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INTERSEXED, INTERTEXT: A CRITIQUE OF LIMITED GENDER IDENTITY IN
HERCULINE BARBIN AND MIDDLESEX

A Thesis
Presented to
the Graduate School of
Clemson University

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts
English

by
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May 2009

Accepted by:
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ABSTRACT

Relying on the work of poststructuralists Michel Foucault, Judith Butler, and Judith Halberstam for their findings on gender and sexuality, as well as the sociological study of intersexed individuals by Sharon Preves, this thesis will show the identity construction of the intersexed both before and after intervention by closely charting their plight as it is presented in Michel Foucault's *Herculine Barbin* (1980) and Jeffrey Eugenides's *Middlesex* (2003). These texts vary greatly in historical significance, genre, and audience, but nevertheless suggest the same argument regarding the construction of identity. Ultimately, it is the self whose definition is of the greatest importance. This work expands on the importance and process of constructing an accurate gendered identity by focusing on desire for the other and for the desire of the other with a discussion of the relationship between the subject and object. It will also address the body as restrictive and oppressive, but also as a sanctuary which houses difference and the idea of isolation versus socialization, the concept of finding oneself, but doing so by rejecting society. Society may mark and mangle, may suggest and single out, those who do not conform to the standard norms, but as is evident by the desire of both Barbin and Calliope to shed the confining eye of society to escape into isolation, one's gendered identity must be created independently from what others perceive as appropriate.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Writing this thesis has been an intellectual journey as well as a personal one. I have learned that there are people in my life who at times have far more faith and confidence in me than I have in myself. I thank them all for that. I am grateful to my friends for keeping me sane, which I know was not easy and to my boyfriend Peter for taking on the incredible challenge of putting up with me and providing unwavering emotional, intellectual and, at times, technical support throughout this entire process.

I would especially like to thank my readers, Dr. Barton Palmer and Professor Keith Morris for their interest in this thesis and for their challenging questions during its defense. Most importantly, I would like to thank my director, Dr. Aga Skrodzka-Bates for all her support and guidance, for allowing me the freedom to work at my own pace and in my own way. I am so grateful for having had the opportunity to discuss my ideas and plans for this project with her during every step of the process and for receiving invaluable comments on each sometimes very lengthy draft.

Lastly, I would like to thank my parents, especially my mom, who has provided all of the above at some point and time during my academic career. Her interest in reading my writing has never wavered nor has her stamina, even as the texts expanded from short stories on the recognizable blue-lined paper of elementary school to theoretical discussions of gender and sexuality in twelve point font. She has been willing to navigate my spelling and grammar and often my frustration to support, guide, and encourage me. For that, I am exceptionally grateful. My dad has also helped in my academic pursuits, supplying much needed emotional and financial support.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
TITLE PAGE	i
ABSTRACT	ii
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS	iii
INTRODUCTION	1
I. CERTAINTY IN CONSRUCTION: THE ROLE OF DESIRE FOR THE OTHER AND FOR ACCEPTANCE IN SUBJECT FORMATION.....	12
II. ORGANS AND ANDROGYNRY: THE CORRUPTING FORCE OF MEDICAL INTERVENTION ON INTERSEXUALITY	34
III. ACTS OF CREATION, NEGATION, AND TRANSPORTATION: THE NEED TO CONSTRUCT ONE’S IDENTITY IN ISOLATION.....	64
CONCLUSION.....	85
WORKS CITED	88

INTRODUCTION

As androgyny slowly encroaches upon conventional gender binaries, as gender and sexuality become more accepted as continua, and as desire and self no longer form a simple equation, self identification and subject formation become more vexed. These transformations both complicate and simplify the process whereby people categorize themselves as men and women, straight and gay. Perhaps this is in part a result of the saturation of ambiguous representations of gender in the global marketplace, a phenomenon that Judith Halbersam points out in her 2005 *In a Queer Time and Place: Transgender Bodies Subcultural Lives*. Such overlap is visible in numerous Calvin Klein advertisements, yet perhaps is better illustrated in Tilda Swinton's performance of the androgynous titular character in *Orlando* (1992), a part that led to her being typecast in indeterminate gender roles for the next ten years of her acting career. Like the influx of personal care products geared toward the metrosexual and the ad campaigns and film careers which highlight the blurring of traditional gender boundaries, Halberstam expands the concept of "gender flexibility," promoting a simultaneous sense of sameness and difference so as to reach the most people with the least effort. That concept is helpful but not groundbreaking in that it in many ways parallels the appeal to the androgynous mind for which Virginia Woolf was a proponent almost a century ago. Woolf gestures to Coleridge, suggesting that "a great mind is androgynous." She adds, "It is when this fusion takes place that the mind is fully fertilized and uses all its faculties. Perhaps a mind that is purely masculine cannot create, any more than a mind that is purely feminine" (98). Woolf believed that there were limits to male intellect and different

confines to female intellect; therefore, for Woolf, the androgynous being offers the closest available intellectual perfection. Her clearest expression of this lies in *Orlando* (1928), in which the titular character enjoys the benefits of the androgynous mind as s/he inexplicably switches genders.

It is in the area of overlap, both physical (the body and its manifestations) and mental (thought processes and subject formation), that certainty is questioned, and with important concepts, such as gender, in flux, the unknown can and often does become a cause of fear and contention rather than a place of knowledge, comfort, and the consumerist success, which Halberstam suggests. Arguably, it is human to crave order, to be able to correctly and definitely categorize items into neat boxes. Gender, much like sexuality, too often falls into an easily discernible dichotomy, which leaves open only two possibilities for identification. In this view, people are either male or female. This oversimplification fails to take into account the blurring of these distinct categories.

People who fail to conform bodily to the rigid guidelines of gender were once known as hermaphrodites—later termed intersexual, with the emergence of that term in 1876. Hermaphrodite literally means, “A human being, or one of the higher animals, in which parts characteristic of both sexes are to some extent (really or apparently) combined” (OED). However, just below this definition, the Oxford English Dictionary renders visible the discrimination, victimization, and duress of the intersexual: “Formerly supposed to occur normally in some races of men and beasts; but now regarded only as a monstrosity.” Individuals who are born with some combination of male and female anatomy and or chromosomal makeup have been both hated and feared, as indicated in

this definition, but they have also been worshiped, as any survey of Greek mythology will show.

Doctors have expanded the categorization of hermaphrodite to include two subsets, female psuedohermaphroditism, in which the individual has male organs but female tissue and can reproduce, and male psuedohermaphroditism, where there are undescended testes and feminized genitals (Preves 26). The distinctions are important, but the attitudes toward and discrimination of all individuals who fail to conform to restrictive gender norms share a struggle for self-identification and acceptance. Though to be considered a true hermaphrodite there must be a presence of male and female gonadal tissue, many levels of physical difference exist, all of which complicate the two-gender system.

Though a complex relationship exists among the sexes, medically speaking, language remains limited in its ability to properly articulate those differences. Of course, there are the scientific differentiations of hermaphroditism and also the term “intersexual,” which has become increasingly accepted when referring to those who do not conform to reductive definitions of gender, yet the real dilemma lies in the use of an appropriate pronoun. To discuss the intersexual as an individual should yield a singular “his” or “her.” However, to forcibly signify intersexuals as a *him*, a *her* or, even worse, as an *it*, undercuts their very existence. Therefore, this thesis will forfeit some grammatical guidelines in order to uphold ideological ones as a discrepancy in number agreement is supremely preferable to the implication that any person should be labeled as something or someone they are not.

The intersexed person cannot conveniently fit into a male or female role because, simply put, they are neither male nor female. They are, as exemplified by the transgendered person during the time of transition, both/and. The scholarship regarding this complex subject remains somewhere among the fields of sociology, psychology, philosophy, and medicine. Hugh H. Young's *Genital Abnormalities, Hermaphrodites and Related Adrenal Diseases* (1937) is noted as one of the first comprehensive medical books on the subject. However, the critical work done regarding literary texts that take an interest in intersexuality is limited.

A survey of past scholarship shows that intersexuality is most often a topic housed in the realm of social sciences or psychology and often is discussed in conjunction with transgenderism. Texts such as Anne Fausto-Sterling's *Sexing the Body: Gender Politics and the Construction of Sexuality* (2000), Sharon E. Sytsma's *Ethics and Intersex* (2006), and Joan Roughgarden's *Evolution's Rainbow: Diversity, Gender, and Sexuality in Nature and People* (2005) explore lived experience and social ramifications of intersexuality more than they illustrate literary representations of these issues. Less theorized attempts at exposure include Lucia Puenzo's film *XXY* (2007), which was first released in Argentina then in San Francisco in the summer of 2008. The two options, then, appear to be stories like the one told in *XXY* or theorized accounts proclaiming unfair treatment and campaigning for equality, but rarely do the two collide.

A 2006 interview with Jeffrey Eugenides, the author of *Middlesex*—whose narrator is an intersexual—points out his debt to other hermaphrodites, namely Herculine Barbin, the hermaphrodite whose memoirs Michel Foucault reprinted in 1980. Eugenides also

highlights the intertextuality of his award-winning novel, declaring, “I wanted to write the love story that I expected to get from *Herculine* and didn’t” (qtd. in Shift 109).

Admittedly, though, he got caught up in the specifics: “I wanted to ground everything, be as accurate as I could about the medical and biological details” (109). Eugenides’s drive to research the medical background of intersexuality and present facts correctly, as well as engage approaches and reactions to androgyny, make his book fairly unique.

Combining scientific facticity with compelling prose and complex characters situates *Middlesex* as an all-inclusive, easily readable study of the life of a (fictional) intersexual. A similar melding of fact and narrative takes place in the memoirs of *Herculine Barbin*, as similarity noted by Ingrid Holme in her 2007 review, “Hearing People’s Own Stories.”

The medical accuracy that Eugenides brings to his work, his use of precise terminology and historically accurate procedures and ideas regarding gender and therapy, is important given the shift to medical intervention in the “treatment” of intersexual children. Prior to the possibility of surgical correctives, intersexuals were forced to reclassify themselves by what appeared to be their “true sex.” Foucault explains this term in his introduction to *Herculine Barbin*. He finds that Western societies “have obstinately brought into play this question of ‘true sex’ in an order of things where one might have imagined that all that counted was the reality of the body and the intensity of its pleasures” (vii). Ironically, the reality of the intersexual’s body is completely at odds with the notion of one true sex obscured by anatomy and in need of salvaging.

The concept of body, desire, and the negation of an illusive “truth” will help to organize this thesis, which will focus on Foucault’s *Herculine Barbin* and Eugenides’s

Middlesex to illuminate not only the plight of the intersexual over time, but the means whereby they construct their own identity. Most importantly, though, the following three chapters will emphasize that it is impossible to establish such an identity in the face of preconceived ideas of order and restrictive, heteronormative categorizations of gender.

The current trend is to “correct” what is viewed as a biological mistake and to alter surgically the intersexual child’s body to capitulate to the physical norm of the gender doctors feel they can more easily mimic. Most often, this results in surgical reassignment to become female shortly after birth. Gender is dependent upon the size and appearance of the infant’s genitals; if the proto-genitalia is over one inch, the child is deemed a boy, if the apparatus is under three eighths of an inch, the child is a girl. The half inch or so that remains requires the medical community to intervene and, because it is easier to take away than it is to add, the majority of these children are turned into girls. Doctors also take into consideration whether or not the child will be able to stand to urinate; the idea of a male who is unable to do so is apparently more traumatic than the surgical reconfiguration of a micropenis to a vagina. Such intrusive practices and arbitrary guidelines obviously privilege a patriarchal society’s drive for conformity over the intersexuals’ right for self-identification.

The history and actual shift in attitudes, medical intervention, and legal ramifications for the intersexual can be traced in several fictional accounts though, the work here will focus primarily on Foucault’s *Herculine Barbin* and Eugenides’s *Middlesex*. *Herculine Barbin* is a non-fictional account of a French hermaphrodite born in 1838. It was later discovered via medical examination that she had testicular tissue.

Barbin was forced to reclassify herself as a male, a gender which she could never fully accept. She killed herself, leaving detailed memoirs of her life before, during, and after her turbulent reclassification. *Middlesex* is the award-winning fictional account of an intersexual. The Bildungsroman, which, like *Herculine Barbin*, devotes much of its story to a coming-of-age account, focuses on Calliope, a young intersexed character born into a tight-knit Greek-American family and assumed to be and raised as a little girl. Eugenides weaves an intricate tapestry of desire and self-discovery as the latter culminates during a manifestation of the former. Calliope and her family eventually discover that she is in fact a male who suffers from 5-alpha-reductase deficiency, a condition which allows her maleness to be hidden until puberty; her anatomy is suppressed by her body, complicating the relationship between the identity individuals construct and the means whereby they construct it. Calliope makes the decision to live life as a male upon learning of the etymology of the word “hermaphrodite” and its relationship to “monster,” which a simple search will still yield. She changes her name to Cal, the novel’s narrator, and flees first to California and then to Europe to slowly construct his life as a man.

Both texts follow the trends of their contemporary culture with regard to the acceptance of intersexual persons, but they differ slightly in their ultimate ends. Barbin commits suicide as she is physically unable to live as a male, and Calliope in effect sacrifices Calliope to create Cal. The similarities in both girls’ childhood and adolescence are helpful as puberty is a time of transition and desire, both for the self and for the other. It is, after all, sexual desire that so often appears to be one of the foremost ways whereby individuals determine their own gender.

The body is also worth examining as it directly relates to both characters' construction of identity. The body is, in effect, the cause of their dilemma. However, these characters vex the importance of the body in such construction. Barbin and Calliope show that there can be no exact correlation between the body and the self when the body is either surgically altered before the age of understanding and consent, or when others strive to fit, no matter how awkwardly, that body into a contrived notion of normalcy. People must embody a gendered identity; society likes labels and gender is a convenient way to place people into a schema that is both telling and helps to regulate the drive for heteronormalcy. However, Calliope and Barbin are forced to adhere to a gendered identity that is not constructed organically, but delivered from doctors and others in society.

By examining two texts which take as their primary focus intersexual characters who have received no surgical intervention, readers are left with a less adulterated sense of the construction of identity. When Eugenides writes of Cal's journey westward as he flees from the Sexual Disorders and Gender Identity Clinic, he trades a scalpel for a pen. Cal, like Barbin, uses narrative to create an identity; they write themselves into being. Eugenides expresses the need of the intersexual to construct an identity in the absence of medical intervention. In reality, the doctors can only eliminate they literally cut off the excess skin, they remove the unnecessary tissues, but they never create anything; thus the intersexual is only broken but never built back up. There is always something missing; there is a continual lack.

This lack can be too much to bear, as Barbin exemplifies in her suicide. These texts then work in concert to illustrate the importance of the intersexual creating an identity that need not be contingent on the strict gender dichotomy that has been so often the measure of normalcy at the exclusion of individuals like Barbin and Calliope. Society should provide ample space for the self-construction of identity, a construction without restrictive parameters, a space more similar to cultures of Papua New Guinea or the Dominican Republic, who accept the presence of a third sex. While not perfect, these islands have retained a culturally accepted space for intersexual populations, a place that Calliope or Barbin would benefit from being able to access. Sociologist Sharon Preves notes that “children are allowed to go through a natural sex change from female to male at puberty without medical intervention” (40). Perhaps the closest we get in the United States is Eugenides’s fictional account of Calliope’s journey, as even the *kwolu-aatmwol* of Papua New Guinea and the *guevedoche* of the Dominican Republic, who change from women to men at puberty, are never granted the same status and privileges that men receive.

