles in cryogenics and uploading the contents of a human brain as data, but he never invents anything that gets much of a reaction from the other characters as a monstrosity. The sexbots come closest to monstrosity, to necrophilia and deadness coming to life, yet they have no consciousness or agency. Ry is the only character who, with the help of medical technology, creates something that is the focus of fascination and cringing throughout the novel – he reinterprets himself as male-bodied. Ry, like Shelley, "writes" himself into being, but where, then, is his own "vampire," his own "spirit set loose form the grave"? (Shelley, as cited in Stryker 245). The only possible location is what the other characters in the novel see as his "alter ego" of a trans man, a monstrous double of someone who "used to be a woman". Even though the two characters could also be interpreted as sharing the monster designation in their quests to achieve transhuman status, they are not the same because Stein is never perceived as a passive body that gets abused, fetishized, and upon which surgeries are performed. Ry is a doctor only in theory – we never see him anywhere near his place of work; it is Stein who assumes the role of scientist and fetishizing cis researcher in observing Ry and making comments such as "you are both exotic and real"

(Winterson 1853). Ry is rendered completely passive – he serves as the link to a UK lab where Stein can get body parts, he lets Stein do whatever he wants to him, and he lets people bombard him with offensive comments. Adding to the implication of trans monstrosity, Dr. Stein, who did not create Ry, becomes fascinated with him precisely because of his transness, which he perceives as transhumanist, as hybrid, as Ry 2.0. On one occasion, Stein tells Ry: "And you, Ry, gorgeous boy/girl, whatever you are, you had a sex change. You chose to intervene in your evolution" (Winterson 1851). For Stein, who pays no mind to gender and race politics, Ry is a "what" rather than a "who". The fact that Stein is simultaneously excited and repulsed by Ry, that he sees him as a transhuman experiment, and his own sexual liaison with him as experimentation with his own (thus far heterosexual) sexuality, recreates the relationship between Dr. Frankenstein and his monster – the scientist and the body altered by science. The implication that trans people are monstrous but sexy is transphobic and dangerous because so many trans women are murdered each year precisely by cis men who cannot come to terms with their simultaneous desire and disgust for trans women and end up resolving their frustration by murdering them after sex.

18 Like the fetishized trans sex workers who end up dead, Ry gets raped at the end of the novel. The fact that the rape takes place in a public bathroom is not accidental. Bathrooms are a space of anxiety for many trans people, who are often "read as out of place in the gender normative landscape" of the either-or choice of bathroom (Cavanagh 63). In the mainstream media, the focus around trans people using public bathrooms mainly revolves around the anxieties of cis people sharing bathrooms with trans people. As Westbrook and Shilt have argued, "the mainstream media portrayed trans-women as dangerous to heterosexual men because they use their feminine appearance to trick men into homosexual encounters" (52). Trans men are "policed differently," Westbrook and Schilt note, because trans men's "perceived lack of a natural penis renders them, under the logic of vulnerable subjecthood, unable to be threatening" (52). Furthermore, in men's bathrooms, trans men "enter a liminal state, in some ways, as they cannot hurt men (making them women), but are not seen as needing protection from men (making them part of a "pariah femininity" [Schippers 2007] that no longer warrants protection" (Westbrook and Schilt 51). In Winterson's novel, the bathroom is not a space that demonstrates Ry's discomfort, but a space where Ry, after a narrative full of abusive misgendering, receives no protection from men and instead gets punished for existing in this liminal space by getting raped by a cisgender man.

