ESSAYS ON TRANSFEMINISM

TRANS RAD FEM

TALIA BHATT

Understanding Transmisogyny, Part One: Misogyny and Heterosexualism

This is perhaps a controversial sentiment, but most people have a very surface-level understanding of misogyny.

This is ultimately a fate shared by most bigotries, as conceptualized by the average person: "I don't hate the gays. I don't hate non-whites. I don't hate women!" Which might even be true, since most people tend to not be ideologically committed to the active hatred of certain demographics. All the same, they might still pull their child out of the local public school when they notice that the student body has become disproportionately full of children from "poorer neighborhoods" (as a safety measure! Private school might be a better fit anyway). Or they might happily attend a drag brunch but become incredibly uncomfortable if they find out that their child has a gay friend, or isn't quite as interested in the opposite sex as they should be, at that age. They might even be ardently pro-choice and advocate for equal pay, but remain vigilant and suspicious of any woman their husband befriends or seems to get too close to—most women are envious and covetous, after all, and it would be naive foolishness to not safeguard the happiness you worked so hard to build.

(Did you think the misogynist I was describing in gender-neutral terms was a man this whole time? Perhaps you should check your implicit biases—women can be misogynists too!)

In general, systemic bigotry is far more deeply-rooted than mere personal acrimony. Woman-hatred at the interpersonal level is nowhere near the totality of *misogyny*, a system that is most likely our oldest institution, one

embedded into the cultural, the political, and the economic as much as the personal or the private spheres. Misogyny is a *regime*, an organizing principle of society itself, one that dictates and pervades nearly all aspects of social life. We can ask, then, what is the matrix that births this force, this machine? What is the *function* of misogyny?

Succinctly, misogyny is the organizing principle by which heterosexuality is reproduced.

Admittedly, that's a bit of a mouthful, and confusing in its own regard if one's understanding of heterosexuality is 'attraction to the opposite sex'. That short statement is in and of itself quite illustrative, however: think of 'opposite sexes' as a phrase, how it implies not merely the binary of sex, but also how it juxtaposes them, frames them as *opposites*, *antagonistic*, *polarized*. That alone should begin to reveal something about the deeper structures at play, how the role of 'man' and 'woman' are constructed in our lexicon and imbued with meaning far beyond the merely biological.

For the biological is where the traditional, conservative and simplistic notion of gender begins and ends. To the gender-conservative, a man is a man due to the penis and testicles he is born with, while a woman is a woman due to her vagina, her womb, her breasts, all the aspects of her biological make-up that make her innately oriented towards motherhood and the rearing of the young. Gender is thus self-evident, even banal and mundane, a straightforward matter of biological destiny determined at birth. Some of us are birthers and some of us are sires, which is where the matter ends.

Only, that's not where it ends at all. It would be one thing if gender was merely an imprecise determinant of one's reproductive capability, but everyone who lives under patriarchy is intimately familiar with how much *more* it connotes, how much about your life and ambitions and permitted disposition is dictated by gender. Gender carries with it a *social* meaning as well, a socially-imposed bevy of characteristics and expectations that individuals of that gender are asked to meet.

A woman is not merely a person with the reproductive potential to give birth, to gestate and deliver a child. She is also a *nurturer*, someone *soft* and *caring* and *loving* and *understanding*, who is suited for the demands of the *domestic*,

the household, the **selfless** imperative to feed and clothe and teach and raise others without regard to her own wants and desires. A woman is a homemaker, is weaker and less assertive and naturally inclined to follow, someone who craves submission, who requires leadership, who needs to be led and will allow herself to be, once someone who demonstrates that he (invariably a 'he') can lead her takes 'command' of her. All of these traits, these roles assigned to women in the social realm of the patriarchal society, do not flow naturally from the mere fact of perhaps being born with gestational anatomy, but gender-traditionalists are extremely invested in the notion that they do.

As for men, they are conversely *independent*, natural-born *leaders* and *dominants* for whom the imposition of their will upon nature and other people is an innate urge, an unquenchable biological *drive*. Men are strong! Sturdy! Rigid! Turgid! Inseparable from the romanticization of the phallic and its inevitable poetic derivatives, meant to embody qualities such as *stalwart* and *stoic* and *dependable* and *powerful*. It seems that the desire for freedom and autonomy, along with all the attendant intellectual and physiological auspices that are indelibly associated with that desire, is stored in the balls.

Ludicrous as that proposition is, it remains the ideological fixation and overarching societal project of gender conservatism. You can easily see, then, why assertive women or men attracted to other men or any and all exceptions to the socially-prescribed gender orthodoxy invites such deepseated antipathy and hostility. It is an inflexible categorization that must be maintained at all costs, that must be rooted in our 'natural', 'evolutionary wiring', lest any opposition to these limiting, arbitrary social categories gain any legitimacy!

Already, the answer to our question regarding the basic purpose of misogyny is taking shape. We have a great many of the pieces—the biological differentiation of the sexes that is imbued with undue social meaning, the confinement of women to one sphere contrasted with the autonomy and self-determination afforded men—but we still need to put the full picture together. The missing piece here, the one connecting the construction of strictly-differentiated social gender roles with the underlying motivation, is *heterosexuality*.