The medical discourse seems to be to conflate the plight of the intersexual with that of the transgender individual and while there are many similarities, the fact remains that the intersexual is often not trying to fit into one particular gender, as the transgender person often is. There may be no desire to become male or female, but rather to exist as a gender completely independent of both, much like the populations of the South Pacific and Caribbean. In this way, the intersexual is more like the transsexual who never seeks reassignment surgery but oscillates between maleness and femaleness. Still, there is an

inherent restrictiveness of the body that deems it impossible for the intersexual to ever truly embody either gender completely, a luxury that both the transsexual and transgender person have. Even after “corrective” surgery, the intersexual faces many of these same issues; there is a cosmetic change but there is never a full transition.

Existing in oppressive societies leads Calliope and Barbin to distance themselves from their societies. Though over a century and an ocean separates the two, both feel they need to be isolated in order to be who they are. Isolation is sought at the expense of family, friends, familiarity and, in Barbin’s case, life. These texts suggest, and this thesis demonstrates, that in the face of desire and in relation to the other, intersexed individuals can actively construct their own identities. Likewise, the restrictions of the body, surgically altered or not, often camouflages the facticity of the individual’s gendered identity, making it difficult, though not impossible, to determine the accuracy of that identity—in most cases, the body does little more than delay the intersexual’s knowledge. However, it is the forced assignment of gender that both texts recognize as most problematic. *Middlesex* and *Herculine Barbin* render visible the true lengths the intersexual will go to escape by presenting their most drastic measures at the cusp of an identity constructed by the other.

Relying on the work of poststructuralists Michel Foucault, Judith Butler, and Judith Halberstam for their findings on gender and sexuality, as well as the sociological study of intersexed individuals by Preves, this thesis will show the identity construction of the intersexed both before and after intervention by closely charting their plight as it is presented in *Herculine Barbin* and *Middlesex*. These texts vary greatly in historical

significance, genre, and audience, but nevertheless suggest the same argument regarding the construction of identity. Ultimately, it is the self whose definition is of the greatest importance.

The following chapters will expand on the importance and process of constructing an accurate gendered identity by focusing on desire for the other and for the desire of the other with a discussion of the relationship between the subject and object. It will also address the body as restrictive and oppressive, but also as a sanctuary which houses difference and the idea of isolation versus socialization, the concept of finding oneself, but doing so by rejecting society. Society may mark and mangle, may suggest and single out, those who do not conform to the standard norms, but as is evident by the desire of both Barbin and Calliope to shed the confining eye of society to escape into isolation, one's gendered identity must be created independently from what others perceive as appropriate.

CHAPTER ONE

CERTAINTY IN CONSTRUCTION: THE ROLE OF DESIRE FOR THE OTHER AND FOR ACCEPTANCE IN SUBJECT FORMATION

Gender, race, ethnicity, nationality, religion, as well as other factors significantly influence how people see themselves. Our constructed identity—what we imagine ourselves to be in concert with what we physically manifest—can be informed by such important characteristics. However, the degree to which each of these identity markers constitutes identity and which has the greatest impact is up for debate. Race and ethnicity have been argued among scholars to be key to identity formation; however, gender is among the leading ways we group or categorize people we meet. Though categorizing people based on gender, race, or otherwise can have negative consequences, often it is merely a way for the human mind to assess the situation before knowing enough to make an otherwise educated appraisal. Outsiders often draw their impulsive conclusions based on what a person looks like, how they behave, and who they seem to be attracted to. While these are superficial criteria when judging another person, appearance, behavior, and attraction are relevant to the self-construction of identity. For example, desire often plays a critical yet intricate role in the way in which we construct our identity. For example, persons can feel desire for another, an easy way to conflate gender and sexuality, as what one desires is often seen as different from the self. People also look for others who desire them; this is related closely to desire for someone. Last, and perhaps most complex, is the desire for someone whose possession will solidify the certainty of the subject. That is to say, in situations where one's gendered identity is in

flux, a desire for another may be nothing more than the need to identify the self via their relationship with that other individual. The impulse to situate information in a schema is not in itself harmful, but the haste with which it is done can be, as can the difficulty that arises when there must be a deviation from the original simplistic male or female. Complications arise when we are unable to move beyond initial, meaningless classifications. When we group things almost instinctively, there is little room for any blurring of boundaries; there is an either/or that takes place. When we step back from the immediacy of the situation, we must learn to expand our understanding of much of the information we receive, as many of the individuals we are assessing cannot be conveniently placed in an either/or box. The dominant ways whereby we create and understand identity are not an exact science, despite what the medical community may think.

There is no pure and unadulterated race; ethnicity and religion can be influenced over time, and gender is not as static as many like to think. Ironically, gender is a construct that has become increasingly restrictive. In the Middle Ages, individuals who could not be classified as a single sex were labeled hermaphrodites; they were later referred to as intersexed once Theodore Klebs coined that term in 1876 (Preves 26). These people were often given the choice, regardless of their prominent sexual characteristics, to decide on the single gender they felt they most clearly embodied, so to speak. However, this individual agency would become increasingly limited in later years. Michel Foucault explains in his introduction to *Herculine Barbin*, “Biological theories of sexuality, juridical conceptions of the individual, forms of the administrative

control in modern nations, led little by little to rejecting the idea of a mixture the two sexes in a single body, and consequently to limiting the free choice of indeterminate individuals” (viii). Stripping the individual of their gender, in some cases switching it, in other instances failing to realize that the intersexed can fully embody two genders (I hesitate to say both because the idea of only two seems radically dismissive of much of the transgender or intersexed populations), only perpetuates the idea that conformity is crucial and that any deviation is wrong or corrupt. For the intersexed then, it seems impossible to argue for the legitimacy of the self when all medical evidence and contemporary cultural experience points to the contrary. How does one reconcile the validity of his or her—language functions in a limited, two gender system—life without invasive medical intervention in the face of literature, medical and otherwise, which considers them a tragic accident?

The answer is found in fictional accounts and actual stories of many who have lived through such terrible circumstances, the most famous of which may be the memoirs of Herculine Barbin, an acknowledged influence on 2002’s *Middlesex* by Jeffrey Eugenides. Herculine Barbin was a French hermaphrodite born in 1838 whose memoirs Michel Foucault shared with the world in 1980. The book remains part medical journal, part heart-wrenching story, and part gender scholarship as Barbin, who goes by the name of Alexina until it is changed to Abel as an adult, is introduced as a girl and has a gendered identity that initially seems to match her designation. Showing hints of difference but no signs of distinct maleness, Barbin attended an all girls’ boarding school, which proved to be a convenient situation for several of the homosexual relationships that

she developed throughout her time there. Despite an affection for young women, there was little suspicion that Barbin threatened anything other than a conservative view of sexuality, although she was aware of the fact that she did not completely fit in with her peers. She recalls while away at school obtaining her teaching certificate: “I would have preferred to be able to hide myself from the sight of my kind companions, not because I wanted to shun them—I liked them too much for that—but because I was instinctively ashamed of the enormous distance that separated me from them, physically speaking” (26). Alexina goes on to expand on the difference, and what she describes are male secondary sex characteristics.

The wealth of information on Barbin’s condition and the framework for the historical shift in the handling of and understanding about the intersexed come as a result of the extended first person narrative Barbin left behind. She literally wrote herself into existence after that existence as a girl was questioned by a society that should have had no authority to threaten it. Found after the suicide, her autobiographical events were first presented by Michel Foucault in 1980. Included alongside her emotional memoirs, a first-hand account of what it means to be on the cusp of fitting in, only to have that and all hope yanked away, readers will find an introduction by Foucault, a telling chronological account of the plight of the intersexual over centuries as well as an explanation of the historical shift, a regressive turn from full agency, to forced reconstruction, to medicalization of intersexed individuals. Furthermore, Foucault’s inclusion of medical documents of Barbin’s exam and autopsy in *Herculine Barbin* reveals the medical specificity that seems to be so crucial to the topic of gender in recent

years. Readers will not see a painstaking construction of Barbin's gendered identity in the book because for the first half of her life, that identity was not in flux. However, as with many intersexed individuals, puberty initiates a chain of events that make any other tumultuous coming-of-age narratives pale in comparison. What readers receive in *Herculine Barbin* is instead the feeling of empathy for the young girl. Her gendered identity shifts abruptly; she goes from female to male in an instant. We could say she is "born twice" as Cal, the fictional intersexed character and narrator in the critically acclaimed *Middlesex* (2003), will declare of himself over two centuries later.

Eugenides's novel has much in common with *Herculine Barbin*, though the two texts differ in their specific ends and, most significantly, in their genre and narration. Eugenides tackles a much lengthier and complex story in his novel. The narrator, Calliope, who later becomes Cal, begins by explaining his unusual medical circumstances. Readers learn that there is a mutated gene on his 5th chromosome, which has resulted in his being male all along, but appearing as though he were a woman. Cal goes into greater detail. He informs us the doctor who diagnosed his condition knew "of my XY karyotype, my high plasma testosterone levels, and the absence in my blood of dihydrotestosterone" (413). Eugenides makes a crucial distinction here, including that the doctor assumes Calliope is a male, but that "did not mean that I had a male gender identity" (413). The separation of sex and gender identity is key to the concept of self-identification. Cal, then, traces his mutated gene through his ancestry, across the Atlantic Ocean, as his Greek grandparents, Desdemona and Lefty—who happen to be brother and sister—unknowingly carry the mutation through Ellis Island and on to

Detroit. He tells of the Stephanides family's ups and downs, their pride in their Greek heritage, his parents, Tessie and Milton, second cousins though they are unaware of that fact too, his brother, affectionately referred to as Chapter Eleven throughout the book, and his conception, birth, childhood, second birth, and adulthood. Eugenides doesn't present all this information in chronological order, though, as the entire story, even the bits that precede Cal's birth by multiple decades, are told by him after he has uprooted himself, moved to Europe, constructed then embraced his maleness and attempted to make sense of his life. The resulting narrative is an engrossing story that presents identity as a process to be determined, no different than ethnicity. In fact, the two means of identification, gender and ethnicity, are closely related in Eugenides's novel, as multiple characters attempt to reinvent themselves throughout the narrative.

Middlesex, for all its similarities to *Herculine Barbin*, presents a more inclusive story. However, both main characters, Calliope/Cal and Alexina/Abel, present a first-person account of their surroundings and, more importantly, themselves. The pictures painted before puberty are much alike in these two works as both "girls" seem to look the same, feel the same, and function much the same way as their peers. There was little reservation as Calliope explains, "I was brought up as a girl and had no doubts about this" (226). Like in *Herculine Barbin*, the certainty of Calliope's gender for over a decade of her life is juxtaposed with the experimentation of her sexuality. An experimental stage that began as a young child with a classmate name Clementine Stark shows hints of the split between body and identity that will haunt Calliope for the

remainder of her life. In this way, Calliope becomes the perfect expression of the Cartesian dualism, which Descartes is famous for advocating in the seventeenth century.

Descartes proclaims that the “soul’s immortality is to form a concept of the soul that is as clear as possible, and entirely distinct from any concept of the body” (10). Descartes continues to situate the mind and body as separate entities, demanding that we “must conclude that all things we clearly and distinctly conceive as different substances, as mind and body are conceived, are indeed substances really distinct from each other” (10). His campaign that the soul and body function independently of one another lays bare the struggles of the intersexual. Calliope and Barbin must create their identities in spite of their bodies, but the irregularity of those physical entities in no way detracts or informs the minds of Calliope and Barbin. Descartes found, “the corruption of the body does not cause the mind to perish” (11). Such sentiments find validity in the constant fight for these texts’ main characters to etch out their way of being in their respective worlds.

Unexceptional in their bodies but already different in their budding sexualities, Barbin and Calliope, the latter in particular, do not necessarily relate their homosexual behavior to any greater deviance. For that matter, they don’t even necessarily reconcile these early sexual encounters as anything even remotely related to sex. For example, Calliope is innocently propositioned by Clementine. The friend asks, “Do you want to practice kissing?” She admits she doesn’t know quite how to respond. She describes the split between body and mind. She confesses, “somewhere below this, my heart reacting. Not a thump exactly. Not even a leap. But a kind of swish, like a frog kicking off from a

muddy bank. My heart, that amphibian, moving that moment between two elements” (265). The “two elements” which she refers to here are emotions rather than kinds of being, but nevertheless, there is an element of foreshadowing involved. This becomes further highlighted in the unknowingly honest articulation of Clementine’s reaction, “You’re the man” (265). Less an instance of foreshadowing than an innocent statement made in response to Calliope’s lip service, the charged proclamation becomes a reprimand resulting in the accidental articulation of the heteronormative desire for one to do gender correctly. Despite acknowledging the amphibian like heartbeat, Calliope confesses, “I was aware that there was something improper about the way I felt about Clementine Stark, something I shouldn’t tell my mother, but I wouldn’t have been able to articulate it. I didn’t connect the feeling to sex” (265). In her memoirs, Barbin describes similar excitement in her first of several homosexual relationships.

Much like Calliope’s early relationship with Clementine, Barbin and a classmate, Lea, spent a great deal of time together and the careful detail in which Barbin describes the girl exudes love as well as lust. She claims, “I could have wept for joy when I saw her lower toward me those long, perfectly formed eyelashes, with an expression as soft as a caress” (10). Barbin continues to depict the relationship, but makes a similar allusion as Calliope to the fact that it lacked for her any connection to her impending physical situation. She recalls, “[T]he accents of that beloved voice echo deliciously in my ears and make my heart beat faster; they recall to me that happy time of my life when I did not suspect either the injustice or the baseness of this world” (13). The similarities of these two situations extend beyond the specifics of the attraction to include, tellingly I would

argue, the disconnect between sexuality and gender identity. The latter quote offers a glimpse of the dual nature of desire for Barbin; on one hand, she loves Lea for the young woman she is and on the other hand, she desires her for what the girls' relationship could mean for an uncertain Barbin. Less significant in that the two characters have much in common, as it has already been noted that Eugenides was quite aware of Barbin, is the fact that both representations reverberate the lack of a desire to reconcile their gender and sexuality.

In many respects, including the main characters' drive to define themselves in the face of an other, an urge often reflected via homosexual desire, Eugenides's story is similar to *Herculine Barbin*, a debt which the author acknowledges in several ways. Many of the other specifics of Barbin's life and subsequent story coincide with the Eugenides's novel. This is less coincidence than an acknowledgement of the importance of the first book, arguably the source text for the later novel. The works have also been compared by critics. A blurb included in the paperback copy of *Middlesex* pays homage to Barbin and her collected memoirs: "Not since Michel Foucault's *Herculine Barbin* two decades ago has there been such a sustained first person narration about the coming of age of a hermaphrodite," and Eugenides makes textual reference to Barbin in an early chapter. Cal explains, "When this story goes out into the world, I may become the most famous hermaphrodite in history. There have been others before me. Alexina Barbin attended a girls' boarding school in France before becoming Abel. She left behind an autobiography, which Michel Foucault discovered in the archives of the French Department of Public Hygiene." (19). Cal goes on to explain the relationship between

the texts, “Her memoirs, which end shortly before her suicide, make unsatisfactory reading, and it was after finishing them years ago that I first got the idea to write my own” (19). In as much as the two stories overlap, they are not identical. Their difference is in part a result of the nearly two-century gap in their iteration and their respective genres. Nevertheless, both texts present a society wherein the availability of a third sex is impossible, and both depict protagonists who flee that society in order to escape a rigid two gendered system. While attempting to function in it, both Calliope and Barbin attempt to fill in their anatomical gaps by way of sexual or pseudo-sexual relationships.

Their split between gender and sexuality is significant; the two, like race, ethnicity, and nationality, to name a few, are important to categorizing the self, but they are different in that sexuality refers to who one desires and gender, when examined critically, refers to what one desires to be. Making the distinction between genders with regard to the impact that desire for another person has on the subject’s desire to be is indicative of the heterosexual matrix, an idea in part developed by Judith Butler, which states that what one is inversely relates to what one desires. This understanding signals a sense of straight sensibility in these two otherwise queer texts. Calliope and Barbin may be intersexed, but their sexualities, unlike their bodies, rarely, if ever, seem to be ambiguous.

