5. Reimagining Intersex

Literary Renegotiations of the Dis/Continuities between Hegemonic Narratives and the Recognition of 'Difference'

5.1 Mainstreaming Intersex I: Novels between Fictional Liberties and the Need for Narrative Closure

Fictional literary works about intersex themes that are mainstream enough to attract a larger readership are rare in North America. The most famous novel is clearly Jeffrey Eugenides' *Middlesex*, published in 2002, followed almost a decade later by *Annabel*, written by Canadian author Kathleen Winter in 2010. The relative success of both novels has resulted in making intersex themes accessible to mainstream audiences, which has helped to make intersex people more visible within society and contributed to the cultural renegotiation of intersex.[1] Yet the scarcity of literary works that include intersex characters and/or deal with intersex issues marks a significant gap in intersex representation, which makes the literary negotiation of intersex necessarily highly selective and exclusionary and produces a very restricted narrative that defines the contemporary western literary 'canon' of intersex works.[2] Both

1 *Middlesex* won the 2003 Pulitzer Prize for Fiction, the Ambassador Book Award, Spain's Santiago de Compostela Literary Prize, and the Great Lakes Book Award and was shortlisted for several other relevant literary awards. *Annabel* won the 2011 Thomas Head Raddall Award and was shortlisted for three major Canadian literary awards. In addition, the novel was adapted as a radio play for BBC Radio and inspired Alison Goldfrapp for her song "Annabel" (Bailey 2014). Both novels are best sellers, *Middlesex* in the USA and on a global scale (the novel has been translated into 34 languages), and *Annabel* foremost in Canada.

2 To date, it cannot be said that a canon of intersex literature exists. However, literary and cultural productions of intersex have been gradually increasing in number over the past

novels focus on the coming of age of a child born with an intersex variation in the 1960s, their struggles with their initial gender assignments and the consequences of the medicalization of their bodies, and their eventual escapes out of the small confines of their homes to the city, in an effort to come to terms with being intersex and with their gender identification. *Middlesex* and *Annabel* share a particular understanding of what it means, or can mean, to be intersex, of how the category of intersex has been produced by specific hegemonic discourses, and of the problematic aspects inherent in this production. Yet while they both employ certain narrative strategies, discourses, and plots in their representations of intersex, the two novels depart in significant ways from each other. The perhaps most obvious difference lies in their respective strategies to produce a coherently gendered intersex subject and a (coherent) narrative closure.

My analysis of the fictional literary representations of intersex subjects necessitates a preliminary delineation of what cultural texts can, and cannot accomplish and contribute when it comes to contemporary cultural negotiations of intersex. Fictional literary works offer, in contrast to non-fictional and/or autobiographical narratives, a greater range of possibility for the reimagination of intersex lives. While fictional narratives are subjected to the demands of fair representation and avoiding harmful and insensitive portrayals of intersex persons, a work of fiction is not bound to do actual activist work, hence it is not obliged to produce a narrative whose (primary) function is to call attention to the human rights violations many intersex individuals are subjected to. This specific function of intersex narratives is, as discussed at an earlier point, a significant part of intersex first-person accounts that emerged in the 1990s. Novels and other fictional work, in contrast, have more liberties in constructing narratives that go beyond discussions of the medicalization of intersex individuals and that can create storylines which involve intersex characters whose defining feature is not or involves more than being subjected to processes of medicalization.

However, the question of whether a literary/cultural production, or an author, can be held accountable for narrating a specific story and ignoring particular aspects of intersex issues that are important to activist struggles, for instance, is debatable (e.g. Holmes 2008, Hillman 2008). The most significant and controversial questions are whether a (non-intersex) author has a moral obligation to write a particular story of intersex, and whether an intersex story has the obligation to challenge, or even subvert, gender and sexed bodily norms. Both questions imply the demands of

twenty years, so that it can be reasonably argued that cultural negotiations of intersex take place in North America, from which to deduce a specific cultural narrative on intersex that exists at the intersection of medical discourses, activist intervention, gender and queer theory, LGBQ and transgender representation in literature and (popular) culture, and human rights debates/ethics.

'authenticity' regarding the representation of intersex lives and of the resistance to hegemonic medical narratives, and consequently the demand on the text to acknowledge, and to critically position itself towards the social, political and legal discrimination and the human rights violations against intersex persons. While there is disagreement about which aspects *should* be part of an intersex storyline, there seems to be more consensus about what an intersex narrative *should not* do. Disrespectful, insensitive and sensationalist (mis)representations of a group of individuals that has been continually threatened with cultural and physical erasure, with violations of their bodily integrity and self-determination that are categorized as human rights violations, become indispensably questions of ethics. As a consequence, literary works can be held accountable for their perpetuation of hegemonic intersex narratives, as they inevitably reaffirm the 'naturalization' of the presumed continuities between body, gender, and sexuality (see Butler 1990), which has informed, and still informs, the basis for physical and psychological 'normalization' procedures.

Literary representations of intersex, then, indispensably involve a critical positioning towards existing discourses and narratives on intersex, both non-fictional and fictional. The time frame between the publication of the two novels under consideration spans nearly a decade (2002-2010) within which significant processes of intersex renegotiations have taken place. In particular, the challenges to medical discourses and treatment practices prompted by activists, the re-organizing of intersex activism, the changes in (mainstream) media coverage on intersex themes, and critical reactions to *Middlesex* (both by intersex and non-intersex academics and non-academics) have considerably redefined the conditions for the cultural, legal, and public recognition of intersex existence and issues. In this context of shifting paradigms of intersex representation, my analysis of and comparison between Eugenides' and Winter's novels interrogates the dis/continuities of (fictional) cultural renegotiations of the category of intersex and traces the dis/continuities between the cultural imaginary of intersex and social and political developments. The novels' intertextual references and renegotiations of specific intersex narratives and the concomitant iteration of certain discursive elements, motifs, narrative strategies, and narrative plots simultaneously perpetuate hegemonic narratives on intersex and submit the category of intersex to processes of resignification, and potential subversion of hegemonic versions of intersex.

In my analysis of the literary intersex representations in *Middlesex* and *Annabel*, I proceed from the claims Judith Butler makes in her analysis of the ramifications of conflicting gender and sex (re)assignments, "Doing Justice to Someone" (2001), where she discusses the conditions of intelligibility for individuals whose sense of gendered self is in a precarious state as it is apparently irreconcilable with the norms by which genders are recognizable. The usefulness of this theory for approaching the two novels lies in its capacity to formulate the struggle of the (fictional) intersex

characters with their conflicting gender assignments in theoretical terms, which reference the structural framework within which the conditions of intelligibility are negotiated. My literary analysis is based on the following theoretical propositions or questions regarding the conditions of intersex intelligibility in the novels: how is the recognizability of the intersex characters' gender, and hence, subjecthood negotiated in the novels? How are the (potential) conflicts between the intersex characters' sense of self and (non-consensual) gender assignments and/or sexed bodily assignments, between their desire to be recognized in a specific way and the conditions of their recognizability available to them, reconciled? How do different intertextual discourses and narratives regulate, and hence, either allow for or constrain their intelligibility as intersex and/or gender nonconforming subjects? Do the novels establish narrative spaces for acting out alternative, affirmative concepts of intersex? Do the novels offer metanarrative criticism of the regulatory processes that govern the conditions of intelligibility (for intersex subjects), do they contain a level of self-reflexivity with regard to their own perpetuation of the norms which subjugate their intersex characters? Are there dis/continuities regarding the literary renegotiation of the category of intersex in *Middlesex* and *Annabel*, and in what way can they be considered as commentaries on the dis/continuity of contemporary cultural discussions on intersex themes? My discussion of the novels starts out from these questions, at the same time focusing my attention on the potential of fictional texts to create intersex narratives that go beyond the concerns of non-fictional intersex first-person accounts.

I begin my analysis with the claim that both *Middlesex* and *Annabel* offer, respectively, coming of age narratives that negotiate (some of) the complexities and realities of the lives of their intersex characters, their struggles with their initial gender and/or sex assignments, and their trajectories of finding/making a place for themselves that allows them to live 'livable' lives, in an overall believable way, while the obvious shortcomings and problematic aspects necessitate critical scrutiny. I will discuss the options the narratives themselves provide for the intersex persons of finding a way out of the dilemma of being/becoming (un)intelligible as theorized by Butler. Hence I look at the (symbolical) survival strategies the novels offer for their intersex protagonists that help them to sustain at the "limits of intelligibility," in "the place of not-being within the field of being, living, breathing, attempting to love, as that which is neither fully negated nor acknowledged as being, acknowledged, we might say, into being" (Butler 2001: 622). I will scrutinize the novels' potential of resistance to hegemonic narratives, in particular the narrative closure they offer, whether the intersex characters' struggles with being/becoming intelligible are resolved by a 'normalization' in form of an assimilationist closure along heteronormative lines, or by a defiance of this 'normalizing' and the prospect of (gender) nonconformity.

5.2 FROM MEDICAL OBJECT TO CULTURAL PHANTASMA AND BACK ON TRACK: *MIDDLESEX* AND MOVEMENTS OF ESCAPING/STRIVING FOR 'NORMALIZATION'

The following analysis of *Middlesex* focuses on the literary negotiations of intersex intelligibility with regard to the novel's intersex protagonist, Cal_lie, and, to a lesser extent, another intersex character, Zora. As elaborated before, the crucial question *for whom* the production of intersex intelligibility is desirable in terms of the production of coherent subjecthood (implying a coherent gender) must be qualified when turning to the novel and its narrative and metanarrative representations. I understand the question of intersex intelligibility here on several levels: first, how do the intersex characters desire to be recognized as gendered subjects, and how are they recognized within the narrative? How do different power regimes and discourses regulate, and hence, either allow for or prohibit their intelligibility as non-normatively gendered beings? Second, does the novel provide conditions of intersex intelligibility within the narrative? Does it open up possibilities and/or (narrative) spaces for an affirmative rearticulation of intersex subjecthood? Third, does the novel provide metanarrative critical commentary on the regulatory mechanisms that govern the conditions of intelligibility (for intersex subjects), does it show a level of self-reflexivity with regard to its own (re)production of the norms which subjugate its intersex characters? How does it relate and/or contribute to current debates on and cultural reimaginations of intersex? The critical discussion of *Middlesex*'s production of intersex intelligibility takes into consideration all of these interrelated levels and thereby takes into account the fictionality of the narrative, which means that any judgment related to the fictional characters in the novel needs to be considered as a judgment of the novel's representations of its characters, and not of real persons' decisions they might make about their lives.

As the recognition or the prohibition of intersex intelligibility is always contextual and culturally contingent, the analysis of *Middlesex* continues the question of how different narratives and discourses about intersex are integrated in the literary articulations of intersex subjects. The crucial moments of intersex articulations in *Middlesex* are informed by and reproduce narratives of mythology and medical science, which, historically, have produced and established hegemonic narratives and constructions of intersex subjects and the category of intersex.[3] Under scrutiny are

3 The exhibition of bodies considered 'transgressive' is a phenomenon that is specific to the historical and cultural context in which it occurs, and that conveys general cultural assumptions about the (gendered) body. America's exhibition culture of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th centuries, with its traveling carnivals, circuses, and medicine shows, serves as a site from which to scrutinize how bodily norms are constructed and enforced,

therefore two distinct (though interrelated) spaces of intersex (re)negotiations in the novel: the medical space (represented by Callie's stay at the *Sexual Disorders and Gender Identity Clinic*) and the space of freak shows and mythology (represented by Cal's and Zora's performances at Octopussy's Garden).

Jeffrey Eugenides' novel *Middlesex* (2002) interrelates a Greek family saga and a coming-of-age narrative of a family member who is born intersex in the second half of 20th century US-America. An acclaimed 'hybrid' text in many respects,[4] *Middlesex* strives to provide a multilayered narrative voice. The first-person narrator Calliope/Callie_Cal Stephanides[5] is presented as both an ethnic and a gender 'hybrid' as s_he is a child of first-generation Greek-Americans and born with an intersex variation. The novel's narrative strategies and visualization practices open up a multidimensional space of representation for its diverse characters, who have "a knack for self-transformation" (*MS* 312):[6]

"[D]er literarische Text [generiert] durch die Erschaffung einer eigenen Welt ein paralleles Netzwerk von Räumen, das in ein vielschichtiges, weit über die referentielle Bezugnahme hinausgehendes, Verhältnis zu den realen Räumen tritt. Darüber hinaus konstruieren manche Texte in einem selbstreflexiven Gestus ihrerseits Orte, die innerhalb des Textes die Qualität

and how these norms have impacted upon the lived experiences of individuals represented as physically different. At the same time, the 19th century has witnessed the rise of medicine's authority and with it a perceived shift from staging bodily difference as performances of freakery in an entertainment context to the medicalization and institutionalization of bodies that were classified as 'deviant.' While the representation of 'transgressive' bodies in so-called freak shows was generally associated with beliefs derived from mythology and folklore, medical science was associated with more 'progressive' forms of knowledge. However, this supposed dichotomy between myth and science proves to be untenable. These two movements – the exhibition and staging of bodily difference in circuses and traveling shows and the establishment of asylums and hospitals – were parallel rather than sequential ones, and the medical establishment and medical practices mirrored to a considerable extent the representational strategies of the entertainment industry (the freak shows).

4 Eugenides has defined *Middlesex* as a "hybrid" text that is simultaneously an "immigrant or family saga," "mirrors the progression of Western literature," and is "[p]art third-person epic, part first-person coming-of-age tale" (interview with Foer 2002).

5 I will refer to Callie_Cal and the respective pronouns as they are used in the respective passages in *Middlesex*. When referring to the character in general, I will refer to her_him as Cal_lie.

6 The following page references in this chapter refer to the paperback edition of *Middlesex* (abbreviated with *MS*) published in 2003.

einer Heterotopie annehmen und zu privilegierten Orten der Veränderung oder zumindest der kritischen Reflexion der Ordnungen der anderen Räume im Text werden." (Kilian 2014)[7]

Middlesex is narrated by an intersex character, Cal_lie, who as the homodiegetic narrator (re)claims the authority over her_his own story; this narrative strategy thus can potentially serve as a destabilization of the normative narrative mechanisms that constitute her_him as an (un)intelligible subject (see also Kilian 2014). The narrative perspective is complicated by the narrative authority of a non-intersex author, or as Anson Koch-Rein phrases it: "Eugenides' novel [...] invokes and draws on the power and authority of omniscient narration, epic story-telling, and a very present heterosexual and assertively male author, while simultaneously trying to pass as a realist intersexual first-person account" (Koch-Rein 2005: 250). *Middlesex* is also a 'hybrid' text as it refers to, uses, integrates, reaffirms, and challenges different texts, discourses, and perspectives on and about intersex. Mythological narratives, medical texts on intersex, intersex first-person accounts and/or activists' texts, and other (popular) cultural narratives are integrated in the literary rearticulations of intersex subjectivity in the novel. The novel thereby produces a not unproblematic multivocal text in which intersex is reconceptualized; these reconceptualized versions of an intersex character, or intersex characters (Cal_lie and Zora), are made available to a mainstream audience. Thus, the novel contributes to a considerable extent to a cultural (re)imagination of the category of intersex. The multilayering and the constant reaffirmative and challenging moments/movements in the novel produce ruptures in the text, which simultaneously allows for and forecloses moments of intersex intelligibility.

The narrative visualizations of the intersex body, or bodies, are complicated by multiple and multilayered perspectives and narrative voices which produce ambiguous images of intersex corporeality. The novel at times refuses to expose or visualize the naked intersex body, at times it renders only fragmented parts of it, and at times it provides explicit images of it. The difficulties and the eventual impossibility to produce a coherent image of 'the' intersex body within the narrative scope of the novel are further reinforced by the presence of more than one intersex character; Zora represents a version of intersex corporeality that is very different from Cal_lie's. With the coexistence of two intersex subjects within the same narrative space, *Middlesex* opens up the possibility of multiple, simultaneously valid intersex

7 "The literary text generates, through the creation of its own world, a parallel network of rooms that enters into a complex, more than referential relationship with the real rooms. Some texts furthermore construct places in a self-reflexive gesture that take on the quality of a heterotopia within the text and become privileged places of transformation or critical reflection on the other rooms' orders in the text" (translation V.A.).

subjectivities. To what extent these different intersex representations can achieve a state of intelligibility needs to be scrutinized more closely.

Middlesex opens with Cal's account of his multiple births: "I was born twice: first, as a baby girl, on a remarkably smogless Detroit day in January of 1960; and then again, as a teenage boy, in an emergency room near Petoskey, Michigan, in August of 1974" (*MS* 3). While the novel evokes the motives of gender 'ambiguity' and transformation right from the beginning of Cal_lie's fictional autobiographical story, this gender trajectory seems to be organized along the lines of medical interventions (the reference to the emergency room). The novel seeks to set up a possibility of non-fixed, unstable and shifting gender conceptualization, while it simultaneously reproduces the heteronormative gender binarism with its two legitimate and mutually exclusive genders (male/female). The motif of rebirth, a philosophical or religious concept of the 'transmigration of the soul' (*Encyclopædia Britannica*), undergoes a reformulation in medical terms here. The coherence of Cal's self-narration is further complicated by the 'third birth' the narrator seems to experience at the age of forty-one, at the present time the frame narration is set. Eveline Kilian argues that this symbolic third birth functions as a narrative act of self-construction and self-affirmation, which hence effects a resignification of himself as a (narrative) subject: "Bei der dritten 'Geburt' mit 41 Jahren handelt es sich um die literarische Selbsterschaffung des Protagonisten im Kontext seiner Familiengeschichte, die als Selbstvergewisserung fungiert und dem Subjekt die Chance bietet, sich ein neues Verhältnis zu sich selbst zu erschreiben, sich als textuelles Subjekt neu zu entwerfen und dieses geschriebene Selbst zu bewohnen" (Kilian 2014).[8] The missing links and the gaps between the three (re)births need yet to be established and filled to produce a narratively coherent (fictional) autobiographical story.

The first image of the intersex body the reader is confronted with, or *not* confronted with is evoked by a strategy of simultaneous reticence to visualize the (naked) intersex body and reference to a violent practice of exposing the naked intersex body. Cal formulates an image of her_himself within the context of medical discourse and practices and thereby refers to the (metanarrative) conditions of intelligibility, and simultaneously marks the narrative's conditions of intelligibility, by which intersex bodies are knowable:

"Specialized readers may have come across me in Dr. Peter Luce's study, 'Gender Identity in 5-Alpha-Reductase Pseudohermaphrodites,' published in the *Journal of Pediatric Endocrinology* in 1975. Or maybe you've seen my photograph in chapter sixteen of the now sadly

8 "The third 'birth' at age 41 refers to the protagonist's literary self-creation in the context of his family history, which functions as a self-assurance and provides an opportunity for the subject to establish a new self-relation for himself in writing, to redraft himself as a textual subject, and to inhabit this newly written self" (translation V.A.).

outdated *Genetics and Heredity*. That's me on page 578, standing naked beside a height chart with a black box covering my eyes." (*MS* 3)

The narrative strategy to visualize the protagonist's intersex body thereby relies on the presumed knowledge of the implied reader(ship).[9] The indirect address, "[s]pecialized readers" (and the referential direct address, "you"), may refer to medical doctors but also to intersex persons and/or activists, i.e. those who are familiar with medicalized images of intersex subjects and medical terminology of intersex variations. For intersex individuals, the evocation of this type of images can have a hurtful and traumatic effect, and thus constitutes a (meta-) narrative act of violence. While specific groups within the (actual) readership can draw on their knowledge so that for them, an immediate visualization of a very specific image of the intersex body materializes, the majority of readers can be assumed to have no precedent knowledge about these pictures and/or the particular intersex variation (5-alpha-reductase deficiency), and consequently for them, a (definite) visualization of Cal_lie's intersex body fails to materialize. The novel's narrative strategy to refuse, to a certain extent, a definite visualization of the intersex body can be interpreted as a refusal to satisfy voyeuristic desires and/or the objectifying and 'exoticizing' of intersex bodies. On the other hand, this reticence to visualize the intersex body risks to induce even more horror about it in the readers' imagination, as the visual gaps are filled by default with notions of intersex that are potentially harmful (especially since the novel makes various references to the myth of Hermaphroditus). An explicit visualization of the intersex body is displaced to the margins of the knowability of (gendered) bodies – and of the human – and thereby intersex intelligibility, at this point in the narrative, is constituted as precarious.

Moreover, the multilayeredness of narrative voices and of temporal sequences through which this image of intersex corporeality is mediated complicate a straightforward reading. This instance in the novel opens *Middlesex*'s narrative and is at the same time part of the frame narration, narrated by a then forty-one year old Cal, who lives as a male-identified individual in Berlin. Cal narrates retrospectively on his past as Callie, who has an intersex variation and was assigned female at birth. In this instance, medical authority is neither clearly challenged nor affirmed. The references to medical discourses and images for a self-referential subject construction can be read as an acceptance of medical authority over Cal_lie's body and, by extension, his_her gender identification. The use and the simultaneous reproduction of hurtful and outdated medical terminology ("Pseudohermaphrodites") and violent,

9 Wolf Schmid notes that "the implied reader can function as a *presumed addressee* [...] whose linguistic codes, ideological norms, and aesthetic ideas must be taken into account if the work is to be understood. In this function, the implied reader is the bearer of the codes and norms presumed in the readership" (Schmid 2013).

pathologizing images reinforce a self-image as an intersex subject that is utterly de-individualized, depersonalized, and even dehumanized.

At the same time, this passage contains traces of resistance against, or criticism of medical authority over intersex lives and its depersonalizing effects. The very act of verbalizing Callie's abuse by medical authority ("standing naked [...] with a black box covering my eyes") creates a moment of exposing the violent medical practices and the dehumanizing conceptualization of intersex persons. Thus read, the first passage of *Middlesex* also serves as a metatextual critical commentary on the medicalization of intersex subjects, and perhaps even marks the novel's self-awareness about its own perpetuation of this specific representation, which introduces and foreshadows the struggle of the protagonist. Moreover, this passage is immediately followed by Cal's summing up her_his life, which contradicts the depersonalizing effects inherent in the medical production of intersex. In this part, he also comments explicitly on the violence s_he experienced from medical authorities: "I've been [...] guinea-pigged by doctors, palpated by specialists, and researched by the March of Dimes" (*MS* 3). Cal's assertion that he was "born [...] again, as a teenage boy, in an emergency room" (*MS* 3) is misleading as it suggests that he had to undergo surgical procedures in order to effect this gender 'transition,' but this surgery never takes place. Yet, Cal_lie's decision to 'change' her_his gender (identification) is in fact effected by a doctor's definition of her_his gendered body. The narrative establishes and maintains critical ambivalence, through the perpetual and alternating reaffirmation and challenging of medical authority over intersex representations. The narrative juxtaposition of the medical perspective to Cal's perspective, i.e. the perspective of an intersex subject, effects to a certain extent a destabilization of the authoritative perspective(s) and the medical gaze on the intersex body. However, the power relations between the intersex narrator – that is, a narrator who refuses to identify as intersex – and medical authority in the novel continue to be complicated.

5.2.1 Callie, a Medical Case Report: The Sexual Disorders and Gender Identity Clinic as a Space of Pathologizing Intersex

The narrative strategies and visualization practices at work in *Middlesex*'s representation of the medical discourse on intersex and its regulatory mechanisms can be conceived as operating in the terms that Foucault refers to as 'instruments of disciplinary power' (Foucault 1977: 170). Hierarchical observation, normalizing judgment, and the examination are exactly the means by which Callie's intersex body is subjected to disciplinary control. The medical discourse constructs Dr. Luce and Callie as 'doctor' and 'patient,' respectively, within the narrative. Their respective positioning within the medical space/discourse is both an effect of and in turn results in the particular power relation between them. While generally in this relation, the

doctor is the holder of medical authority over the patient, in *Middlesex* this power relation is complicated by Cal_lie's narrative authority and her_his strategies to resist her_his subjugation.

Dr. Luce is introduced as a famous sexologist to the reader by Callie. His identification as a doctor precedes him: even before Dr. Luce presents himself or is referred to by his name, his intelligibility as a medical authority is established by Callie's commenting on their first visit of the *Sexual Disorders and Gender Identity Clinic.* The interior of the clinic is described in detail as generic for medical clinics: the "carpeting was institutional," and "[t]here was even a reassuringly medicinical smell in the air" (*MS* 406); the doctor's office "inspired confidence" and is perceived as the "surround of a triumphant psychoanalytic world-view" (*MS* 407). Before Dr. Luce appears in person the reader already expects him to perform his 'identity' as a sexologist in a way deemed 'typical' for a medical authority. Callie's overtly ironic description of the clinic and the office signifies both the institutionalization of medical practices and its de-individualizing effects and, to some degree, the absurdity of medicine's undisputed demigodlike status and power. The narrative's ambivalence regarding the affirmation/challenging of medical authority from the novel's opening passages is reiterated at this point, and continues in the subsequent narration.