In the social realm, heterosexuality is not simply an orientation among

several, just one characteristic a person may have or lack in a neutrally-regarded field of options. It is the *presumed default*, and moreover, the central social arrangement around which all social relations are determined. Patrilineal property relations, ease of access to divorce and legal recourse in marriage, cultural pressures to procreate and 'continue the (father's) line', the patriarch as head of the nuclear or communal households—these are all institutions that arise from an enshrinement of heterosexuality, and furthermore entrench it as a *hierarchical*, *socio-economic* relation.

Crucially, the core insight here is that heterosexuality—as—regime is set up to extract domestic, sexual and reproductive labor from those deemed women under its logics. Its definition of womanhood and the narrowness of her stipulated role in society is oriented around *domestic confinement*, in rigorously naturalizing a positionality of abjection and servility towards others. In a very real sense, autonomous personhood itself is regarded as out of reach for women, as outside the domain to which they belong, a cruelty that is variously justified as done for women's own good, or a consequence of women's "true nature", their inward, subconscious, *biological* preference for their own subjugation. The fact that such subjugation must be ideologically, culturally, legally, economically, politically and violently forced upon women, often over their own vocalized or enacted objections, is never quite taken as contradicting this "natural" maxim.

We can see then why the regime of misogyny and heterosexualism needs must encompass such vast swathes of society, so that women can be reminded of their 'natural' inclination for servitude at every turn, as well as harshly punished if they ever unnaturally rebel against their biological nature. The strategies for domestic confinement throughout history have included legally preventing women from property-holding and earning an independent income, ostracizing and censuring spinsters and widows, denying women the franchise and the ability to hold office, and most reprehensibly solidifying forced marriage and rape as means of violent control. Some of the earliest laws punishing rape did not even consider the violated woman the wronged party—it was her husband or father owed recompense, due to the despoilment of his rightful property.

Broad as the scope of this already is, it is still insufficient to fully reckon with what it means for misogyny to be a cornerstone of society. Media itself is dominated by the perspective of men, created primarily by men for an audience that is largely presumed to be men as well. Their perspective is centered, cemented, elevated and enshrined while women continue to be objectified, to be depicted as prizes for (male) protagonists, as assets for a presumed-male lens, as objects to be appreciated aesthetically and owned by a suitable patriarch. Philosophers historically have extolled male virtues and deliberated on what makes a man a king, what makes him regal and stately, while categorizing women with beasts and animals and slaves, as synonymous with lesser beings of limited intellect and agency. Psychology and medicine have institutionalized and surgically mutilated women, whether for being insufficiently tame and docile or for being of the wrong race, dismissing their capacity for pain and anguish and advancing medicine on an edifice of their stacked bones and bodies. 'Woman' has not been just the bio-social category marked out as lesser, but synonymized with the base, the trivial, the surfacelevel, the unthinking, the eternally-enslaved counterpart to the liberated, leading, domineering, creative, intellectual Man.

Reckoning with the staggering totality of patriarchy, of misogyny as the very foundation of male-supremacist civilizations, can be disorienting and even incredibly debilitating. It is necessary, however, because it allows us to finally identify the core of its operation. The abjection of womanhood resides in the role carved out for women, in their being defined not just as the 'opposite' of men, but as fundamentally *deficient*, as representing a *lack*, bearing a *void* and a *nothingness* where men *are* and *have*. Biological difference becomes social construct, a tangible distinction elevated to *irreconcilable* identities. In doing so, 'woman' becomes everything 'man' isn't … and also, everything 'man' *cannot be*. Everything 'man' *cannot sink to the level of*.

For that is the pernicious secret at the beating heart of every single regime: how much energy and effort and sheer indoctrination is required to *enforce* and maintain it, to uphold its tenets and proscribe all deviation from them. Regimes require foot–soldiers, after all, enforcers willing to get their hands dirty in exchange for the wages of empire. Many a reign has been founded

or toppled on the strength of its ideology, on the reasoning it was able to fashion to socially demarcate the enforcers from the serfs, on its ability to truly, sincerely blunt the capacity for empathy and make its valiant believe that they were materially above and distinct from those they crushed underfoot.

One could hardly ask for a more robust, enduring and ubiquitous ideology than misogyny, an all-pervasive system that we are inculcated into from the moment of our very birth. Our belief and investment in it often reflects the role assigned to us, and for men, whose supremacy, superiority and entitlement to sexual access and domestic labor is codified, even ensured by misogynistic doctrine, the investment is well worth the payoff. Thus, men do not only espouse and reproduce misogynistic belief, they mandate it as well, as much among each other as in their relationships and dealings with the women in their lives. They hold each other to misogynistic standards, to being adequately 'manly' in demeanor and execution, to eschewing genuine connection and love with women in favor of domination and the imposition of one's own will to whatever extent they can get away with. "Male bonding", touted almost as some manner of gendered sacrament, is in fact more akin to ritualistic violence, where men define themselves above and apart from the weak, the womanly. Any shortcoming in a man is attributed to the undue influence of a woman, whether an insufficiently-deferent partner or mother, or the manifestation of an intrinsic womanly emotion or quality that must be shaken off. The worst fate, met with censure, ostracism and outright violence, is being determined as *like them* in any way—whether that involves being too empathetic towards women, or too similar to them, too effeminate or gay or, even ...