Barbin’s memoirs speak candidly of her life-long attraction to women. Ironically, this tendency should have made her forced and abrupt transition from female to male potentially easier, if we are to assume a heteronormative relationship between desire for another and self-identification. Barbin’s desire would match her sex as far as the general

public and the church was concerned. As a young teenager already expressing a feeling of difference, she recounts her attraction to Theela, a female classmate. “From time to time my teacher would fix her look upon me at the moment when I would lean toward Theela to kiss her, sometimes on her brow and—*would you believe it of me?*—sometimes on her lips” (27). Of a later less childish relationship with a girl named Sara, Barbin admits, “What I felt for Sara was not friendship; it was real passion” (48). It is the relationship with Sara that prompts Barbin’s first flirtation with being the opposite sex; she momentarily identifies with the opposite gender in her longing for a relationship with Sara. Barbin declares, “I sometimes envy the lot of the man who will be your husband” (50). Butler explains the complex relationship at play between the body, desire, the other, and the self, all of which combine to inform one’s gendered identity. She asserts in *Undoing Gender*, “The particular sociality that belongs to bodily life, to sexual life, and to becoming gendered (which is always, to a certain extent, becoming gendered *for others*) establishes a field of ethical enmeshment with others and a sense of disorientation for the first-person” (25). The first person would in this case be Barbin, but she is unable to separate herself from the object that she desires. The intertwining of the self and the other is not to suggest that we are what we do not desire, but instead implies the complications that can arise when we jump too quickly to a relationship between gender and sexuality.

Middlesex, like Barbin’s memoirs, discusses at length the budding sexuality of its main character. Calliope, who also attends an all girls’ school, has several seemingly homosexual relationships before having one brief, yet complicated, sexual encounter with

a young man. The emphasis we see placed on relationships in both *Herculine Barbin* and *Middlesex* can be attributed to the enormous role desire has on subject formation. This is not only the case in desire for the other, but also an issue regarding the desire we have as individuals to feel desired by the other. For some, this play between feelings contributes to the way we feel validation of ourselves. Butler notes, “despite one’s best efforts, one is undone, in the face of the other” (*Undoing Gender* 19). “Undone” here supposes that the other has the ability to “do” the speaker. Doing, we may assume, brings into being, which we can then attribute to the creation, or solidification of one’s identity. That is to say that for the struggling self, Calliope for example, an identity that remains in flux can only be made certain by the recognition of another. The individual’s construction of gender over time is important, but must at some point be legitimized by some vestige of the outside world; very often this takes place in the romantic or interpersonal exchange between two individuals.

Desire and subject formation become crucial to Calliope and also becomes a play on language as a chapter titled “The Obscure Object” becomes a key moment in the construction of the character’s complicated identity. This building of identity closely corresponds to what Lacan refers to in his discussion of the mirror stage occurring in early childhood. He explains the importance of the moment of misrecognition for the confirmations of one’s own subjectivity and the role both the other and desire play in subsequent identity formation. According to Lacan, “It is this moment that decisively tips the whole of human knowledge [*savior*] into being mediated by the other’s desire, constitutes its objects in an abstract equivalence due to competition from other people”

(7). The Object, then, a young classmate of Calliope's with whom she becomes immediately enamored, serves as the mirror whereby Calliope initiates a crucial component of her own identity construction. She recalls, "I watched her in class and I watched her outside it, too. As soon as I arrived at school I was on the lookout. I sat in one of the lobby's yellow wing chairs, pretending to do homework, and waited for her to pass. Her brief appearances always knocked me out" (324-325). The passion that Calliope expresses here, in conjunction with the formative power of the gaze upon the body explained by Butler in *Undoing Gender*, cement the Object as the desired goal. She becomes the other, which, in turn, becomes the means whereby Calliope understands herself. Butler states, "The body implies mortality, vulnerability, agency: the skin and the flesh expose us to the gaze of others but also to touch and to violence" (*Undoing Gender* 21). Perhaps it is less Calliope's erotic desire *for* the object than the femaleness *of* the object that Calliope craves. It is hard to say if Calliope is gravitating to what she wants to be or what she actually finds attractive in another.

Calliope's desire for unequivocal femininity stems from her longing to embody those traits. A similar situation occurs as Cal finds himself in the lustful beginnings of a potential sexual relationship. He has become relatively accepting of his body, different and somewhat androgynous he finds similar qualities in Julie, though he does not notice them at first. Julie, who originally assumes Cal is gay, confesses, "I'm always suspicious, being the last stop" (184). Cal is unaware of her implication. She continues, "Haven't you ever heard of that? Asian chicks are the last stop. If a guy's in the closet, he goes for an Asian because their bodies are more like boys" (184). This passage has

the obvious implications of appearance, performance, and sexuality, but what is most telling is the way in which desire to be manifests itself as desire to have.

As Foucault explains in *The History of Sexuality*, there is an intricate relationship between the lack and desire with which Calliope seems to struggle. He notes that “the law is what constitutes both desire and the lack on which it is predicated” (81).

Therefore, Calliope is not only cognizant of the otherness of the Object, but she is aware, perhaps subconsciously, of that which the Object possesses. This possession then, the attraction to the object, becomes an urgent need for Calliope as it exacerbates her own lack, further amplifying the role lack plays in not only subject formation, but sex as well. Foucault finds the two to be entwined. He says, “sex to be governed by the interplay of whole and part, principle and lack, absence and presence, excess and deficiency, by the function of instinct, finality, and meaning, of reality and pleasure” (*The History of Sexuality* 154). That is to say, the way in which certain factors in identity construction work together, sometimes merely in their omission, impacts our subjectivity much in the same way that the Object and her relationship with Calliope affected the young intersexed girl. The interplay between the subject and object, the self and the other, are further highlighted in passages to come. We learn in the chapter immediately following “The Obscure Object”, “Tiresius in Love” that the Object is, in effect, Calliope’s undoing. It is in the Object’s presence, thinking about being with her, then actually being with her sexually, that sends Calliope into a moment of transcendence, a moment at which she begins to learn the reality of her true self.

It is literally Calliope's desire for the young girl, then, that serves as the impetus for the construction of the self. However, it is less a desire to possess the other person than it is a desperate need to understand or recognize the self. Lacan explains a similar scenario wherein the subject questions the validity of the object, when the subject "ends up recognizing that this being has never been anything more than his own construction [*oeuvre*] in the imaginary and that his construction undercuts all certainty for him" (42). If Calliope were to question what she mistakenly recognizes as desire for her friend, known only as the Object, then she will inevitably question the validity of her own identity. What began as infatuation, moved to ambivalence, and shortly turned to passion. Calliope recalls: "I felt a wave of pure happiness surge through my body. Every nerve, every corpuscle, lit up. I had the Obscure Object in my arms" (339). We see early in their relationship, such as it is, something between a friendship among young girls and a budding romance between young women, the emergence of Calliope's journey to true personhood via her relationship with the Object. She recounts, "I sat astride her, on the saddle of her hips, and started with her shoulders. Her hair was in the way, so I moved it. We were quiet for a while, me rubbing, and then I asked, "Have you ever been to a gynecologist?" (347) Readers, of course, are aware of what will happen if Calliope makes it to the appointment she is inquiring about—she never does—but it is during the eroticization of the Object, in the midst of Calliope's lust, where Calliope's truth first threatens to expose itself.

Although Calliope has been experimenting with childhood friends for sometime now, she is, until the summer she spends with the Object, a virgin. However, during the

month long vacation she has with the Object and the Object's family, including her older brother, Jerome, everything changes. Her sexual status and her gendered identity shift. In a retaliatory gesture, Calliope begins to flirt with Jerome. The Object is otherwise engaged with another young boy and Callie is jealous. The foursome venture into the woods and amid drugs, alcohol, and hormones, seem to exhibit some very poor judgment. In a cabin with two cots and some blankets, both couples smoke more, drink more, and engage in sexual activity. Calliope is far more interested in what is going on between the Object and her boy of the moment than she is concerned with what is happening on her own cot. It is during this sequence that Calliope begins to understand more of what is going on than she feels she should know. We find ourselves almost at the mercy of an omniscient narrator as Calliope questions, "Did I see through the male tricks because I was destined to scheme that way myself? Or do girls see through the tricks, too, and just pretend not to notice?" (371) This is the first instant that the overlap of Calliope's conscious mimics the overlap of her anatomy.

Calliope describes the experience of being with Jerome as disagreeable. She acknowledges, "Behind my impassive face my soul curled up into a ball, waiting until the unpleasantness was over" (373). The following events are a mixture of actual anguish and imagined ecstasy as Calliope floats between her own body and the body of Rex Reece, the boy who is on the other cot with the Object. Calliope confides, "I entered him like a god so that it was me, not Rex, who kissed her" (374). She also provides details of her interaction with Jerome, though the tone is much more detached. "I was simultaneously aware of both make-out sessions" (374). This unique position is

described as empowering, not crippling. Calliope finds comfort in her mock heterosexual encounter only insofar as it capitulates to societal norms. She is completely nonplussed by any and all of Jerome's actions. However, she takes great pleasure in the seduction of the Object. She expresses her delight at examining the Object's body, specifically her breasts. "I saw them; I touched them; and since it wasn't me who did this but Rex Reece, I didn't have to feel guilty, didn't have to ask myself if I was having unnatural desires" (375). Calliope is aware here that she is not capitulating to the "heterosexual matrix," the concept that gender, sexuality, and desire must relate in a particular way to be acceptable. Her relief at being able to explore the Object while under the protection of anonymity signals her understanding of the prescribed norm, as does her admission of having "unnatural desires." Assuming these feelings are "unnatural" privileges gender over actual attraction.

Calliope does eventually re-enter her own body, though only because of the calamitous events that are taking place. As Jerome enters her, Calliope begins to understand herself. It is only during a breach in the borders of the body that any progress can be made in the penetration of Calliope's true identity. She announces, "Pain like a knife, pain like fire. It ripped into me. [...]I gasped; I opened my eyes; I looked up and saw Jerome looking down at me. We gaped at each other and I knew he knew" (375). This moment of literal recognition in the face of another is akin to what Butler addresses in *Giving an Account of Oneself*. She explains, "One can reference an 'I' only in relation to a 'you': without the 'you' my own story becomes impossible" (32). For Calliope, Jerome's presumed recognition allows her to understand her own situation. She projects

her reality onto him, so that she can see herself. “[F]or the first time [I] clearly understood that I wasn’t a girl but something in between” (375). However, Calliope’s assumption is wrong; Jerome has no idea what has just happened and has no idea that anything is wrong. She has misrecognized herself and, in a Lacanian sense, Eugenidies has allowed Jerome to be her mirror. He is only the catalyst for Calliope to understand herself. He is the other through which she can truly see what she is. Calliope deliberately places herself in the position of the object by allowing her relationship with Jerome to reflect her own gendered identity. By becoming an object, she allows herself to be consumed by another, in this case the Object, which she has long desired. Lacan explains, “the subject makes himself an object by displaying himself before the mirror” (42). Calliope displays herself via Jerome to gain the attention of the aptly named Object. The explanation lends itself to confusion as the orientation of the subject and the Lacanian clarification overlap linguistically; however, the near continuous reference to subject and object also serve to reinforce the sophistication that Eugenides’s text invites.

The need to define the self in the face of the Other becomes a crucial problem in both texts because the other remains cognizant of a framework wherein the intersexed cannot be the third category that Fausto-Sterling declares necessary. The collective other mandates conformity, a conformity that the intersexual body cannot possibly adhere to, at least not without extensive medical intervention. For Barbin, such intervention was not even possible and what solutions were available, the renaming and reclassification of gender, were not viable resolutions. The shame that Barbin felt from the public nature of her re-gendering permeates her memoirs. She laments the loneliness and misery that

preceded her death. “My God! What remains to me then? Nothing. Cold solitude, dark isolation! Oh! To live alone, always alone, in the midst of the crowd that surrounds me, without a word of life ever coming to gladden my soul, without a friendly hand reaching out to me!” (92). The injustice done to Barbin was a result of a desire on society’s part to fit difference into boundaries which cannot possibly contain it. The current trend seems even more invasive, though, as many doctors manipulate the body in order to make it appear definitively male or female.

Desire, then, with regard to the construction of the gender identity of intersexual individuals functions in three main ways: desire to be accepted by others in society, desire for the other, and desire to be desired by the other. This complex system of want, need, and identity construction mandates that the self is in a state of constant creation. Each relationship fills some hole in the intersexual’s life. For Barbin and Calliope, the desire for the other is trumped by the desire to be wanted by the other, as that is what would truly signal a society that completely understood the circumstances of the androgynous individual. As such, the intersexual’s plight is closely related, albeit exaggerated, to the circumstances of any person going through the ups and downs of puberty. This fact highlights the coming-of-age narrative of both *Herculine Barbin* and *Middlesex*. By employing this well-known genre, the authors of these works inadvertently situate their characters much like every other tormented teen. The undergirding normalcy of each text presents an informative, compelling story that resonates with anyone who has ever felt the overwhelming desire to fit in.

Barbin must not only deal with the way others treat her, she must define her being and her existence by way of what she perceives as others' responses to her. When those responses change, a direct result of her changed classification from female to male, she swirls in a spiral of depression and self-loathing. What has changed is not her body, but the way that others perceived that body. The other becomes more important than the self, which can be a dangerous situation. The reliance on others results in Barbin's rejection of almost all people and, by extension, a rejection of her very self. On this phenomena Butler comments, "The 'I' has no story of its own that is not also the story of a relation—or set of relations—to a set of norms" (*Giving an Account of Oneself* 8). No matter how difficult or counterproductive depending on the other to validate one's identity is, this is a trap into which many people fall.

The restrictive view that a person only meets the standards of personhood if they are entirely male or entirely female is also problematic in that it precludes the androgynous person from being human. To align ourselves with the doctor in *Herculine Barbin*, we must emphatically answer the questions posed by Judith Butler in *Undoing Gender*. Most importantly, Butler inquires "What might it mean to undo restrictively normative conceptions of sexual and gendered life?" (1) and whether or not gender is "automatic or mechanical" (1). There is fluidity between the genders, which leaves ample room for any overlap or in-between. However, without acknowledging this liminal space, we restrict the natural order of gender and identity, privileging instead an artificially created sense of order.

Because the intersexed individual is neither definitively male nor female, they most closely align with the transgender population. Some intersexuals express this sense of “simultaneous being” as magical, including Cal. He remembers from a very young age, Calliope had “the ability to communicate between the genders, to see not with the monovision of one sex but the stereoscope of both” (269). With her conscious following the liminalness of her body, Calliope seems to embody what Halberstam finds to be true of transgender populations. She says, “Transgender may indeed be considered a term of relationality; it describes not simply an identity but a relation between people, within a community, or within intimate bonds” (49). Calliope’s situation then straddles the relationship between both sexes. Eugenides represents Calliope’s overlap by presenting her as having a somewhat androgynous physical appearance. A similar case occurs in *Herculine Barbin*.

There is little distinction between not being able to tell the gender of an individual and a constructed sense of ambiguity in both books. Calliope recalls the style of the 1970s as playing a crucial role. “The early seventies were a good time to be flat-chested. Androgyny was in” (304). This androgyny relates to what Halberstam explains as a positive idea in current culture. She finds, “The gender ambiguous individual today represents a very different set of assumptions about gender than the gender-inverted subject of the early twentieth century; and as a model of gender inversion recedes into anachronism, the transgender body has emerged as futurity itself, a kind of heroic fulfillment of postmodern promises of gender flexibility” (18). She is ultimately referring to the mass marketing campaigns of large companies and the rise of the

rejection of the adherence of labels dealing with both gender and sexuality. The idea of gender flexibility harkens back to Emily Martin's findings that "[s]ome have claimed that the body as a bounded entity is in fact ending under the impact of commodification, fragmentation, and the proliferation of images of body parts" (543). Indeed, the same ideals that are used by the Gap to sell jeans, that we are all basically the same, which can be seen by the general depiction of bodies as similar regardless of gender in their recent commercials, are the cause of violence and murder in the lived population. The inability to determine definitively if a person is female or male has amazing profit potential for businesses and dire consequences for people. Halberstam illustrates a similar scenario: "Promoting flexibility at the level of identity and personal choices may sound like a postmodern or even a queer program for social change. But it as easily describes the advertising strategies of huge corporations like the Gap, who sell their products by casting their customers as simultaneously all the same and all different" (18). If this is the case, Cal should be the spokesperson for the Gap. Being the same and different, part Cal and part Callie, should capitulate to the ideal first established in Greek mythology. Unfortunately the lived reality is the threat of violence and the feeling of isolation.