19 The most puzzling thing about the rape is that it happens at the end of the novel and it does not foster character development or further the plot in any way. In keeping with the Ry/monster theory, like the angry villagers in Shelley's novel who chase the monster with torches because they do not understand it, the faceless rapist who does complete the deed is symbolic of the global transphobic angry mob that misunderstands transness and wants to extinguish it. Unlike Stryker's reclaiming of the term monster for trans studies and endowing it with "its affect, transgender rage," Ry never gets the chance to express any rage – he is conceived as a victim upon whom transphobic rage is released (247). Once the rape is over, neither Ry or the narration mention it again. Instead, Ry comments that this is not even the first time it happened and in the next scene seemingly forgets all about it and replaces it with sexual thoughts about Dr. Stein – a very unlikely reaction to rape. In contrast, when Leslie Feinberg described a brutal rape scene of a trans person at a police station in *Drag King Dreams*, it was to show that discrimination against trans people is institutionalized in the U.S. and that there is no protection under the law. Feinberg's scene showed the character struggling to recover and turn to find community, others who have experienced similar assaults. With compassion, Winterson goes on at length about Mary Shelley's lack of choices as a 19th century woman who has lost three children and has to put up with her husband's affairs and his friends' mocking her for alleged inferiority to men. Yet, Shelley is not raped to drive home the point that women are victims of misogyny and patriarchy. So why is Ry? The lack of any wrap-up or compassion in the rape scene leaves an uncomfortable feeling that this is just an unfortunate staple of trans people's lives and a yet more uncomfortable sense that Winterson thinks he might have deserved it – science gone too far.

20 Fu and Winterson approach their trans characters differently. Fu writes with the aim of expressing a "truth," albeit her own, about a trans experience, and of inciting compassion for her trans character in her predominantly cisgender readers. Adhering to Hale's rule of reading trans writers, Fu nevertheless sticks to a memoiresque structure and repeats many of its tropes about trans people as tragic figures. Winterson's approach to her trans character would have been promising if she had either followed Hale's rule of reading trans writers or, paradoxically, not read anything at all and stuck to her own pattern of gender-bending characters with no references to transition, the medical, or to genitals. In a cis writer's hands, the connection between transness, technology, and monstrosity becomes an uncomfortable addition to TERF rhetoric. Writing about minority characters comes with a responsibility, and with the proliferation of trans literature and

trans activists' efforts to educate cis people on what matters to trans people, hopefully that responsibility becomes more apparent.

Works Cited

Allardice, Lisa. "Jeanette Winterson: 'I Did Worry About Looking at Sexbots'." *The Guardian.* 18th May 2019. https://www.theguardian.com/books/2019/may/18/jeanette-winterson-frankisstein-ai. Accessed 12th Feb. 2020.

Ames, Jonathan. *Sexual Metamorphosis: An Anthology of Transsexual Memoirs*. Random House, 2009.

Butler, Judith. *Bodies that Matter.* Psychology Press, 1993.

---. *Undoing Gender.* Routledge, 2004.

Brevard, Aleshia. *The Woman I Was Not Born to Be: A Transsexual Journey.* Temple University Press, 2001.

Campbell, Heidi. "Postcyborg Ethics: A New Way to Speak of Technology." *Explorations in Media Ecology,* 2006, pp. 279-296. DOI: 10.1386/eme.5.4.279_1

Cavanagh, Sheila. L. *Queering bathrooms: Gender, Sexuality, and the Hygienic Imagination*. University of Toronto Press, 2010.

"Deadname." *Merriam-Webster.* https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/deadname

Fischer, Mia. *Terrorizing Gender: Transgender Visibility and the Surveillance Practices of the U.S. Security State.* University of Nebraska Press, 2019.

Fu, Kim. *For Today I Am a Boy.* Kindle Ed. Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2014.

---. "Kim Fu: Appropriation." National Post. 23rd Jan 2014. https://nationalpost.com/entertainment/books/kim-fu-appropriation. Accessed 12th Feb. 2020.

Gossett, Reina, Eric A. Stanley, and Johanna Burton. "Introduction." *Trapdoor: Trans Cultural Production and the Politics of Visibil*ity, edited by Reina Gossett, Eric A. Stanley, and Johanna Burton. The MIT Press, 2017.

Hale, Jacob. "Suggested Rules for Non-Transsexuals Writing about Transsexuals, Transsexuality, Transsexualism, or Trans." *Sandystone.* 1997. https://www.sandystone.com/hale.rules.html

Keegan, Cael. "Moving Bodies: Sympathetic Migrations in Transgender Narrativity." *Genders* vol. 57, 2013, pp. 1–14.