The relationship between doctor (Dr. Luce), patient (Callie), and by extension, the parents of the patient (Milton and Tessie) in the novel's medical narrative functions as an allegory of the general relationship between the medical authorities and intersex individuals. The physician-patient relationship is hierarchically, and thus unequally, structured. The doctor obtains his predominance in this relationship through several interrelated power tools: he is the exclusive holder of relevant knowledge, he is the observer of bodies, he does virtually the entire speaking and he has the defining power through medical terminology. The patient (and furthermore, her parents) is (are) characterized by passivity and victimization in the novel. Dr. Luce, however, manages to gain her parents' confidence through his patronizing manner considered as characteristic of medical authorities, i.e. by speaking and reassuring. By using medical terminology which is incomprehensible for anyone without medical knowledge he excludes Callie and her parents from the discourse. In doing so, he silences her and her parents – an act of violence, rendering Callie mute and powerless. His obtrusive remarks with respect to Callie's sexuality add to the intimidation of his patient. Callie "hid inside [her] hair as usual" (*MS* 407), barely says anything except for giving short, quiet answers to the doctor's questions, that is, only when he allows her to speak. Her parents are confined to nodding, whispering, waiting, and remaining silent in response to Dr. Luce's daunting medical verbiage. If voice is a symbol of identity, and subjecthood depends on being a subject of language, then Callie is relegated to an object position without choice or agency. However, rendering a criticism of medical supremacy by exposing medical power and patients' powerlessness is a strategy which is often found in non-fictional

intersex first-person accounts. As *Middlesex* refers to ISNA's newsletter *Hermaphrodites with Attitude* as one of its sources, it can be plausibly inferred that the narrative strategy used by intersex individuals who experienced medical abuse is iterated in the novel's (meta-) narrative critique of the power relations between doctor and patient.

Another narrative strategy of challenging medical supremacy is the ironic construction of the figure of Dr. Luce. The narrative presentation of Dr. Luce is mediated and structured by Callie's perception and by her relation to the doctor. Dr. Luce

"was *considered* the *world's leading authority* on human hermaphroditism. The Sexual Disorders and Gender Identity Clinic, which he founded in 1968, had become the *foremost facility in the world* for the study and treatment of conditions of ambiguous gender. He was the author of a *major* sexological work [...] which was *standard* in a variety of disciplines ranging from genetics and pediatrics to psychology." (*MS* 409, emphasis added)[10]

The hyperbolic representation of Luce's seemingly uncontested demigodlike status within the medical sphere iterates the irony in Callie's description of the clinic; this parallelism construes Luce as an 'extension' of the clinic, as an embodiment of the medical institution rather than an individual. This de-individualizing of the character of Luce might seem paradoxical given his outstanding accomplishments and his starlike status. However, while his work is claimed to have influenced and, in fact, established the standard for medical treatment of persons with 'ambiguous' gender, Luce needs to be considered as a 'tool' in the medical machinery. This, the novel attempts to make clear by its strategies to ironically exaggerate its demigodlike construction of Luce and to render a de-individualized representation of him through Callie's perspective. As the founder of the *Sexual Disorders and Gender Identity Clinic* and the major referee in questions of sexology he functions as the representative of the institutionalization, classification, and thereby the legitimization of intersex variations as a sexual "disorder," a medical "condition" which requires

10 The character of Dr. Luce bears striking analogy to pediatrician and sexologist John Money. In his acknowledgment Eugenides cites one of Money's texts as a source for the novel. During the 1950s up to the 1970s and beyond, Money claimed that a child's gender identity is fluid in very early life, which would become fixed at arriving a certain age. This theory led to his argument that children born with intersex genitalia could develop a stable gender identity when they were raised in one sex assigned at birth. Although Money's (in)famous and widely influential ideas relating to gender identity and his medical management of intersex variations have been heavily and publicly refuted, Money's theories have formed the basis of medical practice concerning intersex variations up until today.

medical "treatment." As "a famous sexologist" with "glamour status in the field" (*MS* 408), he has the authorized, exclusive power of defining 'normative' and 'non-normative' sexes and genders. Callie's referring to him as "a scientist *like* Luce" (*MS* 408, emphasis added) negates him as an individual and instead constructs him as a, or *the*, specimen of medical authority. The apparent impossibility to call (t)his authority into question is underscored by the "strength of this success" – i.e. of Luce's theory of gender as "determined by a variety of influences [...], most important, the sex of rearing" – so that consequently "his reputation reached the stratosphere" as the late 1960s were "a great time to be a sexologist" for sexology "was a matter of national interest" (*MS* 410f). The public's unchecked approval of this medical authority can, according to Callie's assessment, be accounted for by "the American belief that everything can be solved by doctors" (*MS* 426).

The protagonist's ironic comments on medical authority and her_his at times caricature-like descriptions of Luce can be interpreted as her_his attempt to reclaim (narrative) authority over her_his situation, which effects moments of destabilization of the 'traditionally' rigorous doctor-patient relationship and its inherent regulatory power. It becomes also clear, however, that these strategies cannot ultimately dismantle medicine's power over intersex subjects but can merely serve as a (meta-) narrative critique of this power. Hence, while the novel shows a level of self-reflexivity about its own limitations regarding the dismantling of medical authority, it simultaneously reaffirms medical authority's efficacy, both on the narrative (Cal_lie radically redefines her_his gender identification based on medical definitions of gender) and the metanarrative level (by reproducing hurtful and outdated medical terminology, reiterating and reveling in representations of violent examination practices, and granting medical authority the defining power over intersex [self-] identifications, etc.).

The narrative oscillates between (re)producing and challenging Cal_lie's objectification through several interrelated power discourses and mechanisms that regulate her_his intelligibility as a gendered subject. The question of who (or what) controls the narrative is crucial in determining what Cal_lie can be/come within the limits of the narrative. The conditions for Cal_lie to be/come a recognizable subject are to a considerable extent provided by the narrative's reiteration of cultural norms, which marks the boundaries of being/becoming for Cal_lie but at the same time allows for the possibility of their contestation. It becomes also clear that subject formation always occurs in relation to an other and its norms, as Butler notes: "the very being of the self is dependent not just on the existence of the Other [...] but also on the possibility that the normative horizon within which the Other sees and listens and knows and recognizes is also subject to a critical opening" (Butler 2001b: 22). This 'other' in the novel is (temporarily) represented by Dr. Luce, in relation to whom Callie's gendered body is marked as 'deviant.' For Luce,

"I was an *extraordinary case*, after all. He was taking his time, *savoring me*. To a scientist like Luce I was nothing less than a sexual Kaspar Hauser. *There he was*, a famous sexologist [...], and suddenly on his doorstep, arriving out of the woods of Detroit like the Wild Boy of Aveyron, *was me*, Calliope Stephanides, age fourteen. I was a *living experiment* [...]. He was a brilliant, charming, work-obsessed man, and watched me from behind his desk with keen eyes. While he chatted, speaking primarily to my parents, gaining their confidence, Luce was nevertheless making mental notes. *He registered* my tenor voice. *He noted* that I sat with one leg tucked under me. *He watched* how I [...]. *He paid attention* to [...] *all the external manifestations* of what *he called my gender identity*." (*MS* 408, emphasis added)

In this moment of doubled visualization – Callie observing Luce observing her – the object of the medical gaze becomes simultaneously the agent of the gaze, while the holder of the medical gaze becomes the object of its own object. Through this change in, or appropriation of perspective, Callie manages to reevaluate and hence to destabilize the doctor's construction of her as a gender 'deviant,' and as a 'case,' or object of study. Furthermore, Callie sees herself through the doctor's eyes – although it can be claimed that she rather projects her own self-perception onto Luce – which complicates the narrative coherence of her self-construction. Through Luce's gaze, or rather his various modes of gazing, which is further complicated by Callie's appropriation or projection of the gaze, Callie's intersex body is constructed as a medical condition, as a genetic 'disorder' that causes 'pseudohermaphroditism' and as such 'deviates' from normative conceptions of gendered bodies which are set up and enforced by medical authorities, represented by Luce. While Cal_lie's narrative voice challenges her_his objectification to some extent, the novel cannot avoid the seemingly inevitable pathological connotation of intersex.

The dichotomization of culture/nature, or civilization/wilderness, as embodied by Luce and Callie respectively, amplifies the marginalized status of an individual who fails to conform to the system's norms and whose corporeality is transgressive of the normative system of rules and regulations. Since all those 'transgressors' come to Luce's clinic, he "had at his disposal a body of research material – of living, breathing specimens – no scientist had ever had before" (*MS* 412). Callie is a representative of this *body of research material*, of an object at the mercy of medical authority's regulative forces. Luce's examinations of Callie's body, and the other medical experts' examinations of her body, reiterate the hierarchical relationship: Callie is commanded to undress and is powerless against the humiliating scrutinizing of her body. These situations of medical examination are negotiated in terms of systematic and institutionalized violence exercised over a specific group of subjects by representatives of the (medical) system.

While Dr. Luce probes Callie's genitals during the first instance of gynecological examination, he himself becomes the object of Callie's observation: "I looked down to see that Luce was holding the crocus between his thumb and forefinger. [...] He

didn't look shocked or appalled. In fact he examined me with great curiosity, almost connoisseurship. There was an element of awe or appreciation in his face" (*MS* 412). This doubly mediated perspective on Callie's genitals produces a moment of ambiguity and destabilization of medical definitory power. This disruption, however, lasts only momentarily as institutional power is immediately reestablished by ignoring and transgressing the patient's physical and emotional limits: against Callie's protest, Luce keeps on with his invasive examination: "There was a hint of annoyance, of command in his voice. I took a deep breath and did the best I could. Luce poked inside. [...]. [...] a sharp pain shot through me. I jerked back, crying out. 'Sorry.' Nevertheless, he kept on. He placed one hand on my pelvis to steady me. He probed in farther [...]. My eyes were welling with tears. 'Almost finished,' he said. But he was only getting started" (*MS* 412f). This scene provides a commentary on the institutionalized medical examination practices from different angles. In an effort to regain control, to a certain extent, over a situation of powerlessness, Callie reverses the gazing relations in an attempt to regain mastery over her body via the regulatory power over corporeality. Her ultimate defenselessness against Luce's acts of violence and of violating her corporeal and emotional boundaries signifies all the more the apparent insurmountability of medical authority. While the novel provides criticism directed at the violent medical practices in examination situations, it narratively reproduces the violent practices in question, and thereby reiterates the potentially triggering and traumatic effects on intersex, or other, individuals (including the implied readers) who have made similar harmful experiences. This raises the question of whether the explicit and graphic description of violent acts is always indispensable to narrative representations of and their metanarrative critical commentary on structural or interpersonal violence. *Middlesex* contains several explicit scenes of violence – not only against the intersex protagonist –, and thus perpetuates violence, which undermines its own claims of self-reflexivity.

The institutionalization of medical violence constitutes the context for, and is in turn produced by, the repetitive performance of the examination. Thereby the intersex subject's internalization of its routine marks the problematic interdependency of acceptance of and refusal to consent to this systematic violence. Callie has the processes of a "typical unveiling" (*MS* 419) internalized to the extent that her active participation in the examination is confined to mechanical movements to facilitate the process of exposure: "I knew the drill. Behind the screen I undressed while the doctors waited" (*MS* 420), "[w]ithout having to be told, I lifted my legs and fit my heels in the gynecological stirrups" (*MS* 421), "after the third or fourth time I could recite the list" of medical terms "by heart" (*MS* 421), "I lay there, letting Luce [...] do what he had to do" (*MS* 421), "I dropped my robe. Almost used to it now, I climbed up on the riser before the measuring chart" (*MS* 422), etc. What at first might seem like consent to or acceptance of the examination practices, the submission to the authorities is not so much an expression of the patient's consent but rather a result of

the internalization of the workings of the regulatory regime, and its sanction system, in question. Moreover, this (non-)consensual subjection can serve as a survival strategy in situations where no other form of resistance is available.

That the interdependency of (alleged/forced) acceptance and refusal of institutional violence cannot be easily disentangled, if at all, becomes obvious in Callie's self-reflections on her ambivalent reactions to the forces of medical authority. In one of the examination scenes with two other doctors present, the intricate processes of dependency and 'obedience' constitute a psychological double bind for Callie:

> "Luce put his hand on the small of my back. Men have an annoying way of doing that. They touch your back as though there's a handle there, and direct you where they want you to go. Or they place their hand on top of your head, paternally. [...] Luce's hand was now proclaiming: Here she is. My star attraction. The terrible thing was that I responded to it; I liked the feel of Luce's hand on my back. I liked the attention. Here were all these people who wanted to meet me." (*MS* 420)

This self-reflective moment marks an awareness about the manipulative forces behind Callie's conflicting emotions. Yet the narrative here itself makes a problematic assertion. Introducing the (ever so vague) possibility of an intersex person actually *enjoying* the medical examinations – even when feeling ambivalent about it – constitutes a gross misrepresentation of the actual harm and traumatizing effects many intersex individuals have to suffer as a result of these practices. The novel here seems to prioritize a representation of the psychological complexity of its main character to make her_him appear more 'interesting,' at the expense of decidedly criticizing the institutionalized medical violence and its harmful consequences for its intersex subjects. Again, the novel here perpetuates problematic ideas about intersex subjects and hence compromises its self-critical approach.

While one of the recurring narrative strategies to challenge the medical perspective on and medical authority over the representation of Callie's intersex corporeality is Callie's appropriation of visualization practices and of narrative authority, which serves to expose, and to some extent subvert the power relations inherent in the relationship between institution and individual, the narrative presents several other strategies for Callie to cope with the violence she is subjected to. The strategy of bodily dissociation serves as a survival tool at various points in *Middlesex*. In the examining situation, Callie's attempt at mentally escaping the shameful and traumatic experience succeeds only for brief moments: "behind the curtain, I no longer felt as if I were in the room" (*MS* 421), "I was there and not there, cringing at Luce's touch, sprouting goose bumps, and worrying that I hadn't washed properly" (*MS* 421). The willful or, in terms of emotional survival, necessary attempt at disembodiment is reiterated by, or reiterates the dissociation of body and

person(hood) as the premise and the effect of medical practices, which focus on intersex body parts detached from the individual who inhabits this body. The depersonalizing and dehumanizing process is fortified by the covering of Callie's face in the medical textbook: "The black box: a fig leaf in reverse, concealing identity while leaving shame exposed" (*MS* 422). Individuality is erased, body parts deprived of humanity are left, with the aim of making intersex individuals invisible within society (*MS* 428f). Although the processes of bodily and mental dissociation are based on different premises – one functions as a dehumanization of medical subjects, the other as a protective mechanism against this dehumanization –, disembodiment seems to be inherent in the medicalization of intersex.

The mechanisms of enforced 'normalization' are quite evidently at work in the narrative. One significant moment in the novel is an incident in Dr. Luce's office where the sexologist discusses the medical treatment of Callie with her parents in Callie's presence. At stake is a sex/gender 'reassignment' surgery to make her genitalia look more 'normatively female' as she was assigned female at birth and raised as a girl until puberty, when her body starts producing more testosterone and develops into a different direction. The politics of gender 'normalcy' and the 'normalization' of bodies which do not seem to 'fit' cultural/medical gender standards constitute a motif that structures *Middlesex*'s entire narrative, but becomes most explicit and compressed in the novel's representation of the attempted medical 'normalization' of Callie's intersex body. Cultural notions of gender performance and questions of bodily and sexual capabilities are interdependent factors in the novel's negotiation of intersex intelligibility. The novel oscillates between acceptance or reaffirmation of and challenging normative ideas of gender, a narrative process that is also represented through the protagonist's internal struggle.

The point of origin for the impending medical 'normalizing' procedures is a "doctor's wild claim about [Callie's] anatomy" while she is hospitalized after an accident (*MS* 401). The narrative's adamant focus on the relevance of genitals in its negotiation of intersex intelligibility is all the more striking when compared to representations of non-intersex subjects. Genitals in *Middlesex* are only under consideration – and this to a great extent – when they apparently 'deviate' from an (unmarked) genital or gender norm. The novel's failure to mark normative genitals and other gendered bodily characteristics *as normative* conceals the construction of 'nonconforming' gendered corporeality along the lines of, or in (supposed) opposition to gender and sexual norms. It is the very unmarkedness of normative representations of genders and corporeality that establishes the apparent priority of genitals for intersex individuals. When Callie asserts, "my genitals have been the most significant thing that ever happened to me" (*MS* 401), the novel at once claims that genitals are *the* defining parameter of intersex – and intersex only – subject construction and that they are, after all, not inherent in a person. To point out the significance of genitals in the production of the category of intersex while at the same

time relating to their performative qualities sets up a contradiction between biological essentialism and cultural constructivism. The performative character of genitals (and of hormones and chromosomes) does not mitigate their crucial function in the negotiation of Callie's intelligibility. When the doctor's claim about her 'atypical' gendered corporeality leads her parents to take her to the *Sexual Disorders and Gender Identity Clinic* in order to find a 'solution' to the 'problem,' Callie becomes aware of the signifying power of the gendered body:

> "I knew that my situation, whatever it was, was a crisis of some kind. [...] They [my parents] acted as though my problem was medical and therefore fixable. So I began to hope so, too. Like a person with a terminal illness, I was eager to ignore the immediate symptoms, hoping for a last-minute cure. I veered back and forth between hope and its opposite, a growing certainty that something terrible was wrong with me." (*MS* 405)

By comparing an intersex variation to an illness – a *terminal illness* no less – the process of the medicalization of intersex is rendered explicit: first comes the declaration of intersex as a "crisis," or a state of emergency, followed by a pathologization of intersex, and finally, at least, the prospect of a remedy, a "cure," the "fixing" of the intersex 'condition.'

Callie's alleged 'deviance' from gendered bodily norms triggers sequences of attempted 'normalization' in the narrative. Callie is suddenly confronted with her perceived failure to meet the cultural/medical standards of femaleness/femininity by both her parents and the doctors. Her bodily self-perception clashes with the perception of others: "I was largely oblivious to the clumsy figure I cut. [...] all that machinery clanked beneath the observation tower of my head, and I was too close to see it" (*MS* 406). Her parents, however, make her aware of her non-normatively gendered body: "It was *terrifying* to see your child in the *grip of unknown forces*. [...] they [my parents] were seized with a *fear* that I was *growing out of control*" (*MS* 406, emphasis added) – like a Bakhtinian grotesque body that is continually growing, transgressing its material, bodily boundaries. Yet the novel urges to preserve, or re-establish, Callie's gender intelligibility: "There was no sense in worrying about a psychological assessment that could only confirm what was obvious: that I was a normal, well-adjusted girl" (*MS* 415).

The impending 're-establishing' of gender 'normalcy' – or rather, as it is phrased by the doctor, the establishing of an 'appearance' of gender 'normalcy,' more precise: normative 'femaleness' – is formulated in terms of a quick-change medical intervention aimed at 'aligning' Callie's physical gender characteristics with her female self-identification. This medical intervention as suggested by Dr. Luce draws on a rhetoric that can be formulated as the "legitimating rhetoric of spiritual transformation to naturalize [the] makeover processes" (Weber and Tice 2009). This rhetoric, containing a logic that, as Ann Kibbey argues, "'converts the ordinary

person or object into something that is retrospectively perceived as inadequate,' in turn heightening the salvational powers of the intercessionary agent" (quoted in Weber and Tice 2009), seems to be an integral strategy in Luce's recommendation of medical treatment:

"'First, hormone injections. Second, cosmetic surgery. The hormone treatments will initiate breast development and enhance her female secondary sex characteristics. 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. And then Callie can go on and enjoy her life.'" (*MS* 428, emphasis added)

This statement strikes as problematic in several ways. First, the notion of gender binary is reaffirmed, or in fact about to be reproduced, by the planned endeavor to create an 'unambiguously' (appearing) gendered body and the underlying assumption that 'unambiguously' gendered bodies do even exist, and can be produced with the help of medical technology. Second, this idea relies on a biological essentialism, which allows for a 'conformity' between body and gender identification. Third, it perpetuates the idea that specific genders are 'authentic' and others are 'non-authentic,' and that there are particular persons or groups who have the (legal) authority to determine the criteria for a demarcation of this gender 'authenticity.' Forth, it is suggested that intersex lives are miserable, unintelligible lives, and only normatively gendered persons can live fulfilled, intelligible lives. And finally, fifth, the logic of the argumentation requires the consequent erasure of any intersex characteristic. The novel's iteration of the well-established medico-cultural justification for medical intervention picks up the criticism formulated in many intersex first-person narratives. However, the novel lacks self-reflexivity here, as the anticipated outcome of the interventions sounds too promising even to Callie. Moreover, the connotation of processes of gender reassignment surgery and procedures in transgender contexts and its displacement to an intersex context lacks an awareness about this problematic narrative strategy.[11]

The willfully intended erasure of any intersex characteristic from Callie's body contributes to the invisibility of intersex subjects and forecloses the possibility of (adult) intersex intelligibility. The surgical and hormonal interventions are trivialized and the risks downplayed by Dr. Luce, and consequently by Callie's parents, especially in comparison to the anticipated result of the creation of a 'fixed' (in the

11 While some people opt for surgical, hormonal and other medical treatment on their own accord, in order to align their bodily characteristics with their gender self-identification, in the case of Callie the situation is different. Callie does not have a say in the decision-making process. Moreover, prior to her stay at the clinic she never felt the need to change her body in any way.

double sense of 'corrected' and 'stable') female subject: "It was not a difficult decision, especially as Luce had framed it. A single surgery and some injections would end the nightmare and give my parents back their daughter, their Calliope, intact. [...] No one would know. No one would ever know" (*MS* 429). Any mark of an intersex variation needs to be 'corrected,' in order to (re-) produce 'normalcy' – most crucially, to enable Callie to perform heterosexuality by making her sexually available, i.e. sexually attractive *and* bodily capable, for heterosexual activities. The influence of pornography on medical views on gendered corporeality and sexuality, which has been discussed previously, is explicitly commented on in the narrative. Not only does Dr. Luce write a sex advice column for *Playboy*; he moreover utilizes the "diagnostic tool of pornography" (*MS* 418) in his psychological assessment of Callie's (psycho-) sexual development, by showing her heterosexist porn movies to find out about Callie's sexual preferences; accompanied by the doctor's uncalled-for sexual remarks (*MS* 419).

The novel's naturalization of heterosexuality and the erasure, or the biologist explaining away of lesbian sexuality is not only effected by the planned medical interventions and its heteronormative premises. Throughout the narrative, lesbian desire is either prohibited (Callie's desire for the Obscure Object, a girl from her school, fails to materialize) or retrospectively justified by bodily characteristics marked as 'male' (XY chromosomes; testosterone level, *MS* 166) and the "inkling of her true biological nature" (*MS* 327). The contrast to a heterosexual male-identified Cal's success with Julie amplifies the novel's heteronormative privileging of heterosexuality. Morgan Holmes argues that this erasure of lesbian desire and existence is "deeply problematic," and criticizes *Middlesex*'s double standard with regard to sexuality: "Eugenides' characterization of Cal/liope falls right along the matched values of prescientific and biologist explanations for sexual dimorphism as *the* appropriate mode of being" and hence "rewrites [lesbian desire] as male heterosexuality" (Holmes 2008: 93). As a consequence of this characterization, Holmes claims, Callie is deprived of "any transgressive power"; queerness, she concludes, is marked as the non-human in the novel:

> "The problem is that the hermaphrodite can only become recognizable as human once all the queer desire, embodiment, and sex have been erased in a zero-sum game. [...] Until Caliope's [sic] humanity is as obvious as a lesbian – or a queer person more generally – as it is as a heterosexual protagonist, then Calliope is not an especially powerful character and the novel not especially new, revolutionary, or useful, but just a retrenchant heterosexist politics." (Holmes 2008: 94)

Middlesex's narrative strategies to (re)construct Cal_lie as an intelligible subject and the question of the "relationship between intelligibility and the human" (Butler 2001: 622) becomes particularly explicit in the narrative's negotiations of her_his sexuality

and the origins of her_his sexual desires. Cal_lies humanness depends not only on a coherent gender (Butler 2001: 622), but on a coherent performance of her_his gender in sexual terms. A 'failure' would mean to lose her_his humanness – thus, the novel's cautious efforts to prevent Cal_lie's loss of humanness, or of her_his recognizability as human, at the same time works to stabilize the very normative conditions of intelligibility.

A closer analysis of Dr. Luce's case report about Callie, titled PRELIMINARY STUDY: GENETIC XY (MALE) RAISED AS FEMALE (*MS* 435), reveals it to render a condensed version of conventional medical studies on intersex subjects, that entails its own deconstruction. Luce's report presents medical "data," his observations of Callie's gender behavior, notes on her familial background, on her "sexual function," and finally concludes:

"'*As the girl's gender identity was firmly established as female at the time her condition was discovered, a decision to implement feminizing surgery along with corresponding hormonal treatment seems correct. 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, sexual pleasure is only one factor in a happy life. The ability to marry and pass as a normal woman in society are also important goals, both of which will not be possible without feminizing surgery and hormone treatment.*'" (*MS* 437)

The report can be interpreted as constituting a moment of self-reflexivity and an ironic rearticulation of 'traditional' medical intersex discourses in the novel. Metanarrative references to medical texts (case studies etc.), heteronormative concepts of femaleness and female sexuality (that the medical texts themselves draw upon), and – more implicitly – to criticism of medical practices formulated by intersex activists and in first-person accounts, are interwoven in and appropriated for both a textual and a metatextual criticism on medical practice and its underlying normative framework. Thereby the text exposes the absurdity and the self-deconstructive moments of the medical reasoning. While the character of Luce himself does not show any hint of a self-reflective perspective on his own work, or on the medical establishment, or on his privileged positioning in a hierarchical context of institutionalized power relations, let alone on his own position as a white, able-bodied, middle-class, heterosexual, non-intersex, male individual, *Middlesex*'s fictional medical doctor functions here both as a representative (a specimen indeed) of the medical establishment and as an inherently (self-) revealing allegory of everything that is wrong, i.e. ethically questionable, with it. The doctor is not represented as an insensitive, barbaric monster who goes out of his way to inflict the greatest possible harm upon his patient. It is his patronizing manner and his pretense to act in the 'best interest' of his patient, together with his lack of critical (self-) awareness, that constitutes his violence.