According to many scholars, the construction of identity formation is not something that has to do with the body either as it is born or what becomes of it after any kind of transforming surgery. To be clear, the body as an entity is significant, but not a key component in identity formation. If this were not in fact the case, people like Barbin would be able to understand that their anatomy did impact their gendered identity. However, Barbin's identity seemed to be high-jacked by her body, complicated by her

tissues. She felt like she was a woman; she had constructed over time a feminine gender, but upon discovering certain truths about her body, she was forced to alter that gender. The transformation, as it were, was never successful. Her suicide proves that one's body is not the be all and end all of their gender. Instead, the physical self is merely a container for the collected feelings, emotions, desires—both for and to be—and does not always correlate to the person who inhabits it.

CHAPTER TWO

ORGANS AND ANDROGYNY: THE CORRUPTING FORCE OF MEDICAL INTERVENTION ON INTERSEXUALITY

Science and medical intervention are complicated concepts for the intersexual. However, both *Middlesex* and *Herculine Barbin* take a critical approach as they present characters that are ultimately destroyed by the act of or the threat of medical intrusion. Similarly, these texts address the complex role the body plays with regard to identity construction for Calliope and Barbin. By presenting characters who respond negatively to the breach of the most sacred of borders—the body—these texts extend the critique present in Foucault’s notion of “scientia sexualis,” as well as the opposition to “the widespread practice of performing coercive surgery on infants and children with sexually indeterminate or hermaphroditic anatomy in the name of normalizing these bodies” that Butler addresses in *Undoing Gender* (4). By establishing a medical need to either reclassify or surgically alter one’s gendered identity, the medical community sends a potentially damaging message to the intersexual. However, the intersexed person should be granted immunity from the intrusive medical eye, as the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* does not include intersexuality as a situation falling under the broad heading of “Gender Identity Disorder.” Intersexuality is listed as a “condition in which an individual shows intermingling, in various degrees of the characteristics of each sex, including physical form, reproductive organs, and sexual behavior” (DSM-IV 825). The manual mandates that a diagnosis of cross-gender identification, which the intersexual often faces as they are raised as one gender and later choosing to associate

with a different one, “is not made if the individual has a concurrent physical intersex condition” (576). The manual’s recognition that intersexuality is a physical condition which requires different handling than that of the transsexual or transgender individual is a big step toward the intersexual being free of the heavy hand of science. To refrain from listing a natural, albeit rare, condition as a disease requiring intervention, the manual more closely aligns the intersexual with the definite ends of the spectrum that they traffic between.

For many who are not intersexed, the body is a key element of identity formation. However, if intersexuals’ actual bodies are medically altered before they reach the age of recognition, they are forever stripped of the rights granted the rest of the population. The intersexual child loses the ability to construct its identity in conjunction with their original physical markers of gender, thereby setting the stage for a constricted, contested, or stunted sense of self. Intervention, then, must be viewed in concert with the need to preserve the sanctity of the body as an entity and a vessel, the place of origin of the self and the containment of that identity. Barbin and Calliope’s strong negative reactions as they face their respective scientific communities exemplify the primal drive for the protection of the body, irrespective of the changing attitudes regarding gender and its fluidity between the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

For years Barbin lived an unremarkable life until a thorough medical examination in her early twenties yielded devastating results. During that exceptionally thorough exam, the doctor discovered, among other things, “ovoid bodies and spermatic cords found by touch in a divided scrotum” (128). Despite the presence of female organs, the

doctor echoes what Foucault announces as the sentiment of the time. On his findings the doctor vows, "These are the real proofs of sex. We can now conclude and say: Alexina is a man, hermaphroditic, no doubt, but with an obvious predominance of masculine sexual characteristics" (128). Barbin had no option; she had to legally change her sex. Her identity was no longer her own and was thus forcibly high-jacked along with her agency in the matter. Perhaps as a combined result of immediate upheaval, loss of all she knew and loved, and the shame, isolation and feeling of near instant dislocation familiar to many intersexuals, Barbin was unable to successfully deal with her circumstance. It appears from her writing that Barbin was deep in despair. She writes, "Go, accursed one, pursue your fate! The world that you invoke was not made for you. You were not made for it. In this vast universe, where every grief has its place, you shall search in vain for a corner where you may shelter your own" (98-99). An exposition in pain, this passage indicates it is not surprising that Barbin killed herself shortly after being stripped of the only life she had known for twenty years. She hints at the impending disaster: "This incessant struggle of nature against reason exhausts me more and more each day, and drags me with great strides toward the tomb" (103). In reality, Barbin never successfully lives as a man. Once learning of her physical condition and being forced to live as something she was not, Barbin began what can only be described as a two-year process of death.

Barbin's medical condition was magnified by the attitudes of gender in the nineteenth century. There was a strict adherence to two genders, with the undergirding belief that the ambiguous body often hid the true self. As per the time, Barbin was

immediately re-categorized as a boy to match her physical manifestation and the life she constructed as girl was ripped away. She was left to embrace her new sex without much preparation or support. The medical intervention, in so far as we can call it that, aimed to help Alexina. However, such firm ideas and categorizations had the reverse effect. Instead of her reclassification as male allowing her to remove the stigma that others assumed she felt as a result of her difference, that renaming introduced a schism between her own self identification—woman—and the identity others placed on her—man. In her writing, Barbin acknowledged the effect she had on others. She notes, “I was aware that my condition was causing anxiety” (39). However, she correctly never assumes medicine will provide an answer or a remedy.

Barbin fears science can do nothing for her. In a way, she is right. The scientific community did little more than set a trap for individuals like Alexina at that time. Foucault explains in his introduction to *Herculine Barbin*, “In the Middle Ages, the rules of both canon and civil law were very clear [...] the designation ‘hermaphrodite’ was given to those in whom the two sexes were juxtaposed, in proportions that might be variable. In these cases, it was the role of the father or godfather (thus of those who ‘named’ the child) to determine at the time of the baptism which sex was going to be retained” (vii). The naming of the child became, in effect, the enactment of gender. That is to say, by calling one a boy or a girl, they became, in the eyes of the church and the law, that which they were declared to be.

The strict either/or categorization of the Middle Ages is not far removed from contemporary standards wherein the intersexed child is often immediately medically

altered to conform to others' ideas of gender norms. During corrective surgery, the intersexed is patched up, cosmetically shaped to fit into the restrictive male or female mold. Science has defended the stance that this is what is best for the child, but in many ways it is no more helpful than the response Alexina received in the 1800s, immediately after the infamous examination in which she describes herself as less than cooperative. She recalls her attitude toward the doctor and the experience: "It displeased me to see him initiate himself into my dearest secrets, and I answered in not very restrained terms certain of his remarks that seemed to me to be a violation" (78). Barbin's lack of cooperation is understandable. Despite the ease with which the medical community plays God, identification cannot be achieved by someone else's command. Barbin's terrible ordeal indicates that it is impossible to cure a problem, in this case the excruciating pain of an infected internal testicular mass, by changing the information written on a birth certificate. Gender is too complicated an identity marker to be switched on a whim by outsiders who have not constructed it over time.

Middlesex also deals at length with the period both directly before the narrator, born Calliope Stephanides (he changes to Cal upon finding out that he is intersexed), learns of his condition and after he elects to forgo surgery and live as a male. In essence, Calliope opts to recreate her gender assignment by way of performance rather than surgically maiming her ambiguous genitalia to conform to a reified gender norm. On the surface, then, Eugenides seems to be offering a more positive outcome for those who embrace their intersexuality; however, in reality, the improvement is on the strength of the individual more so than on any external forces.

There is an increasing sense of the urgency in contemporary medical intervention. For example, in cases such as Calliope's, there is an undercurrent of the immediacy for alterations that has developed in recent years. As decades pass and science is able to reconstruct and recreate, the tendency is to "fix" things that are not broken. We see this idea broached in conversations between Calliope's parents in which they lament, "'Dr. Phil should have noticed when Callie was born' [...] 'This whole thing could have been fixed back then'" (403). Barbin, on the other hand, did not face a medical community that wanted to "fix" her, but rather a society that sought to label her differently. However, their renaming lacked any significant performativity and Barbin was left with a conflicting sense of self-constructed identity and perceived identity.

As the medical community gained the ability to "fix" what society perceives to be broken, or rather what they do not understand or what threatens their own sense of selfhood—constructed in binary terms—the mutilation of intersexed infants became common. Surgical intervention was not available during Barbin's life, but Calliope was most certainly at risk of being surgically forced into a body for the sake of conformity and appearance at the sacrifice of any real chance at the organic construction of an accurate gender identification. Both girls escape any permanent medical intervention. They also feel a similar urge to tell their stories.

Herculine Barbin and *Middlesex* both dramatize the need for intersexuals to create their identity independent of society. *Middlesex* emphasizes this need by foregrounding the construction of several identities. For example, the construction of an imaginary narrative, with a desire that both its creation and subsequent performance will

situate it as actual, is prevalent in *Middlesex*. Desdemona and Lefty know that as siblings they should not marry; however, they concoct a story wherein they have just met onboard a ship bound for America. A smaller background story to the larger deliberate construction of gender, the grandparents' fictional relationship serves as a reinforcement of Butler's idea that "stylized repetition of acts" will result in an actual shift in fact. Desdemona and Lefty feel that if they participate in the theatrical representation of courtship, it will in some way situate them as lovers rather than siblings. Likewise, if Cal wears uber-masculine clothing and has a rock hard, gym-chiseled body and writes what is, in effect, his memoir from Cal's point of view, he will create his maleness.

Sadly, Barbin is never able to successfully create maleness via dress or otherwise, nor does she make any real effort to conform because despite the type of organs that are housed in her abdomen. Alexina Barbin is, by most measures, a woman. The gender identity prevails over chromosomal facticity. The maleness others impose on her proves to be too much for Barbin to take. She is unable to accept her life as a man; despite a physical presence of male tissues, Barbin cannot fathom living as a man and is unable to successfully do so because regardless of biology, her gendered identity was, is, and will remain female. To understand the level of displacement Alexina and the many who challenge a binary understanding of gender like her must have experienced, one must first understand the complexity that is gender.

Gender is multifaceted; it can be indicative of sexuality, though homosexuality, bisexuality, and transgenderism complicate the idea that the two are inextricably linked. Gender is not a medical, biological fact. It is instead a social construct (Butler *Bodies*

that Matter 1). However, such a construction can be a direct influence of desire, not only sexual desire, but the desire to be accepted. To further complicate matters, desire to be accepted is often more related to what is expected by the outside world, doctors, parents, and institutions, than the individual whose gender is at stake. It is the desire or need of society for the child to capitulate to their sense of normal. Such is the case with the intersexed child. Intersexed children cannot be easily grouped as either sex or gender. In many instances, the genitals, the main way to determine a baby's biological sex, are examined briefly, which causes many conditions to go untreated, at least until further complications arise. These complications often begin at puberty. There are an increasing number of births after which an abnormal genital presentation is cause for action in today's world of modern medicine. However, the sense of urgency with which medical intervention is often afforded the intersexual is astounding as many of the complications are psychological and not physical. According to sociologist Sharon Preves, "[E]stimates indicate that approximately one or two in every two thousand infants are born with anatomy that some people regard as sexually ambiguous" (2). With an occurrence similar to well known diseases like cystic fibrosis and Downs syndrome, it is hard to believe that the condition is still so stigmatized (Preves 3). The medical community often pushes surgery as the only viable option for the intersexual. They are so quick to force the child into one of two acceptable genders that they often fail to inform the parents of the details of the case. The tendency toward surgery creates a situation wherein intersexuality becomes invisible, hidden by shame and surgery. Perhaps a greater

understanding and increased visibility of intersexuals who don't undergo intervention will relieve the stigma of the third sex.

The attempt to impose others' sense of normalcy is problematic and dealing with categories of gender is not different. Whose definition of male is correct? What must one wear to be considered female? Because gender must be constructed from the inside out, it is not reasonable to have views from the outside dictate the identity of the self. Cal echoes this sentiment: "It's a different thing to be inside a body than outside. From outside, you can look, inspect, compare. From inside there is no comparison" (387). Gender is a sliding scale. Likewise, "distinctions between female and male bodies are actually on more of a continuum rather than a dichotomy" (Preves 2). Because the infant male and female bodies are so similar to one another, the physiological shift between male and female is distinguished in several ways: genitals, chromosomes, and reproductive organs. Any and all of these can be vexed in the intersexual, but regardless of the exact breakdown, the desire to classify such individuals as either male or female results in grave complications for them and, in turn, for society who often find it difficult to grasp the concept of a deviation in a two gender system. The fight for acceptance, or adherence to this exclusionary system, often has a negative effect on the individual in question. Isolation, loneliness, and the stigma placed on the intersexed can be a great burden to bear, one that for many, including Barbin, becomes too much to take. However, with an increased availability of literary representations of the intersexed individuals who refuse "corrective" surgery, an alternative way of being is rendered visible.

It is important for the intersexual to be informed of their unique circumstances as early as possible in order to actively construct a gender identity. *Herculine Barbin* and *Middlesex* present the difficulty that masking or overlooking symptoms can cause later in life. Surgery only exacerbates these problems as it temporarily suspends one's sense of knowing. Cal can only exist once Calliope understands who she really is, what her body means, and why her sexual urges are what they are.

The body, the role of desire, and the need for other's sense of conformity all play a vital role in the identity formation of the intersexual, but Cal and Barbin prove that knowledge is most valuable to autonomous existence. Butler asks in *Undoing Gender*, "What counts as a person? What counts as a coherent gender?" (58). At first blush, the questions seem connected; however, to relate them to one another presupposes the validity of the latter issue of coherent gender on the issue of personhood. To go this route, one would have to consider that Barbin, and intersexed individuals like her, do not display a coherent gender based on the western concept of gender as an either/or and male/female split. This is not the case. The very notion of western gender is not the *sine qua non* of division. To return to the characteristic influences on identity, race, religion, ethnicity, and nationality, and—queer theory would have us include sexuality (not to be confused with gender)—we must expand our understanding of these markers beyond the borders of North America and Europe. Western cultures fail to embrace any formal third gender, although they have acknowledged the existence of one for decades. The now somewhat dated, "The Five Sexes: Why Male and Female Are Not Enough" by Anne Fausto-Sterling announces, "biologically speaking, there are many gradations

running from female to male” (20). Though printed in 1993, this language is still not part of the collected consciousness. The refusal to amend the archaic, inflexible, and limited male or female division exacerbates the stigma of the intersexed individual.

People like Alexina are trapped. They, in effect, become imprisoned in their own bodies. Gender is not bound by the facticity of the body, and chromosomes are not as easy to spot with the naked eye. Therefore, the breakdown for others, an inevitable part of the identification process, becomes limited by what they can see. Others notice if the secondary sexual characteristics do not capitulate to the gender assigned at birth long before hormones will alter what is visible. Most often, then, as was the case with Barbin, there are no worries until beginning the winding road through adolescence. During this time of change, the body betrays the intersexed. Often, the intersexual does not know that there is anything different about them, but it is at this time of great transformation that they, as well as those around them, are made aware. As the physicality of the situation becomes increasingly obvious, the very entity that created the circumstance, the body, continually complicates the scenario. The body divulges all of its secret to others. According to Butler, “The body implies mortality, vulnerability, agency: the skin and flesh expose us to the gaze of others but also to touch and violence. [...] Although we struggle for rights over our own bodies, the very bodies for which we struggle are not quite ever only our own” (*Undoing Gender* 21). In this view, the body the intersexed inhabits is not completely theirs anymore. Similarly, the body of any man or woman is not completely separate from the scrutiny of others, but because society has the need for order, they intervene most often when dealing with the intersexed.