This *enforced difference*, this strict social outlawing of actually-felt affinity between men and women on pain of exclusion, is hardly the exclusive domain of men. Women participate in it too, to varying degrees, because ultimately, to be raised in a misogynistic culture is to imbibe and internalize that which is described as a given, as the natural way things are. It is easy, in the absence of a widespread and rigorous feminist counterpoint, to say that *women* are shallow and banal and vapid and unintelligent, but *I*, personally, am not. Falling into the trap of distinguishing oneself as above the fray, an individual breaking the

mold of derided womanhood, is a common and distressingly easy thing for many women and girls. It is a tactic that can, in the short term, yield dividends in approval and acceptance, since misogyny is a social currency that everyone bargains with, but in the final summation, no individual woman truly escapes the fate she is consigned to by dint of her gender, merely by participating in its denigration.

Despite this, some women never quite let go of exceptionalism, choosing to negotiate with patriarchal precepts on their own terms and making a grim sort of peace with patriarchal existence. The vast majority of conservative women are not in fact ignorant about patriarchy or their limited role in it, but have adopted a certain fatalistic attitude. To them, liberation from patriarchy is neither possible nor worth fighting for, as it would be no better than tilting at windmills. Better to accept that a woman is modest, domestic, a homemaker and child-rearer, and to perform according to those standards. In exchange, they receive the stability and security that a man who has claimed them can provide, a certain safety located within having to manage a single man's desires and needs. This 'traditional' life protects them, shelters them from the wider world which remains hostile and misogynistic, and is thus the 'smart' choice, one that all women ought to wisely and maturely accept.

Of course, such a bargain remains slanted in favor of the patriarch, and the task of satiating a single man's appetites is not quite as manageable as advertised. Leave aside the lack of true autonomy, the complete financial dependence, the everyday drudgery of domestic labor, and the lack of recourse in the (not infrequent) cases of abuse. The most glaring and evident pitfall is one that arises from straightforward patriarchal framing: that of the woman's value being entirely tied to her reproductive and sexual capacity. A woman who assents to the premises laid out by a patriarchal man is signing her own expiration date, affirming her own disposability and always dreading the day when she is no longer of use to her husband. She does and did everything right, from saving herself for marriage to comporting herself with dignity, but in spite of it all she is still only as valuable as her husband deems her, completely at his mercy. Her hopes are bound up entirely in the affection a patriarchal man might feel for a wife too old to excite him, a woman who mothered his

children (but can bear him no more), and the slim chance that his eye does not wander to over to any younger woman willing to cut the same deal as she did.

The attitudes and logics described here form the foundation of an antifeminism that is primarily a traditionalist, reactionary fixation, but greatly informs the sexual politics of the liberal-left too. If you map the contours of the reactionary woman's worldview, you can arrive at the same conclusion many of them often do, led by a scarcity mindset and a fatalistic fear of having to zealously guard one's meager lot: that other women, far from being sisters, far from being fellow-travelers who can share burdens and pains, are in fact the real enemy. For if you have somehow successfully swindled yourself into believing that men are a prize, that legitimacy as a wife and mother is the greatest ambition permitted to you, that a man's approval—the apotheosis of which is the offer of marriage—is what makes or breaks a woman, then you have unwittingly entered yourself into a competition where other women are your opponents and your reward is patriarchal heterosexual existence.

(It's a miracle we've survived as long as we have).

Following this train of thought, we can see what shaped the emergence of *modesty* culture, of sex and sexual access becoming a fierce battleground among (heterosexual) women and men alike. In a field where women feel that they must actively compete for men, with sexual access to their bodies as their only leverage, a natural tension arises between those who consider it imperative that sexual relations occur only with the "safe", legally-enforced bounds of heterosexual marriage and those who do not see the point in doing so, who view marriage as more a shackle than a shield and who wish to embrace their sexuality more fully, instead of wielding it as a reward in a legal transaction.

Such dichotomy fosters resentment, breeds animosity, and imposes strict but contradictory standards on women, based on their sexual philosophies. The domestic aspirants bitterly despise the sexually 'liberated', regarding them to be 'loose' women, 'floozies' and 'strumpets' whose inability to maintain a strict discipline devalues all women's sexual power and disincentivizes men from entering into marriages, since they can have their sexual needs met outside of the bounds of matrimony. It is almost trivial, in a way, to associate

the sexually-liberated woman with a liberal, laissez-faire progressivism, one that rejects the stuffy, confining, almost *backwards* outlook of the 'modest' woman. The sexually-liberated woman, so the myth tells, is a woman who is in charge of her *own* sexual destiny, who determines access to her body on her own terms and isn't afraid to enjoy sex, to actively seek it out, even! Is it any wonder, then, that she was able to single-handedly overthrow patriarchy, chipping away at its stalwart edifices one orgasm at a time?

Perhaps this is a disappointing revelation to some readers, but based on our current socio-political circumstances, free love and sexual liberation did not in fact succeed in lighting women's way to equality and emancipation. It has been tried more than once, the pendulum swinging inexorably between 'whore' and 'madonna', cycling them in and out of vogue, but ultimately liberating sex without liberating women rarely seems to achieve the desired outcomes. As much as men love sexually-liberated women—love sleeping with them without strings attached most of all—eventually it comes time to settle down, time to return to the patriarchal fold, at which point he's back to searching for his perfect, virginal, *modest* woman. As it so happens, in order to be liberated, women don't just need the freedom to sleep with anyone of their choosing, but also require the ability to earn, inherit, purchase property, influence policy you know, liberation, the ability to exist independently of men. Otherwise, they are merely trying to negotiate between two tightropes: being the matronly madonna without being too prudish or dull, or being the sexually-liberated free lover without also being considered disposable, tainted, or too into sex, all things that deny her the status of "wife material".