Ultimately, the mechanisms of enforced 'normalization' in *Middlesex* are de/legitimated, respectively, by Callie's refusal/acceptance of the medical authority's gender construction. Callie comments on the apparent impossibility to *not* obey the medical authority's definition of her gender as female: "In his mellow, pleasing, educated voice, looking directly into my eyes, Luce declared that I was a girl whose clitoris was merely larger than those of other girls" (*MS* 433) – "If I had a clitoris – and a specialist was telling me that I did – what could I be but a girl?" (*MS* 434). The defining relative clause that modifies "a girl," "*whose clitoris was merely larger than those of other girls*," marks Callie's femaleness as 'inadequate' or 'insufficient' (paradoxically, the 'excess' of the clitoris signifies a 'deficit'). Callie internalizes the necessity to occupy a clearly delineated identity, or gender category, in order to be/come intelligible. The novel, once again, is anxious to establish, or to restore Callie's intelligibility:

> "It wasn't difficult to pour my identity into different vessels. In a sense, I was able to take whatever form was demanded of me. I only wanted to know the dimensions. Luce was providing them. My parents supported him. The prospect of having everything solved was wildly attractive to me, too [...]. I only wanted it all to be over. I wanted to go home and forget it had ever happened. So I listened to Luce quietly and made no objections." (*MS* 434)

Again, ostensible acceptance of a situation ("the blankness of obedience," *MS* 434) of being subjected to (institutional) power functions as a strategy to cope with or escape this situation, when other strategies of resistance are not possible or might even be potentially harmful for the individual, e.g. through sanctions. However, the use of this strategy in the narrative is not unproblematic as it perpetuates the idea that intersex individuals are able or willing to arbitrarily take on any gender identity; thereby it claims an essentialist relationship between body and gender identification, and reinforces the highly problematic notion found in medical reasoning that intersex infants' or children's gender identification is 'malleable,' which functions as a prerequisite for surgery and hormone treatment.

Callie leaves her family in order to escape the 'normalizing' surgery, which might seem like an act of liberation from the medical authority's control and a rejection of its coercive regulatory mechanisms which affect her body. However, Callie's rejection of a female gender does not lead to an acceptance of her intersex embodiment. Callie decides to radically redefine herself as a boy – a decision based on the data she finds in Dr. Luce's report (the discovery of her XY chromosomal status, undescended testes, and a slight hypospadia), and hence on a biologist concept of gender , and not on a subjective, individual experience or choice. By "going where no one knows me" (*MS* 439) Callie seeks to erase her former identity as a girl, or as a "hermaphrodite," as a "monster" (*MS* 431), in order to take on the 'unambiguously' male identity of Cal. The novel's continuing renegotiations of gender intelligibility,

epitomized by Cal's subsequent struggle with the sociocultural demands of gender and sexual normativity, are summarized by Cal's critical reflection on normativity on his westward journey:

"I was beginning to understand something about normality. Normality wasn't normal. It couldn't be. If normality were normal, everybody could leave it alone. They could sit back and let normality manifest itself. But people – and especially doctors – had doubts about normality. They weren't sure normality was up to the job. And so they felt inclined to give it a boost." (*MS* 446)

This insight corresponds to a simplified concept of cultural constructivism and relates to medicine's investment in relying on and reproducing bodily, gender, and other norms. The explicit commentary on the historical and cultural contingency of norms marks the protagonist's individual process of awareness and simultaneously functions as a metanarrative moment of self-reflexivity.

However, the novel's explicit statement of self-reflexivity at this point seems like a predictable attempt to anticipate potential criticism directed at *Middlesex*'s reproduction of normative concepts of gender and sexuality – an anticipation that has proven true, considering the amount of literary reviews that formulate their critiques exactly along these lines (e.g. Koch-Rein, Lee, Holmes). This metanarrative strategy to anticipate – and thereby evade – criticism by explicitly claiming the author's/the text's own awareness about problematic representations and their/its own reproduction thereof as an a priori justification for their reiteration is a popular strategy of postmodern texts about politically, ethically, or otherwise precarious themes.

At a later instance in the narrative, Cal's elaboration of conflicting theories on gender identity formation similarly serves as both a reflection on his gender identification and a metanarrative commentary on the debates surrounding the cultural/biological constructedness of gender. Cal finds himself caught up within contradictory theories and discourses on subject and gender formation, including evolutionary biology, Luce's theory that "personality was primarily determined by environment," and the "essentialism" of the intersex movement (*MS* 479): "My life exists at the center of this debate. [...] I don't fit into any of these theories. [...] I never felt out of place being a girl. I still don't feel entirely at home among men. Desire made me cross over to the other side, desire and the facticity of my body" (*MS* 479). Kilian argues:

"Die Diskursvielfalt unterminiert den naturwissenschaftlichen Diskurs in seinem Geltungsanspruch, lässt ihn vielmehr als "Teil einer Serie kultureller Narrativierungen" [...] erscheinen. Sie erlaubt dem Protagonisten, sich aus den Fesseln eindeutiger Bestimmungen zu lösen, die verschiedenen Erklärungsmodelle sowohl als Begrenzung als auch als Ermöglichung der

Selbstpositionierung zu begreifen und gleichzeitig ihre beschränkte Reichweite zu markieren, indem er zwei Pole der Widerständigkeit postuliert: einen psychischen Überschuss, das Begehren, sowie die unhintergehbare Materialität des Körpers, die er allerdings ebenso unhinterfragt mit einer heterosexuellen Orientierung verbindet" (Kilian 2014)[12]

While Cal's self-positioning postulates an 'ambiguity' of gender identification, the binarism of gender constructions (and hence, of sexuality) remains in place. Intersex intelligibility is, yet again, displaced outside the realm of the possible.

5.2.2 From Callie to Cal, from Detroit to San Francisco: A Cross-Country and Gender Transition Journey

The narrative transition from Callie's life with her family in Detroit to Cal's new life in San Francisco is allegorized by the double transition motif of Cal's gender transitioning and his cross-country journey. The travel motif is frequently employed in transgender narratives; the departing from one geographical place to arrive at another as symbolizing a 'departure' from one bodily/identitarian place to 'arrive' at another conceptualizes the gender transgression in terms of a binary notion of gender, in which there are two fixed gender categories (male and female) cast as either the 'point of departure' or the 'final destination.' Although this concept of gender transition can also be conceived as understanding gender as a continuum, and thus would allow for a identitarian/bodily 'halt' or 'arrival' at some place in-between (as it is, for example, the case with Jess Goldberg in Leslie Feinberg's novel *Stone Butch Blues*), *Middlesex*'s protagonist seems determined to radically redefine his gender identification from female to male.

As Cal makes his way across the country and from one gender to the 'other,' he faces substantial external (considering the travelling) and internal (considering his gender identification) problems. In appropriating various motifs, themes, and narrative strategies from transgender/trans and intersex narratives, the novel seeks to substantiate the 'authenticity' of the protagonist's struggle during his gender transition. The narrative's strategy to employ as many of these motives as possible however fails to construct a transition narrative that is differentiated or plausible.

12 "The plurality of discourses undermines the scientific discourse in its validity claim and makes it appear rather as a 'part of a series of cultural narrativizations' [...]. It allows the protagonist to free himself from the constraints of distinct determinations, to understand the various explanatory models both as a limitation and an enabling of self-positioning, and at the same time to mark their limited scope by postulating two poles of resistance: a psychological excess, the desire, and the uncircumventable materiality of the body, which he however also unquestioningly associates with a heterosexual orientation" (translation V.A.).

Within a very short time period, Cal experiences an identitarian rollercoaster that has his intelligibility as a man constantly threatened by the reemergence of Calliope. The novel provides a commentary on the cultural constructedness of gender but at the same time resorts to essentialist ideas to make its point. Clothes, a haircut, and the 'proper' use of the public toilet are equated with a distinct gender: "He [the barber] turned me to face the mirror. And there she was, for the last time, in the silvered glass: Calliope. She still wasn't gone yet. She was like a captive spirit, peeking out" (*MS* 442) (the narrative cannot avoid the clichéd usage of the mirror scene as a Lacanian moment of subject formation); this moment is followed by Cal's own doubts about his male identification: "What if the girl in the mirror really *was* me? How did I think I could defect to the other side so easily?" (*MS* 442) – the only escape from this moment of uncertainty and ambivalence is closing his eyes, "refus[ing] to return Calliope's gaze any longer" (*MS* 442). The refusal to meet the gaze of the 'female' part of his sense of self marks a moment of identity dissociation and contestation, and gives Cal room to scrutinize his gender re-identification, fearing that it would result in a compromising or denying of a part of his sense of self: "I was fleeing myself. [...] I was fleeing [...] under the alias of my new gender. [...] I was becoming a new person" (*MS* 443). The new male gender identification lacks 'authenticity' and therefore cannot be integrated into a coherent sense of self yet. Yet only one haircut later, Callie seems to have given way to Cal: "I opened my eyes. And in the mirror I didn't see myself. [...] Not the shy girl [...] but instead her fraternal twin brother" (*MS* 445). He feels himself to have become "a new creation" (*MS* 445) but at the same time he "didn't feel like a boy would feel" (*MS* 444), as "the feelings inside that boy were still a girl's" (*MS* 445).

While these passages claim a self-reflexivity concerning the cultural construction of gender, they reproduce normative concepts of gender up to the point where they reproduce harmful images and ideas of intersex (or transgender/trans) subjects. The idea that a distinct gender can be aligned with certain ways of feeling – an example of "feminine" feelings is "[t]o cut off your hair after a breakup" (*MS* 445) – does not only reaffirm normative biologist-essentialist concepts of gender, but moreover misrepresents the real emotional and physical struggles of individuals who go through the experience of a gender transition or who seek to come to terms with the (un)intelligibility of their gender identification. The novel's appropriation of themes and motifs from transgender/trans or intersex narratives strikes at moments as a misrepresentation, if not a mockery, of the referenced narratives.

At other moments, the novel manages to capture some of the aspects and consequences of perceived gender 'ambiguity,' for instance the forms of violence trans, intersex, and (other) gender nonconforming persons have to face. *Middlesex*'s representation of these incidents is, however, far from unproblematic. The obligatory scene in which a gender nonconforming person – usually during their childhood and/or adolescence – is violently attacked by (cis) men who rip off the person's

clothes (usually pants and/or shirts or binders) in order to inspect their genitals and/or chest/breasts, followed by more violent attacks due to the attackers' feeling disgusted by either the 'ambiguous' body parts or a 'discrepancy' between corporeality and perceived gender, is integrated in Cal's narrative (*MS* 475ff).[13] The violence in this scene, both physical/sexual and visual, parallels the violence exercised by the medical authorities. The crucial techniques of power and control to which Foucault refers – hierarchical observation, normalizing judgment, and examination – are reiterated here, as the men who attack Cal easily overpower him, they are physically on top of him, they make normalizing judgment with regard to Cal's perceived gender, and they finally examine his genitalia, leaving Cal disempowered, humiliated and stripped of humanity: "'Crawl back into the hole you came out of, freak'" (*MS* 477). The novel asserts that no matter how hard Cal tries, as long as he remains in an unintelligible state (i.e. the failure to perform normativity), he can never escape disciplinary control, and consequently will be punished again and again for his gender 'transgressions.' The narrative's reiteration of (structural) violence against an intersex individual needs to be understood as the forcible reiteration of norms that produces the conditions for the intersex subject, Cal.[14] By this point in the narration, the novel has constituted the conditions for its protagonist (that seem to be) in line with social norms and that represent its intersex character as an 'impossible' subject, marking Cal as "a real outlaw" (*MS* 467) – a gender "outlaw" no less. In its simultaneous processes and strategies of the iteration of norms and its appropriation of trans or intersex narratives, *Middlesex* reveals a persistent refusal to recognize, accept, and appreciate genders that are not classifiable according to one of two normative and legitimate categories, 'male' or 'female.' After all, "[r]unning away didn't make [Cal] feel any less of a monster" (*MS* 449).

5.2.3 San Francisco: Space of the Freak Show and Mythology

With Cal's arrival in San Francisco, the novel takes up and renegotiates two other (interrelated) historical narratives that shaped the category of intersex in problematic ways: Greek mythology and the US-American freak show of the 19th and early 20th centuries. Academic criticism on *Middlesex* repeatedly revolves around the novel's use of the freak or monster trope and mythological motifs with regard to intersex. This relation is heavily refuted by many critics – intersex and non-intersex alike – on the grounds that it reduces intersex to a marginalized, pathetic and negative identity position. Sarah Graham refers to Cal_lie's association with mythological tropes for

13 Other examples are *Stone Butch Blues* (Leslie Feinberg 1993), *Sacred Country* (Rose Tremain 1992), *Boys Don't Cry* (dir. Kimberly Peirce 1999), *XXY* (dir. Lucía Puenzo 2007) and *Tomboy* (dir. Céline Sciamma 2011).

14 This concept of iterability is theorized by Butler (1993: 95).

her argument that Cal_lie is a "tragic" figure, inhabiting a "'disqualified' identity," the intersex subject's fate being inevitably "miserable, associated with disempowerment, the theft of identity and an unhappy dual existence" (Graham 2009). She further argues that

> "like Cal, who rejects intersexuality in favour of a distinct gender identity, the novel itself continually expresses anxiety about sexual ambiguity by associating such hybridity with monstrosity and freakery. I propose that the novel's use of Greek mythology and the tropes of the traditional American 'freak show' destabilize its otherwise affirmative representation of the central character by suggesting that intersexuality is, in fact, a 'synonym for monster.'" (Graham 2009)

As a partly Greek narrative, *Middlesex* makes various and recurring references to the myth of Tiresias, whose gender changed from male to female and back, and to the myth of Hermaphroditus; their motif of transformation is iterated by the novel and hence becomes its leitmotif that structures the whole narrative. It is thinkable that mythological narratives and figures have a potential to offer alternative spaces of representation for intersex subjects, which challenge the medical discourses on intersex in its validity claim (Kilian 2014); although, as pointed out earlier, mythological references can be traced in medical (re)conceptualizations of intersex.

The evocation of mythology in the context of contemporary intersex representations is generally considered as problematic as it forecloses a reclaiming of viable intersex subject positions:

> "The mythic, metaphoric, monstrous hermaphrodite for all intents and purposes seems to have – for the longest time – eclipsed the existence of intersexual bodies, and silenced their realities [...]. [...] there is a history of the hermaphrodite as myth and metaphor that needs to be considered, a particular history of objectification, a history in which academic discourse has (widely) participated." (Koch-Rein 2005: 242)

Through the narrative displacement of intersex narratives, traditional, mythological narratives interfere with real-life narratives, as intersex author and activist Thea Hillman argues: "While the myth of Hermaphroditus has captured the imagination for ages, it traps real human beings in the painfully small confines of [...] someone else's story" (*Intersex* 29). *Middlesex* indeed seems to make a distinction between its usage of the terms 'intersex' and 'hermaphrodite' and its (historical) connotations.[15]

15 The term hermaphrodite is and can be used as a self-affirmative term by some intersex persons. In *Middlesex* its use is not unproblematic, although an intersex character uses it to refer to himself. However, this usage is not sufficiently contextualized in the novel, and it is the non-intersex author who chose to use the term, not a (fictional) intersex person.

Some critics have noted that the use of the term 'hermaphrodite' associates Cal_lie with the mythological figure and thus connotes an unintelligible identity category, an "impossible state of being" (Graham 2009), implying "the conservative view that only the categories of male and female are natural genders" (Lee 2010: 33). In contrast, the term 'intersex' is mostly used in a political context and associated with activism and social bonding (represented by the character of Zora), and thus with a more progressive stance on gender nonconformity; a (self-) categorization which Cal rejects: "I happen not to be a political person. I don't like groups. Though I'm a member of the Intersex Society of North America, I have never taken part in its demonstrations. I live my own life and nurse my own wounds" (*MS* 106). Cal's refusal to associate himself with a collective intersex identity serves to further distinguish him from self-affirmative intersex persons. This self-imposed detachment has an alienating effect on him, as it restrains Cal from occupying a modern, empowered and intelligible intersex subject position. The message seems to be that (self-affirmative) non-intersex individuals can afford "apolitical apathy" (Holmes 2008: 92). The novel thereby exposes its own apolitical stance, or rather its political agnosticism typical for postmodern narratives. Morgan Holmes argues that the "open declaration of an absence of political motive for Cal/liope conveniently releases the novel from any perceived duty to move the intersex movement forward, which is fair enough. [...] however, the claim to a lack of politics is specious, for whether the narrative voice does or does not declare a politics, the actual cultural product that is the novel exists within a political context" (Holmes 2008: 92).

Middlesex's iteration of the tropes of the freak and of mythological figures necessitates closer scrutiny with regard to its potential to offer an alternative point of reference for the novel's intersex narrative. The problematic nature of the novel's evocation of the 'monstrosity' of the intersex body is pointed out by Sarah Graham, who asserts that "the novel's use of myth and freak show tropes conveys Cal's monstrosity" and as a result it "invokes damaging images of transgender figures from the past to show the legacy that queer subjects are forced to contend with in the present" (Graham 2009). However, it can be argued that this connotation of freakery might also possibly function as the counter-site in the novel from which a subversive redefinition of (sexed) bodily difference can be realized. Morgan Holmes expresses ambivalent feelings about the subversive potential of associating intersex subjects with monstrosity:

"At one time it may have been worth positioning intersexed bodies to fulfill what Donna Haraway has termed the 'promise of monsters,' creating patterns of interference to challenge traditional, masculinist, linear narrative structures that code power and privilege along a binary axis in which the self-contained male body always wins and the excessive, gestating female body always loses [...]. The problem, however, is that the deployment of intersexed monsters as culture jammers par excellence has stalled, resulting not in substantive interference [...], but

in the reification of the proper place of traditional visions and modes of masculinity in opposition to femininity." (Holmes 2008: 90)

Ultimately, the "neutralized" intersex body is "repositioned not as disruptive agent but beyond and outside the realm of gender altogether" (Holmes 2008: 90). The following analysis of the (performed) freakishness of intersex bodies in *Middlesex* takes up and reconsiders the initial approach outlined by Holmes; thereby drawing on a concept of freakery as "the intentional performance of constructed abnormality as entertainment" (Chemers 2005) that reflects the performativity of corporeality, which calls into question dominant constructions of 'normative' and 'non-normative' bodies. The subversive potential of staging bodily indeterminacy is reflected in the structure of the performance itself: "the exhibition defie[s] official closure. To exhibit is to hold something up for question, to deny its totalizing teleology" (Fretz 1996: 105).

Both 'intersex' and 'freak' are concepts that rely heavily on visualization practices; historically, the former particularly within the medical discourse, the latter within the show context. These visualization practices are governed by hierarchical and objectifying relations which are generally prevalent in the social system, but which nevertheless have a very specific tradition in both intersex and freak contexts. Rosemarie Garland Thomson notes that "[f]reaks are above all products of perception: they are the consequence of a comparative relationship in which those who control the social discourse and the means of representation recruit the seeming truth of the body to claim the center for themselves and banish others to the margins" (Thomson 1997: 62). Freaks in this account contest the status quo of human embodiment. A similar point can be made for intersex subjects, but with a crucial distinction. Sandell et al argue that "[o]f the modes of being on display, one is 'freakishness' – based on physical, *usually visible*, difference. It has been suggested that the identity of the dominant or mainstream community is strengthened by rejecting anomaly" (Sandell et al 2005, emphasis added). The significant difference between intersex and freak visual representations is the mode of 'visibility.' Historically, definitions of individuals as freakish arose generally from human responses to extraordinary bodies, based on visual appearance which was apparent to the public in most cases. While individuals who are visibly and publicly gender nonconforming were and still are often punished for their perceived gender transgression within their social and cultural surroundings, most intersex individuals were defined as such at birth or very early in their lives almost exclusively by those who possessed the clinical gaze. The historical dis/continuities between 'freakish' bodies and intersex bodies were marked by advanced medical knowledge providing 'scientific' explanations for non-normatively sexed bodies, which classified them as pathological (Fausto-Sterling 2000: 34-37).

The potential of the freak show space, and by extension San Francisco, to function as a site of resistance or a heterotopia[16] to the normative space of society depends on how the power relations within the freak show context are organized. The novel's displacement of the freak show from its traditional locations to the city of San Francisco is an interesting strategy. Historically, places and spaces played a significant role in the social and cultural perception of intersex and functioned as the sites where the knowledge production of intersex was institutionalized. The freak show of the 19th and beginning of the 20th centuries was generally located outside the city sphere, or outside the 'civilized' life. The traveling carnivals had no fixed place but were constantly moving, mostly through North America's rural areas, particularly in the Midwest and the rural South. The shows and entertainment industry located at Coney Island were, due to its peninsula status, while linked to the city sphere also remote enough to not disturb the ordinary social life of citizens. Either way freakery was not something encountered and confronted with in people's everyday life: one either had to travel there, to leave the city or one's 'home space'; or it came for a visit but did not stay for long. In each case, freakery and its disruptiveness posed only a temporary challenge to normative notions of embodiment. In *Middlesex*, the relocation of the freak show to the sex club Sixty-Niners in North Beach, San Francisco signifies its positioning at once within the city limits but also on the social margins of ordinary city life, in "an America that had never existed, a kid's idea of sharpies and hucksters and underworld life" (*MS* 483).

In *Middlesex* it seems that a "seamy underworld" (*MS* 483) is the only space where an intersex person can make a living, by exhibiting their intersex body. Working in a freak show is conflated with working in a sex show: Cal's journey takes him to San Francisco, where he works as an attraction in a *freak sex show* called Octopussy's Garden. Cal's performance as 'The God Hermaphroditus – half man, half woman' and his co-workers' performances as 'Melanie the Mermaid' and 'Ellie and Her Electrifying Eel' make references to the myth of Hermaphroditus and the nymph Salmacis (*MS* 482, 490) – and as such are deemed 'adequate' work for gender-variant persons like Carmen, a pre-op male-to-female transsexual, and Zora, who has Androgen Insensitivity (an intersex variation).

16 In "Of Other Spaces" (1967), Michel Foucault defines the heterotopia as a real place/space (in contrast to utopias) that is formed in the very founding of society; heterotopias are spaces in which other (real) spaces within the culture are simultaneously represented, contested, and inverted, and thus function as counter-sites (Foucault 1967). Heterotopias are usually found outside of all other places, or at the margins of society; they are 'other spaces.' One sort of heterotopia called 'heterotopias of deviation,' defined as "those in which individuals whose behavior is deviant in relation to the required mean or norm are placed" (Foucault 1967), can be related to the freak show, but also to the clinic/asylum of the 19th century.

While working at the freak sex show, Cal's self-identification and how he is perceived by others is inconsistent. For Bob Presto, the owner of the sex club, Cal is less an individual than a freaky commodity in his show. Presto represents the stereotypical unethical, money-hungry US-American white businessman – "an exploiter, a porn dog, a sex pig" (*MS* 483) – who has gained material prosperity at other people's expense, who is unethical, with the attitude that he can buy anything, or anyone, with money. His position marks him as a representative of the dominant patriarchal ideology and capitalism. His only interest in Cal is economic; he considers him as "a gold mine" (*MS* 483), an object he can sell like the other 'commodities' in his club who are mostly female, or gender-variant: prostitutes, lap dancers, sex show performers. The novel is undetermined whether working at a freak sex show is considered as exploitation. The exploitative quality is downplayed by Cal's assessment that he "could have done worse" (*MS* 483) – a problematic statement, as it suggests that it is somehow more ethically justifiable to exploit an intersex person than to exploit a non-intersex person for sex work.