The degree of outside intervention has increased over time, partially because there are new and innovative procedures, but also in part because our lives have become more public. Butler finds, “In a sense, to be a body is to be given over to others even as a body is, emphatically, ‘one’s own,’ that over which we must claim rights of autonomy” (*Undoing Gender* 20). However, the rights of autonomy of which she speaks must be understood to belong to the owner of the body, the identity as it were of the physical manifestation of the self. If the individual does not hold the sole rights to the self, either the result of a coerced surgery before the age of consent or due to a forced re-categorization of the self to which the body refers, how can they ever have full ownership?

Prior to the Middle Ages, the idea that hermaphrodites were both sexes was accepted, but during the Middle Ages, others became disenchanted with the idea that any individual could complicate the binary. Foucault explains, “Everybody was to have his or her primary, profound, determined and determining sexual identity” (*Herculine Barbin* viii). The classification of one sex was at odds with the intersexuals’ body. Society was determined to override biology if it threatened heteronormative gender construction. Butler relies on religion to articulate the intricate relationship between gender and sexuality. In the past, the involvement of the church has been of particular importance especially since doing one’s gender wrong, an easy slip for outsiders to perceive of the intersexed, resulted in what religious institutions supposed as homosexuality. Butler explains, “In the international debate, the Vatican denounces the use of the term “gender” because it either (1) is a code for homosexuality, or (2) offers a way for homosexuality to

be understood as one gender among others” (*Undoing Gender* 183). If, then, an individual who identifies herself as a woman, regardless of the physical manifestation of a feminized body or female genitalia, decides she is attracted to women and that decision is founded on the incidence of male hormones or the presence of a male chromosome, that woman would be attracted to women thereby threatening the heterosexuality of the body. However, this read assumes that the relationship of gender and sexuality is clear-cut. Butler asserts that “the correlations between gender identity and sexual orientation are murky at best: we cannot predict on the basis of what gender a person is what kind of gender identity the person will have” (*Undoing Gender* 79). Similarly, we cannot pretend that the relationship between desire to be of one gender and sexual desire for a particular gender are linked in any consistent or meaningful way. This vexed relationship is highlighted in the sexual orientation of Barbin and other fictional representations of characters like her.

Though current trends differ from the Middle Age’s highly religious and heteronormative drive for certainty in gender, traces of that need to capitulate to an idealized standard delineated by the heterosexual matrix can be seen in the influx of surgery performed on intersexed infants. In these surgeries, doctors often remove or remodel the proto-genitalia, the site of either the clitoris or the penis, to make it appear more normal. What often results are “bodies in pain, bearing the marks of violence and suffering” (Butler *Undoing Gender* 53). The forced assignment of a definitive sex precludes the idea that there can be a third sex, or as Fausto-Sterling suggested nearly twenty years ago, as many as five. It says more about the fears of the many than the

medical circumstance of the few. In fact, these days, intersexed people are rarely given the chance to live as they were born, to embody the overlap of male and female, to embrace the intersection of the dichotomy. Many critiques focus on the medical intervention that has become commonplace in births of intersexed children and the sociological experiments conducted on those who promised to be a medical gold mine for researchers such as Dr. John Money, who was involved in the infamous David Reimer case. Money felt that a male child who had lost his penis in a freak accident during a routine circumcision could be re-gendered as female at a young age. Money was wrong and although David was reared as a female child for years, he self identified as male, going so far as having reconstructive surgery at the age of fifteen.

Middlesex, like *Herculine Barbin*, is openly critical of the medical and scientific communities. Both texts illustrate their dissatisfaction by presenting characters that are willing to pay dearly for escaping the confines of science. Eugenides provides a first hand account of the medicalization of the intersexual as Calliope is taken to the Sexual Disorders and Gender Identity Clinic, where she is interviewed, poked, prodded, and humiliated. Preves explains how often this occurs: “Repeated genital exams are part of medical protocol for assessing intersex patients’ physiological development” (66).

Herculine Barbin is equally critical of the medical profession, although the historical limits of the nineteenth century affect the specificity of the text. *Barbin* shows an insensitive doctor whose advice does little more than seal the fate of the poor girl whom he is attempting to negate. The doctor is shown as insensitive and harsh. He responds cavalierly to Alexina’s mother, “It’s true that you’ve lost your daughter, [...] but you’ve

found a son whom you were not expecting” (78). The trouble with this statement, aside from the obvious lack of bedside manner, is that we witness a fundamental problem with the idea that reclassification can “fix” anything. First, there is nothing broken. Secondly, there is no either/or here, no daughter or son, because both can coexist, and indeed have for some time in Alexina’s case. Each text tackles the medical “treatment” available for the intersexual by highlighting the ineptitude of the entire field.

The skepticism each text brings to the available means of medical intervention illustrates that the problem is not the specific type of intrusion, but rather society’s desire to intervene in any capacity. *Middlesex* and *Herculine Barbin* reinforce the attitudes of many intersexed people today. Current trends among the intersexed population show that the “coercive acts of ‘correction’ undergone by intersexed infants and children [...]often leave those bodies maimed for life, traumatized, and physically limited in their sexual functions and pleasures” (Butler *Undoing Gender* 6). The overall sentiment regarding intervention in these texts is that it is unnecessary and irresponsible as the foundation of identity does not seem to benefit from a forced and unnatural categorization. For example, Barbin experiences far more trauma after a medical intervention than she does during the time of uncertainty immediately prior to her diagnosis. She confides early on, “Science can’t explain me” (39). She is correct. Science can’t explain her and when it tries, its only success is to castigate her from her own life. Likewise, *Middlesex* is openly critical of any scientific intervention. There are similar declarations from the narrator; furthermore, for the most part, Eugenides sustains a continuous criticism of the medical community by presenting it as inept.

Extra-textually, the discussion of the validity of science in the realm of identity construction has also been of interest to scholars. Foucault addresses such concerns in the *History of Sexuality* as well as in *The Birth of the Clinic* (1989) in which he unfavorably describes the impact that the medical community and science in general has had on sexuality. Foucault finds no reason for science to delve into such a personal and delicate facet of human development, but feels its presence has done more harm than good. He declares, “Knowledge invents the Secret” (*Birth of the Clinic* 201). Abrupt and stinging, his observation is applicable to the intersexual. As the medical community has grown more adept at “fixing” these children, science has succeeded in drastically reducing the number of children who understand their circumstances. The scientific community values appearance over truth; if an intersexual child appears to be male, what is the likelihood of anyone ever informing them of anything different? Foucault is equally critical of the medical community’s ability to self-regulate. He explains that “doctors would once again be able to control their own recruitment; they would be reconstituted as a body capable of defining their own criteria of competence” (*The Birth of the Clinic* 93). Foucault’s critique of doctors and their scientific practices is echoed in *The History of Sexuality* wherein he describes the dangers of examining scientific knowledge amid the repression of the Victorian era’s strict morality. In his discussion of sex and sexuality, Foucault finds little room for any accurate depictions or medical fact. Foucault finds the field “made up of evasions since, given its inability or refusal to speak of sex itself, it concerned itself primarily with aberrations, perversions, exceptional oddities, pathological abatements, and morbid aggravations” (53). The two options that Foucault

leaves available then with regard to knowledge, science, and visibility are that either knowing something causes it to become repressed and hidden, for instance, the urge to surgically alter the intersexed or to abruptly and definitely reclassify them before society, and ideally the intersexed child, becomes aware of their circumstance. In the alternative, medical knowledge exacerbates the difference of such individuals and the intersexed is only seen as a perversion of the normal order. Either way, medical intervention, indeed, medicine and science in general can be negative influences on our knowledge of the intersexed. Power lies not in medical knowledge, but in the psychological understanding, offered as an alternative to science in Eugenides's novel.

Desdemona, Calliope's paternal grandmother and maternal aunt, is known for her ability to predict the sex of a child long before birth. Calliope explains the scene, a preview of the competing beliefs of identity that will permeate the remainder of the book. She describes her grandmother's past successes in determining an unborn child's gender: "Up until now Desdemona had had a perfect record: twenty-three correct guesses" (5). Calliope continues to divulge the details of what will be the conflict that defines the rest of her life. "After some hesitation, the spoon swung north to south, which meant that I was going to be a boy" (6). To consent that this result was a success fails to take into account the intricate work that goes into the construction that is gender. Although Tessie, Calliope's mother, begrudgingly begins to agree with Desdemona, Milton, Calliope's father, argues the spoon's findings. The ensuing conversation echoes the sentiments of many people involved in the debate over intersexed surgery. Calliope relates the remainder of the situation as Milton voices his opinion. "[H]e marched into the kitchen

to tell his mother that, this time at least, her spoon was wrong. ‘And how you know so much?’ Desdemona asked him. To which he replied what many Americans of his generation would have: ‘It’s science, Ma’” (6). At the most basic level, there is an obvious critique here of what is intuitive and what is determined by science. What Eugenides continues to do, though, is remain consistent with his criticism of the medical community portraying doctors as either unskilled or insensitive and medical explanations for natural occurrences rudimentary at best. The representation of science in terms of Calliope’s conception serves as another significant, if not comical, way to show the idiocy of medical intervention. Furthermore, the idea of intervening by any means is presented as utterly distasteful, as Tessie, Calliope’s mother, says, “To tamper with something as mysterious and miraculous as the birth of a child was an act of hubris” (9). To an extent her sentiments, when broadened, apply easily to the same matter just after birth.

Just because medicine can alter an infant’s sex shortly after birth doesn’t mean that should become common practice. To allow, or condone, the alteration of the intersexed infant’s body just after birth, negates any chance that child has of accurately determining its own gender identity. The intersexed, unlike any other person, transgender and transsexual included, must often construct their identity not as a result of their body, either in opposition or accordance, but completely independent of that body; however, performing surgery to eradicate any traces of one’s true gender or, the intersexuals’ overlap of genders, problematizes the role of the body in any identity formation. Butler also addresses the role of the body in *Giving an Account of Oneself*.

She explains, “To be a body is, in some sense, to be deprived of having a full recollection of one’s life” (38). Similarly, the restrictiveness of trying to fit that body into one of two arbitrary slots becomes further problematic for the intersexed individual. It is then nearly impossible for the intersexed to remain cognizantly intact during the tumultuous time of the re-construction of their gendered identity. Case in point, Barbin’s inability to find life worth living after her forced re-categorization. Butler continues to speak of the need for consistency in the construction of identity, a consistency that neither Barbin, nor her more recent fictional counterpart, Calliope, had. Butler notes this necessity in the relation of the self to the other. She questions, “Where and who is the other and can the notion of the other comprise the frame of reference and normative horizon that hold and confer my potential for becoming a recognizable subject?” (*Giving an Account of Oneself* 23). The simple sentiment hearkens back to the aforementioned role of desire and the complex question is a familiar one: to what degree is the self influenced by its relationship to the other?

Barbin could not construct a subsequent identity after her mandated change in gender classification, which ultimately resulted in her inability to see herself as a living entity. For Barbin, the perceived rejection by the other was profound enough to force her to question her very existence. If others cannot respond the way that Barbin wants, if they cannot treat her like the same girl she was, she would clearly rather not respond to them at all. Barbin laments, “Profoundly disgusted with everything and everyone, I endure the injustices of human beings [...] I have shut myself up in a retrenchment that is proof against their attacks. There is an abyss between them and myself, a barrier that

cannot be crossed...I defy them all” (102). Unfortunately, Barbin’s behavior is to be expected. Though prior to any of the scholarship on the formation of identity, what Barbin expresses in grief-filled words coincides with Butler’s argument in 2004. She finds that “despite one’s best efforts, one is undone, in the face of the other” (19). To relate this important sentiment back to the other, arguably crucial, component to self-identification, the body, we should again examine Butler’s findings. Barbin is betrayed by her body which signifies that she is a male, but Calliope, on the other hand, is vindicated by her body, which tells her she is not fully female.

The body, which is a key component to most forms of personal identification, proves indeterminate at best for the intersexual. Barbin, Calliope, and the estimated four percent of the population who are born with ambiguous genders fluctuate between approval of the other and recognition of the self to create a coherent gendered identity. One’s own identity is often the basis of a balance between desire for and desire to be.

However, because the intersexual is often secure in their sexuality, Cal and Barbin are clearly attracted to women, they focus on the latter—desire to be. This desire to be can manifest itself as the desire for the other, and while it can be couched as erotic desire, such as in the case of Calliope and her friend Clementine, the real want lies in the possession of a non-ambiguous body. For the intersexual, having such a body, either by direct ownership or the indirect possession of a lover, they are able to guard against other people’s questions regarding their gender and, by extension, their identity. If others recognize the intersexual in a particular way, as a man or as a woman, then they are able to feed off that categorization and feel as though they embody a more stable identity.

The drive for a stable physical characterization of the self is often strong enough to affect the intersexuals' desires, but it is not powerful enough in the cases presented here to make surgical intervention or gender re-classification seem a viable option. Barbin and Cal do not let their wants for acceptance override their need for a self constructed and accurate gendered identity. Their bodies remain different and that difference makes them significant. If we look at Barbin and Calliope, their bodies in no way prove pertinent to this key construction. Difference and the opinion of the other are far more important to identity formation. Perhaps the body and its relationship to gender, then, in these two texts is only interesting insofar as that entity denotes difference.

The physical body serves as an indicator for the destabilization that demarcates their overall strife. The body of the intersexed cannot be easily classified as male or female, yet the assumption is to align these individuals to a particular gendered identity. If the body does not naturally conform, why would society think that the mind can? The intersexual, then, physically manifests the boundaries that they continually blur. The body houses male and female tissue, chromosomes, and genitals and the psyche holds a similar combination. The mind is neither completely male nor female; it is most similar to Virginia Woolf's perfect androgynous being. However, the actual mix of tissues, chromosomes, and genitalia in both Cal and Barbin do little more than exemplify the burdens they must sort through. Because living as a third sex is not actually a viable option in their respective societies, Cal and Barbin must exist inside bodies which make it impossible to capitulate to societal norms. Furthermore, Butler notes, "To be a body is, in some sense, to be deprived of having a full recollection of one's life" (*Giving and*

Account of Oneself 38). This statement can be taken literally when applied to Barbin's struggles. When broken down into a restrictive categorical segment of the population—man versus woman, Barbin literally chooses to cease to be. In this tragic case, to reduce the self to a physical entity, a body, crushes and destroys the larger being, the person. Barbin confides, "Reality is crushing me, is pursuing me" (104). The reality of which she speaks is the physical emphasis that has been regrettably placed on her by others. She cannot flee the physical and so she must escape her life.

Calliope has a similar need to divorce her body from her mind and to conjure up a new identity in opposition to the other, though in her case, the other need not be all that different. As we see with Calliope's shift to Cal, the other cannot, in any meaningful way, characterize the self. One's actual gendered identity should not be constructed by any other individual, it should be reliant only on the self. Individuals must rely on the self as divorced from outside influence. It was Barbin's inability to make this leap that lead, in part, to her death. Desire still plays an important role in the formation of that self-identification, but we must remember that the desire that is most important is the desire to be accepted by the other. As for the desire for the other, there is a split between romantic or erotic desire, neither of which is as important as the desire for recognition, recognition for the way others see the individual to coincide with the way the individual sees themselves. This, of course, lends itself to the primary narcissism often influential in sexual desire. Many people look to see themselves reflected in their partners; the intersexual is looking for the very same thing, but for validation rather than desire. The justification that Barbin and Calliope seek from others cannot be filled by their body

alone; they must be able to relate that body to something else, to show how it is both different from and aligned with other beings who are deemed more stable than they feel themselves to be.