Which brings us to the final, cruel joke of the farce that is patriarchy and the misogyny that empowers it. This force that pervades all legal, socio-economic, and political institutions, that structures the atomic family unit itself, and that seeps into our most private intimate moments also, ultimately, robs most of us of the capacity for the kind of intimacy we crave. The patriarchal man may covet the sexually free woman to bed and may wish to trot out the modest woman at family gatherings, but he never quite manages to respect either. Cherish, perhaps, prize as a conquest or a tamed servant, even, but true, actual respect, the appreciation one engenders for a fellow person's wit and charm

and intellect and compassion and genuine, sparkling insight—why, *that* kind of admiration, that kind of *love*, is only reserved for fellow men.

Because misogyny is an un-personing of the woman, a dictum to hold her in contempt, to slander everything associated with her, and burn away one's ability to empathize with her state. She is only as good to you as the function she can serve, whether helpmeet or matron or just a good fuck. If one is to humanize her, it requires tearing the veil misogyny places over all our eyes and reckoning with the codified strictures of patriarchy in fact and in execution. To truly, actually love her, you must begin to dismantle everything you've been raised to believe about her.

Let me assure you, reader: I love women with all I am and all I can be, and I hope that you do too, or will in time.

Understanding Transmisogyny, Part Three: Construcing the Transsexual

Do boys experience gendered violence?

We left the previous chapter talking about *gendering* as a process, as an action that takes the autonomous human and *reduces* his autonomy, *lessens* his status and *subjugates* him under the gendered regime. The principal mode by which this is done is through *sexing*, the social process of gendering the body, whereby certain anatomical features in aggregate are granted outsized social meaning and determine one's social standing, primarily (though not exhaustively) by means of their relation to gestational capacity. Those sorted into the category burdened with reproductive, domestic and sexual labor—women—are dehumanized and denied full personhood. Furthermore, *heterosexualist* logics can position someone closer to or further away from the abject woman, whereby any violation of patriarchy's organization around its own reproduction carries a commensurate sentence. Men are thus positioned as the beneficiaries of an extractive labor relation, one that they must enforce and uphold to continue reaping its rewards.

Though of course, this begs the question: how does one become a man? How is one prepared and trained for a lifetime of serving the regime?

Recalling the verticality of the gendered hierarchy, we understand how much easier it is to become more 'like' a woman than a man, to have one's humanity denied than built up, to fall further down the ladder than to ascend its rungs. This manner of conceptualizing patriarchy and its enabling misogyny makes one very important elision, however: it does not quite account for children.

No child is a man or a woman, of course, and for a time, determining what a child's sex might be is a difficult prospect by sight alone, requiring parents to resort to fairly explicit external gendered markers in order to distinguish which sex-caste their progeny has been sorted into. The realm of gender and sexuality is largely placed out of reach of children, though the boundary is far more porous than it perhaps should be and frequently trickles down to shape and mold their social development. Children are enmeshed in a process of perpetual becoming, much like we all are, only more explicitly so. They are socialized into various roles according to class, race, sex, ability, and more, their existence defined and determined by the authority of others, their world divided into what they are allowed to be and what they must never become. Girls quickly learn just how rigidly-bounded their worlds are, how narrowly their expected selves are defined. Boys in turn quickly pick up how much they can be, intuit how much possibility is afforded them even when it is very little, and implicitly understand that their own worlds are not permitted to overlap with that of the girls.

Except for the boys who don't.

Rules and edicts only go so far, after all, and for all of history, children have always known better than their betters, no matter how much their parents have insisted that they don't. Not every punishment stings enough to dissuade, not every rebuke inspires compliance and not every child grows into the adult that their guardians so desperately wanted them to be. We know that there are girls who, despite being told that kisses are for boys, steal them from each other's lips behind closed doors and whispered glances, who think fondly of the boots and carabiners they'll sport when they're older. Similarly, there are boys for whom the reproachments don't ... stick.

Violence is, of course, a gendering process.

Which is to say that violence is also thoroughly *gendered*, an act that connotes certain delineations in a world where aggression, strength and *power* are all considered the domain of men, while women are meant to—for various meanings of this phrase—*take it*. There is thus a terrible anxiety that centers upon the boy, this creature that is destined to grow up and become a man with all the power and vigor and virility that embodies, but is not quite a man *yet*,

is distressingly proximate to the reviled woman by dint of his dependence and relative frailty and subjection to authority. For all the arrogant assertions of the naturalness of gender, most cultures have understood that boys need to be *made* men, need to be inculcated and indoctrinated into the cult that is manhood, and many have accordingly acknowledged this explicitly via the coming-of-age, the rituals and processes through which a pitiable boy, this child that is a potential-man, can demonstrate his readiness for the mantle and harshly divide his boyhood from manhood, demonstrating definitively that he has successfully left his juvenile weakness behind him.

Though of course, this begs the question: what of those who do not succeed? If you can succeed in overcoming boyhood to become a man, what happens if you *fail*?