Cal's objectification and exploitation operate on several intersected levels, as intersex persons are not only subjected to the medical but also to the economic system: "The Clinic had prepared me for it [i.e. working at the freak sex show], benumbing my sense of shame, and besides, I was desperate for money" (*MS* 483). Since trafficking in sex is one of the most profitable trades to conduct,[17] the relations between trader, customer, and commodity are strictly and hierarchically regulated in economic terms. Presto's gaze is the powerful gaze of the profit-greedy trader of bodies, and the object of his gaze is constructed in terms of how profitable the object is for him, how well Cal will perform as a commodity. In this trade relation, Cal considers himself a performer-object who gets paid for exhibiting his body. He knows that he would "give [Presto] an edge over his competitors on the Strip" (*MS* 484), i.e. would perform well in monetary terms, and he claims that he only works at the show because he needs the money. The spectators are repeatedly referred to as "customers" by Cal (*MS* 486). In adopting an economic viewpoint and its terminology which are established and dominated by the system's authorities, Cal apparently submits to the

17 Sex trafficking has an estimated annual revenue of $32 billion, or about $87 million a day; about 800,000 people are trafficked into sex and forced labor throughout the world every year (Neubauer 2011). LGBT youth is disproportionally exploited for forced sex work: 58.7 percent of LGBT homeless youth have been sexually victimized (compared to 33.4 percent of heterosexual homeless youth); LGBT youth are three times as likely to engage in survival sex than their heterosexual peers; LGBT youth are roughly 7.4 times more likely to experience acts of sexual violence than heterosexual homeless youth (Lillie 2013). Transgender street youth are 3.5 times more likely to be involved in sex trade compared to cisgender street youth (Koyama 2012).

inspecting gaze and the power of the system. Ethical questions concerning sex trafficking remain largely untouched in the novel.

While economic factors with regard to the exhibition of (intersex) bodies in freak/sex shows are inextricably linked to and inform its power relations and modes of representation, it is crucial to consider the normative regulations of the freak show narrative beyond the economic context, and to look at the performative aspects of freakery. Freak show performers generally inhabit bodies that are culturally constructed as 'abnormal' or 'unnatural.' Robert Bogdan asserts that "being a 'freak' [...] is not [...] a physical condition that some people have [...]. 'Freak' is a way of thinking about and presenting people – a frame of mind and a set of practices" (Bogdan 1996: 24). Recent studies of freak shows claim that "the body of the 'freak' functions as a stage for playing out various pressing social and political concerns" (Stephens 2005). Elizabeth Grosz notes that performers who stage their (actual or pretended) gender 'ambiguity' "occupy the impossible middle ground between the oppositions dividing [...] one sex from the other" (Grosz 1996: 57), hinting at the unintelligibility of such subjects outside the show context.

The principles of dominant ideology that control the narrative structure represent the white male authority as the bearer of the look of the spectator, and the intersex individual as the spectacle to be looked at.[18] The visualization practices, and their regulatory mechanisms that constitute their conditions, at work in the medical context are apparently reproduced in the freak show context. In the clinic, Callie's intersex body is the object of the authorities' gaze – the white, male, heterosexual, non-intersex gaze – and subjected to normative judgment. In medical textbooks, the genitalia of the objects of study are exposed while their faces are made invisible, which not only makes them anonymous but strips them of their individuality and humanity. This practice of fragmenting, and thereby hyper-dramatizing intersex bodies is iterated in the show context, where Cal keeps his head out of the water and his face remains unseen by the audience. On display are only those body parts that are considered as 'deviating' from the established norms and as such are constitutive of the category of the 'freak' – and therefore must bear up against the scrutinizing gaze of a collective audience who judge the body parts with regard to the normative standards. At first, the idea of facing the spectators ("voyeurs") unnerves Cal: "I don't think I could have performed in a regular peep show, face-to-face with the voyeurs. Their gaze would have sucked my soul out of me" (*MS* 484). Cal's referring to the audience as "customers" and at the same time to their scopophilic practices construes the practice of gazing as a form of consumption: the show "was the sexual equivalent of Trader Vic's. Viewers got to see strange things, uncommon bodies, but much of

18 See Laura Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema" (1975) for a discussion of the concept of 'the male gaze,' which has been a central idea of feminist film and media criticism.

the appeal was the transport involved. Looking through their portholes, the customers were watching real bodies do the things bodies sometimes did in dreams" (*MS* 486).

Despite its reproduction of "images of exploitation and prejudice for consumption" (Graham 2009), the novel's freak show narrative presents several strategies of resistance to the objectifying gaze. Performative resistance within the freak show context can effectively operate by employing basically two different strategies: the counter-gaze and refusal of interaction with the audience. Traditionally "the freak represents an existence that barely looks back. [...] freaks invite looks and stares from audiences and researchers. They don't stare back" (Mitchell and Snyder 2005). The staging of bodies considered as freakish affirms normalcy as it presents subjects against which a spectator is able to identify themselves as 'normal' against a 'deviant' Other. Moreover, the show context and its setting draw a clear demarcation line between seer and seen, between self and other, which facilitates for the audience to distinguish themselves from the 'deviant' object, and at the same time to unite with fellow spectators in their perceived 'normalcy.'

The dominant subject position of the show's audience is called into question by the performer returning the gaze. The spectator's body becomes fragmented in the eye of the performer; since the spectator looks through a peephole into the tank their body remains invisible to the performer except for their face. Water distorts both the spectators' and the performers' visions, and the peephole allows only for a limited field of vision. The mode of moving inside the water is different from that outside water: bodily motions are slowed down and the underwater law of gravitation enables a distinct corporeal representation. The performers in Octopussy's Garden confront their audience with their gaze in different ways and not only with their eyes.

Zora is probably the most likable gender variant character in *Middlesex*, although – or maybe precisely because – her intelligibility as an intersex individual is represented as precarious and fraught with uncertainties. Zora is introduced in the novel as antagonistic to Cal both with regard to an affirmative self-identification as an intersex person and with regard to images of intersex corporeality. The first instance of her appearance in *Middlesex* is her performance as Melanie the Mermaid in the sex freak show. She has an intriguing effect on the audience, but even more so on Cal, through whose gaze she is constructed in the first place, or almost exclusively. Zora appears to be a stunning beauty,

> "her long blond hair flowing behind her like seaweed, tiny air bubbles beading her breasts like pearls, as she kicked her glittering emerald fish tail. She performed no lewdness. Zora's beauty was so great that everyone was content merely looking at her, the white skin, the beautiful breasts, the taut belly with its winking navel, the magnificent curve of her swaying backside where flesh merged with scales. She swam with her arms at her sides, voluptuously fluctuating. Her face was serene, her eyes a light Caribbean blue." (*MS* 485)

Zora confronts the spectators with her whole bodily performance: she opens her eyes underwater and looks at them, smiles at them, and uses her beautiful body in a voluptuous manner to enthrall the audience. Her mermaid performance might not be a coincidence here: cultural representations of intersex subjects and mermaids have in common, throughout history, a profound anxiety of the unknown, the other-than-human, the transgressive, of that which resists bodily, speciesist and/or gendered unity by exceeding boundaries of the body and identity. This anxiety manifests in representing both mermaids and intersex subjects as living outside or at the margins of the civilized, cultural human realm of reason and order; as being threatening to this order by either entering the human realm which offers no explanations for their existence, or by luring humans away from the cultural realm and into the depths of transformative, unknown spaces, which leads to the dissolution of stable identities.[19]

In directly facing her audience and performing the mermaid myth, Zora seeks to resist the spectator's hierarchical observation and normalizing judgment of her intersex body. However, while she privately identifies as intersex (*MS* 488), the intersex features of her body remain invisible to the audience. In addition, her apparent normative beauty prevents the spectators from being appalled or disgusted by her body. The novel does not comment extensively on the spectators' reaction to Zora's performance apart from that "everyone was content merely to look at her" because of her beauty, as Cal claims (*MS* 485). The audience shows no anxiety or terror of the 'deviant' body. Within the freak show context, Zora is not able to be/come recognizable as intersex because others fail to identify her as intersex; instead the heterosexist notions implied in this gazing at a perceived female body that complies with the system's coercive beauty standards are inscribed into her body. As a consequence Zora fails to disrupt or even subvert the modern system of disciplinary power and its system of thought.

Both within and outside the freak sex show context, Zora's body is constructed through Cal's perspective. In some respect, she embodies a clichéd image of women with Androgen Insensitivity (AIS), whose bodies are despite XY chromosomes immune to 'male' hormones and consequently develop 'female' external bodily

19 The mermaid figure is associated with *l'homme différent*, a creature which lives in a world parallel to that of human society, usually located on the boundaries of the known world. According to Lucian Boia, the 'other' of 'human' – that which is not human, the 'animal' – is imagined as a fantastic creature, which can embody traits of animals or spirits. *L'homme différent* resembles humans in most instances but possesses one characteristic which makes it fundamentally different from human beings. Humans feel simultaneously awe and abomination about *l'homme différent* – a fascination but also horror of the other-than-human, of a creature that is *akin* to them but is at the same time *deviant*. Boia elaborates the concept of *l'homme différent* in *Entre l'ange et la bête: Le mythe de l'homme différent de l'Antiquité à nos jours* (1995).

characteristics. Cal's comparison between himself and Zora leads him to the conviction that despite their similar bodily variation Zora benefits from her intersex variation:

"Aside from being blond, she was shapely and full-lipped. Her prominent cheekbones divided her face in Arctic planes. When Zora spoke you were aware of the skin stretching over these cheekbones and hollowing out between her jaws, the tight mask it made, banshee-like, with her blue eyes piercing through above. And then there was her figure, the milkmaid breasts, the swim champ stomach, the legs of a sprinter or a Martha Graham dancer. Even unclothed, Zora appeared to be all woman. There was no visible sign that she possessed neither womb nor ovaries. Androgen Insensitivity Syndrome created the perfect woman, Zora told me. A number of top fashion models had it." (*MS* 487)

The reference to fashion models with AIS points to the sexualized notion of a very specific type of intersex women, who *despite/because* of their intersex variation embody the female beauty ideal to its extreme. This notion of women with AIS is ambivalent. On the one hand, in a cultural context in which gender nonconformity is negatively connoted and violently rejected, it appears all the more surprising that the result of an intersex variation is regarded as positive and beautiful. On the other hand, this image is problematic. First, the sexualization of women with AIS denies to a certain extent the dangers of cis-hetero-male violence directed at many gender variant individuals, in particular trans women and intersex women, which is motivated by homo-, trans- and interphobia. Second, the differentiation made between 'acceptable' and 'non-acceptable' intersex individuals based on their appearance and level of gender normative attractiveness serves to further render gender nonconforming persons at the whim of the majority and to reaffirm the normative conditions for gender intelligibility. The representations of intersex individuals' social 'acceptability' in *Middlesex* seems to revolve around an intersex person's ability to measure up to cultural requirements of female beauty standards – while Callie seems to have failed in this regard, Zora's extraordinary beauty serves to mark Callie's 'failure' even more crucially. The different representations of two intersex characters and the commentaries provided on their ability to perform the 'proper' modes of femininity can be interpreted as the novel's comment on how cultural imperatives on normative femaleness is implicit in validating or prohibiting intersex intelligibility.

Yet it is important to note that Zora's body and comment on her femininity is completely constructed via Cal's gaze. He describes Zora's body in great detail, mostly in an eroticizing way. This strategy serves to express his perceived difference from her in terms of gendered appearance and (hetero-) sexual attractiveness: "[W]e looked nothing alike. [...] On the street people took me for a boy. Zora turned heads. Men whistled at her" (*MS* 492). In Cal's perception his, or rather Callie's ostensible 'failure' to perform satisfyingly as a 'woman' is due to her lack of normative

femininity and heterosexual appeal. This estimation, which has been articulated at earlier instances in the novel during Callie's teenage years, becomes now even more obvious when contrasted to another intersex woman's embodiment of the 'ideal woman.'

On another level, Cal's descriptions of Zora testify to his own sexual attraction to her. Although he asserts that she has a sexual effect on many men, both in the sex show and outside, it becomes obvious how Cal himself perceives her as an object of desire. He even admits his attraction to her when he states that "I never felt sisterly around Zora. [...] I was always aware of her figure under the robe. I went around averting my eyes and trying not to stare" (*MS* 492). Looking at Zora, however, is what he does extensively. However, while Zora, as previously noted, embodies a specific cultural idea(l) of a woman with AIS that might be clichéd, Cal's construction of Zora involves more than just a superficial image of her normative beauty rendered through the perspective of a non-intersex, cisgender, heterosexual majority. Unlike the visitors of the sex show or past male lovers, Cal's perspective on Zora is a perspective from an intersex person on another intersex person. This shift in perspective is both a result of and creates moments of intimacy and solidarity. Zora is recognized as desirable by an intersex person who actually knows about her being intersex – in contrast to everyone else who fail to recognize her as intersex – which allows for moments of Zora's intelligibility as an intersex person.

Zora's repeated misrecognition as female stands in contrast to how she perceives herself as a gendered and sexual subject. Zora contends that she does not "want to be anything in particular" (*MS* 487), seeking to defy culturally imposed gender determinacy. Despite her perceived 'successful' performance as "the perfect woman" (*MS* 487), she refuses to identify as female and prefers to identify as intersex (*MS* 488). The unrecognizability of Zora's gender, and consequently her involuntary 'passing' as a non-intersex heterosexual woman, crucially threatens her intelligibility as an intersex and lesbian individual. In representing Zora's ostensible failure to be intelligible as intersex, the novel exposes the intricate ways in which normative idea(l)s about femininity/femaleness and female beauty, ideas of sexuality, and ideas of intersex are interrelated in the constitution of the conditions for gender coherence.

However, with the character of Zora, *Middlesex* presents not only the apparent impossibility of constructing a viable intersex subject position, but also moments of resistance to the threat of intersex unintelligibility. Zora tries hard to be recognized as intersex. She is represented as an early pioneer of intersex activism before the intersex movement began to organize in the early 1990s. Her most significant power tool for the production and transference of knowledge about intersex is writing and education. On a metatextual level, the character of Zora functions as an educational instance in *Middlesex*, by which readers are educated on the history of intersex. On a narrative level, Cal is also equipped with crucial knowledge, which offers significant moments of intersex bonding: "Mainly, her politics consisted of studying and writing.

And, during the months I lived with her, in educating me, in bringing me out of what she saw as my great midwestern darkness" (*MS* 488); "After all my troubles, wasn't it my right to expect some reward in the form of knowledge or revelation? In Zora's rice-paper house, with misty light coming in at the windows, I was like a blank canvas waiting to be filled with what she told me" (*MS* 489). The socializing with another intersex person effects a moment of epiphany for Cal which causes him to come to terms with his intersex variation, at least temporarily. This home which Zora provides becomes a symbol for Cal's internal and bodily transition: the bungalow shared with Zora "was a refuge for me, a halfway house where I stayed, getting ready to go back into the world. My life during these six months was as divided as my body" (*MS* 491). What is more, Zora's friendship – and by extension, the show staff – functions as an alternative familial bonding, and thus challenges normative concepts of the legal core family and North American middle-class values.

In the end, despite Zora's repeated gender (and sexual) misrecognition, her failure to publish her book on intersex history *The Sacred Hermaphrodite*, and her difficulties in making her intersex body visible as such in her mermaid performance, she refuses to submit to the politics of intersex erasure within the system. She even imagines a future society in which intersex people embody a new form of intelligible gender: "[W]e're what's next" (*MS* 490). Thus, while Zora's diverse interventions into normative gender constructions and power relations seem to miss their purpose, the representation of her character not only reveals the limits of being/becoming intelligible as intersex but introduces crucial intersex interventions and produces moments of intersex intelligibility – both for Zora herself and also for the intersex protagonist, Cal. Or, to appropriate Butler's words, Zora "emerges at the limits of intelligibility, offering a perspective on the variable ways in which norms circumscribe the human" (Butler 2001: 635).

Middlesex offers another representation of a gender variant person, more precisely, a transgender woman. Carmen's femininity is juxtaposed to both Cal_lie's and Zora's femininity, and thereby subjected to problematic judgment. Carmen's femininity and her femaleness are defined as not 'authentic,' as an obvious "over[doing] [of] the femme routine": "There was entirely too much hip swaying and hair flipping in Carmen's airspace," as Cal sardonically comments (*MS* 486). The notion of trans women not being 'real' women, who need to exaggerate cultural codes of normative femininity in order to be recognized as female, iterates transmisogynist language and reasoning. The racialization of Carmen as a "Hawaiian girl" "from the Bronx" (*MS* 486) adds the dimension of 'race' to her gender representation that further serves to exoticize her. Moreover, Zora's suggestion that Carmen's boyfriends are latent homosexuals and/or that men fetishize her as "impure" (*MS* 487) further denies Carmen (or any trans woman) 'real' womanhood and perpetuates biologist relations between gender, body, and sexuality. The stigmatization of trans women as 'fake' women, or as fetish objects, puts them at a high risk of (sexual)

violence. "This pervasive ideology," Janet Mock argues, "says that trans women are shameful, that trans women are not worthy of being seen and that trans women must remain a secret – invisible and disposable" (Mock 2013). The novel reaffirms this problematic and transphobic (and racist) ideology in its representation of its only transgender character, without any hint of self-reflexivity. This problematic fetishized and exoticized rendering of Carmen is iterated in her freak sex show performance.

Carmen's performance as Ellie contains moments of subversion of normative gender concepts. In her show, her body returns the spectator's gaze, too, albeit in a different way. At first sight she is perceived as a feminine woman, but at second sight, "there it was on the slender girl's body, there it was *where it should not have been*, a thin brown ill-tempered-looking eel, an endangered species," i.e. a penis (*MS* 486, emphasis added). In Cal's narrating the spectators' point of view, Cal either alleges or himself renders an implicit normalizing judgment on Carmen's body by defining its gender 'ambiguity' as an 'impossible' corporeality, with the imperative *should* referring to the enforced adherence to a norm established by the system's regulatory forces. This notion is reiterated in Cal's description of the exchange of gazes: "it was the eel's moment to shock. [...] it stared at the customers with its cyclopic eye; and they looked back at her breasts, her slim waist, they looked back and forth from Ellie to eel, from eel to Ellie, and were electrified by the wedding of opposites" (*MS* 486).[20] Although Carmen/Ellie returns the spectator's gaze with her penis and effects a moment of gender 'ambiguity,' a destabilizing of gender norms is complicated. The spectators' visual reassurance of Carmen's gender operates on a binary, the supposedly 'female' (breasts) and 'male' (penis) signifiers are constructed as oppositional and are supposed to be mutually exclusively found on *one* body; the "wedding" between these two signifiers hints at a cultural practice rather than a 'natural' process constituting the body. Outside the freak show context, Carmen's story "followed the traditional lines better than" Cal's – the "born into the wrong body" rhetoric attests to the novel's stereotype representations of gender variant bodies and identities by producing not only a one-dimensional account of transgender and recognition ("traditional lines") but also a normative notion of bodily "wrongness" (*MS* 487). The binary ultimately stays intact, the spectators remain electrified – by shock rather than pleasure – and the 'ambiguity' is soon to be dissolved by Carmen's impending gender reassignment surgery.

Cal usually does not return the spectators' gaze, but one time, while performing as Hermaphroditus underwater, he has a moment of epiphany:

20 The term cyclopic contains a double reference to Greek mythology (Cyclops) and a congenital disorder (cyclopia), reiterating the interaction between medicine and myth that structures the narrative.

"I opened my eyes underwater. I saw the faces looking back at me and I saw that they were not appalled. I had fun in the tank that night. It was all beneficial in some way. It was *therapeutic*. Inside Hermaphroditus old tensions were roiling, trying to work themselves out. Traumas of the locker room were being released. Shame over having a body unlike other bodies was passing away. The monster feeling was fading. And along with shame and self-loathing another hurt was healing." (*MS* 494)

The cause of this ostensibly dramatic change in Cal's perception of his intersex body remains unclear and seems implausible to explain with his gazing encounter. The only reaction of the spectators experienced by Cal is that they are not appalled – yet on what this conviction is based remains obscure to the reader. Cal's narration of the freak show audience's alleged reaction iterates his narration of Dr. Luce's reaction to the exposure of his genitalia: "He didn't look shocked or appalled" (*MS* 412). Implicit in both narrative accounts is less an actual reaction of the spectators but rather Cal's self-perception of his intersex body – which is primarily constituted by his own rejection of it – from which he draws conclusions about the supposed reactions of others, in particular authorities. Graham points to the fact that "his work at 'Sixty-Niners' can only be undertaken in a state of intoxication and with a consequent dissociation from his scrutinized body" (Graham 2009). It remains unclear whether Cal's gazing has an effect on the spectators, effects a moment of confrontation, or destabilizes the hierarchical quality of visualization practices within the freak show context. Ultimately, Cal's claim of the therapeutic effect of his intervention is undermined by the novel's continuing perpetuation of his shame about his intersex body, even up to his adult life.

At this point in the novel, Cal still does not embrace an identification as intersex. The novel presents at best one halfhearted, semiconscious attempt to find a way out of rigid bodily and gender classifications: "I waited for my soul to leave my body. I tried to fall into a trance state or become an animal" (*MS* 495). His wish to transcend the material, the human (gendered) body, or to become an animal rearticulates the principal motif of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, the creative power of bodily transformations and transmigration of souls; a repetition of the rebirth motif from the novel's opening paragraph. There is no fixed identity, neither in terms of species, nor gender, nor otherwise; the soul can inhabit any form, and form changes ceaselessly (Ovid, *Metamorphoses* XV: 143-175). While this repeated narrative displacement to the realm of mythology might seem like a viable alternative to medical constructions of intersex, the transcendence of his (intersex) body remains a phantasma, given the reality of social constraints that condition intelligibility. The reiteration of mythology in the novel cannot provide a livable space for intersex intelligibility as it always refers to an imagined past and remains always a mythical and hence unattainable and impossible space.

In the end the possibilities of producing Cal's gender intelligibility in the 'middle' are not realized. Cal's self-identification after he leaves San Francisco rather implies that there is only an either-or possible: since his father died before Cal's return, "[w]ith respect to my father I will always remain a girl" (*MS* 512), while to his mother, Cal is not a daughter anymore but a son, "at least by looks" (*MS* 519), and Cal's brother refers to Cal as "bro'" in response to Cal's suggestion to "[c]all me whatever you want" (*MS* 515). This apparent incoherence of (his narrative about) his gender identity is constituted by a process Judith Butler refers to as the "relationality" of the self, by which "[t]he very 'I' [who seeks to tell the story] is called into question by its relation to the one to whom I address myself. This relation to the Other [...] clutter[s] my speech with signs of its undoing" (Butler 2004: 19). On the narrative level, Cal's sense of coherent self is complicated by his relations to his family (and later to his potential lovers); even the way his mother sees him is contradictory ("son" vs. "daughter"). On a metatextual level, for the reader, the incoherence of Cal's identity construction is further complicated and at the same time ostensibly resolved by Cal's self-affirmative identification as a heterosexual man (yet his insecurities about his corporeality towards female lovers again questions this coherence). The novel closes with an ambivalent final negotiation of gender indeterminacy:

> "Did Calliope have to die in order to make room for Cal? [...] After I returned from San Francisco and started living as a male, my family found that, contrary to popular opinion, gender was not all that important. My change from girl to boy was far less dramatic than the distance anybody travels from infancy to adulthood. In most ways I remained the person I'd always been. Even now, though I live as a man, I remain in essential ways Tessie's daughter." (*MS* 520)

This statement is contradictory in its claim of gender as being not really important: Cal_lie changes from one end of the gender binary to the other one (of only two legitimate gender categories, i.e. male and female), and ends up living as a self-identified man, not as (openly) intersex. Cal's statement that he is struggling for "unification, for *Einheit*" (*MS* 106) signifies both Cal's and the novel's need for coherence and closure, which seems to be achieved by the integration of the different and conflicting aspects of his gender into a coherent sense of self. Even Cal's placement in Berlin, "a city historically associated with division and duality," which could be read as symbolizing his "comfort with inbetweenness," eventually affirms his, and the narrative's, anxiety to mend the ruptures: "Cal lives in post-reunification Berlin, so any sense of a divided past – for Cal and for the city – has been replaced with a newly whole, coherent 'self,'" as Sarah Graham argues (2009). The (re)establishing of Cal's gender coherence is paralleled by a narrative closure. Even Cal's musing on the last page of the novel that Middlesex is "a place designed for a new type of human being, who would inhabit a new world. I couldn't help feeling, of

course, that that person was me, me and all the others like me" (*MS* 529) cannot belie the fact that he and *all the others like* him are denied recognition of their intersex bodies and self-identification in the novel and are instead relegated to a constrained heteronormative subject position.

5.2.4 Is there a Moral Obligation to Write a Particular Story of Intersex?

Returning to the initial question of how *Middlesex*'s narrative and metanarrative strategies negotiate intersex representations and work to acknowledge, allow for, or prohibit intersex intelligibility, what can be ascertained is that an unambiguous reading is complicated by the novel's at times contradictory statements and moments of representation. Within literary criticism it has been widely suggested that *Middlesex* cannot live up to its own claims of productive indeterminacy. Critical readings of the novel "as a book that endorses a narrative of heteronormativity and ethnic assimilation" (Lee 2010: 32), and as "put[ting] intersexuality in a position that can be thought of as located in the 'I' of the norm" (Koch-Rein 2005: 250) attest *Middlesex* a pessimistic stance on the possibilities of constructing a viable intersex subject. Holmes contends that "Caliope's [sic] peculiar form of embodiment is assumed to be a kind of paradox that carries the burden of contradictory stances regarding monstrosity and incest, while at the same time Eugenides makes a plea for the tolerance of difference in the basic humanity of the monster" (Holmes 2008: 94). The trouble with this construction is that in order to become recognizable as human in *Middlesex*, the intersex subject needs to become intelligible, and the only way her_his intelligibility can be produced is by becoming male (and heterosexual) – or so the novel seems to suggest.