Namaste, Viviane. *Sex Change, Social Change: Reflections on Identity, Institutions and Imperialism.* Women's Press, 2005.

Page, Morgan M/Odofemi. "Trans Women's Lit? An Interview with Trish Salah and Casey Plett" *CWILA: Canadian Women in The Literary Arts*. 26th Oct. 2014. http://cwila.com/wordpress/trans-womens-lit-an-interview-with-trish-salah-and-casey-plett/. Accessed 23rd Dec 2014.

Prosser, Jay. *Second Skins: The Body Narratives of Transsexuality.* Columbia University Press, 1998.

Raz Link, Aaron. "For Today I Am a Trans Writer." *TSQ: Transgender Studies Quarterly,* Vol. 1, No. 4, 2014, pp. 649-653. DOI 10.1215/23289252-2815174.

Raymond, Janice. "Sappho by Surgery: The Transsexually Constructed Lesbian-Feminist." *The Transgender Studies Reader*, edited by Susan Stryker and Stephen Whittle. Routledge, 2006. pp. 131- 144.

Rothblatt, Martine. *From Transgender to Transhuman: A Manifesto on the Freedom of Form The Newly Titled and Expanded Second Edition of The Apartheid of Sex.* Kindle Ed. Martine Rothblatt, 2011.

Ruthven, Andrea. "Subverting Transnormativity: Rage and Resilience in Kim Fu's For Today I Am a Boy." *CLCWeb: Comparative Literature and Culture.* Vol 21, no. 1, 2019, pp. 1-8. https://doi.org/10.7771/1481-4374.3369.

Shapiro, Lila. "Who Gave You the Right to Tell That Story? Ten authors on the most divisive question in fiction, and the times they wrote outside their own identities." *Vulture,* 13th Oct. 2019. https://www.vulture.com/2019/10/who-gave-you-the-right-to-tell-that-story.html. Accessed 12th Feb. 2021.

Steinbock, Eliza. "Framing Stigma in Trans* Mediascapes: How does it feel to be a problem? *Spectator* vol. 37, no. 2, 2017, pp. 48-57.

---. "The wavering line of foreground and background: a proposal for the schematic analysis of trans visual culture." Journal of Visual Culture vol. 19, no. 2, 2020, pp. 171-183. Sage. https://doi.org/10.1177/1470412920944480

Stone, Sandy. "The Empire Strikes Back: A Posttranssexual Manifesto." Eds. Stryker, Susan, and Stephen Whittle. *The Transgender Studies Reader*. Routledge, 2006. Pp. 221-236.

Stryker, Susan. "My Words to Victor Frankenstein About the Village of Chamonix Performing Transgender Rage." *The Transgender Studies Reader*. Routledge, edited by Susan Stryker and Stephen Whittle.2006, pp. 244-257.

Tannehill, Brynn. “Why Jared Leto’s Rayon Is Bad for the Trans Community.” Bilerico Project, 3rd Mar. 2014, http://bilerico.lgbtqnation.com/2014/03/why_jared_letos_rayon_is_bad_for_the_trans_communi.php. Accessed 12th Feb. 2016.

Thomas-Corr, Johanna. “Jeanette Winterson: ‘I didn’t see this coming’.” *The Guardian.* 22nd Dec. 2019. https://www.theguardian.com/books/2019/dec/22/jeanette-winterson-frankissstein-interview#_=_. Accessed 12th Feb. 2020.

Transhumanist FAQ. *Humanity Plus.* https://humanityplus.org/philosophy/transhumanist-faq/ Accessed 12th Feb. 2021.

Westbrook, Laurel, and Kristen Schilt. “Doing Gender, Determining Gender: Transgender People, Gender Panics, and the Maintenance of the Sex/Gender/Sexuality System.” *Gender and Society,* vol. 28, no. 1, 2014, pp. 32–57., www.jstor.org/stable/43669855. Accessed 22 Nov. 2020.

Winterson, Jeanette. *Frankissstein: A Love Story.* Kindle Ed., Jonathan Cape, 2019.