Paradoxically, boys are often subjected to violence to make them men, are broken down and further abjected in a bid to make them reject that abjection. A boy that is not sufficiently aggressive is made the subject of aggression, a boy that feels too much is angrily taught that the only feeling he can express safely is anger, and a boy that refuses to prey on others is brutally made to understand that that will mark *him* as prey himself. Boys have to like girls without loving them, without wanting to be like them or among them. Boys have to reserve affection and admiration and camaraderie for other boys, without crossing the threshold that makes that affection too much like the affection only a girl can harbor for a boy. Boys have to prepare to be men, and any insufficiency in that regard must be violently corrected until the boy decides that doling out the beatings is better than being on the receiving end.

Still, some boys never quite learn what's good for them.

There is another purpose to this omnipresent violent *correction*, this repeated attempted breaking of the boy to reveal the putative man ensconced within, irrespective of how old the arrested boy actually gets. Simply put, should the constant testing of manhood be too agonizing, the repeated failure to become that which the boy was supposed to become too much to bear, and the torturous excesses of others' brotherhood too exclusionary and ostracizing, then the failed man, the persevering boy, can finally elect to stop persevering, one way if not another, thereby ridding the world of his malodorous taint.

Proving rituals never quite ceased, after all, even if they have become somewhat more esoteric and less momentous.

So far the experiences described herein could apply to people of quite a few identities, generalized as they are to 'boy who does not perform masculinity appropriately'. The sources of this inadequacy can even be located outside of a gendered paradigm (such as along racial or religious lines, for example) given how synonymous demeaning a man is with gendering him, how the worst insults that can be levied at a man or type of man involve likening him to a type of woman. Even so, the sharpest disciplining is reserved for those boys who show signs that they are unlikely to ever be man enough, who do not love or fuck or *be* in the manner a man ought to. For the single worst outcome possible, the result that must be avoided at all costs, is absolutely untenable in a male-supremacist society.

Namely: What if the boy is neither broken nor discouraged by the disciplining, and perseveres without becoming a man?

What if a boy, despite being shown exactly what will be done to him for rejecting his biodetermined destiny, chooses it anyway?

What if a boy actually chooses to be a woman?

No regime can afford to take desertion lightly, but outright treason, actual and legitimate identification with the occupied, the exploited—that it cannot countenance under *any* circumstance. If one's entire ideology is built on a myth of essentialized superiority, of a difference between the master and the slave that is innate and natural and impossible to transcend, then legitimizing any porosity between the two contradictory categories, permitting any identification of the humane Self with the dehumanized Other, *has* to be treated as an existential threat, a possible catastrophe in the making. Traitors to the regime need to be sought out and suppressed with all possible zeal, every last one stamped out and marginalized to the utter fringes.

Which all, ultimately, amounts to this: if society ever erroneously constructs a transsexual, she needs to be immediately, instantly destroyed.

There is a rich irony inherent to this destruction, however, which is that in attempting to destroy the transsexual, patriarchal society actually constructs her. For in a society that genders everything, every mechanism, essence, and

feature, the act of violently negating the transsexual's potential manhood, of casting her out from the upper echelons of the humanized down to the depths of the untouchables, is an act inseparable from the misogynistic processes by which all besides the patriarchal man are ultimately defined. Creation in destruction, construction by nullification, patriarchy births its own antithesis in hatred, by expelling its worst traitors for the unforgivable sin of seeing worth in all that it did not want them to be.

As it so happens, under patriarchal ideology, womanhood is the worst fate that a person can be consigned to.

We can now truly begin to ascertain the shape that transmisogyny materially takes, finally begin to put the pieces together after reckoning with gender as a socially-constructed regime of dehumanization predicated on specific forms of labor extraction. The failure to take up the mantle of manhood, or the temerity to wilfully reject it carries the penalty of reassignment, of revocation of any and all respectability that existence under patriarchal gender affords. The transsexual, having already failed at being a man, is relegated to the simultaneous state of failed woman as well, given her inability to serve patriarchy's reproductive logics, to become a somewhat valued property utilized to perpetuate patrilineality. Her exploitation takes an acutely sexual form, her purpose defined and distilled into the sole function that women are reduced to if (and when) they cannot bear a man's children.

Despite this reduction of the transsexual's existence to her sexual availability, she is also peculiarly denied something crucial: recognition. While it may be permissible to treat the transsexual like a woman, to degrade her and objectify her and sexualize her as one, she cannot at any point be named as one, cannot be admitted to have achieved the status that those who violate her implicitly categorize her into even as they commit the violation. No, the transsexual has to be something else, has to be the boy who could never grow up, the sissy who couldn't be manly enough, or the homosexual whose lust for straight men drove her to self-mutilation. In order for her to be the ur-example of dehumanization, the totalized non-person that exists in the harshest contrast against the Natural Man, she must be hurled out of gendered classification so utterly that she becomes Something Else, held up as a degendered freak even

as she is subjected to the full force of gendering.

In this sense the transsexual and her body become the site upon which any and every patriarchal excess can be enacted without remorse, the brutalized Other who is not simply a colonized subject of the regime, but a barbarian milling at the gates, at once wretched and pitiable while also representing the crisis that could undo the regime's very foundations. All regimes sooner or later need an external threat to divert attention to, a foreign enemy for its people to focus on so that the extant tyranny seems preferable, even tame by comparison, and the transsexual is the Gendered Empire's very own Vandal. She is the menace against whom any violence can be justified, both the failed man who can be beaten senseless and the failed woman who can be raped with impunity, against whom no amount of harm is unjustifiable.