Can the novel be held accountable for producing a heterosexual male subject, instead of an intelligible intersex (and lesbian) subject? While Morgan Holmes argues "that neither Eugenides nor anyone else was morally obliged to write a particular story of intersexuality" (2008: 93), the novel, as a piece of fiction, could have functioned as a space of possibility for alternative subject constructions, as a 'heterotopia' (Kilian 2014). Yet in its anxiety to represent Cal as an intelligible subject, the narrative resorts to strategies of assimilation and 'normalization' of its protagonist. Despite moments of incoherence and contestation, the character never slips into an unintelligible state; every 'lapse' is immediately prevented, explained or counteracted. The narrative strategies to represent Cal's self-affirmative claim of his gender indeterminacy are inconsistent with and undermined by other strategies that affirm his problematic self-perception, his "persistent[...] communicat[ion] [of] discomfort with his disunited state, always seeking to escape it" (Graham 2009). The sense of the protagonist's coherent subjecthood is to a considerable extent the result

of the first-person narration: at least as the narrator of this – his own – story, he remains always intelligible within the narrative and to the reader. The novel's attempt at producing Cal's intelligibility hence must be considered on several (meta-) narrative/metafictional levels.

The question how 'authentic' a literary representation of intersex lives should be becomes, in the face of the social, political and legal discrimination against intersex persons, a question of fair representation. While one might or might not agree whether an author has a moral obligation to tell a particular story about intersex, harmful (mis)representations of a group of people that is constantly at danger to be culturally *and* physically erased, mutilated, or disowned, who are subjected to violations that have become acknowledged as human rights violations, have necessarily an ethical dimension. In that respect, literature – or authors – can be made accountable for their perpetuation of normative representations, as they inevitably reaffirm the naturalizing of the relationship between body, gender, and sexuality (what Butler refers to as the "heterosexual matrix," 1990: 151, fn6), which has provided, and continues to provide the arguments for physical and psychological 'normalization' procedures. Critics' opinions are divided with regard to *Middlesex*'s rendering of an 'authentic' account of (an) intersex character(s). While Hillman finds fault with Eugenides' neglect to interview intersex persons before writing the novel, instead "us[ing] intersex as a metaphor," and being "in no way an advocate for intersex people" (Hillman, in Roth 2008), she gives the author credit for his credible portrayal of an intersex character and their struggle:

> "One of the most powerful things Eugenides did was illustrate the dilemma many intersex people face: while they might accept and enjoy their body as it is, people around them want to 'fix' their body so it matches some mythical ideal. I think Eugenides' depiction creates empathy for the intersex character in the reader, and gives credibility to the perspective of the intersex person who doesn't understand the horror their body may incite in others." (Hillman, in Roth 2008)

Graham disapproves of this all too positive assessment, arguing that while the novel's strategies "may reflect the difficulties" of individuals who live at the margins of intelligibility due to their gender nonconformity, they at the same time "affirm the validity" of that unintelligibility (Graham 2009). *Middlesex*'s integration of different discourses on intersex can be read as an attempt to challenge the hegemonic medical narratives, by opening up alternative narrative spaces that allow for more affirmative and diverse rearticulations of intersex subjecthood. Thereby, however, the novel resorts to narratives and metaphors that themselves denote 'unlivable' intersex 'identities,' such as mythological figures, 'freaks' or 'monsters,' without being able to utilize their subversive potential for a successful reclaiming of the category of intersex; hence the novel remains in a normative loop of iteration that constitutes the

"place[s] of not-being" to be occupied by "that which is neither fully negated nor acknowledged as being, acknowledged [...] into being" (Butler 2001: 622).

The constantly iterated rhetoric of shame that Cal feels about his body perpetuates the highly problematic notion of (surgically/hormonally unaltered) intersex bodies as 'abject' and 'deviant,' and thus implicitly supports the logic inherent in the medical argumentation that intersex bodies need to be surgically and/or hormonally altered in order to enable a 'livable' life for the person. While Cal asserts that "we hermaphrodites are people like everybody else" (*MS* 106), he still maintains for a large part secrecy about his intersex corporeality: "I'm closeted at work, revealing myself only to a few friends. [...] Only a few people here in Berlin know my secret" (*MS* 107). His intersex corporeality, or rather, his shame thereof, seems to foreclose a fulfilling love and sexual relationship; in anticipation of his first date with Julie, he sees "[n]o reason to mention my peculiarities, my wandering in the maze these many years, shut away from sight. And from love, too" (*MS* 107). As a consequence, Cal "lives in an exile that is both self- and socially-imposed" (Graham 2009), for the most part out of self-protection. Instead of allowing him to overcome his shame, the novel resolves his problematic self-perception by asserting that Cal is decidedly male and heterosexual, ultimately privileging an assimilationist closure over a more radical production of (gender) indeterminacy that defies a final closure.

5.3 HOW TO MAKE A LIFE IN YOUR BODY WHEN YOUR BODY FEELS UNINHABITABLE: *ANNABEL* AND THE SEARCH FOR SPACES OF RECOGNITION

Eight years after the mainstream success of Jeffrey Eugenides' *Middlesex*, Canadian author Kathleen Winter takes up the theme of intersex in her novel *Annabel* (2010), and sets the narrative in the cold, harsh environment of Labrador in the 1960s. The novel was widely critically acclaimed; in 2011 it won the Thomas Head Raddall Award and was shortlisted for several other Canadian literary awards. It was also adapted as a radio play for BBC Radio and served as inspiration for the song "Annabel" (2013) by the British band Goldfrapp and its accompanying music video clip (Bailey 2014). The relative success of the novel has served to bring the issue of intersex, once again, to the attention of a mainstream audience and thus contributes to the literary body of work on intersex and to the cultural negotiation of intersex themes.

The analysis of *Annabel* is based on the same preconditions regarding the questions of intersex intelligibility as outlined in the chapter on *Middlesex*: how does the novel's intersex character reconcile their own sense of self with the conditions of their recognizability available to them? Does the novel provide conditions of intersex

intelligibility; does it establish narrative spaces for intersex rearticulations? Does the novel offer metatextual criticism of the regulatory practices and norms that govern the recognizability of personhood and gender? In which ways does *Annabel* take up the popular cultural renegotiation of the category of intersex initiated by *Middlesex*, and how does it contribute to the contemporary cultural reimagination of intersex? My discussion of the novel proceeds from these questions, bearing in mind the potential of the text for offering alternative representations of intersex realities. I argue that despite the novel's obvious implausibilities, at times sensationalist plot devices, often stereotypical gender conceptions, and its slightly idiosyncratic characters, *Annabel* accomplishes to create, by and large, a believable narrative about an intersex child and their relation to their parents and the complexities of an intersex life, that cannot be accounted for by a theory of intelligibility alone.

Annabel interrelates several narratives, discourses, and motives of intersex which inform and construct the novel's coming-of-age story of its intersex protagonist, Wayne/Annabel Blake,[21] thereby articulating their quest for intersex intelligibility throughout their childhood to young adult life. The novel interweaves medical discourses, Greek mythology, discourses on (gendered) beauty and aesthetics, sexual violence, and the motif of transformation and rebirth, among others; this multiplicity of diverse narratives creates a dense narrative that at times appears overloaded with signification. Among the various interrelated themes, the significance of spaces stands out as one of the major tropes in the novel. In *Annabel*, specific spaces/places are connected to, or embodied by, specific characters: Labrador's nature and wilderness (Treadway, the 'male' sphere), Croydon Harbour (Jacinta, the 'female' sphere of the domestic), hospitals (the creation of Wayne and the erasure of Annabel), St. John's (Jacinta's youth, Wayne/Annabel's gender transformation), Boston (Wally Michelin's recovering of her voice), bridges (symbolizing the gender transition of Wayne/Annabel), travelling (Thomasina's acts of freedom and independence), and the university campus, particularly the Technical University of Nova Scotia (signifying freedom of gender expression and allowing Wayne/Annabel to craft his_her own narrative). The particular spaces are clearly gendered, or gender and sexed corporeality are "spatialized" (Neuhaus 2012: 124), whereby some of the spaces are regulated by rigid gender norms, and simultaneously function as regulative systems that construct, perpetuate and enforce gender norms through social constraint, while other spaces function as representational spaces for 'alternative,'

21 I mostly refer to the character Wayne Blake and use the pronoun 'he' when referring to Wayne as it occurs in *Annabel*. I want to point out, however, that the novel's references to the intersex character (almost) exclusively in 'male' terms is not unproblematic and seems implausible to some extent as this narrative strategy fails to do justice to the complexities of the character's gender (self-) identification and transformation(s). I refer to the character as Wayne/Annabel when it seems apt.

non-normative gender concepts, and hence can be conceived as counterspaces, or spaces of resistance "to the dominant order arising precisely from their subordinate, peripheral or marginalized positioning" (Edward Soja, quoted in Neuhaus 2012: 126).

The following analysis of the novel starts from the argument that the recognizability of Wayne/Annabel is negotiated within the interpersonal relationships and the intimate connections between the characters. The quest for recognition is inextricably linked with the social relations between the individuals; it concerns in particular Wayne/Annabel's longing to be recognized as a non-binary gendered subject, for him_her the precondition to become intelligible as intersex, but the issue of recognition is not restricted to Wayne exclusively. At issue are the relationships between Wayne and his parents, between Wayne and Thomasina, and between Wayne and Wally, but also the relationship between Jacinta and Treadway Blake, and the characters' relations to their surroundings (friends, classmates, doctors, etc.). The moments in which these relations are challenged, damaged, severed, lost, and reconciled in specific ways indicate the relativity and the precariousness of Wayne/Annabel's intelligibility.

Annabel is narrated from a third-person omniscient perspective, thus marking a significant contrast to both *Middlesex* and fictional and non-fictional intersex first-person narratives. While in the latter, the first-person narrative mode is employed to convey the inner thoughts and feelings of (real or fictional) intersex protagonists, hence producing a certain sense of (narrative) 'authenticity' when it comes to intersex matters, the eschewal of the (intersex) first-person perspective in Winter's novel effects a certain emotional detachment between the intersex character and the reader. While this sentiment is not exclusively or foremost the effect of the narrative mode, the emotional distance created between protagonist and narrator enforces the sense of the character of Wayne as 'uninhabited' to some degree. Winter explains her choice of not narrating the story from Wayne's perspective with a reluctance to appropriate the intersex character and their experiences:

> "I know more about the people and communities surrounding Wayne than I could possibly know about his inner life. Perhaps I could have tried, but I don't know if I really felt I had the authority. I was attuned, throughout the writing, to an idea that anything I wrote about being between genders would have to be personal knowledge, of which I do have some, but not enough to fully inhabit that character. To write from the point of view of one character is, for me, to inhabit that person." (Winter, in an interview with Bailey 2014)

Despite Winter's reservations about 'inhabiting' her characters, *Annabel*'s narrative mode provides insights into several main characters' state of mind, and into their emotional attachments they have to each other. Hence this strategy allows the renegotiation of intersex from multiple perspectives on an intersex child, thus not

only from the intersex individual's point of view but from those of their parents, friends, and other persons close to them. As a result, in *Annabel* intersex becomes a contested category that, at times, defies coherence.

5.3.1 The Cultural Parameters of Gender Construction: Medicine, Aesthetics, and Sexual Violence

The narrative of *Annabel* follows at first glance the 'traditional' lines of many intersex narratives: when a baby with 'indeterminate' gender is born to Jacinta and Treadway Blake, the father insists on raising the child as a boy; a medical assessment legitimizes this decision on the basis of biologist claims about gender (the 'phallometer'); genital surgery (sewing up the 'vagina') to medically confirm the gender assignment (a "believable" male, *Annabel* 48)[22] follows; and the child's intersex variation subsequently has to be maintained a secret at any cost. The reinforcement of the assigned gender is a common plot in intersex accounts. Treadway's attempt at socially 'masculinizing' his 'son' relies on the notion of gender as a rigid and normative binary, informed by gender stereotypes, biologist essentialisms, and distinctly separate spheres: the community of Croydon Harbour "is one of rigid conformity and outright sexism, where men are 'kings outside their houses' and women 'queens of inner rooms and painted sills... and carpet cleaners.' Men hunt, fish, trap, build things and are mostly really bad in bed; women marry young, have babies, suffer quietly and long inchoately for more" (D'Erasmo 2011).

The questions of and the different perspectives on gender in the novel, offered by several characters, are central to the negotiation of Wayne/Annabel's intelligibility as an intersex person. What is anticipated at an early point, and will manifest itself throughout the narrative, is not only Wayne's struggle to come to terms with his intersex corporeality, or rather, with the (attempted) erasure thereof, but also his striving for a non-binary gender identification. The novel makes it unmistakably clear at various moments and throughout the narrative that Wayne's gender nonconformative sense of self is a result of his intersex variation. This causality might not be problematic in itself, as a person's gender identification and sense of sexed embodiment can correlate to different degrees. However, the heteronormative and binary ideas of gender on which this correlation between Wayne's intersex body and his sense of gendered self relies is not unproblematic and raises questions as to the novel's intentions regarding the representation of its intersex character. The novel appears adamant in its attempt to convince the readers, and the characters themselves, of Wayne's 'male' and 'female' parts of his gender along the lines of characteristics deemed unquestionably 'typical' for boys and girls (or men and women),

22 The following page numbers in this chapter refer to the paperback edition of *Annabel* published in 2010 by Black Cat.

respectively. In consequence, what the novel really claims is that Wayne's supposedly gender-specific characteristics and acts are, in fact, a result of his intersex variation – thereby making biologist-essentialist assumptions about gender –, while these acts are rather socially marked as gendered.

Before turning to the analysis of the negotiation of Wayne's intersex intelligibility through (his relationships with) particular characters, it is crucial to scrutinize the cultural parameters of gender construction in the novel. The dominant parameters that determine the alleged difference between normative dichotomous genders are medicine, aesthetics, and sexual violence. Constructing gender according to these parameters is not unproblematic, as they reference and reiterate profoundly normative and deeply troubling signifiers for gender. The question is whether the novel is (self-) reflective of the problematic implications of these constructions and of its own strategy to make use of them.

Annabel's noticeable departure from *Middlesex*'s extensive, detailed representation of the medical establishment and its power over the intersex protagonist, their body, and the definition of their gender can be interpreted as a decentering of the relevance of medicine for the intersex person's life and their sense of self. However, the actual authority held by medical practice (and practitioners) over Wayne/Annabel and his_her sexed body becomes all the more obvious and significant in the compressed representation of the medical scenes in *Annabel*. The categorical, de-individualized power of medicine is highlighted by the novel's introduction of several, changing doctors who treat Wayne, instead of concentrating on one specific doctor and their relationship with him; a narrative strategy that makes these doctors interchangeable representatives of the medical establishment.

Medical episodes and interventions recur at several stages in Wayne's childhood and coming of age throughout the narrative. Wayne/Annabel is not born in a hospital, but in his_her parents' house in Croydon Harbour, with only three of Jacinta's female friends present. Thomasina Baikie, who acts as the midwife and delivers the baby, is the first who notices the baby's 'ambiguous' sex characteristics (penis, one descended testicle, labia, vagina). Thus, the initial 'diagnosis' of the newborn's intersex variation is made by a family friend, not by medical authorities. Yet the first reactions to the baby's intersex body parallels the rhetoric of 'medical emergency' commonly used by doctors: "Thomasina caught sight of something slight, flower-like; one testicle had not descended, but there was something else. She waited the eternal instant that women wait when a horror jumps out at them. [...] What Thomasina knew [...] was that something can go wrong, not just with the child in front of you, another woman's child, but with your own child, at any time, no matter how much you love it" (*Annabel* 15f). This instance not only invokes a sense of horror about an unexpected 'anomaly' of the baby's body, but equates a child's intersex body with the death of a child, as this passage foreshadows the death of Thomasina's own daughter Annabel. The language of 'wrongness' and horror of the infant's

intersex body is reiterated by Jacinta, who compares her child's intersex variation to a case of conjoined twins, whose mother's determination to raise them joined sounds at first unthinkable to Jacinta: "she thought the woman would come to her senses one day and allow the babies to die" (*Annabel* 23). The strategy of secrecy about the infant's intersex variation, recommended by doctors as a rule, is also followed by Jacinta, who keeps the baby's bodily state a secret even from her husband in the beginning.

While the baby's first weeks pass without medical definition and intervention, as soon as Treadway learns about the intersex variation he decides his baby's gender as male, and to have 'him' examined by a doctor. Jacinta brings Wayne/Annabel to the hospital despite her internal conflict about the impending 'normalizing' surgery. She even considers running away from the hospital and the surgery, and contrasts western medical practices with the culture of the Innu, the indigenous inhabitants of certain areas of Quebec and Labrador, she had once encountered: "He [a baby of an Innu woman] had been born with a genetic anomaly but his mother had held him and sung to him, a lullaby in Innuaimun, and no one had tried to take that baby to the Goose Bay General Hospital and maim him or administer some kind of death by surgery. No one had found fault with him at all" (*Annabel* 43). While this statement appears to oversimplify indigenous cultural practices, and ignores the real-life conditions of Innu people in Canada (e.g. the mainstream/non-Innu health care system's lack of understanding of Innu culture and their own definitions of health as a possible reason for not bringing the baby to the hospital), juxtaposing indigenous cultures' notions of gender (in opposition) to western gender concepts is a common strategy employed by western academics and writers (Qwo-Li Driskill points out that the appropriation of concepts like Two-Spirit for western concepts of queer, transgender or intersex is problematic, Driskill 2010). In *Annabel*, Jacinta's comparison exposes the western cultural practices of dealing with intersex infants as violent and cruel, referring both to the surgical intervention into bodily integrity and to the defining power over gender categories she experiences as destructive mechanisms: "Everyone was trying to define everything so carefully, Jacinta felt; they wanted to annihilate all questions" (*Annabel* 45).

Nevertheless, Jacinta brings Wayne/Annabel inside the hospital to the surgeon Dr. Simon Ho, who will perform the surgery attempted at making Wayne/Annabel look more 'male,' and hence medically affirm Treadway's gender assignment of his son. It is noteworthy that the intersex baby's 'maleness' is determined and reinforced by men (the father, the male doctor), while the baby's 'femaleness' is nurtured by women (the mother, the female friend). The representation of Dr. Ho is ambivalent. The instance in the hospital occurs primarily through Jacinta's perspective, hence the doctor appears as experienced by the mother of the intersex child he is about to treat. His figure has only a small part in the narrative and thus necessarily remains sketchy and simplified, yet his reductionism represents the central conflict all the more

pointedly. Jacinta has mixed feelings about the doctor: "Jacinta noticed the seriousness of Dr. Ho. She liked that he looked at her steadily, that he was young and slim and not aggressive" (*Annabel* 48); "She felt that in Dr. Ho's presence any thought, any fear or wish, was understandable. He would not dismiss her" (*Annabel* 50). The doctor's perceived trustworthiness is however relativized: "Dr. Ho took Wayne from her arms so gently she thought he must love babies, even if he did merciless things to them. He must have bad dreams. He must wake up in the middle of the night just before the part of the dream where he cuts the baby. [...] But maybe not. Maybe he didn't care. Maybe he only looked like he cared" (*Annabel* 51f). Jacinta's ambivalent judgment of the doctor's humanity as a prerequisite for acting ethically and medically responsible signifies the complicated relationship between doctor, patient, and parent, and the parents' (or mother's in this case) difficulty of leaving the decision about the medical interventions into their child's body to the medical authority's discretion.

Dr. Ho's medical assessment of Wayne/Annabel's sexed corporeality and his subsequent suggestion of medical intervention follow the traditional medical protocol and a frequently found narrative plot in intersex narratives. Within only a few pages, the narrative evokes all common motives and strategies related to the medical rendering of intersex as an unintelligible category. The attempted 'normalization' of Wayne/Annabel's intersex body into a 'coherent' 'male' body draws on the rhetoric of a person's 'true sex' (or 'true gender'), of the 'believability' of the sexed body in social situations, and on the penis size as the ultimate marker of a person's maleness, or femaleness by default. Without any introduction or preliminary talk the doctor comes straight to the point of the planned surgery: "'The point,' the doctor said, 'is to create a believable masculine anatomy. [...] we try to make the baby comfortable as a male in his own mind, and in the minds of other people who are in his life now or will be in the future'" (*Annabel* 48f). The justification for irrevocably surgically altering the baby's genitals is to make Wayne/Annabel an intelligible social subject, in fact, a human subject: "'We want to give him a chance. As soon as possible after the birth'" (*Annabel* 50), as if Wayne's 'monstrosity' is bound to grow with every day he stays in his intersex body. According to the medical view, Wayne's very humanness is threatened by his intersex body, which displaces him to the realm of the unconceivable, unreal and monstrous, as Jacinta infers: "'You think,' she said, 'a child's sex needs to be believable. You think my child – the way he is now, the way she is – is unbelievable? Like something in a science fiction horror movie? And you want to make her believable. Like a real human'" (*Annabel* 50). Jacinta's query hints at the constraints of the production of personhood by binary normative gender notions that are inevitably bound to the notion of the human implicit in the medical logic. Her use of both male and female pronouns when referring to her child is significant here and can be considered as a way of resisting the doctor's definition of Wayne/Annabel as male.

The 'normalizing' surgery is phrased in terms of the only acceptable and responsible reaction to an intersex variation, as Dr. Ho assures: "'what we are doing today is the normal medical response. [...] And I think it's the most compassionate one. We try to decide the true sex of the child'" (*Annabel* 50). As mentioned earlier, the rhetoric of 'true sex/gender' relies on an essentialist notion of an 'innate,' firmly fixed sense of self that is inextricably linked to, or 'expressed' by a 'coherently' sexed body. The surgical production of such a 'coherently' sexed body is in fact not, as often claimed by medical authorities, the 'detection' of an already existing gender, but the construction of a gender. In what follows, the procedure suggested by Dr. Ho to determine Wayne/Annabel's gender resorts to an oversimplified sketch of the medical protocol of treating intersex variations, up to the point that it could pass as a parody. Naturally the phallometer out of the medical textbooks is cited as the apt instrument to measure Wayne's 'maleness' (the chapter is aptly titled "Phalometer" [sic]):

"It's a tiny ruler."

"It is. See?" He pointed to a mark three-quarters of the way down the phalometer [sic]. "If the penis reaches or exceeds this length, we consider it a real penis. If it doesn't meet this measurement, it is considered a clitoris."

Jacinta strained to read the tiny marks. "One point five centimetres?"

"That's right."

"What happens if it's less than that?"

"When a phallus is less than one point five centimetres, give or take seven hundredths of a centimetre –"

"Seven hundredths?"

"Yes. When it's less than that, we remove the presentation of male aspects and later, during adolescence, we sculpt the female aspects."

"What if it's right in the middle? Right straight, smack dab down the precise centre? One point five centimetres with no seven hundredths."

"Then we make an educated guess. We do endocrinological tests but really, in a newborn, as far as endocrinology goes, we're making a best estimate. Penis size at birth is the primary criterion for assigning a gender." (*Annabel* 51)

While this exchange between Jacinta and Dr. Ho exposes the absurdity of the phallometer for determining a child's gender and the arbitrariness with which crucial decisions that affect the integrity of the child's body are made ("educated guess"), it becomes obvious how much power medical authority even has for/over the mother. Although Jacinta attempts resistance to this authority by continuing calling her baby 'she,' against the gender definition of Dr. Ho, and by questioning his methods to determine her baby's gender ("'I can't even see the numbers. They're so tiny,'" *Annabel* 52), she eventually submits to the doctor's assessment, affirming Treadway's decision to raise her child as a boy. The novel at this point does nothing to substantially challenge the medical authority over Wayne/Annabel's subject construction.

In the course of the narrative and Wayne's growing up process, there is for a longer period no considerable incident with doctors or hospitals. He sees changing 'specialists,' and needs to take his daily medication to prevent his body from 'feminizing,' but he is unaware of the true reason he has to take the pills. He even fears that he is diabetic, has leukemia or a brain tumor. At one point, Wayne asks his mother about his 'condition': "'Is what I have,' Wayne said now, 'called something?' He did not like to have an ailment for which there was no word. He had never heard of anyone in his class having a nameless medical condition. Even the things that killed you had a name" (*Annabel* 154). The conflation of intersex variations and diseases is produced here not by the use of medical terminology but by the omission or refusal to name the intersex variation, in combination with the (supposed) need of medication. Since even terminal diseases are denoted, an unspeakable 'condition' obviously must be even worse than a fatal condition.