In presenting texts that are openly critical of science in general, it stands to reason that Eugenides will have a similar response when a particular type of science is at stake. By presenting somewhat unrelated criticisms of science, readers see Calliope as a victim of the inept medical field. Eugenides incorporates discussions of the tangible body, but quickly situates his larger criticisms of science as a whole.

Desdemona, the superstitious and stubborn matriarch of the Stephanides family, is said to be “a sick person imprisoned in a healthy body” (20). Though dealing indirectly with Calliope, the comparison is still pertinent. The split between mind and body is a significant one, which has been of consequence to the intersexual community. If the body is different, does that mean the mind should immediately follow? Is gender construction an act of defiance in the body of the intersexed, even more so in the body of the transgendered individual, or an act of acquiescence. *Middlesex* describes the body as the origin of the attraction between Desdemona and Lefty; the incest, which sets the subsequently significant events in motion begins with lust, physical and as such clearly related to the body, rather than deep love, which we could assume would be rooted in the mind. It is Desdemona’s body that ignites the chain of horrible events; however, it is in Lefty where we see the first bridge in the gap between body and mind. “His mind and body had become one entity, thinking one thought, bent on one obsession” (27). In a narrative that takes as its fundamental concern the construction of gendered identity,

irrespective of the androgynous body, any comment of the marriage between the two most related entities in that fundamental construction is telling. There are numerous references to the idea of the mind body split, including, Calliope's aunt's/grandmother's idea that "the soul didn't enter the body until the child started speaking" (133). Despite punctuated comments throughout Eudenides's text, the ultimate observation is manifested in the main character. Cal's very existence without any surgical intervention is stronger than any dialectical stance. The body and the mind are separate entities and the latter need not consult the former in making a claim regarding the identity of the whole, illustrating that the intersexual is the literal embodiment of the duality which Descartes advocated in the seventeenth century.

The idea of the body as a veritable anchor, which goes against Descartes's assumption, is problematized in *Middlesex*, but the concept is also seriously questioned in recent scholarship. Emily Martin notes in "The End of the Body?" that "the body's products all flow out over the edge of the body, through one orifice or another, into the outside world" (544). Though she is speaking most directly of bodily fluids here, semen, blood, etc., the findings hold true if we include identity as a construct, which cannot be contained by the boundaries of the physical corpus either. Barbin finds comfort in death because it is at the time of death that she will shed the constricting vessel which has damned her to a life of solitude and misery. She speaks fondly of death: "I feel that in an obvious, terrible way, and how sweet, how consoling this thought is for my soul. Death is there, oblivion. There, without any doubt, the poor wretch, exiled from the world, shall at last find a homeland, brothers, friends. And there, too, shall the outlaw find a place"

(103). To be whole again, Barbin must detach from her body. In the act of molting her skin, she will attain the freedom of personhood. Like Barbin, Cal too feels betrayed by his body; however, his realization comes after college, long after he has made the mental shift from female to male. He confesses, “I tried to forget my body by keeping in motion”(320). However, for the intersexed, the before and after, the shift in gender identity, are often equally stressful, particularly with regard to the intersexual’s relationship with their body. We can see this in Calliope who was a slave to her body. She didn’t understand its nuanced differences and feared that it would eventually be her undoing. Calliope recalls puberty, “I looked down at my own body. There it was, as usual: the flat chest, the nothing hips, the forked mosquito-bitten legs” (283). Similar scenes of personal terror in locker rooms and the tension at feeling left behind are reflected in what the medical community notes as justifiable grounds for genital mutilation.

What is different, though, in Eugenides’s text is the honest, retroactive appraisal of the intersexed body, not as it fails to comply with the normative constructs of femininity or masculinity, but as a complete third entity. Furthermore, the dreaded locker room scenes, which the medical community has become so desperate to prevent, can be overcome by the intersexed if that individual is confident in their body, whatever that body may be. Cal fondly remembers the intricate details of what made Calliope unique and, for that matter, makes him unique, too. He recalls Calliope’s “crocus” fondly. The divorced narrative provided in these descriptions is as interesting for the way it is told as it is for the information given. There is a sense that Cal no longer has the same

apparatus; however, fleeing before surgery, we are to understand that physically, nothing has changed for Cal, save some costuming and cosmetic details. The sensations the crocus provides are pleasurable, “Sitting in class with a book in my lap or riding home in car pool, I’d feel a thaw between my legs, the soil growing moist, a rich peaty aroma rising, and then—while I pretended to memorize Latin verbs—the sudden, squirming life in the warm earth beneath my skirt” (330). The description is adequate and the use of the word crocus in place of a bolder, more recognizably gendered word is helpful insofar as it situates Calliope and her desire as androgynous. However, the inclusion of the “skirt” is overtly feminine and serves as a signpost for readers. Furthermore, the declaration that “The crocus was part of her body” allows readers to view a split between Cal and Calliope. We know the body is the same, but that body has undergone a new identity solidifying it as second in importance regarding one’s identity.

Because the body of the intersexed is literally part male and part female, there is no better encapsulation of an androgynous being. Calliope then, as well as Herculine Barbin, represent the overlap that has been at times honored—ancient Greece—and at times—our current Western milieu—feared and hated. Also embodying a degree of androgyny, albeit often temporarily and by choice, is the transgender or transsexual individual. These people are the subject of 2005s, *In a Queer Time and Place*. In it, Judith Halberstam addressees the brutal murder of Brandon Teena, a transgender female-to-male. Ultimately killed because *she* was too masculine, Teena’s tragic death highlights the insecurity that is the underlying reason for so much of the violence toward not only transgender and transsexual people, but the intersexed as well. Halberstam says,

“Even less time has been spent in consideration of these subjects who remain outside the ambit of the medical and the psychological productions of identity” (44). Individuals like Barbin and Calliope can be understood to be similar to transgender people. Indeed, Eugenides dabbles in the distinctions between being born intersexed and a transsexual’s decision to transition later in life at the end of his novel, but the transgender person remains slightly different than the intersexual in that their body is naturally held in a liminal state that the transgender person achieves only after some form of medical intervention. Unfortunately, though, the intersexed are vulnerable to the same hate crimes that Teena and others like him are often the victims of. While living in a park in California, Cal is attacked by group of men. At first they come to beat him up; when they realize, or think they recognize him as a girl, they attempt to rape him, but when they pull down his pants and see an ambiguous organ, they scream, “Jesus Christ? [...] It’s a fucking freak. [...] I’m gonna puke, man. Look!” (476). Cal remembers, “No sooner had the other one done so than he let go of me as though I were contaminated. He stood up, enraged. By silent agreement, they then began to kick me” (476). Butler argues, “This kind of violence emerges from a profound desire to keep the order of binary gender natural or necessary” (*Undoing Gender* 35). The very existence of the intersexed body is in direct conflict with this desire.

Somewhere along the way, society became less accepting of androgyny than it had previously been. The history of the intersexed long precedes the term itself and feelings that swirl around those who are born with ambiguous genitals or uncertain genders face a grimmer future now than they would have in centuries past. Perhaps this

is due to technological advances or the ever-growing rift between those who believe issues regarding gender are coterminous with a progressive view of sexuality.

Regardless, there is no arguing the fact that dominant contemporary attitudes about intersexed individuals lack any of the mysticism or privilege that they received centuries earlier. According to David Greenberg, in Ancient Greece there was no “compulsion to restrict oneself to one sex” (181). There were similar representations of intersexedness or hermaphroditism in popular literature of the early nineteenth century. For example, in an “1835 novel by Theophile Gautier, one character is described as having ‘the body and soul of a woman, and the spirit and strength of a man.’ She proclaims herself ‘a third sex which has not yet got a name’” (Greenberg 187). From this vantage point, we see an additional type of difference in the sexes, not only one of physical significance.

Greenberg argues, “The concept of psychic hermaphroditism, referring to someone whose “soul” is not completely male or female, was but a short conceptual step” (189). The mental state of ambiguity has been theorized by Virginia Woolf. She claimed that the androgynous mind was the most perfect being but, at the same time, she emphasized the importance of the mind and body working together to form a stable identity.

The idea of an intersexed individual being categorized as such because of a schism between mind and body may be reminiscent of a separate but related category of gender deviation—transgenderism and transexualism, which Halberstam addresses in *In a Queer Time and Place*. She explains, “Baudriallard [...] uses transexuality and, by implication, transgenderism as simply a metaphor for the unlocatability of the body” (99). Such unlocatability is less a literal problem with the whereabouts of the self and is

instead more at odds with the concept that body itself is even an entity that determines the self. This is an idea that the transgender individual has grappled with at length, as they must construct their identities often in opposition to any physical manifestations of gender. That is to say, “the transgender body has been theorized as an in-between body, and as the place of the medical and scientific construction of gender, when it comes time to picture the transgender body in the flesh, it nearly always emerges as a transsexual being” (Halberstam 97). Their similarities are helpful to understand the predicament of the latter and, arguably, the stigma attached to the transgender individual can provide insight to the long and complicated road of the intersexed.

Though societal norms seem to have departed dramatically from the concept of an idealized third sex, many who live that experience daily agree with the mysticism that androgyny has carried with it. Tiresius and Hermaphroditus both permeate ancient literature and the former shows up in works that span the ages, from *The Odyssey* to T.S. Eliot’s *The Waste Land*, to *Middlesex*. Tiresius is presented as a blind prophet who is a man-woman. Tiresius’s duality situates him/her in much the same way as the biological facticity of Calliope and Barbin denote them as different, both/and. Hermaphroditus according to legend, is said to be the result of Hermes, the messenger of the gods and Aphrodite, the goddess of sexual love and beauty. The tale continues, “Hermaphroditus, who at age fifteen became half male and half female when his body fused with the body of a nymph he fell in love with” (Fausto Sterling 21). This fantastical explanation was no doubt concocted to describe some actual occurrence; however, the tender handling of the topic barely relates to the ostracization and embarrassment that we have come to

expect of difference in today's society. The idea of simultaneously being of two sexes or two genders has aptly been described as a mythic occurrence by those who do in fact have the physical apparatus necessary to experience it. Calliope finds this duality a moment of transendence; others like her, according to researches, describe it as a similar euphoria. Preves includes similar experiences voiced by several of the intersexed participants in her study of thirty-seven such adults. Robin, one of Preves's interviewees, declared, "I'm both; I'm the yin and yang. I'm the epitome of yin and yang. Genetically I'm male, but physically I'm a woman. So I'm not one or the other; I'm both. And I just feel so powerful in that" (134).

It is a positive move that intersexed individuals are not only dealing with their "conditions" but that they are accepting and thankful for them. There is, after all, little difference in being born male, female, or somewhere along the continuum. However, it is difficult to disseminate this message of affirmation amid a society that has sent negative messages of difference and doctors who continue to develop new procedures which medicalize the identity of the intersexed child. Cal exhibits this medicalized identity by introducing himself to us as chapter number and specific page in Dr. Peter Luce's study. He says, "Specialized readers may have come across me in Dr. Peter Luce's study, 'Gender Identity in 5-Alpha-Reductase Pseudohermaphrodites, '[...] Or maybe you've seen my photograph in chapter sixteen of the now sadly outdated *Genetics and Heredity*. That's me on page 578, standing naked beside a height chart with a black box covering my eyes" (3). The situation that he describes is all too familiar to the

intersexed, whose very identity is constructed, indeed dependent on some type of medical narrative.

The intersexual engages in a complex relationship with its own body, which, in effect, complicates the painstaking construction of self-identity. The blatant criticism of science in these texts draws attention to the increasing problems as medicine advances. In being so quick to remove the excess skin from the intersexual infant's genitals, most closely paralleled in *Middlesex* by the Doctor's proposed surgical intervention of a teenage Calliope, the medical community only takes away from the intersexual, they never build them back up. Noticeably absent from the standard procedure, which Preves explicates in her study, is the tendency of plastic surgeons to construct, at times over-construct, the body in an effort to recreate an individuals' sense of self. Breast augmentation, lip injections, bicep, calf, and butt implants, all popular forms of cosmetic surgery, strive to impact a patient's psychological health by adding to, molding, and manipulating their physique; however, most surgeries for intersexuals, specifically those performed shortly after birth, only remove excess skin from the proto-genitalia. In this way, the surgery done on the intersexed more closely resembles the brutal practice of female circumcision in third world countries than it does any other cosmetic procedure. The two practices may have much in common as a result of society's views on the subjects. In a culture where a female is less than a man, the circumcision is preformed to keep her from experiencing any sexual pleasure. The same risks occur for the intersexual who undergoes genital surgery. Indeed, this is one of the reasons Calliope flees the clinic. Similar results and a similar practice are concerning in that intersexuals should

not be viewed as less than anyone but, by maiming the intersexed in a practice akin to female circumcision, a brutal procedure performed, among other reasons, to minimize the participant's sexual gratification, contemporary western culture is sending a complicating message about power, conformity, and physical pleasure.

CHAPTER THREE

ACTS OF CREATION, NEGATION, AND TRANSPORTATION: THE NEED TO CONSTRUCT ONE'S IDENTITY IN ISOLATION

Despite allusions to the proverbial village, the circumstances for Cal and Barbin seem to suggest that intersexuals must craft their identities in isolation, abandoning any communal organizations and leaving behind both friends and family. This act of self-induced exile, as it were, is of particular interest in *Middlesex* since Eugenides has worked hard to preserve the strong familial ties common among immigrant families in his novel. Nevertheless, Calliope chooses to flee, illustrating the necessity for accurate self-identification to be constructed in solitude. She gives up her family, her friends, her life in Michigan, her very self to become Cal. Though the degree to which her sacrifice is influenced by the intrusion of the medical community's promise to "fix" her remains unclear. Readers experience, via Calliope's narration and painstaking recollection of her research of the term "hermaphrodite" and the act of tracing that term's etymological track back to "monster," a chain of events set in motion that ultimately led to Cal. After psychological testing, interviews, and physical exams, after observing Calliope's mannerisms and probing her relentlessly about her sexuality and attraction, Dr. Luce tells Calliope, "We're going to do an operation to *finish* your genitalia" (433 emphasis added). "Finish" is significant here as the doctor has already explained Calliope's unique physical circumstances. The doctor acknowledges that physically Calliope is a boy, but explains that "in utero, she followed the primarily female line of development. Especially in terms of the external genitalia [...] At puberty the other androgen—testosterone—started to

exert a strong effect” (427). Dr. Luce’s professional opinion is that to “finish” Calliope’s genitals consists of removing the small, underdeveloped penis and creating a clitoris.

The fact that that clitoris will be aesthetically accurate seems to make the projected surgery a success in the doctor’s eyes, even as “finish” implies that he will be completing something that was stunted, which he has already acknowledged is not the case as Calliope is not a female whose genitalia did not develop properly. “Finish” presumes something has not developed yet and will be completed. What Dr. Luce should say is “we are going to *change* or *remove* your genitalia.”

Dr. Luce, though, falls into the same trap as many of the medical professionals who mistakenly privilege conformity and appearance. The doctor explains, “The surgery will make Callie look exactly like the girl she feels herself to be. In fact, she will be that girl. Her outside and inside will conform. She will look like a normal girl. Nobody will be able to tell a thing” (428). Dr. Luce’s solution may be to make sure that other people cannot tell what Calliope is, but her need for self-construction in isolation accomplishes a similar task with far less intrusive means. The desire to craft an identity in solitude allows for the intersexual to streamline the superfluous influences that can complicate that construction. That is to say, without the presence of the other whose desire for and desire of often play crucial roles to gendered identities, the intersexual can form a more accurate and unadulterated opinion about who and what they are.