Speaking in plain terms, the tranny is constructed as the union of fag and whore.

What, then, is *transmisogyny*? It is the process by which those conscripted into the male sex under patriarchy are denaturalized and dehumanized, being demoted from potentially liberated agent to subjugated object. It is the intensification of misogyny in a manner that does not merely enforce sexual difference but explicitly penalizes the failure to uphold it. It is the *degendering* of the male subject, enacted to reconstruct her into an un-person who cannot be considered to be wronged, violated, or otherwise harmed, upon whom sexual exploitation and feminized labor extraction can be enacted with impunity. More broadly, if misogyny is the force that elevates men at the expense of women, then transmisogyny is the complementary force that makes examples out of those who dare to turn their backs on the resulting gendered rewards. Transmisogyny is the reminder, the warning, the deterrent: "Be the man you were meant to be, *or else*."

Degendering and Regendering

We have spoken at length about the *degendering* that trans women are subjected to. As a summary, Serano's definition is succinct and sufficient: trans women are often treated not as men or women, but as some manner of "third thing", a "third-sexed" and dehumanized creature subject to dismissal, hypersexualization, brutalization, and fetishistic violence. In terms of understanding trans women's place in the patriarchy, degendering is as relevant a concept as *epistemic injustice*, which is the locking-out of transfems from all the processes of knowledge-production about us, resulting in a culture where we are spoken of frequently, but rarely *heard*.

Of course, degendering and epistemicide are both broad subjects, mechanisms that are not limited to transmisogyny by any means. Infertile women, racialized women, disabled women, fat women, and many other categories of women are routinely degendered, while epistemic injustice impacts many marginalized populations, including but not limited to lesbians, racialized people as a whole, and transmascs.

Arguably, epistemicide affects transmascs particularly acutely and results in the phenomenon that is commonly referred to as *inviziblization*. Transmasculinity is rendered invisible both transculturally and transhistorically, a denial of the possibility that manhood is a permeable social category rather than a 'natural', inevitable, biodestined role based on one's anatomical configuration.

This is because many societies are patriarchal and male-supremacist, enshrining not merely the humanity of those designated men above the subjugation of those deemed women (or *suffciently close*), but also refusing

to entertain the idea that anyone who is at any point deemed unworthy of manhood could ever ascend to this positionality. Transmasculinity cannot be permitted, cannot be named or allowed to be possible under a system that is oriented around the exploitation of reproductive and sexual chattel by those who are their 'natural' superiors, imbued with the signifiers of masculinity and thus autonomy, personhood, *agency*.

In short, to acknowledge transmasculinity, a society would have to first admit that manhood—just like womanhood—is a social class and not a 'natural' category. Its people would have to acknowledge that the desire for independence and self-actualization exists within all of us and is not, in fact, stored in the balls.

Conversely, the reason that transfemininity has been more visible across both time and cultures is that the veneration of manhood is highly central to patriarchal modes of organization. The idea that manhood *can be failed*, that an individual can fail to live up to its mantle and be stripped of manhood's privileges and protections is a useful schema to ensure ideological investment in patriarchal society. The transfeminized serve as examples of what happens to gender traitors. The transmasculine, by contrast, are ignored or treated as little more than delusional, as people who reach above their station and are doomed to never succeed.

In that sense, transmasculinity is subject to *regendering*. Where transmisogynistic forces marginalize and ostracize the transfeminine from society, rendering us unworthy of any fate outside of being treated like sexual chattel, *transemasculative* forces deny the transmasculine any possibility of escaping reproductive exploitation and seek to *re-gender* the transmasculine—viewed as *lapsed reproductive assets*—back into the confines of womanhood.

These forces are complementary and interrelated, but not identical. Transmisogyny exists on a continuum with anti-effeminacy and the homophobia directed at queer men, while transemasculation is on a continuum with lesbophobia and the vilification of the 'masculine', 'unladylike' woman. This is because of how sexuality is not neatly separable from gender under patriarchy, since the only permissible mode of existence is heterosexuality, and so homosexuality is also, frequently, understood as a form of gendered deviance.

DEGENDERING AND REGENDERING

This is also why the most common forms of transemasculative rhetoric beat the drum of the 'mutilated girl', itself an echo of the idea of *damaged goods*. Being a reproductive asset under patriarchy is not an enviable fate, but patriarchy, in the process of dehumanizing the transmasculine, still accords them—no, not *humanity*, don't be absurd, but *utility*. The transmasculine can still be "of use" to a natalist, heterosexual regime and can still be instrumentalized for their gestational capacity and ability to further patrilineality. And so, they are assiduously discouraged from changing their sex or altering their embodiment, lest they jeopardize their precious 'fertility' and render themselves 'undesirable', unfit for reproductive exploitation.

There is, sometimes, a point of no return, past which the transmasculine are no longer as heavily subject to regendering, having committed the cardinal sin of exercising autonomy over their own sex. They are, at this point—welcomed as men?? Don't be absurd. If they are recognized as transmasculine, even if they can navigate the world as men, transmasculine individuals become subject to degendering, vilification, and monsterization. The goods have been damaged, and the heterosexual regime seeks to discard them as it discards all of us who do not fit into its vision of 'natural' reproduction.