A medical emergency marks a drastic watershed in Wayne's narrative. Up to this point, he is still unaware of his intersex body. His womb fills with menstrual blood that cannot drain off his body, since his vagina has been sewed up in the course of the surgery he had as an infant. Thomasina, who is his teacher at this time, rushes him to the hospital without informing his parents, and is about to tell Wayne the truth about his intersex variation, but backs off last-minute, and leaves the revelation to the doctor in charge, Dr. Lioukras: "'Dr. Lioukras is the one who should talk to you. I'm no good at the facts'" (*Annabel* 211), she tells Wayne – obviously the truth about his intersex body is all about medical 'facts' that need to be articulated by someone who is 'authorized' to define and deliver these facts. Before the incident, when Wayne had seen Dr. Lioukras, he "had not explained anything. In fact, the doctor had put him to sleep" (*Annabel* 204), hence acting in a paternalistic, authoritarian way, without having to rely on informed consent – wielding unrestrained medical power over the sedated patient and his body. His unethical behavior seems to go unchallenged, even unquestioned, due to his self-assertive demeanor: "Dr. Lioukras took pictures of the children he saw in his surgery, and nobody minded, as he was such an optimist. Nobody ever said, 'Hey, Dr. Lioukras, make sure you get the

parents to sign a release form'" (*Annabel* 211). The novel appears indecisive as to whether the doctor's authority is problematic. While it is pointed out that his authority is not questioned, his performance is explained by his unconventional nature and even more justified by the way he treats Wayne's intersex variation as something 'standard,' even beautiful:

"Wayne lifted his Trans-Labrador Helicopters T-shirt. His breasts were like tinned apricots that have not broken the surface tension in a bowl of cream. No flicker of alarm or warning crossed the doctor's face. He looked at Wayne's chest as if it were the most ordinary boy's chest in the world. Thomasina loved him for it. She could not have looked directly at Wayne's chest without Wayne's knowing she felt there was a deep, sad problem. When Dr. Lioukras looked at Wayne's breasts, he saw beauty equal to that which he would have seen in the body of any youth, male or female. It was as if he saw the apricots growing on their own tree, right where they belonged." (*Annabel* 212)

Dr. Lioukras' reaction is mediated by Thomasina's perspective on the examination, conveyed by an omniscient narrator, creating a triply mediated gaze on Wayne's body. Thus, what this passage reveals about the characters' feelings towards Wayne's intersex body is not easy to disentangle: at first glance, the doctor is represented as appreciative of the beauty of Wayne's body, of his breasts/chest foremost, while Thomasina seems to find the appearance of 'breasts' on his body as somehow 'abhorrent'; the averting of her eyes is perhaps also a sign of feeling guilty about having kept Wayne's intersex variation a secret from him. Instead, she directs her gaze on Dr. Lioukras' face, who is looking at Wayne. What Dr. Lioukras really thinks about Wayne's breasts/chest remains speculative. The novel wants to make believe that the doctor finds no fault with Wayne's body; yet in the context of the passage, "Dr. Lioukras managed to suggest that he deadened areas and drained fluids out of boys' abdomens every day, and that nothing could be more normal or upbeat" (*Annabel* 212), his reaction is rather revealed as a strategy of concealment, or at least as medical professionalism and rationality. The metaphor of apricots for Wayne's breasts indicates an aestheticization of and a simultaneous detachment from the corporeal realities of the intersex body. Whether it is in fact Dr. Lioukras, or Thomasina, or the narrator who imagines the apricots remains unclear; however, Wayne's body is transformed from a medical object into an aesthetic object in the examination situation, displacing the conditions by which the intersex subject is recognized.

After the surgery to drain the menstrual blood out of Wayne's body, Dr. Lioukras eventually reveals Wayne's intersex variation to him. This scene reveals the limitations of language, in particular medical language, to account for the category of intersex, and the novel provides a narrative and a metanarrative critical commentary on both the significance and the inadequacy of language available for

the production of gender intelligibility. Dr. Lioukras' choice of vocabulary – and his inevitable failure – to define Wayne's complex corporeality operates under the premise that there are "ways of knowing, modes of truth, that forcibly define intelligibility" (Butler 2001: 621): "Dr. Lioukras had done his best. [...] he had tried to use words that were true. The limitations of medical language were no greater, in his mind, than those of language as a whole. Science, medicine, mythology, and even poetry shared a kind of grandeur, as far as he saw" (*Annabel* 235f). The doctor's language of 'truth' contains mythological references on the one hand and oversimplified medical terminology on the other hand, which makes up a narrative about intersex as a "story of [a] male body and the female body inside it" (*Annabel* 237). This language of 'truth' conflates myth and science and creates a 'scientific myth' about the intersex body: "'This is one time,' [Dr. Lioukras] told Wayne [...], 'when medical science has given itself over entirely to mythical names. A true hermaphrodite' – he said it as if the state were an attainment – 'is more rare than all the other forms. It means you have everything boys have, and girls too. An almost complete presence of each'" (*Annabel* 236). This statement is not only biologically inaccurate – no human can have equally and fully formed 'male' and 'female' bodily characteristics – but displaces the medical treatment of intersex to the mythological realm (while the term 'hermaphrodite' was still in use in medical discourses around 1980, at the time this incident takes place in the novel, the term 'intersex' was already in use) and thus connotes an 'unreal' subject "for which there is no place in the given regime of truth" (Butler 2001: 621).

The remainder of Dr. Lioukras' attempt to explain his bodily state to Wayne further reaffirms the category of intersex as an unintelligibly category, as intersex is articulated in terms of the collapsing of the girl/boy dichotomy within Wayne's body: without medication, he tells Wayne, "'[y]ou would become more like a girl than you are now. You're already a girl inside'" (*Annabel* 236). Naturally, Wayne reacts with confusion: "'Inside?' How could he be a girl inside? What did that mean? He pictured girls from his class lying inside his body, hiding. What girl was inside him? He pictured Wally Michelin, smaller than her real self, lying quietly in the red world inside him, hiding" (*Annabel* 237). This comment exposes not only the limitations of the doctor's use of language but its absurdity; his language of 'truth' thus signifies a necessary failure to account for Wayne's intersex body, and for the category of intersex in general. The novel, however, seems aware of this failure:

> "So it was with names – suture, true hermaphrodite, menstrual blood, gynecological intervention – that the doctor had done his best to acquaint Wayne with the story of his male body and the female body inside it. Dr. Lioukras was not happy with the talk. He had wanted it to be about life, and possibility, not blood and stitching and cutting. He had to remind himself that the work of a surgeon is poetry of a kind, in which blood is the meaning and flesh is the text." (*Annabel* 237f)

The possibility of an intelligible life cannot be provided by normative language; intersex intelligibility fails here. Yet subsequently, "Wayne felt the power of names in a new way. [...] You explained away the mystery" of something "by naming its parts" (*Annabel* 238). While Dr. Lioukras' story of intersex might be deficient, it at least provides Wayne with a term from which he can start to reconceptualize his gendered and sexed reality.

Involved in this medical emergency is an incident of self-fertilization and its resulting in an embryo trapped within Wayne's fallopian tube, which was consequently aborted by Dr. Lioukras. This is later disclosed to Wayne by Thomasina, together with the (pseudo-scientific) explanation that self-impregnation can happen "'[w]hen the male and female reproductive organs are adjacent in the same body'" (*Annabel* 305). This process is, however, physiologically impossible. The reason why the novel introduces an implausible sub-plot like this other than for sensationalism is disputable. Sassafras Lowrey considers the "use [of] medical drama as a plot device" as "the largest weakness of the book" as it "makes the whole book take an unnecessary turn towards the sensational in a text that otherwise does such a great job of avoiding those pitfalls" (Lowrey 2011). Casey Stepaniuk goes even further with her criticism and asserts that the inclusion of this sub-plot overshadows the by and large insightful representation of intersex issues in the novel: "In an otherwise realist and perceptive book, this sensational and implausible plot device is not only unnecessary but offensive. I was really disappointed that Winter chose to include a physiologically impossible pregnancy instead of exploring *some of the actual complexities or realities of intersex folks' lives*" (Stepaniuk 2013).

The implausibility of the process of self-fertilization aside, the fetus can be read as a metaphor for Wayne's internal gender struggles and the 'female' identity of Annabel that stays submerged within Wayne, a part of him that haunts him, like the ghost of Thomasina's drowned daughter Annabel, his namesake, and the girl Annabel inside him whom he feels will 'die' if he does not prevent it: "Where was the fetus now? It had eyes, and the eyes had watched him. He had been in the red world and the fetus and he had looked at each other. Had it wanted him to save it? If he had not lost it, if it had grown into a person, who would that little person be now?" (*Annabel* 308). This passage is reminiscent of Wayne's musings about the 'girl inside him' that Dr. Lioukras has evoked. Wayne/Annabel, however, still lacks the conditions by which Annabel becomes knowable, and hence s_he is not able to fully 'grasp' his_her gendered sense of self: "But Annabel ran away. Where did she go? She was inside his body but she escaped him. Maybe she gets out through my eyes, he thought, when I open them. Or my ears. He lay in bed and waited. Annabel was close enough to touch; she was himself, yet unattainable" (*Annabel* 252). The elusiveness of Annabel signifies Wayne/Annabel's "occupy[ing] the place of not-being within the field of being, living, breathing, attempting to love, as that which is neither fully negated nor acknowledged as being, acknowledged, we might say, into being" (Butler 2001: 622).

In terms of plot advancement, this moment marks a significant turning point, as it displaces the narrative to a different geographical place. The image of the dead fetus haunts Wayne up to the point where it makes him leave Croydon Harbour and move to St. John's, where he is later again haunted by the incident: "he remembered the fetus that had formed in him before. He imagined its eyes and he easily imagined its face looking at him now. [...] What was to stop him being haunted by one pair of eyes after another, just the same as that first pair?" (*Annabel* 365f). Significantly, this passage is set in a context where Wayne tries to deal with his gender nonconformity after he decided to stop his medication, which causes his body to 'feminize.' The inclusion of the motif of self-fertilization thus appears to serve more than a sensationalizing of an intersex variation, but can be interpreted as symbolizing the struggle to become recognizable as Wayne *and* Annabel. However, this motif has been rightfully criticized by many reviewers as it renders a harmful representation of intersex as a 'horrifying' 'condition.'

Wayne's last confrontation with the medical establishment exposes their dehumanizing procedures and at the same times marks a moment of intersex resistance against them. When his abdomen once more fills with menstrual blood, he goes to the Grace General Hospital, where he is treated as a study subject for training the medical students: "a doctor named Haldor Carr came in with two more doctors and seven interns. These observers all watched carefully, hoping to learn a great deal from Haldor Carr about a kind of case most interns never got to see. [...] Haldor Carr was a teaching physician, and he was teaching now. Wayne was an exhibit" (*Annabel* 369). This scene reiterates the many similar scenes in various intersex narratives, fictional and non-fictional, in which intersex individuals become the objects of medical study, examination, and scrutiny, and are depersonalized and dehumanized in the process. Wayne is patronized and reprimanded by the doctors for having "taken matters into his own hands" (*Annabel* 369) when he discontinued his medication, since only a medical authority is eligible for making medical decisions, and the claiming of this authority by a patient is considered a disobedience and has severe consequences, or so the doctor alleges: "They could not guarantee the safety of any medical intervention from now on, and had Wayne considered this before he had acted so rashly, they would not now all be in a position of risk" (*Annabel* 369) – at risk here is obviously the medical establishment's supremacy over the intersex body.

Wayne is rendered powerless and terrified in the face of being subjected to the medical arbitrariness. He fears that Dr. Carr might remove some of his sexed body parts, or make a wrong decision about Wayne's body that conflicts with his own wishes. Then suddenly Wayne realizes he must intervene to regain control over his situation and his body: "he forced himself to sit up and use the only thing of influence that he owned: his voice. His voice did not want to come out of hiding, but he knew he had to exercise it or Haldor Carr would choose one of the surgeries and perform it" (*Annabel* 370). He demands from the doctor that his vagina should not be closed

again and that no body part should be removed; so that he can return to his initial state and recover his 'real' sense of self: "This way, Wayne thought, he would become who he had been when he was born. At least he would have that. The truth of himself, who he really was. [...] Wayne had spoken up, and now he had done so, he knew he had spoken with his whole self: with the voice of Annabel and not only that of Wayne" (*Annabel* 370f). The stay at the hospital, which is Wayne's last one (within the scope of the narrative), then, marks again a significant turning point in his story: not only does he challenge medical authority over himself and his body, he moreover reclaims his intersex body of which he was disowned by medical intervention. With this reclaiming, he also fully embraces his 'male' and 'female' parts, Wayne *and* Annabel, together at the same time. Annabel becomes the voice of resistance, the voice that has been subdued is now released. Dr. Carr's medical verbiage becomes consequently meaningless and cannot define Wayne/Annabel anymore.

In one empathic intern s_he finds a moment of recognition as Annabel: "'I see you. I see there was a baby born, and her name is Annabel, and no one knows her.' The intern said this, and Annabel, inside Wayne, had been waiting for it. She heard it from her hiding place" (*Annabel* 373). The intern's recognition of Annabel signifies a subversion of the hegemonic visualization practices and terminology traditionally exerted over intersex persons. Her assertion, "I see you," verbalizes the (medical) gaze and subverts its power to dehumanize and depersonalize its subjects into the recognition of the intersex subject as human, as an individual – an intersex individual no less. Her use of the name Annabel to address Wayne/Annabel stands in contrast to the various medical terms Dr. Carr uses to refer to him_her in the same scene, and thus counteracts the depersonalizing scientific discourse that constitutes the category of intersex as a medical yet unintelligible category. Ironically, it is in the space of the hospital that Annabel is enabled to surface, and the possibility of Wayne/Annabel's intelligibility as intersex is provided.

While medical parameters are the most salient and radical signifiers for the demarcation between 'male' and 'female' genders in *Annabel*, aesthetics or questions of beauty are also crucially, though perhaps less drastically, involved in the processes of the performativity of gender. The motif of beauty is inextricably linked with the intimate relationships between the characters in the novel; a theme that will be scrutinized in more detail below. Beauty, however, is also related to certain characteristics, acts, and objects, which demarcates gender for the most part, but eventually comes to (re)signify intersex. The novel's language itself is characterized by an aesthetic style which is used not only for creating sensuous pleasure, but to convey social and critical messages: "Most of the descriptive prose is melodically poetic, marrying spare lucidity and sage observation. [...] Even mundane tasks are illuminated by harmonious language [...]. [...] Winter's flair for capturing atmosphere is not confined to the harsh land and its inhabitants' arduous labour. She is equally

adept at using her idiosyncratic eye to create charming images," as Leyla Sanai puts it (Sanai 2011).

The beauty of *Annabel*'s language is iterated on the content level; Wayne/Annabel in particular is concerned with the messages and value of beauty. Beauty is often found in symmetry and closely associated with perfection. The beauty of synchronized swimmer Elizaveta Kirilovna becomes a seemingly unattainable ideal for young Wayne – he, as a boy, is not allowed to be a synchronized swimmer and to wear a glittering bathing suit –, and the symmetry of the figures made by her and other (female) synchronized swimmers becomes a recurring motif of fascination with perfection which translates as beauty. The concept of symmetry-as-beauty is repeatedly iterated in the motif of bridges. Thomasina sends Wayne postcards from various bridges from different countries to which she travels, and Wayne is fascinated by their architecture; he is even inspired to build his own bridge with the help of his father, an endeavor that is at first approved of by Treadway as he wants to teach his son craftsmanship which is marked as a 'male' skill, but when he finds out that Wayne decorates the bridge in the style of the Ponte Vecchio and uses it as a place to hang out with his friend Wally, Treadway dismantles the bridge. The juxtaposition of the symmetry of the bridges associated with beauty and the perceived 'asymmetry' of his own body establishes a definition of what qualifies as an aesthetic object, and hence marks Wayne's body as an unaesthetic body-object. However as the symbol of the bridge can also interpreted as uniting gender differences, and hence reconciling the notion of aesthetics and corporeal beauty, the bridge can function as a heterotopia for acting out alternative concepts to conventional gendered beauty.

Beauty as inextricably linked to the ideas of 'order' and 'flawlessness' is also reiterated in the medical narrative space. Intersex variations were, and still are, considered as 'disorders' (as the term 'Disorders of Sexual Development,' or DSD, demonstrates), i.e. the non-orderly, that which has come undone, the norm that is disturbed. Given the equation of order and beauty, intersex signifies as the non-beautiful. Interestingly, in the narrative this equation is not challenged by dismissing the equation, but by the resignification of one of its variables. "I wouldn't call what you have a disorder. I'd call it a different order. A different order means a whole new way of being. It could be fantastic. It could be overwhelmingly beautiful, if people weren't scared," Thomasina tells Wayne (*Annabel* 208f). Even Dr. Lioukras sees "beauty equal to that which he would have seen in the body of any youth, female or male" when looking at Wayne's intersex body (*Annabel* 212). The resignification of intersex from a bodily (and gender) 'disorder' to a (different) 'order' allows for Wayne/Annabel's intersex body to be marked as beautiful, not by aligning her_his body with the norm, but by critically positioning him_herself in relation to the norm, thus pointing to the norm's limitations to be representative of all subjects and bodies. As noted earlier, notions of normative beauty inform medical perspectives on the gendered body and hence medical practices to produce a body that conforms to

normative aesthetics; surgery becomes the physical tool for culturally 'aestheticizing' (gender) nonconformative bodies. The marking of Wayne/Annabel's intersex body as beautiful subverts the logic inherent in this reasoning and the premises of this equation, and thus effects a destabilization of the absolutism of this distinction (Butler 2001: 634) without giving up on the idea of bodies as aesthetic objects.

Yet the intricacies of having an (intersex) body that undergoes transformations – due to medication and later discontinuing medication – are more complicated than simply redefining a 'disorder' as a 'different order.' Wayne/Annabel questions his_her own beauty, and the question of beauty's definition(s) becomes entangled with notions of bodily 'realness' whereby 'constructed' body images and 'authentic' body images seem impossible to be distinguished:

> "Years of hormones had made him angular, and it occurred to him that he wished he could stop taking them. He wanted to stop swallowing them every day and having them alter his body from what it wanted to be into what the world desired from it. [...] He wanted to throw the pills away and wait and see what would happen to his body. How much of his body image was accurate and how much was a construct he had come to believe? [...] his body wanted to be water, but it was no water. It was a man's body, and a man's body was frozen. Wayne was frozen, and the girl-self trapped inside him was cold. He did not know what he could do to melt the frozen man." (*Annabel* 343)

The narrative suggests that for Wayne/Annabel, (at least) two body images exist that compete for prevalence and recognition: the intersex body in its 'natural,' or 'original' state ('natural' referring here to the body unaltered by surgery and medication) and a culturally/medically constructed body whose constructed maleness overlies the femaleness of his 'original' body. This 'natural' body is endowed with a kind of agency or will ("what it wanted to be," "his body wanted to be water"), but at the moment when Wayne/Annabel still takes his_her medication, this body is deprived of its agency, or freedom of action, and hence remains in a (trans)fixed state.

When Wayne moves to St. John's and stops taking the medication, his body starts to transform, but again Wayne has no control over his body (image) which becomes increasingly harder to define in terms of a coherent gender: "everytime he passed through one of [St. John's] clearly defined spaces he felt that he did not fit into it. His body, or the idea of his body, had grown amorphous and huge" (*Annabel* 356). The significance of spaces for the articulation of corporeality becomes apparent in Wayne's relation to the Battery, a district in St. John's that is different from the rest of the city: "The Battery was, like himself, part one thing and part another. [...] It was unregulated [...]. [...] The night on the Battery was a necklace of floating light, a world of dreams, part city and part ocean, a hybrid, like Wayne himself, between the ordinary world and that place in the margins where the mysterious and undefined breathes and lives" (*Annabel* 356f). This passage can be interpreted in terms of Judith

Butler's theorizing of marginalized places in the context of the questions of the conditions and the limits of intelligibility: "What happens when I begin to become that for which there is no place in the given regime of truth?" (Butler 2001: 621). While the Battery is not exactly a non-place, or a place of not-being, it exists at the "limits of the conceivably human" (Butler 2001: 627), that is constantly in a state of flux, shifting between reality and imagination – just like Wayne/Annabel's body.

Although the medical and aesthetic parameters take up more narrative space to account for the demarcation of genders than others, the most disturbing and problematic marker for gender in *Annabel* is the motif of sexual violence. After Wayne/Annabel has decided to discontinue medication, and as a result appears increasingly feminine, s_he is sexually assaulted by a group of men. The sexual assault is triggered by Wayne's new friend Steve's remark to Derek Warford and his friends that Wayne had a "sex-change operation" and changed her_his name to Annabel (*Annabel* 374). When Warford and his gang attack Annabel/Wayne, they call her_him a "little girl" over a dozen times throughout the whole assault (*Annabel* 377-81). The sexual violence scene reiterates a specific narrative of sexual violence towards gender nonconforming individuals already mentioned in the chapter on *Middlesex*, i.e. a sexually motivated attack that involves the stripping of the person's clothes in order to 'inspect' the seemingly 'ambiguous' sexed body parts, followed by normative judgment of the body, and an exaggerated violent attack and/or rape. The attackers are always exclusively cis men. While in the majority of these narratives of violence, the aim of the attack is to 'expose' the gender nonconforming person as something other than they present and/or self-identify, in *Annabel* the sexual assault is interrelated with Wayne/Annabel's femaleness, and his_her (supposed) desire to be/come a girl translates as the desire to "get fucked" by men (*Annabel* 381). Casey Stepaniuk argues in a similar direction: she interprets the sexual assault

> "as some kind of marker of 'essential femaleness.' Throughout the novel, Winter uses only the name Wayne and the personal pronoun 'he' to refer to her protagonist; understandably it might be difficult for some readers to visualize this character's later feminine gender identification and presentation. Because of this, I saw the sexual assault as a way to convince readers of Wayne/Annabel's femaleness. The implication that only women are sexually assaulted and that this kind of assault is somehow proof of the female nature of the character readers have known as 'Wayne' up until this point is deeply problematic. [...] as a feminist I find it very offensive." (Stepaniuk 2013)

While I would not go as far as to claim that the sexual attack was included (only) to convince readers of Wayne/Annabel's femaleness, the problematic connection between gender and victimization Stepaniuk points to correlates with the normative gender concepts in *Annabel*. Another point that substantiates this reading is the

evocation of beauty at various moments throughout the sexual attack: "The bottle hovered over his face and Wayne thought about beauty, and how he never had it, and he realized he had been hoping for it to come. He didn't want a lot of it but he was hoping for some. Just once to look in the mirror and see a beautiful face, even if the beauty was subdued. Even if no one could see it but himself" (*Annabel* 377f). Apart from the implausibility of a victim of sexual violence musing about issues of beauty while being attacked, and even considering the broken bottle with which they are threatened as beautiful, this kind of beauty Wayne/Annabel thinks about refers to a female gendered beauty, perhaps that of Annabel, which s_he feels subdued in Wayne, in the same way s_he feels the 'girl inside him,' Annabel, subdued. The connection between female beauty and the sexual attack reinforces the deeply problematic notion of female attractiveness as a motivation behind sexual violence.

In the moment the attackers are about to strip him_her naked, Wayne/Annabel's immediate thought is that "[b]eauty is gone and beauty is never coming back and it has not even been here yet" (*Annabel* 380). Another possible interpretation of this evocation of beauty in the violent situation is that beauty refers to, or signifies, Wayne/Annabel's state of intelligibility. Wayne has been hoping to become intelligible as an intersex subject, with the surfacing of Annabel and the representation of both Wayne and Annabel inside him, and on the outside – this intersex intelligibility is not reached at this point, and Wayne fears that with/after the sexual attack, which could even involve his death, he will never achieve it: "A thing could depart before it reached you in the first place" (*Annabel* 380). This scene can be read as a reiteration of the equation of beauty and the intersex body within the narrative, and thus as an affirmation of intersex – although, paradoxically and problematically, during a moment of intense pain and exposure.

The three crucial narrative paradigms of gender construction and demarcation in *Annabel*, medicine, aesthetics, and sexual violence, are intricately interrelated in the production of the conditions for intersex intelligibility in/by the novel. Thereby the narrative reiterates specific discourses (such as the medical discourse as well as its renegotiations and/or contestations by intersex first-person narratives, activist texts, and cultural productions), motifs (corporeal beauty standards as antithetical to intersex bodies), and narrative plots (sexual violence against and stripping of a gender variant person triggered by the desire to destroy – both visually and physically – any perceived gender 'ambivalence') frequently found in narratives about intersex, and hence involves processes of repetition of the normative aspects of the production of the category of intersex. Yet at the same time, these narrative reiterations open up possibilities of refusing and/or challenging normative intersex narratives.

5.3.2 A Parent-Child-Relationship: Lost Daughters and Sons of Nature

The analysis of the negotiation of Wayne/Annabel's intersex intelligibility through specific characters and their relationships with him_her starts off with the observation that the coherence of (the character) Wayne/Annabel is produced by various different perspectives in the novel (including his_her own), due to the narrative mode of third-person omniscient; as a result the narrative coherence of the intersex character is constantly contested and necessarily remains fragmentary and at times implausible. As aforementioned, this narrative mode allows for multiple (re)configurations of intersex. *Annabel* not only produces the conditions for the contestation of the category of intersex, but accounts for the motivation behind the parents' decision to raise their intersex child in an 'unambiguous' gender and the struggles that they feel that accompany their decision.