The actions Calliope takes upon hearing Dr. Luce’s prognosis and plan for surgical intervention seem drastic at first, but when compared to the penectomy Dr. Luce was advocating, leaving behind friends and family seems quite mundane. Calliope

decides to flee after sneaking a peek at her file in the doctor's office. The faux report nearly mimics the actual medical findings included in the last third of *Herculine Barbin*; however, in *Middlesex*, readers are able to witness the potential positives that such blatant truths can inspire. Eugenidides's novel, then, can be seen as a marker of societal improvement; although, such progress must be read cautiously as ultimately Calliope like Barbin still ceases to be and Cal only exists apart from his family, living a lonely and, at times, truly isolated existence.

Dr. Luce's medical write-up pinpoints many of the same physiological markers which Preves mentions account for the majority of surgeries in intersexed infants. The report soliciting surgery includes, "somatic appearance of a penis so small as to appear to be a clitoris" and a "'penis' [that] was slightly hypospadiac, with the urethra opening on the underside" (435). The size and functionality of the "penis," coupled with the concocted admissions of heterosexual desire that Calliope has fed the doctor, lead to his diagnosis. However, other elements of the report are significant, too. Dr. Luce concludes, "To leave the genitals as they are today would expose her to all manner of humiliation. Though it is possible that the surgery may result in partial or total loss of erotosexual sensation" (437). Calliope does not share the doctor's sentiments that others' opinions of her should trump her own pleasure. She leaves.

Calliope escapes surgery, she runs away from her family's hotel room in New York and, most importantly, she abandons her gender. Calliope's shift in identity is a process, one she begins immediately. A seemingly innocuous decision about luggage initiates Calliope's symbolic death: "When they were gone, I got my suitcase from the

closet. Then, looking at my turquoise flowers, I exchanged it for my father's suitcase, a gray Samsonite" (438). Calliope expresses her rejection of herself by way of rejecting everything that represents the femininity she craved for so long. Interestingly, the object that begins her shift, her journey to boyhood is a suitcase, an article indicative of and synonymous with travel. Calliope's purging extends to her clothing and outward appearance. She confesses, "I left my skirts and my Fair Isle sweater in the dresser drawers. I packed only the darker garments, a blue crew neck, the alligator shirts, and my corduroys. The brassiere I abandoned, too" (438). A change in garments signals the beginning of a shifting identity; her next consideration is her gendered behavior and outward appearance. Cal must learn to walk like a boy. He explains the difference, "I tried to keep my pelvis steady now. To walk like a boy you let your shoulders sway, not your hips. And you kept your feet farther apart." (441). Cal seems to embody the Butlerian maxim of performativity in gender construction. His need to walk, dress and behave a certain way serves as a set of repetitive acts that he believes will convince others of his gender as well as solidify that identity for himself.

As readers leave Calliope behind, a significant shift in narration takes place. Cal enters the picture for the first time in this retelling as a third person. The initial recollection includes no "I." Cal is a stranger; he is unfamiliar to Calliope and, as such, alien to readers, signified by the defamiliarization in the narrative. Cal's first venture is to Ed's Barbershop where he is introduced in the third person. This presentation makes it hard for readers to be sure that Cal is, in fact, the individual who has just walked in the shop: "[s]tanding inside the door but looking as though he might flee back out of it was a

teenage kid, tall, stringy” (441). The kid’s identity becomes clear only after Cal describes his telltale possession introduced a mere two pages earlier. Readers are reminded, “the kid’s suitcase was big and gray, a businessman’s.” It is at this point we recognize Cal as the tall teenager in question. Perhaps the introduction occurs in this manner because Cal feels like a stranger inhabiting Calliope’s body. As he makes changes in dress and mannerisms, he begins to feel more secure, more concrete, and the “he’s” shift to “I’s.”

After shedding Calliope’s appearance, Cal begins his journey into solitude and away from all that is familiar. For Cal, more important than initiating a distance from family and familiarity is forcing a separation with Calliope. He struggles with this and recognizes that it will be a process, one he begins with the masculinization of his appearance. He glances at himself in the mirror of the barbershop still seeing Calliope: “there she was, for the last time, in the slivered glass: Calliope. She still wasn’t gone yet. She was like a captive spirit, peeking out” (442). By leaving behind Michigan, Dr. Luce, Tessie, Milton, the Object, and most importantly Calliope, Cal is free to craft a new identity, an identity that provides a clean backdrop for Cal to fully create himself, though rather than transitioning from female to male, Cal manages to successfully transition from female to intersexed, living as a man, but embracing the third sex to which s/he belongs. This is a crucial distinction that Herculine Barbin never makes as she cannot embrace any overt maleness despite her forced reclassification. Though like Cal, Barbin also reverts to an introverted existence, maintaining rather than crafting what she feels to be her true gendered identity—woman. Barbin is able to reject her forced maleness by

rejecting the society that imposes that classification. The strict binaries that both Cal and Barbin face make it mandatory that they escape the people who impose such a limited understanding of gender.

The beginning of what will become the ultimate end for both Calliope and Barbin starts when they learn that their gendered identity is not a simple male/female dichotomy. They discover their intersexuality and attempt to adjust to the limited, mostly forced, social options available to them during their respective moments in history. The way in which they handle such a delicate situation differs dramatically, but what is perhaps most interesting when juxtaposing the two texts is not how they differ, but rather how they are similar. The way in which *Middlesex* and *Herculine Barbin* are alike when specifics are overlooked and generalities favored, is remarkable. Calliope and Barbin are both skeptical of science, both seem to crave in others the physical certainties which they desire to possess themselves, both are limited by their bodies yet reliant on them for truth, and most importantly, both must develop their selves in seclusion. The most significant difference, though, is in Cal's ability to transition far more successfully from a female to a male as compared to Barbin's. However, upon closer examination, it becomes apparent that many of the same needs were at play for both intersexuals.

For example, when given the information about her condition, Calliope only ends her life as Calliope; she doesn't end it altogether. Calliope, instead, runs away. She runs westward in a literary convention dating back to Mark Twain's *Huck Finn* and commonly linked to finding the freedom in the frontier to be one's true self. The West has long been indicative of the frontier, the land where rules are more lenient, lax, where lines are

blurred. Huck confesses, “I reckon I got to light out for the territory ahead of the rest, because Aunt Sally she’s going to adopt me and sivilize me, and I can’t stand it” (405). The West, as a departure from civilization, a freer climate is precisely why Calliope escapes there as well. After tracing the etymology of “hermaphrodite,” Calliope stumbles upon the word “monster.” Her fear and the anticipated ostracization cause her to flee. Calliope leaves her family a note declaring, “I am not a girl. I am a boy” (439) and lives like one from that time forward. The following chapters are labeled, “Go West, Young Man” and “Gender Dysphoria in San Francisco” evoking a literary convention of escape and confinement. The move west then is not only a journey to a frontier not yet fully explored, but an underlying exaggeration of the self, “as the intersection of ways of being—for to pass is not to inhabit one place but to move between, to carry with one’s self the very other that one desires to be” (Caster and Andrew 138). The journey, then, the literal westward move that Calliope makes and the passage into seclusion on which Barbin embarks, before later escaping from her own body, exemplify the larger excursion to find one’s self within the physical entity they escape with.

Herculine Barbin presents a similar scenario, an intersexual character that must construct identity in solitude, but Barbin does so with far different motivations and a drastically dissimilar outcome. Like Cal, Barbin also became divorced from her life as a female upon learning the truth about her intersexuality. Importantly, her initial alienation was not voluntary. Barbin was forced to live in seclusion; however, the next iteration of that isolation, her suicide, was a conscious decision.

Though these texts and characters cannot be aligned seamlessly, the actions of Calliope and Barbin immediately following their moments of recognition have much in common if we are to view Barbin's suicide as a metaphorical exile as well as a final attempt to align the body and the psyche, a constant struggle for the intersexed. Her body, so far as it was classified, did not exist to her. She was listed as man, but she never felt, acted, or wanted to be one. As such, her male body was not real or tangible, therefore the act of killing herself was merely a formality. By ending her life, Barbin outwardly performed the negation of the self, which she had already been struggling with internally. Her mind was female, but her body was labeled male making the only alternative to alleviate the conflict of classification to either reconcile the difference or eliminate the competition. Barbin chose the latter and ended her own life rather than to exist in a state of constant internal conflict. The division between mind and body, an independent need for the soul to be a separate entity, situates Barbin's suicide as a self-fulfilling prophecy. Her body was not present under the classification of Abel and so her soul was terminated as well.

Barbin's death can be viewed then in several ways; it can be read as an act of defiance, an act of affirmation, or an act of despair. In all situations, the drastic measure shows agency, which was a continual struggle for Barbin who was stripped of the ability to decide the most fundamental of things—who she was. In this way, killing herself was an act of preservation. By refusing to live under the confines of a restrictive and repressive exterior categorization, Barbin's suicide can be seen as an act of affirmation, such acts are not unheard of in subjects who feel a devastating loss of control. Glenn

Muschert discusses the paradoxical relationship between creation and destruction in “Self-Affirmation through Death: A Contribution to the Sociology of Suicide through Literature.” He finds, “We actually see the individual...seek to strip himself of his personal being in order to be engulfed in something which he regards as his true essence” (298). “True self” should not be confused with “true sex,” which Foucault discusses in relation to the changing attitudes toward hermaphroditism in the nineteenth century. The true self that Muschert references is likely the gendered identity that Barbin felt she was—female—and sought to not necessarily preserve, but cling to throughout her isolation until ultimately affirming that identity in her final, charged action. Barbin’s case proves that the “true self” and “true sex” are at odds with one another. Her situation also highlights the drastic actions that one is willing to take when they are forced into a categorization, in this instance a gendered identity, that they feel is inaccurate. Rather than living as something she was not, Barbin chose not to live at all. Perhaps, then, her suicide was more escape than affirmation. Muschert finds that the ultimate goal in suicides like Barbin’s is to send a message. He declares, “Some forms of suicide are meant to be self-affirming despite the apparent irony that self-killing might appear to lead to the annihilation of the self. Suicide can be a ‘means of taking control over one’s self’” (299). Barbin’s death serves two functions, one practical and one ideological.

Literally, her suicide is an act of erasure. Barbin felt that no one understood her; she was forced to live a life that she felt was a lie and, as a result, made a conscious decision to permanently escape the society that had shunned her. Barbin did not have control over the loss of her female gender categorization, but she was in total control of

her own annihilation. Her suicide, then, is the clearest expression of what she felt was her metaphorical death—her reclassification as male. By stripping her of agency in creating her own gendered identity and then leaving with that identification, Barbin was forced to enact her autonomy more violently. However, to the outside world, Alexina had already died, resurrected as Abel, there was no longer a female Barbin. Barbin on the other hand did not agree with this re-classification and by alleviating her pain and enacting her own agency also sutured others' perception—Alexina does not exist—with fact.

Butler reminds us that we must read acts such as Barbin's suicide as acts of what could be considered affirmation, cautiously. She says, "Survival is not the same as affirmation, but there is no affirmation without survival (unless we read certain suicidal acts as affirmative)" (*Undoing Gender* 195). For Barbin, the act of suicide was coupled with the act of composition, erasure complicated by creation. Barbin left what Foucault terms over a century later, "a document drawn from the strange history of our 'true sex.' It is not unique, but it is rare enough. It is the journal or rather the memoirs that were left by one of those individuals whom medicine and the law in the nineteenth century relentlessly questioned about their genuine sexual identity" (*Herculine Barbin* xi). It is the act of telling her story that immortalized the tortured Barbin; an act of telling that becomes likened to the coming out of so many people who blur the "straight" lines set up by a society unwilling to accept difference. In the strictest sense, the creation achieved by writing and the negation that occurs after suicide function in similar ways; both actions drastically alter one's subjectivity. The act of writing her memoirs created a hyperreal sense of self for Barbin, while her death obviously minimizes any possibility

for continuing subjectivity. Each action is also a means to communicate, albeit one way communication, to others the most personal of feelings. In recounting their story, Barbin and Cal lay the groundwork for others to relate to them and for their struggles to live on in language.

Barbin is not the first or last intersexual, using the term loosely so as to include transgender individuals, for whom the need to recount their story is so urgent. The act of speech is in itself a declaration. The voice, then, only in this case a manuscript, a written affirmation of the self is crucial to the construction of identity. On some level, the urgency of the telling may be related to the need to capture their truth, but it may more readily be understood to be an exaggerated existence. When something is written down, it becomes a more permanent extension of the self than the body is. The desire to overpower the body with the personal narrative then is an understandable drive for individuals whose body has, in effect, betrayed them.

Though they may differ in the specifics of their constructed identities, the transgender and the intersexed are alike in their need to tell their stories. Halberstam explains, “transsexuals become real literally through authorship, by writing themselves into transition” (52). This is also the case with the intersexed as they write to construct their complicated existence, an issue that has more to do with agency, action, and affirmation. We can see the fulfillment of this urge in Barbin’s extensive memoirs and also in the fictitious narrative of Cal, who at one point confesses, “It occurred to me today that I’m not as far along as I thought. Writing my story isn’t the courageous act of liberation I had hoped it would be. [...] Still, you can only do what you’re able. If this

story is written only for myself, then so be it” (319). Cal’s next statement, an address to the reader, “I feel you out there, reader” (319) mimics what Butler notes can be an important part of such an identity creation process. She explains in *Giving an Account of Oneself*, “If I am trying to give an account of myself, it is always *to* someone” (67). If we assume that like Cal, Barbin’s implied audience is the imagined future readers, we recognize that Butler is right and that any narration of existence must be directed to someone. These characters then, who cannot rely on the physical body to confirm their somewhat tortured existence instead depend on the evasive act of self narration to, in effect, write themselves.

It is urgent as Halberstam explains, for many intersexed to rewrite their stories because the future can be bleak. Barbin, for example, writes a great deal of information before killing herself, but perhaps it was her losing battle with suicide that sped the process up. Halberstam tells us, “The constantly diminishing future creates a new emphasis on the here, the present, the now” (2). For Barbin, there was no future; for Calliope, that future was dramatically changed the day she learned of her condition. There is an urgent need for individuals who blur the boundaries of gender and identity to privilege their story over their body and when they cannot or will not recreate their bodies, they must instead write themselves into being.

The importance of narrative is highlighted by the structure of *Middlesex*. The result of Eugenides’s organization is an all-engrossing middle story with the necessary background and evidence bookended on either side. *Middlesex* though, presents an elaborate tapestry of medical terminology, personal narrative, constructions of identity

and a socio-cultural window into the lives of those who live it amid gender ambiguity. Perhaps even more importantly, Cal, the narrator, spends much of his time providing a detailed recollection of his life as Calliope, but also presents enough information about his newly constructed life as Cal to serve as a sequel to *Barbin*, as it were. The duality of the narrator is something that we cannot access in *Herculine Barbin* as she never fully embraces any other gendered identity. Yet, it is precisely this availability in *Middlesex* that makes the book so sophisticated in its exploration of the intersexual's life. *Middlesex* shows in its nuanced portrayal of Cal and his current construction of identity that it is acutely aware of not only the scientific material, but also the theoretical conversation regarding the lived experiences of the intersexed.

When compared to Cal's delicate, albeit proactive, response to Calliope's extinction, it may seem that Barbin's response to her mandated reclassification as male was drastic. However, such extremes are understandable when we factor in the historical time period, the abruptness of the situation, the cavalier manner in which Barbin's new identity was handled by the diagnostician, and, most importantly, the inability to adhere to a gender to which she did not feel she belonged. The greatest tragedy, then, her suicide, is not a result of difference, it is a direct result of being forced to live as something she was not. David Reimer, the young boy who was raised as a girl for much of his childhood after his penis was accidentally removed, shared this sad fate as he, too, could not embrace a preconstructed gender and also killed himself. In the process, he disproved the idea prevalent in the 1960s that "if a child underwent surgery and started socialization as a gender different from the one originally assigned at birth, the child

could develop normally, adapt perfectly well to the new gender, and live a happy life” (Butler *Undoing Gender* 59). The doctors were wrong and David’s gendered identity, despite him being treated, dressed, and socialized as a girl, remained male. At fourteen, David began living as a male again, and shortly thereafter, his male genitals were reconstructed somewhat in the hopes that he could live a relatively happy life (Butler *Undoing Gender* 60). Reimer, like Barbin, could not negotiate his changing body or shifting identity, and also like Barbin, felt that the only escape possible would be to leave the body behind. We can see how Barbin’s depression and inability to transform herself into a man is directly related to her gendered identity, which is irrefutably female. *Middlesex*, on the other hand, finds a narrator in a very similar situation, though with a crucial difference. Cal’s gender identity, and Calliope’s for that matter, is male.