A note: An individual's actual inclination toward having children does not impact the perception of gay people or trans people *as a class*. Heterosexuality, cissexuality, and monogamous straight coupling with the intent of furthering a bloodline are the presumed patriarchal default. Adoption, artificial insemination, or even the participation of trans people in 'natural' reproduction does not detract from the patriarchal perception of us as mules who mutilated ourselves into sterility, to say nothing of the frank reality that the majority of queer people do not, in fact, seek to bear or raise children.

Patriarchy's calculus is cold, impersonal, and infinitely reductive. A person's value to society is measured in terms of their ability to participate in the heterosexual regime, while those of us who deviate from this prescription in any way suffer gender-marginalization. The specificities of our oppression and how the violence against us manifests in policy, cultural perception, and public rhetoric are important, and cannot be collapsed or easily equivocated.

However, even still, I urge us all to keep in mind an important maxim: our

oppressions, even if distinct and asymmetrical, even if difficult to map onto each other, are *interrelated* and *share the same root*.

We are all dissidents from heterosexuality in the eyes of patriarchal society and are thus all subject to punishment for that desertion.

Conclusion: The Question Has an Answer

The Day Transphobia Ended

If you're unfamiliar with who Graham Linehan is, he is most famous for being divorced and writing a lot of transphobic tweets. He identifies affirmatively with the gender-conservative movement that has with no sense of irony dubbed itself 'Gender Critical', and thus fosters an online presence that is uncomfortably fixated on trans issues and trans women. On one fateful day, a lone, brave voice posed a question to Linehan, prompting an exchange that I cannot do justice to, but will do my best to paraphrase here.

In response to his utter befuddlement at the idea that "There is no definition of woman", Linehan was asked: "Graham, could you define 'chair' for us real quick?"

Not one to shrink from such a trivial intellectual challenge—no matter how loudly telegraphed the rhetorical trap was—Linehan met this inquiry with the solid rejoinder: "A separate seat for one person, typically with a back and four legs."

"Happy to help but try Google next time. The definition of 'woman' is there, too," he added, no doubt with a hearty chuckle at his own brilliance.

He had no idea what a storm his words would unleash.

With the tripwire triggered, the replies to his foolish rhetorical volley came in fast and furious, pelting him with counterexample after exception after erroneous inclusion. Images of chairs with no legs, bathtubs with four, and all manner of absurd objects were conjured in response to his foolish attempt

at an encapsulation of "chair-ness". The killing blow came in the form of a harbinger, a vehicle for Linehan's own personal linguistic apocalypse.

"Chair" the tweet simply stated, suspended above the photographic depiction of a humble, four-legged, one-backed horse.

As the farrier drives shoe into hoof, so too did this tweet hammer home the final nail in the coffin of Gender-Conservative ideology. Having been shown how erroneous, how insufficient, how baldfacedly *absurd* their patterns of thinking were, transphobes had no choice but to capitulate utterly to a Total Transgender Victory. Every transphobic politician resigned in disgrace, while every newspaper that had ever dared to entertain transphobic notions—which is to say, every newspaper—issued a full retraction and announced Judith Butler's coronation as World Monarch. The gender-conservative movement was driven underground, left to languish, huddled around garbage fires made of discarded children's literature, clinging to an image of an imperfect world that had long passed them by.

If only their names had not been lost to time and ill-advised rebranding, we may have been able to honor these valiant heroes, these courageous soldiers who through their collective efforts won the Second Sex Wars.

Right! ... Right?

Or, you know, none of that.

Instead, the transphobic reactionary wave core to the modern Gender-Conservative antifeminist movement only grew more emboldened, accruing more and more funding, institutional legitimacy, and coverage. The relentless push to implement transphobic legislation, from bathroom discrimination to outright bans on transition care, eventually gathered enough momentum and ideological backing to finally pass in various Western jurisdictions. Junk studies, bunk science, and fraudulent reports proliferated, polluting the scientific consensus on trans healthcare, and many politicians either took up the cause of scapegoating a tiny slice of the population for their policy shortcomings, or considered it expedient to abandon us entirely.

How did the champions of trans people and trans rights react to this

resurgence of reactionary gender politics and intensifying attacks on queer existence? Largely by posting doctored images of Donald Trump and Elon Musk in a gay relationship, or in dresses, because no crime a man commits can ever compare to a presumed lack of masculinity.

Truly, we are in good hands.

A simple look around at the current state of affairs should clue in even the most tuned-out of us to the blindingly obvious: liberal feminism is fucking dead. It failed to protect abortion rights, it failed to meaningfully issue a challenge to patriarchal rape culture, and absolutely fucking failed every single trans person.

This is not a eulogy. It is not fanfare at witnessing the doddering, shambling corpse of this ideological dead-end finally collapse. It is an autopsy, an accounting, and first and foremost a reckoning with a feminist project that sought to liberate women while refusing to take into account the male-supremacy endemic to patriarchy. The mainstream feminist discourse did not meaningfully challenge the prevailing essentialist model of naturalized sex, nor did it effectively advocate for the bodily autonomy of the gender-marginalized. It is poised to squander even more of the second wave's gains if someone doesn't just. Call. *Bullshit*.

I come not to praise Steinem, but to bury her, and some of her worst accomplices with the bier.

Listen Up, Liberal

Liberalism is the erroneous belief that one can paper over systemic inequality with enough contract law, consent fetishism, and lip service to 'individual freedom'. It is ruling-class propaganda that bamboozles people into thinking that token mass participation in the political process can outweigh the hoarding of wealth and privileges and control over the means of cultural production.