In *Annabel*, the parents of Wayne/Annabel cannot be considered as a narrative entity ('parents') but need to be considered separately and individually, as Jacinta and Treadway Blake. This does not mean, however, that their relationship with and behavior toward their child are never enacted as a parental entity; but despite the fact that some of their decisions regarding Wayne/Annabel are made in unison, the way they perceive and treat their intersex child and enforce or counter their child's gender assignment is very different from one another. Divergent notions of gender and social norms are the main point of contention between Jacinta and Treadway. In the following, the focus is on the production of Wayne/Annabel's intelligibility as a gendered subject through his_her mother's and father's actions, and on the real or imaginary spaces Jacinta and Treadway respectively envision for their child to live a 'livable life,' which potentially offer heterotopias of intersex renegotiations.

The parent-child-relationship in the novel is characterized by secrecy and contesting claims on Wayne/Annabel's gender assignment and performance. The narrative follows the conventional patterns of the majority of (publicly known/available) intersex (auto-) biographies: when the baby of the Blakes is born with an intersex variation, the first reaction is to make a decision about the gender assignment. The erasure, silencing and invisibilization of intersex by medicine and cultural constraints are recurring motifs in personal intersex narratives. The motif and strategy of secrecy about the child's intersex variation run like a common thread through the narrative: for days after the infant's birth, Jacinta keeps its intersex body a secret even from her husband. When Treadway eventually learns about their baby's intersex variation, he insists on a quick and pragmatic decision not only on behalf of the child, but in conformity with their social surroundings: "He knew his baby had both a boy's and a girl's identity, and he knew a decision had to be made. [...] There was only the fact of which sex organ was the most obvious, which one it would be

most practical to recognize, the easiest life for all concerned. For if there was one thing Treadway Blake considered with every step, it was how a decision of his affected not just himself but everyone" (*Annabel* 26f). In contrast to Jacinta, who has come to accept her child's intersex corporeality and secretly imagines raising it "exactly as it was born" (*Annabel* 26), Treadway considers this option as socially irresponsible: "It never occurred to Treadway to do the thing that lay in the hearts of Jacinta and Thomasina: to let his baby live the way it had been born. That, in his mind, would not have been a decision. It would have been indecision, and it would have caused harm. [...] he refused to imagine the harm in store for a child who was neither a son nor a daughter but both" (*Annabel* 27).

The language used in *Annabel* to represent the parents' struggles with their intersex child iterates the language of and the logics inherent in processes of enforced 'normalization' of intersex subjects, namely, the evocation of the 'monstrosity' of an 'ambiguously' sexed body, the subsequent 'necessity' to erase this perceived 'abomination' as the reconstruction of cultural normativity, and the strategies of concealment and lies in order to produce a 'coherent' normative gender narrative. The different ways in which Jacinta and Treadway imagine a viable future for their child point to the difficulty to clearly define what intelligibility means and for whom it is important that a person becomes intelligible:

> "Everything Treadway refused to imagine, Jacinta imagined in detail enough for the two of them. Whereas he struck out on his own to *decide how to erase the frightening ambiguity* in their child, she envisioned living with it as it was. She imagined her daughter beautiful and grown up, in a scarlet satin gown, her male characteristics held secret under the clothing for a time when she might need a warrior's strength and a man's potent aggression. Then she imagined her son as talented, mythical hunter, his breasts strapped in a concealing vest, his clothes the green of striding forward, his heart the heart of a woman who could secretly direct his path in the ways of intuition and psychological insight. Whenever she imagined her child, grown up without interference from a judgemental world, *she imagined its male and female halves as complementing each other, and as being secretly, almost magically powerful*. It was the growing up part she did not want to imagine. The social part, [...] the part that asks how will we give this child so much love it will know no harm from the cruel reactions of people who do not want to understand." (*Annabel* 28, emphasis added)

The insights into Jacinta's and Treadway's emotional states and reasoning about their child's intelligibility reveals the force of social constraints that regulate the conditions of intelligibility, and that threatens the cultural viability of intersex. While Treadway's notion of gender complies with and perpetuates normative cultural and social ideas of gender, Jacinta's imagination offers a possibility of the reconceptualization of gender and potentially provides a space for an intersex subject to be/come intelligible. The binary gender notions inherent in her considerations

aside, immanent in her idea of her child as a gender nonconforming individual is a 'magical power' that stands in contrast to the 'frightening' quality of intersex bodies envisioned by Treadway. However, it becomes obvious that the conditions for intersex intelligibility can only be provided within the realm of the imaginary, a space outside of cultural and social constraints. Even in Jacinta's imagined space, gender nonconformity needs to be concealed to a certain extent, and its power can only have an effect secretly. Eventually, it is the father who decides that the child will be a boy, that he will call him Wayne, "after his grandfather" (*Annabel* 29), to continue the male family tradition, and that medical intervention needs to be performed. The father's decision to assign the child a male gender is reminiscent of a godlike power: "After Treadway had spoken, there was a holy lull in the house" (*Annabel* 30), which signifies even more the arbitrariness with which the child is constructed as a gendered being.

After the decision is made and affirmed by medical interventions, the inevitable disintegration of the relationship between Jacinta and Treadway commences. Their differing views on their child grow continually apart the older Wayne gets. Throughout the narrative, Jacinta mourns the loss of her daughter, is even haunted by the specter of her 'dead daughter' (*Annabel* 142), and is torn between keeping Wayne's intersex variation a secret from everyone including Wayne himself and nurturing her child's 'female' side. Jacinta's struggle symbolizes the power of the social constraints that either allow for or prohibit certain forms of being and living: "her tormented wish for a world in which her child did not have to be confined to something smaller than who he was" (*Annabel* 94). The longing for this 'alternative space' that allows for the resignification of gender is iterated in Wayne's desire to find or create a space where he can be recognized as an intersex subject, for instance the building of the bridge where he can pursue his passions he usually has to keep a secret from his father or his classmates, together with his only friend Wally.

Jacinta blames herself for being responsible for the (symbolic) 'death' of her daughter, and she feels that she is not able to prevent Treadway from pressuring their child into an exclusively male identity, to the effect of "a kind of annihilation by Treadway of some part of his own child's soul" (*Annabel* 140). Guilt towards her child and sadness about the 'lost daughter' continually consume her, but she keeps her imagining Wayne/Annabel as a daughter to herself. Jacinta's narrative is the narrative of a mother of an intersex child who feels coerced to adhere to a 'coherent' story of a non-intersex child that relies on the strategies of concealment, secrecy, and lies. Her efforts to sustain this created narrative, paradoxically, leads to its gradual disintegration: "She wished she had not locked the secret inside her, where it clamoured to get out. [...] This is my problem, Jacinta thought. I am dishonest. I never tell the truth about anything important. And as a result, there is an ocean inside me of unexpressed truth. My face is a mask, and I have murdered my own daughter" (*Annabel* 142). Again, she tries to conceive of a place where her child can exist

without the potential consequences of social ostracism: "was there a place where she could live with truth instead of lies? [...] You told the truth or you lived with the consequences like these. If you held back truth you couldn't win. You swallowed truth and it went sour in your belly and poisoned you slowly" (*Annabel* 151). Jacinta's inner turmoil marks a self-reflective moment in the novel, both on the narrative and on the metanarrative level. Her conflict corresponds to the dilemma of intelligibility, the conflict between compromising (a part of) oneself in order to become recognizable as a gendered subject and social or cultural 'death' by refusing or being unable to become recognizable by the terms available, and hence becoming unintelligible. The narrative displacement of this conflict to the figure of the mother reveals the extent to which the parents of an intersex child are involved in the production of the conditions of intelligibility for their own child.

The motif of secrecy is reiterated in the mother-child-narrative, but there are moments of breaking up the silence about Wayne/Annabel being born intersex. After the incident in the hospital, where Wayne learns about his intersex variation, a change occurs in Jacinta's behavior towards him: "it was the first time since he was a baby that she could allow love unimpeded to escape her heart and flow to her child. [...] She had not freely loved the girl part of Wayne, as the girl had not been acknowledged to exist" (*Annabel* 230). It seems that now that Wayne was provided with the terms of his corporeality, and the secret has been disclosed to him (by a doctor), Jacinta now has the 'permission' to talk about the 'lost daughter' with her child. The invented narrative of the boy Wayne and the silencing and erasure of the girl Annabel is gradually replaced by narrative pieces of the daughter Jacinta always had imagined: "It had not occurred to her that Wayne would want to hear about those times [she saw Wayne/Annabel as her daughter], as if they were beautiful stories. It had never entered her mind that the countless lost moments could be recovered by speaking about them" (*Annabel* 239). This speaking out is an act of recognition of Wayne/Annabel and creates for the first time a verbalized mother-daughter moment, that had been rendered impossible by the narrative of the boy Wayne, and hence changes the mother-son relationship to a crucial extent. Jacinta recounts certain parts of Wayne's body that were like a girl's parts to her; thereby she retrospectively produces a fragmented image of her child's intersex body. Yet this fragmented narrative still needs to remain subdued – "Memories of when Wayne was a girl became a secret conversation held while Treadway prepared for his winter on the trapline" (*Annabel* 241) – and hence fails to fully materialize.

Despite Jacinta's efforts to 'revive' her daughter, she feels she has failed her. After Wayne leaves Croydon Harbor, "she felt sadder for the lost girl than if the lost girl had been herself" (*Annabel* 315). While Wayne/Annabel stays in St. John's, Jacinta feels the absence of both her child and her estranged husband: "she now floated in an existence in which she remained untouched. No one touched her body, and now that Wayne had gone away, no one touched her soul. She had become unreal,

she thought, to anyone outside herself. And as a result she was losing a sense of her own effect on the world" (*Annabel* 390). Her perceived disembodiment and emotional detachment to other people parallels Wayne/Annabel's experience of her_his changing body that starts to reflect more and more her_his intersex corporeality, which causes a situation of loneliness, isolation, and lack of physical contact. This parallelism marks the emotional connection between mother and child, but at the same time symbolizes Jacinta's guilt towards Wayne/Annabel. They do not meet each other again within the scope of the novel's narrative, and hence there is no (explicit) reconciliation in the end. While Jacinta opposes Treadway's decision to coerce upon their child a male gender, and tries to nurture the child's gender variance, the novel represents her as being (partly) responsible for Wayne/Annabel's struggles with gender expectations and limitations, and hence seems to punish her with the disintegration of her emotional state and her social relations, delivering a moral judgment of her actions.

In contrast to Jacinta, who is more accepting of her child's female identification, Treadway not only decides to raise Wayne as a boy but enforces this decision by toughening him up through activities that are typically considered masculine, and simultaneously trying to nip his son's 'feminine' interests in the bud. The division of feminine/masculine labor, spaces, and interests is, as already pointed out, extremely rigid and normative in the novel. Along these normative gender lines, Treadway is cautious to maintain Wayne's gender assignment by perpetuating acts of normative maleness, that are supposed to construct Wayne as a male subject: "normally he would have waited until a son was four or five before he trained him in the ways of how to become a man. But with this child Treadway did not want to take a chance" (*Annabel* 68). This process of iteration of a 'male' gender, in order for the subject to become a 'male' subject, is particularly precarious for intersex individuals (children), and, as suggested by Treadway (and the novel), requires especially forceful processes of iteration, as "[t]here were so many ways Wayne could fail" to perform masculinity right (*Annabel* 134); thus the processes of reiterating the masculinity of an intersex subject need to exceed, in their enforcement, the processes of reiterating the masculinity of an (already) 'male' subject (Treadway "wanted to dismantle what he saw as a deterrent to his son's normal development" [*Annabel* 135]). By making this assertion, the novel is reflexive of the performativity of gender and hints at the constructivist character of the very gender norms it seems to claim as a given.

Despite, or rather as a result of this enforcement of masculinity, Wayne feels this gender assignment not to be his "authentic self," as he experiences his "authentic self," or sense of his lived reality, as also female (*Annabel* 71). The performativity of gender, as represented in *Annabel*, however does not contradict that a person's sense of gendered self can be/feel, subjectively, 'real.' Hence, while the novel makes an argument for the constructedness, or performativity of gender, perhaps best represented by the character of Treadway himself and his efforts to 'make' Wayne a

'man,' Wayne/Annabel's sense of (gendered) self reflects this performativity and at the same time asserts itself as 'authentic,' i.e. both male and female.

Yet, the character of Treadway represents not only the maintenance of this strict division between genders and gendered spaces, but also the dis/continuities between nature and the human. By his incessant wandering between nature/wilderness and the social space/his family he not only connects these two spaces but blurs the clear demarcation line between supposedly 'male' (the trapping line) and 'female' spaces (the home of his family): "The wilderness of Labrador was home to him" (*Annabel* 423). In the course of the narrative, Treadway comes increasingly to symbolize nature itself. He not only communicates with animals when seeking their advice – in contrast, he hardly communicates with or connects to other people –, but becomes himself (like) an animal, especially in Jacinta's mind on the brink of their disintegrating relationship: "[S]he [Jacinta] thought he had begun to think like the animals he trapped. He had begun to walk like them, and sleep like them. He had become wild, and there was no way you could send a message to him if you did not know the wild language" (*Annabel* 254). Treadway's self-imposed solitude he finds in the woods brings him to reflect on social norms and their implications. He conceives of the space of the wood/wilderness as an 'alternative' space that provides the conditions for Wayne/Annabel's intelligibility, which the social space (especially of Croydon Harbour) fails to provide. Treadway reconsiders his choice to assign his child a male gender, seeking the advice of an owl:

"'I should have let well enough alone,' Treadway said. 'I think that now. What would have happened if I had let Wayne become half little girl?' The owl allowed Treadway to see Wayne as a girl child. So Treadway stood there in the woods and saw a vision of his daughter. [...] Treadway loved her. 'You're a beautiful child.' But the child could not hear him as the owl could. [...] Treadway felt, for the first time since his wife had given birth, pain flow out of his heart and into the moss. It sank into the moss and became part of the woods. [...] If only the world could live in here, deep in the forest, where there were no stores, roads, windows, and doors, no straight lines. The straight lines were the problem. Rulers and measurements and lines and no one to help you if you crossed them. [...] 'I wish,' Treadway told the owl, 'I could bring him in here with me for good six months. Longer. Forget about the medicine that keeps him being a boy. Hospital medicine, no. The medicine is in these trees. [...] What would happen? [...] We could live here.' The owl had its back to the man." (*Annabel* 215f)

While Treadway seems to be, as Dan Hartland argues, "very much a product of [a] world ['where every person, or plant, or animal, or any entity whatsoever, has an explanatory ticket on it,' *Annabel* 203], and [...] can see – perhaps has – no real way out of it," and ostensibly "remains the plain personification of a blinkered, restrictive worldview" (Hartland 2011), he gradually begins to seek a way to imagine a situation where his child can live unrestricted by social norms. Nature, more specifically the

wilderness of Labrador, which previously has come to signify the male (dominated) space in *Annabel*, now seems to be the only space Treadway can imagine from where to rearticulate Wayne/Annabel's intelligibility as an intersex subject. However, he becomes aware of the unfeasibility of this idea, and the wilderness hence has to remain the imaginary alternative space outside, or at the margins of, social life and its regulative system of norms – and, above all, he becomes aware of his own inability to "handle having a son in the house who was openly changing into someone [he] could not explain to himself or to anyone in the community" (*Annabel* 353).

Treadway's disconnection from his child has a tremendous effect on how Wayne perceives himself. The constant feeling of 'failing' as a boy/man haunts Wayne throughout his childhood and adolescence, until he leaves his home in Labrador and moves to St. John's. Wayne/Annabel perceives him_herself to be in a state of undefined subjecthood, uncertainty, and transformation, with his father's expectations functioning as a reminder of his_her inability to live up to male gender norms: "now that you had left things behind that confused you, that defined you as a man when you weren't a man. Not the son your dad wanted. Not a son who kept up family traditions. [...] Instead you were ambiguous, feminine, undecided" (*Annabel* 333). Wayne/Annabel gradually emancipates him_herself from his_her father's authority over his_her gender identity and his_her body, which becomes most explicit in her_his decision to stop the medication (*Annabel* 351). Yet Wayne/Annabel is still in a state of gender and bodily transitioning, and this process involves feelings of a loss of authenticity or a coherent sense of self, and the iteration of secrecy and lies concerning his_her gender and sexed corporeality. His_her father still has the power to "evoke[...] in Wayne's mind the beast he was afraid of becoming. The beast was vicious. She hurtled and would not back up. [...] Her pain threshold was high. She was not pretty. She prowled, animal-like, uncivilized. [...] She was without language" (*Annabel* 352). Wayne/Annabel experiences a profound anxiety of becoming unintelligible, not recognizable by the terms and cultural categories available to him_her, of losing her_his state as a subject (of language), when s_he is no longer recognizable as a male subject. Annabel has not yet become 'socialized,' not visible, and not nameable. She needs to be hidden from Wayne's social surroundings, since she is not yet recognizable. But she cannot be contained anymore within Wayne, or, what s_he feels, within the 'disguise' of a male identity: "if he was going to grow into the softness of Annabel, he did not want to have a man's barbered head or face. He did not know what he wanted, but he knew he did not want to continue to pretend to be a man" (*Annabel* 403); at the same time Wayne/Annabel feels that the make-up applied to her_his face is a "façade and a lie," that it "exaggerated something and diminished something at the same time" (*Annabel* 420).

Wayne/Annabel's struggle with the dilemma of intelligibility – becoming intelligible as a gender nonconforming subject without having to compromise his_her sense of self – that runs like a common thread through the narrative becomes most

explicit in the moment s_he tries to give an account of her_himself, but lacks the language and terms by which s_he can define her_himself. When Wayne/Annabel runs into the former principal of her_his school, Victoria Huskins, the inadequacy of the language available to him_her makes it impossible to tell a coherent story of her_himself.

"Wayne felt his own story amass as a cloud. He could not be coherent about it. He wanted to talk to someone but he did not know how, because somehow the facts, with their tidy labels and medical terms, reduced his whole being to something that he did not want it to be. How could he sit here and tell Victoria Huskins what the doctors had labelled him without reducing himself to the status of a diagram [...]? He could not begin to explain, so he sat without words. [...] he could not explain his whole being with words. The cloud rose in him and reached his throat, where it amassed as a blockage that felt leaden and sorrowful. He felt it as a lump that threatened to silence him." (*Annabel* 417f)

Wayne/Annabel feels that the way s_he is/was 'constructed' by a medical discourse misrepresents how s_he perceives him_herself; the terms provided, and imposed, by the specific medical discourse on intersex fail to acknowledge intersex subjects as individual and human subjects and fail to represent Wayne/Annabel as something other, or more, than a medical subject. However, while the social construction (or the assignment) of a person's gender can potentially conflict with the person's own sense of self, the idea of social construction also contains the possibility to either transform the available terms and concepts to fit the person's own subject formation, or to refuse them altogether. At this point in the narrative, Wayne/Annabel already challenges his_her gender assignment, by rejecting the terms that constitute him_her as something s_he strongly feels to be inadequate and hurtful. Yet s_he still has not been able to formulate the terms by which s_he wants to be known.

Eventually, Wayne/Annabel starts to reconnect with her_his father who visits her_him in St. John's after the sexual attack. Treadway now finally recognizes his child not only as a son, but also as a daughter: "Though Treadway had never called Wayne anything but a son, he knew and had always known that within his son lay hidden a daughter. He had seen this daughter in the past day here in St. John's. He had seen Annabel in Wayne's face" (*Annabel* 440). Although Treadway had seen the feminine traits of his child's intersex body at earlier moments, he never acknowledged them openly, and instead continued the enforcement of his son's masculinity. It seems disturbing to some degree that he recognizes his child's gender nonconformity only after s_he was sexually assaulted (*Annabel* 425f) – an incident that can easily be read as an affirmation of Wayne/Annabel's femininity, as argued above.

The novel's sympathetic representation of Treadway and the cautiousness with which he is portrayed as a 'good' man who is, as Mark Callanan puts it, "a character

that is no brute stereotype of maleness – it would have been easy for [Winter] to reduce him to a caricature of machismo – but a man capable of sensitivity who is simply unable to deal with the complication of having a child of indeterminate sex" (Callanan 2010), creates a more complex picture of a father who struggles with acting ethically responsible on behalf of his intersex child. Although the ending of the novel, with the conclusion that "[o]nly in wind over the land did Treadway find the freedom his son would seek elsewhere. Treadway was a man of Labrador, but his son had left home as daughters and sons do, to seek freedom their fathers do not need to inhabit, for it inhabits the fathers" (*Annabel* 461), remains strangely vague and still refuses to acknowledge Wayne/Annabel as both a son *and* a daughter to Treadway, Treadway's financial support of his child and his encouragement of Wayne/Annabel to go to university can be interpreted as a father imagining a future for his child where s_he is enabled to "work toward subverting the dominant ideologies of space" and gender, as Mareike Neuhaus argues (Neuhaus 2012).

5.3.3 "Make a Life for Yourself any Way You Want, in any Place": Thomasina and the Crossing of Spatial and Gender Boundaries

Thomasina Baikie is easily the most 'radical' transgressor of social conventions and gender norms in *Annabel* – "[y]ou got the feeling something radical could happen with her around," we are told (*Annabel* 168) – and the person who encourages Wayne/Annabel's intelligibility as a gender nonconforming subject most emphatically. Even her name hints at someone who defies social as well as gender expectations. In the novel, her name is explained as a reference to the Doubting Thomas, as her mother wanted to call her if she was a boy, "'after the disciple who wanted to see Christ's nail marks with his own eyes. But [she was] a girl,'" so her mother called her Doubting Thomasina (*Annabel* 34). Her name hints to her disposition to take nothing for granted or as a given, and to always question or challenge norms and their underlying premises. In the context of a novel about an intersex character, the name Thomasina can also be read as a reference to Thomasine/Thomas Hall, who, throughout her_his life, was crossing back and forth between male and female genders.[23] The motif of crossing or transgression structures Thomasina's narrative within the novel and crucially influences Wayne/Annabel's (gender) trajectory.

The motif of transgressing or crossing boundaries and/or spaces can be identified in Thomasina's traveling to various countries, after the death of her husband and daughter, and in her affinity for bridges, of which she sends selected postcards to

23 Hall's case was registered in the *Minutes of the Council and General Court of Colonial Virginia* in 1629 (edited by H. R. McIlwaine, 1924).

Wayne/Annabel. The travel motif is a very common trope found in transgender narratives, symbolizing the sexed bodily 'transitioning' of trans persons or characters, as already discussed in the *Middlesex* chapter. In *Annabel*, it is one of the most dominant leitmotifs, signifying not only Thomasina's independence (from a man and social expectations) but Wayne/Annabel's journey to come to figure out her_his sense of self, by moving first to St. John's, then traveling to Boston to reconnect with Wally, and finally going to the Technical University of Nova Scotia to study architecture. Crossing spatial boundaries has also significance for other characters: Jacinta reminisces her past as a young woman in St. John's and struggles with her life as a wife and mother in Croydon Harbour, which differs drastically from the city life; Wally Michelin moves from Croydon Harbour to Boston in order to recover her injured singing voice; and Treadway roams between his family home and the woods. All central characters are on their own journeys, alone and with one another. Their journeys come to symbolize the intimate connections between each other, the loss or damage to these connections, and (in some cases) their reconciliation, but also the reconciliation with themselves, in terms of (mutual) recognition.

"To Thomasina people were rivers, always ready to move from one state of being into another. It was not fair, she felt, to treat people as if they were finished beings. Everyone was always becoming and unbecoming" (*Annabel* 41). Thomasina's concept of the human condition makes a reference to Ovid's mythological narrative of the *Metamorphoses* and reiterates other intersex narratives' renegotiations of mythological motifs (e.g. medical discourses on intersex, *Middlesex*, to name a few). A more explicit intertextual reference to mythology is the homework of researching the figure of Hermaphroditus which Thomasina, who by then has become Wayne/Annabel's teacher, gives to him_her, with the aim of letting her students "enjoy playing roles they normally hid" (*Annabel* 174). Her approach to offer an alternative model of identification and vocabularies through mythological narratives ("She saw all tradition as metaphorical. It was, in her mind, all about story, character, psyche," *Annabel* 173) clashes with Treadway's worldview, who strongly objects to her intervention in his method of parenting, as "the rest of us have to live in the real world. Wayne has to live in the real world" (*Annabel* 180), cautioning against the social consequences of a disruption of 'the real world's' norms. Neuhaus argues that the "intertextual allusion in *Annabel* to Hermaphroditus achieves two things, then: one, it points to another discourse, if one that did not have any impact on the social, cultural, and political realities in antiquity; and two, it suggests that norms are subject to change; they may be modified, if not entirely abolished" (Neuhaus 2012: 132). To deduce the dis/continuities or changes of norms from idealized mythological narratives, however, is a problematic move and it is therefore questionable whether

the myth of Hermaphroditus can really serve as a point of reference for a *viable* alternative reconceptualization of contemporary intersex personhood.[24]

The naming of the intersex child as Annabel by Thomasina marks the crucial moment in the narrative that determines Wayne/Annabel's ensuing gender trajectory from infancy to young adulthood. The baby is born while Thomasina's own daughter Annabel and her husband, Graham Montague, drown. Instead of grieving for long over their deaths, Thomasina dedicates herself to guard "that little baby of Jacinta's, Wayne, whom no one wanted to call a daughter" (*Annabel* 41) against the harsh enforcement of his_her 'masculinity' by Treadway, as "Thomasina believed the child's difference was a strange blessing that had to be protected. That it was a jeopardized advantage, even a power" (*Annabel* 29). Hence, when the minister baptizes the child as Wayne, Thomasina intervenes: "With greater skill than his [Reverend Julian Taft], Thomasina whispered, 'Annabel,' so low he could not hear. Thomasina believed there was power in a name. The name Annabel settled on the child as quietly as pollen alongside the one bestowed by Treadway" (62). As Judith Butler has argued, the giving of a name constitutes a person as a subject (of language) (Butler 1997b: 2), and so the intersex child 'comes into being' as Wayne and Annabel, albeit secretly.