What Eugenides offers in his well-researched fictional account of a young intersexed character is the move beyond despair that is unattainable in *Herculine Barbin*. Calliope, for all she has in common with Barbin, does not seem to have a strictly female gendered identity. That is not to say she suspected she was intersexed all her life, indeed, she, like Barbin, had no idea until puberty that her anatomy was any more complex than that of other people; there was no reason to suspect anything out of the ordinary, but Calliope and Barbin share the need to escape their current bodies. Barbin does so by taking her life, unable to imagine how to live one as something she is not—male. Calliope does so by cutting her long hair, dressing as a boy, disappearing from her family, traveling across the country, and calling herself Cal. The difference ultimately comes down to the gender identity or the self-identification of both characters. Cal,

unlike Barbin, seems to have little problem classifying himself as male. This further emphasizes the need to classify gender as a fluid entity that for the intersexual, can be determined irrespective of the body.

Despite the work's other overt similarities in their complexity, subject matter, treatment of relative medical intervention, and commentary on the importance of a stable identity, *Middlesex* and *Herculine Barbin* present what seems to be an accurate, albeit depressing, account of what it means to live on the outskirts of normal in the Western world. Cal is able to eventually create a space wherein he feels complete. He is always aware of his past and periodically slips into some of Calliope's mannerisms, but he maintains a completely independent identity that is both functional and sexual. Barbin lacked the ability to create a male identity. Though she was renamed Abel, Alexina remained intact and in control. Rather than make the shift from being female to being male, Barbin chose to cease to be anything at all. Calliope unravels her fate, traces her mutated genealogy, and allows her body and, more importantly, her identity to morph into the man that she realizes she has always truly been. In Foucault's version, readers are given a divided account of theory, with an emphasis on the emergence of the importance of the "true sex," of Alexina Barbin translated by Richard McDougall, narrated in first person, and finally the medical report and autopsy both including intricate details of the metabolic condition of the late Barbin. By presenting this information in a less integrated way, readers' attention is drawn to the emotional impact, the physical difference, and the legal consequences of intersexuality in the nineteenth century. Eugenides's near seamless integration of the same issues can be seen as an

improvement in the presentation of the intersexual's struggle as readers are less aware of the disparate parts which comprise the thematic whole.

When examining the differences in *Middlesex* and *Herculine Barbin*, which also mandates an analysis of the differences in their main characters, what is most striking is not the different genres or what was considered normal at each text's time of creation, but rather the way in which one's ability to live freely in the gender they so choose directly affects their capacity to function. Despite the desire for the public to neatly classify difference and group things that are alike, there is no way for the intersexual to neatly fit into any one box. Therefore, they must often etch out a new box and the help of personal narratives, like Cal's and Barbin's, mimic the meticulous construction of their own gendered identities.

The need to construct a self is closely related to the need to provide a being with a sense of history. Cal, who is only born after the symbolic death of Calliope in a small hotel room in New York City, lacks the extensive history that Calliope enjoys. Cal has no childhood, no first day of school or a Greek Easter with only red eggs and so he constructs a personal narrative, a history via words and sentences to stand in for holidays and family memories. The act of writing, recalling and retelling helps to situate Cal and Barbin as functional people who have a past, present, future, and deserve to be heard. The act of writing is in itself an act of becoming, a creation of sorts, a solidification and preservation of the extension of the self.

A similar practice of self-narration in which Barbin and Cal engage has been encouraged of patients struggling to develop a strong sense of identity for many years.

John E. Toews discusses Freud's suggestion for one of his patents to do the very same thing. Toews finds that the act of story telling could prove beneficial to the subject, particularly if "the telling of stories contained within themselves an analytic perspective on the conditions of their own story-making" (37). To write is to give perspective and to understand often requires perspective, making the stories told by intersexuals like Cal and Barbin doubly effective. Furthermore, the act of writing results in leaving behind something relatively permanent. In this way, writing becomes an extension of the self, fulfilling a function that for many individuals is satisfied by having children. This concern, the cultural expectation and drive to procreate, is exemplified by Tessie, who asks in the doctor's office upon learning of Calliope's complicated diagnosis, "Will she be able to have children?" (428). Her plea is denied. Dr. Luce answers, "I'm afraid not, Mrs. Stephanides. Callie will never menstruate" (428). Because the intersexual is often sterile, the writing they leave behind serves as a makeshift marker of permanence, a self that will outlive the physical body.

Historically speaking, the importance of the physical body decreases as time progresses and as the capability of the medical community to alter that body increases. That is to say, for Barbin, constructing an identity independent of the body was not possible, whereas for Cal, it was an option. Barbin suffers from what Lacan specifies is "a personality that achieves self-realization only in suicide" (8). Perhaps greater possibilities and a lesser reliance on perceived physical limitations is a result of changing social mores. Eugenides comments on the body briefly in what is, at first blush, a seemingly unrelated comment.

In Calliope's case, and later in Cal's, too, the ambiguity causes the physical representation of gender to function much like a blank slate. There is an over-performance of gender both in Calliope's childhood as she is described wearing, "Pink skirts, lace ruffles, Yultide bows [her] hair" (224) and there is the similar exaggeration from Cal as he negotiates his gender and self in Europe. A mother dressing her young child in over-the-top feminine attire is not remarkable, but that same child growing up to do the exact thing with masculine garb to construct his maleness is. Cal informs us during the intermittently dispersed second narrative that his dress is also exaggerated. "The cigars, the double breasted suits—they're a little too much. I'm well aware of that. But I need them. They make me feel better. After what I've been through, some overcompensation is to be expected" (41). In a later description, Cal begins to collapse body and clothing, confessing, "Under the armor of my double-breasted suits is another of gym-built muscle" (107). Butler discusses this reliance on a constructed act or repetition of acts as a means to perform or create one's identity. She declares in *Gender Trouble*, "If gender attributes, however, are not expressive but performative, then these attributes effectively constitute the identity they are said to express or reveal" (192). Dress or, perhaps more appropriately, costumes, as they are described as exaggerated by the characters who wear them, serve as a crucial component to one's gendered performance. Cal also uses the metaphor of clothing to explain his relationship to Calliope, who has not entirely relinquished control of their body. He says, "It's a little like being possessed. Callie rises up inside me, wearing my skin like a loose robe. She sticks her little hands into the baggy sleeves of my arms. She inserts her chimp's feet

though the trousers of my legs” (41-42). The collapsed boundary between flesh and fabric becomes a comment on the way in which for some, the body is little more than a vehicle through which to perform or a forum to construct one’s self.

Perhaps society is regressing. Despite the encouraging testimonies of Robin, one of thirty-six intersexed adults who participated in Preves’s sociological study, and those like her, the intersexed are becoming increasingly singled out. Preves explains the trend: “Deviance has shifted from being cast as sin, to crime to sickness” (33). Foucault addresses the second of these classifications in *The History of Sexuality* wherein he remarks: “For a long time hermaphrodites were criminals, or crime’s offspring, since their anatomical disposition, their very being, confounded the law that distinguished the sexes and prescribed their union” (38). Foucault explains then what people such as Barbin must have felt of themselves, if for no other reason than they challenged what others believed to be rational. We can see the tendency to interpret difference, particularly when it threatened heteronormativity as sin. During the Middle Ages, the church was a key component in public lives and, as Foucault notes, a medical shift, insofar as there was any worthwhile medical intervention at the time. He explains in his introduction to Barbin’s memoirs, “when confronted with a hermaphrodite, the doctor was no longer concerned with recognizing the presence of the two sexes, juxtaposed or intermingled, or with knowing which of the two prevailed over the other, but rather with deciphering the true sex that was hidden beneath ambiguous appearance” (viii). The new notion of the “true sex” is at play today, but strict adherence to this school of thought

makes it impossible to embrace a third sex thereby negating any real progress in the intersexual movement.

Preves refers to deviance as a crime, and there are certainly enough executions to support that statement. However, the crime was thought to occur not in the creation of the intersexed individual, but rather in their oscillation between constructed genders, again negating any true progress in terms of an autonomous third sex. Halberstam finds, “Within the life cycle of the Western human subject, long periods of stability are considered to be desirable, and people who live in rapid bursts [...] are characterized as immature and even dangerous” (4). The “bursts” to which Halberstam refers here are a bit exaggerated when dealing with intersexuals, since often there is not a constant back and forth between genders or even a continual movement along the continuum, but, for example, in the nineteenth century, intersexuals had to decide on, then adhere to, one particular gender. At first, this single shift does not seem to constitute as a “burst.” When compared to their “normal” counterparts, the shift we see in the intersexual is abrupt. As it seems, the real danger and, by extension, the real crime was thought to result in “appearing, outwardly, to be of the ‘other’ sex, it was feared hermaphrodites would tempt heterosexual partners into “homosexual relations” (Preves 35). The problem, then, is in the disruption of what Butler coined the “heterosexual matrix” (*Bodies that Matter* 239), the need for the self the “other” to be different, for desire and identity to remain a normative construct.

The third of these categorizations, and one that has proven true as of late, is the tendency for the “deviance” to be labeled as a sickness. There has been an overwhelming

move to denote the intersexual as sick. The necessity of any medical intervention for an intersexed child is at best debatable. For example, “most children with ambiguous sexual anatomy do not require medical intervention for their physiological health” (Preves 11). Furthermore, the surgeries that are offered are usually, “elaborate, expensive, and risky procedures [and] are performed to maintain social order for the institutions and adults that surround the child” (Preves 11-12). Also problematic for the intersexed individual of today is the way in which the medical community decides on the “true gender” that the impending surgery will create. Their decisions are often irrespective of the likely sex of the child, instead favoring artistic success. Butler explains, “the vast majority of intersexed infants are subjected to surgery that seeks to assign them to a female sex, since as Cheryl Chase points out, it is simply considered easier to produce a provisional vaginal tract than it is to construct a phallus” (63). It appears then, that despite the chromosomal status of many of these children, most have a Y chromosome, which should demand that the “true sex” is that of a male, surgery becomes nothing more than an aesthetic shift to force conformity. At least in the Middle Ages there was a choice for the intersexed individual, but as the idea of a “true sex” emerged, then later as science advanced, that agency was removed.

Some problems regarding the medicalization of the intersexed have been constant since at least the time of Barbin’s plight. The necessity of uncovering one’s actual sex and embodying a combination of two different genders was no longer acceptable. Barbin’s own entries emphasize this point as she was stripped of her cultivated femaleness and renamed Abel. She was labeled a boy with very little explanation or time

to understand what had happened. Clearly an abrupt shift can be traumatic and, when coupled with the stigma of her condition, was deadly for Barbin. A toxic cocktail of shame and isolation led Barbin, and leads many others, to react violently against that which is different. For the intersexual, it is the threat of violence from others, the uncertainty of themselves, and often the need to re-create a childlike state or a condition of innocence of identity construction that pushes them to the margins of society. The bodies of Cal and Barbin breach borders and binaries and as the owners of those bodies they follow. They move to the outskirts, travel west, over oceans, into small villages, away from prying eyes, away from a population who will always see them in a certain way. In writing, they strive to negate an old identity, a forced gender, an inaccurate alignment with preconceived notions of reductive identification. Cal and Barbin create, then solidify the existence of their selves even as they reject the forced construction of the self that others force upon them.

CONCLUSION

The representation of intersexual characters in recent literature and film remains limited, making the ability to witness and engage in steps of self-identification, particularly with regard to gender construction, marginal, at best. However, in the scarce availability of the process of the intersexual's identity construction, readers, scholars, and activists must turn to elements of their experience that are more easily visible. By focusing on works which depict transexual's and transgender individual's times of becoming, we can assess many of the same issues which would otherwise remain hidden. Similar but not identical, transgendered people, through their physical manifestation of vexed anatomical facticity, render visible the conflicts and prejudices that are often applicable to intersexual characters. Cal finds himself in the same dangerous circumstances while in a park in San Francisco as many transgender people who are victimized in hate crimes around the world. Similarly, Barbin was forced into a lonely existence in which she felt no one understood her. What is most beneficial, though, in looking to the transgender population for answers regarding the intersexed are the moments of overlap the simultaneous genders which both at some point embody.

In effect, intersexuals like Cal and Barbin are caught in a constant pre-operative state. That is to say, when transgender people are in the midst of their transition, they embody both genders. In the in-between, they vex the binary and blur the boundaries between male and female. This is precisely what occurs in the body of the intersexual as their chromosomes, genitals, and gendered tissues often not only contradict the gendered identity attributed to the person, but many times each marker of biologic sex is in

disagreement with the other. For the intersexual, then, there is no true gender, no true self, no one answer; however, because for most of the Western world this is not a viable option, the intersexual is forced to categorize themselves as something they are not.

In this way, the transgender person differs from the intersexual as they are seeking and, in fact via surgery, achieve one true sex. However, while in the transitional state, they are male-to-female or female-to-male marked by language as something at once less than and more than a traditional male or female gender. Despite the current trend to surgically alter the intersexual child, they will never achieve the same level of harmony between body and psyche that surgical intervention offers the transgender person. The type of procedure that Dr. Luce wants to perform on Calliope, like the procedures available to most intersexuals, will only align their appearance with societal norms of gender. All “corrective” surgeries performed on intersexuals are nothing more than a re-naming and a re-classifying, much like what Barbin was forced to endure prior to the scientific ability to alter one’s genital appearance. Though they differ in the origination and particulars of their gender complexity, transgender people and intersexuals illustrate the need to break barriers and conventions between male and female classifications.

Films and fictions that feature any character who challenges the reductive gender binary provide a window into the possibility that there are more options when determining gender as strictly an either/or construct. Also, by highlighting the meticulous construction of that gender and, by extension, the self, we see that it is the process rather than the outcome that is an integral part of the human condition. The need to classify one’s self and the agency to do so can be seen in the transitions from one

gender to another that films such as *The Crying Game* (1992) and *Transamerica* (2005) emphasize. Similarly, the consequences of maintaining a strict adherence to a two-gender system are shown in Virginia Woolf's classic fantastical tale of a gender switching royal, *Orlando* (1929) and its adaptation in 1992, as well as the mythologically inspired film *Zerophilia* (2005), whose low cinematic and performance quality are more than made up for by its delicately nuanced presentation of a world wherein genders are mobile and switching is dependent upon desire and passion.

Cal and Barbin provide the window through which to view the processes of self-identification, the body, desire for the other and by the other, and the fight for autonomy often resulting in self-induced isolation, but the conduit for the necessity of self-identification comes from the struggles these intersexuals endure. Their fight against a society that wants to banish them, erase them, correct them, and maim them sheds light on the problems with the two-gender system. Why force people to adhere to an antiquated way of classification? Why not alter the system? Why not allow the categories to emphasize the overlap, to highlight the possibility of human existence rather than letting the erasure of that difference stifle any possibility of understanding and accepting it? Cal and Barbin emphasize the need to deviate from the binary that restricts the anatomy of the intersexual body. The limited categories of gender do not work in *Herculine Barbin* or in *Middlesex* and those categories should be expanded to allow for the inclusion of bodies like Alexina and Calliope as they are rather than the bodies highlighted by those texts being marginalized, eradicated or mutilated to fit into the current categorizations.

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