Thomasina's act of naming the Blakes' child after her own lost daughter seems only comprehensible in the light of her grieving for her own child, in an effort to preserve her memory (*Annabel* 171). Yet this act bestows the narrative, and Wayne/Annabel's story, with a ghostlike quality: Annabel is like a specter haunting not only Wayne, who has recurring dreams about being a girl and sees Annabel's reflection when he looks into the mirror, but also Jacinta, who "seems to feel that she has murdered her daughter by raising her child as conventionally 'male.' In this sense, her secret nurturing of Annabel appears almost like a communion with the dead," as James Bailey has argued (Bailey 2014). Annabel, in her association with a dead girl, a ghost, or a shadow self, becomes an 'unreal' identity, a disembodied entity who

24 Neuhaus points out that the mythological narrative of Hermaphroditus differs widely from the lived realities of intersex persons in ancient Greece and Rome: "Thomasina's idealist approach to Wayne's situation [...] romanticizes intersexuality based on a rather one-sided reading of ancient history. Wayne is not a deity celebrated in a cult; his life is not myth. In fact, his story resembles the reality of intersex people in Greek and Roman antiquity more than it resembles the myth of Hermaphroditus. The longing for a primordial form of being, the original androgynous sex, finds expression in antiquity only in mythology (Brisson 41-71; see Ovid's *Metamorphoses* and Plato's *Symposium*). The reality of intersex people in the Greek and Roman world was rather brutal: up until the Roman Republic, intersex children were regarded as ominous public prodigies and were therefore killed. Such superstition was eventually challenged during the Roman Empire, but intersex children continued to be abused as a form of entertainment (Brisson 7-40)" (Neuhaus 2012: 132).

almost seems to 'inhabit' the body of the 'boy' Wayne; she is a non-subject for she cannot be recognized outside the confines of Wayne.

Interestingly, there are different interpretations of the personhood of the intersex character. Sassafras Lowrey considers not Wayne to be the novel's central character, but Annabel (as Annabel is also the title of the novel), and reverses the perspective on the character's gender trajectory: "The character Annabel is born into a quiet rural community ruled by the seasons, hard work, and conformity. She comes of age in the shadow of Wayne, the name she was given when the doctors determined she was to be raised male" (Lowrey 2011). Stacey D'Erasmo questions the dichotomization of Wayne/Annabel itself: "Winter is [...] working from the same binary model she is purporting to overturn: the idea that Annabel is a 'girl' – and that this means someone softer, sweeter, gentler, more emotional – is a given here. But what if the inner Annabel were a little butch? Or what if she changed from day to day? Or what if she and Wayne were less distinguishable from each other?" (D'Erasmo 2011). Lowrey and D'Erasmo definitely have a point here. Lowrey's reading reverses the conditions for the intersex subject to be/come intelligible, and thus complicates the conditions of the whole narrative. By reversing the intersex infant's initial gender assignment, conceiving of the child as a girl on whom a male identity is forced upon, the focus is directed towards the arbitrariness of assigning an intersex child a clear-cut, normative gender and the potential consequences that might arise from *any* decision. It also serves as a reminder that Wayne – i.e. the gender assignment as a boy – is a construction of not only medical definitory power and interventions but also of paternal authority. Lowrey's statement, therefore, should not be read as conceiving of the intersex protagonist's 'real' or 'authentic' gender to be female, but rather as a challenge of the idea that anyone, be it author, narrator, other characters, or reader, should make an assumption about Wayne/Annabel's 'true' gender. It is also a commentary on the implausibility of consistently using male pronouns when referring to the protagonist even in the stages where s_he considers her_himself as a non-male gendered person.

D'Erasmo's criticism of the duality of Wayne/Annabel identifies the main paradox in the novel when it comes to the construction, and the (intended) deconstruction, of gender. As argued earlier, *Annabel*'s representation of gender relies on a rigid and normative binary construction along the heteronormative matrix (Butler). The character of Wayne/Annabel is, apparently, supposed to challenge the strict division line between male and female, because s_he has an intersex variation. So, according to the novel, *naturally* an intersex person (to clarify once more: a person who is born with "congenital physical traits or variations that lie between ideals of male and female," Carpenter 2012) *must* also identify as both male *and* female (i.e. as a combination of neatly separated 'male' and 'female' gender characteristics), *must* challenge the gender binary as they already challenge the binary of sexed corporeality, and *must* live in a liminal place in society. While an intersex

person *can* identify as both male and female (or as male, or female, or neither, or as some other gender altogether), the novel represents Wayne/Annabel's being positioned in-between two genders as a necessary result of having an intersex variation. I argue that *Annabel* pursues this strategy in an effort to always keep Wayne intelligible – and in order to be intelligible at all, normative genders (male and female) need to serve as points of reference for the representation of Wayne's gender. While several characters and his social surroundings may at times react with confusion to the protagonist's gender nonconformity, which threatens Wayne/Annabel's intelligibility on a narrative level, e.g. in his_her social context, the narrative is cautious to present Wayne (to the reader) continuously as an intelligible subject – Wayne remains, in his refusal to conform to an assigned gender norm, a coherent character, because it is this refusal that defines him and makes him always recognizable.

The character of Thomasina renders, perhaps unintentionally, a metanarrative commentary on this difficulty to provide the conditions for Wayne/Annabel to be/come an intelligible subject, not only in the environment of Labrador, but within the cultural system. She is the one person in the narrative who endorses gender nonconformity and reflects on the social constraints as well as on the possibilities of self-determination. When she tells Wayne/Annabel, "'I wouldn't call what you have a disorder. I'd call it a different order. A different order means a whole new way of being. It could be fantastic. It could be overwhelmingly beautiful, if people weren't scared'" (*Annabel* 208f), she picks up Butler's question: "What, given the contemporary order of being, can I be?" (Butler 2001: 621). Yet Thomasina is also aware of the crucial point that is missed by this question, a point that touches upon questions of responsibility that comes with revealing new information and possibilities to a child while the conditions for these possibilities do not yet (fully) exist, when she hesitates to tell Wayne the truth about his intersex variation: "But what would Wayne do with the truth? He would need more than the truth. He would need a world that understood" (*Annabel* 209). Thomasina reminds us that the conditions of intelligibility for intersex individuals are precarious. Even when she eventually reveals to Wayne that he was born intersex, it becomes clear that the truth about Wayne/Annabel cannot be contained within a word: "Thomasina was a good one for naming things in a way that still let you ask questions" (*Annabel* 235).

5.3.4 "Building a Voice up from the Ruins": Wally, Annabel, and the Quest for Vocal Self-Determination

Wally Michelin[25] is somewhere between a main and a minor character in *Annabel*, but can best be defined as a 'supporting' character in the literal sense. While she has her own storyline, this storyline as well as her character per se have several functions within the narrative which serve as points of reference for Wayne/Annabel's narrative. The first of her two most important narrative functions is related to the motif of voice. Wally personifies the power of voice to assert one's right to define oneself and exemplifies the strong interdependency between using one's voice and the production of identity in the face of the voice's precarious state: Wally uses her singing voice to express herself and what she wants to be, then (temporarily) loses it and with it an important, defining part of her sense of self, and eventually recovers her voice and with it the ability to speak (sing) her self again. Wayne/Annabel follows a parallel trajectory, whereby voice becomes a symbol for the silencing of his_her being intersex and the gradual recovery of his_her gender variant personhood. Secondly, Wally can be interpreted as an embodiment of Wayne's female identity part, and hence as a flesh-and-blood version of Annabel.

Wayne and Wally become friends as both of them are outsiders in a way: while Wally is at first very popular in school, in contrast to Wayne, her popularity wanes when a new girl, Donna Palliser, comes into their class. It is, however, not the lack of popularity that connects them; it is rather Wally's ambition of becoming a professional alto singer and the determination with which she pursues her goal that sets her apart from their classmates. Wayne is deeply impressed by Wally's certainty about and definition of a clear goal in her life; a clearly defined goal he himself misses. Wayne's attraction to Wally is neither strictly sexual nor nonsexual, it is "an excitement he could not name" (*Annabel* 113). He feels drawn towards Wally in a constant ambiguity of wanting to *be with* her and wanting to *be* her. His desire to be close to her translates as a desire to unite with her corporeally; he alternately imagines being inside her body, or Wally being inside him: "Wayne was in love with her from the moment he heard her crumbly voice. If there was a way he could make himself into a ghost without a body – a shadow – or transparent like the lures his father used to catch Arctic char, he would have done it. He would have transformed into his father's lure, slipped under Wally Michelin's divinely freckled skin, and live inside her, looking through her eyes" (*Annabel* 99). When Dr. Lioukras tells Wayne that he

25 It is noteworthy that Wally's mother named her after Wallis Simpson, who herself has been speculated about to be intersex (Sebba 2011). While the novel contains no reference to Wally being intersex, in view of her close relation to Wayne and association with Annabel, the choice of her name adds to her construction as a 'projection surface' for intersex representations in the novel.

is "a girl inside," Wayne imagines this girl to be Wally, "smaller than her real self, lying quietly [...] inside him, hiding" (*Annabel* 236f). The motif of aesthetics is a structuring principle of their relationship, and Wayne's desire to be (like) Wally can be interpreted as his desire to be beautiful, whereby beauty is strongly related to femininity: "if he turned his face a certain way his cheekbones looked almost like the cheekbones of Wally Michelin, still easily the most beautiful girl in the school, in Wayne's mind" (*Annabel* 265f). Wally serves as a point of reference for Wayne when he tries to imagine his own femininity. This physical attraction seems to be onesided; Wally's sexuality is scarcely addressed and in fact seems irrelevant, which hence reinforces the argument that she serves mainly as a projection surface for Wayne to act out his own desires – the imaginary testing of transgressing bodily and gender boundaries, without having to actually transgress any boundaries.

The relationship between Wayne and Wally contains a reference to the Greek myth of Hermaphroditus, who was the son of Hermes and Aphrodite. According to myth, the water nymph Salmacis fell in love with Hermaphroditus due to his handsomeness, and asked the gods that they should be forever united, upon which their two bodies were transformed into one body with both male and female characteristics (Ovid, *Metamorphoses* IV: 346-388). Wayne is driven by a similar desire as Salmacis, which gives *Annabel*'s adaption of the mythological narrative an additional twist in terms of gender roles. While this intertextual reference to mythology is more implicit, the novel's use of it iterates its other, more explicit reference to Hermaphroditus in the context of Thomasina's homework assignment. Again, mythological conceptions of intersex serve to imagine alternative figures for identification that are not medical. However, while the figure of Hermaphroditus, and/or the term hermaphrodite, *can* be chosen by intersex persons who like to define themselves as such, their uncritical use by non-intersex people to define intersex persons has been contested.[26] Therefore, mythological references to intersex still remain problematic when used in fictional or nonfictional works written by non-intersex people about intersex people.

The connection between Wally and Annabel is strong and complicated. While Annabel remains for the most time subdued in Wayne, both physically and identitarian, and thus is invisible and unrecognizable, Wally serves for Wayne as an intelligible model after which to imagine his own femaleness. Wally is the only person in whom Wayne confides his recurring dreams of being a girl, and wishes her to recognize Annabel and become her best friend. Annabel, it seems, can only materialize through the figure of Wally – either by 'borrowing' her body, or by Wally's recognition of her existence. There comes a moment in the narrative when the strong connection between Wayne and Wally is severely damaged. When Wayne

26 A discussion of the use of the term 'hermaphrodite' in intersex contexts can be found in Viloria 2013.

tells his classmates about his dream of being a girl at a party, Wally gets into a fight over this with Donna, during which her vocal chords are lacerated by a piece of glass. The rupture of Wally's vocal chords – and hence the likely destruction of her aspiring singing career – marks a rupture in their relationship, and leaves Wayne feeling guilty. Just like Wally distances herself from Wayne, Annabel escapes from inside his body (*Annabel* 252). With the (temporary) loss of Wally, Wayne/Annabel feels disconnected not only from their shared intimacy, but also from his_her sense of bodily reality, and from their shared spaces where Wayne can also be Annabel. When Treadway dismantles the bridge where Wayne and Wally had spent time together and shared their deepest passions, it was like "a kind of annihilation [...] of some part of [Wayne's] soul" (*Annabel* 140); after the accident with Wally's vocal chords Wayne tries to reconnect with her by reentering their "own world" in which anything is possible (*Annabel* 277), but this space fails to materialize for the time being.

The symbolic significance of the voice as asserting one's existence is most obvious in Wally's storyline. Wally's voice is so closely interrelated with her own sense of self, and with her existence within the novel, that it becomes representative of her whole self, so that by losing her singing voice, her identity is threatened. Her voice, even after the injury, is constantly associated with beauty; a motif that is reiterated throughout the narrative in Wayne's musings about his own beauty (or, that of Annabel), the loss of beauty, and beauty as the seemingly unattainable ideal for him. The long rupture in Wally's ability to sing marks the period of disconnection from Wayne, and parallels Wayne/Annabel's disconnection from his_her own corporeality and sense of gender identity. Wally's involuntary silence mirrors the years of silence kept about Wayne/Annabel's intersex variation by his_her parents, and thus reinforces the symbolism of voice as a tool to become an intelligible subject. At approximately the same time – although in difference places, Wayne in St. John's and Wally in Boston – Wally decides to visit a voice clinic in the hope to have her vocal chords repaired, Wayne/Annabel uses his_her voice to speak up against the doctors in the clinic and against their authority over his_her body and gender identity: "he knew he had spoken with his whole self: with the voice of Annabel and not only that of Wayne" (*Annabel* 370f). The attempt to use one's own voice as a strategy of self-assertion, in order to (re)gain the authority over one's own life, and hence, over one's identity, is a crucial statement the novel makes.

In the end, it is the recovering of voices, for both Wally and Wayne/Annabel, what reconciles them with each other. Wayne/Annabel visits Wally in Boston to attend her performance in a choir. She is able to sing again, even the piece she has always wanted so sing since she was a child, and her voice is now part of a choir's sound: "'It was never meant as a solo piece,' Wally said, 'It was always a piece for four parts, for a choir, and that's only one of the things I didn't realize'" (*Annabel* 453); and it is this polyphonic voice that reconnects the two friends: "The sound insinuated itself underneath all the other sounds, and this sound, alone in the room,

entered Wayne's body" (*Annabel* 454). Wally provides the (space of) recognition for Wayne/Annabel which finally allows him_her to become an intelligible subject (and the reader is assured of Wayne/Annabel's intelligibility by his_her assertion that Wally recognizes her_him):

"He felt they recognized each other in a way that no one else recognized either of them. Other people could look at him but they did not see what Wally Michelin saw, and perhaps others saw in her the same thing he did, but he did not think they saw it. What it was was limitlessness. When you were with an ordinary person, you could draw a line around the territory the two of you covered, and Wayne had found that the territory was usually quite small. It was smaller than a country and smaller than a town and sometimes smaller than a room. But this room, the room they were in, did not really exist. [...] The way he responded to Wally's presence was that he felt as if life at this minute was blossoming inside him instead of lying dormant. He felt the electric presence of his own life, and he did not want that feeling to end, although he knew it had ended in the past and that it would end again." (*Annabel* 452)

This passage articulates the felt dis/continuities between Wayne/Annabel's and Wally's bodies, and reiterates his_her ambiguous desire of intimacy and merging with Wally. Yet it becomes also clear that Wayne/Annabel cannot remain forever in this non-existent space and needs to find a spatial equivalent within his_her social context in order to become intelligible outside the intimate heterotopic symbiosis with Wally.

Annabel closes with placing Wayne/Annabel into a 'real' space where s_he can be/come intelligible, among the students on the university campus, where s_he "did not feel out of place because of his body's ambiguity [...]. [...] He felt he was in some kind of a free world to which he wanted to belong" (*Annabel* 455f). More precisely, s_he starts to study "not only the design of bridges but also the architecture, design, and planning of whole cities, [...] to understand not just the surfaces but also the underpinnings of a city's character" (*Annabel* 459). Wayne/Annabel is now able to literally build bridges, to construct unifying devices which symbolize the 'unification' of his_her gendered reality. Neuhaus argues that Wayne/Annabel is now able to leave his_her place at the margins of society, by using the city's potential to provide for counterspaces:

"Studying city design, Wayne explores and analyzes *conceived space*, those discourses that determine people's perceived and lived spaces. Criticizing dominant social discourses, Wayne may thus claim a position from which he may alter cities and thereby facilitate change, producing real spaces for himself and the various Others of contemporary society [...]. Hence, lived space, the space of social conflict and struggle, becomes in *Annabel* also a 'counterspace' from within which Wayne may affect the social change that will allow him to be recognized as a person [...]." (Neuhaus 2012: 130)

With the help of Wally, Thomasina, and her_his father, Wayne/Annabel is now able to conceive of a world for her_him to live a 'livable' life.

5.3.5 Does an Intersex Story Have the Obligation to be Subversive?

When seeking to find answers to the question of how a fictional work on intersex negotiates the intelligibility of its intersex character, the question seems to be inextricably linked with the notion that an intersex story has to be subversive or challenging. But what exactly is it that needs to be subverted or challenged, in order to render the intersex subject intelligible? Proceeding from Butler's claim that the "conditions of intelligibility [are] composed of norms, of practices, that have become presuppositional, without which we cannot think the human at all" (Butler 2001: 621), the most obvious and the most logical answer is that a challenging or a subversion of sociocultural norms, more precisely of gender norms and norms of sexed corporeality, is at issue here. *Annabel* provides the apt preconditions for a challenge of gender and bodily norms, by establishing a context in which gender is a rigid binary construct and gender norms are forcefully maintained. Into this rigidly heteronormative context, the novel introduces a character who is supposed to challenge this binary: an infant born intersex, and since s_he happens to have a body that defies 'standard' notions of male and female corporeality, what would seem more natural than asking of this person (a child, for the most part of the narrative) to gladly and emphatically defy normative gender notions as well? Or so the novel seems to suggest.

Is Wayne/Annabel a subversive character who challenges gender and sexed bodily norms? Two questions (at least) arise from this question: first, can the character become intelligible as an intersex subject without having to challenge normative ideas of gender and corporeality, and second, is it the task of the intersex person to be challenging and disruptive of these norms as a requirement for the novel to challenge the norms in question? At the beginning of the chapter I argued that *Annabel* accomplishes to create an overall believable narrative about the complexities and realities of the life of an intersex child/adolescent that seems to find a way out of the dilemma of being/becoming (un)intelligible. I want to come back to this symbolic survival, the intersex character's surviving the threat of their symbolic/social 'death' that is caused either by becoming unintelligible due to their gender and/or bodily nonconformativity or by compromising (a part of) their self in order to become culturally intelligible, both alternatives that would lead to an 'unlivable life,' in consideration of the survival strategies the novel provides for its intersex protagonist.

The novel oscillates between marking Wayne/Annabel as an 'impossible,' unintelligible being and continually reassuring his_her intelligibility. This

establishing of the intersex protagonist's intelligibility, especially for the reader, is not accomplished by a first-person narration, hence the narrative has to rely on several other strategies. One obvious strategy of keeping the character intelligible is to refer to them as Wayne and with male pronouns exclusively, and to continue to do so even after Wayne decides to stop his medication and let his body reflect his intersex corporeality and identifies as non-male. The novel validates this strategy by representing Wayne as a boy – even though it is made clear that this is only one of the possible gender assignments and that Wayne himself rejects this assignment – who has a girl 'living inside of him.' This 'girl-inside-boy' narrative allows for the character to be still perceived as a boy, rather than a person who cannot be recognized in terms of male and/or female gender. This specific narrative is further affirmed by the constant reference to supposedly 'masculine' and 'feminine' acts performed by Wayne. Thus, while Wayne is neither exclusively male nor female, his gender and sexed body still remains recognizable by normative gender and corporeal standards, and the reader is provided with detailed description of body parts and acts of behavior that can each be marked as either male or female. In Wayne, even during and after his transitioning, nothing remains really unmarked, or is marked as something other than male or female. This strategy of asserting the intersex character's intelligibility, however, leads to some extent to the invisibilization of an integral part of Wayne/Annabel's gender, and thus to a misrecognition of her_his gender. This specific kind of intelligibility that is attempted to be established unfortunately comes at the expense of the recognition of Wayne/Annabel as a person with intersex corporeality and a non-binary gender.

Another strategy of rendering Wayne/Annabel continuously intelligible relies on the affirmation of his_her recognizability by others. No matter what processes of struggling with his_her gender identification and bodily changes Wayne/Annabel is going through, s_he remains at all times defined by his_her relations to his_her surroundings: s_he remains Treadway's son until Treadway consciously decides to see Wayne also as his daughter, s_he remains Jacinta's official son and secret daughter, s_he remains Annabel for Thomasina, s_he remains Wally's best friend, and so on. Even the other characters seem, at least most of the time, very sure about what Wayne is to them – and hence, they validate Wayne/Annabel's recognizability for the reader. As argued in detail above, Wayne/Annabel is rendered, his_her own struggles (and at times others' struggles) with his_her gender assignment and the rejection thereof notwithstanding, intelligible through his_her relationality in the novel.

Returning to the question of whether *Annabel*'s intersex protagonist subverts or challenges gender and bodily norms, and to the consequential question whether s_he can become intelligible as intersex without disrupting these norms, what can be ascertained is that the novel's strategy to first set up a rigid gender binary and then introducing an intersex character who is supposed to dismantle said binary has fairly

missed its aim. The representation of Wayne/Annabel relies itself on strict binaries and gender stereotypes, in an effort to always keep him_her intelligible, and to provide for her_his coherent subjecthood. However, the novel's negotiation of Wayne/Annabel's intelligibility must be considered on several (meta-) narrative levels. While Wayne/Annabel generally remains intelligible as a fictional character in the novel, and is mostly recognizable to the persons close to him_her, Wayne/Annabel is threatened to become unintelligible at various moments in the narrative both to him_herself and to his wider social surroundings. The narrative of a young person who has to come to terms with the secrecy and (attempted) erasure of her_his intersex body, its eventual revelation, and the subsequent difficulties to make a decision for him_herself about who s_he wants to be, how to align his_her body with his_her own sense of self, and how s_he wants to be recognized by others, accomplishes to capture the insecurities, fears, shame and sense of loss, but also the feelings of relieve and joy about finally being able to reclaim self-determination, in quite insightful and (mostly) believable ways. Moreover, by making Wayne/Annabel subjected to various forms of power and violence – medical interventions and definitory power, sexual violence perpetrated by cis men, the risk of losing a job, etc. – the novel draws attention to the realities of intersex persons (or any gender nonconforming person, for that matter) for whom society at large does not (yet) have the terms by which to recognize *and* accept someone who does not fit into a clearly defined, normative male or female category.

In closing, I argue that whether Wayne/Annabel is a subversive character in the sense of dismantling gender and bodily norms is not the most crucial question when seeking to ascertain whether intersex becomes intelligible in the narrative. The potential of the novel to offer affirmative representations of intersex seems to be located somewhere else, and not in the first place in the disruptiveness of Wayne/Annabel itself. In presenting a story about an intersex character who comes of age as intersex without being incessantly threatened by unintelligibility, and without having to be exceptionally radical in terms of dismantling the gender binary (Thomasina, for instance, seems overall fairly more 'radical' in transgressing social conventions and gendered boundaries than Wayne/Annabel), *Annabel* manages to provide an intersex narrative that functions both as an alternative to medical intersex narratives, and as an alternative to Eugenides' *Middlesex*, by establishing a kind of narrative closure exactly by allowing Wayne/Annabel to find a space where s_he can become intelligible as an intersex subject. In that sense, *Annabel* defies a narrative closure that seems to have become mandatory in cultural productions about intersex, namely a closure that is reached by establishing the intelligibility of the intersex character through assigning them a clearly defined male or female gender. While many intersex persons in real life identify as either male or female, the narrative gender assignment of intersex characters along heteronormative lines in fictional texts has, as elaborated in the analysis of *Middlesex*, other implications: this gender

assignment (and the narrative closure that comes with it) made by non-intersex authors iterates the non-consensual gender assignment made by doctors (and parents) with the aim of 'normalizing' the intersex subject; in a similar way, the fictional narratives seek to 'normalize' their intersex characters to render them intelligible in the narrative, for a mainstream audience in the first place. I conclude with giving Kathleen Winter credit for resisting this kind of narrative closure by a 'normalization' of Wayne/Annabel, and instead asking of her readers to acknowledge that intersex people have a right to refuse normative gender assignments and the right of self-determination regarding their bodily integrity and living out their sense of gender.