When applied to feminist thought, this ideological defect reframes the imbalances of power in the sexual economy to a simple matter of 'restricted freedoms' that can, one by one, be alleviated legislatively through state

protectionism. If women are underpaid, then we shall simply make it illegal to pay them less, in much the same way one would apply a bandage to a gaping wound. Surely treating symptoms without investigating causes would eventually solve the problem. We need not inquire why women are paid less, what factors are contributing to their labor being undervalued, and whether there are underlying causes leading to such treatment that legislation alone cannot remedy.

It is, in a sentence, a Human Resources approach to managing rape culture. What liberal ideologies are worst at addressing, of course, are questions pertaining to their own violences, the injustices and disparities they promulgate, perpetuate, and thrive on, just underneath the facade of bringing all parties to the same table. They have never been able to confront the truth of how workers are far less free to negotiate terms than bosses, concerned more with the image of happy coordination than the reality of who has signed the dotted line with a gun to her head.

For feminism, this became a maxim of *choice*, a true punchline to the joke that is gender. Women can choose to be empowered, careerist, liberated, and professional, or we can 'choose' to be domestically confined, saddled with the bulk of reproductive labor, and have little recourse to violations of our body, dignity, and personhood. With the benefit of hindsight, it is plain to see how this strain of 'feminism' was never a serious counterpoint to patriarchal relations.

Fundamentally, the liberal-feminist model is motivated by a desire to ignore the elephant, even as it tramples the room's occupants underfoot. It adopts a language of ersatz gender equality, presuming that so long as barriers to individual freedom are addressed, everyone can benefit from the system equally. In matters of coercion, violence, non-economic interests, or even the simple identification of cultural factors contributing to these issues, this approach falls short entirely. Questions of subjugation, violence, and suppression are ignored in favor of trust in institutions and the singular guiding principle: "But what if the oppressed party consents?"

It was PR.

Missing from any of this is an analysis of the mechanisms of patriarchy,

the heterosexuality at the heart of it all. There is a pervasive incuriosity permeating the school of thought, a wilful omission of the exploitation, extractivism, and sheer sexual sadism that underlies a misogynistic society.

The dirty secret is that liberal feminism, for all its paeans to gender parity, did not ever meaningfully contradict the naturalization of sex, the idea that on some essential level, women are simply synonymous with gestation, with child-rearing, with *less*. It was content to simply proffer the platitude that *if* a woman wishes to exceed her station, then she should surely be *allowed* to. How much could women's liberation cost, girls? Ten dollars?

This was never an attitude, a rigorous school of thought, or an approach that could radically challenge the retrenchment of Gender-Conservatism. When the gains of feminist victories and economic independence started to pile up, the patriarchal recuperation and reactionary backlash was focused and swift. Right-wing attitudes found many masks to conceal misogynistic intent, sometimes wearing an anti-capitalist hat to talk about the meaningless grind of women's workplaces, and at other times adopting feminist theatrics to conflate "women's rights" with genital inspections.

Crucially, when Gender-Conservatism asked on what basis we should consider trans women to be *real*, *authentic* women, liberal feminism simply shrugged and began babbling about category errors, as though philosophical technicalities are an adequate substitute for advocacy. They are women because they *choose* to be, and who are we to deny them that *choice*?

As far as endorsements go, this one rings hollow. The gender anxieties underpinning trans people's mutable sex, the ability to "cross" heterosexuality's impermeable barrier, won out over a half-hearted attempt to frame the question of our rights as *free expression* rather than a struggle against patriarchy's attempts to deny us bodily autonomy and eradicate us.

We were, to speak it plain, abandoned. Women, queers, and trannies alike. I guess we *chose* wrong.

Round Two

For all its faults, though, wasn't liberal feminism *better*? Wasn't it a kinder, gentler alternative to the second wave that preceded it? The radical feminist movement was categorized by a militant commitment to academic, middle-class white womanhood, championed by the misandry of affluent lesbians, resulting in a stiflingly uniform classist, racist, and transmisogynistic politic. Surely, what followed learned from its mistakes, built upon its strengths, and gave a voice to those whom feminism had historically silenced?

No.

No, not really.

There is a tendency to narrativize history, to draw boundaries and delineations that are far cleaner on paper than they ever were on the ground. It would be as inaccurate to attribute an artificial homogeneity to the secondwave as it would be to assert that liberal feminism successfully addressed its myriad failings. This contextual collapse results partly from a refusal to take feminism seriously as a school of thought, one rife with its own orthodoxies, contradictions, dissidents, theoretical innovations and internal critiques. Feminism has always been fractious, always an arena rather than a solidified platform, with competing and collaborating branches that unify and schism in equal measure.

It is, in short, a discipline, and a perpetually evolving one at that.

Attempts to partition the history of feminism into easily-separable waves tend to be just as arbitrary and constructed as patriarchal gender. Audre Lorde and Leslie Feinberg are frequently claimed by "Third Wave" feminism, a categorization that flies in the face of Lorde's two decades of friendship with Adrienne Rich, or Feinberg's gratitude for Rich's support in the acknowledgements of *Transgender Warriors*. Reading their work alone should be sufficient to see where they were inspired by the radical lesbian feminist tradition as well as where they deviated—at least, if one were given to treat feminist subschools with a greater degree of complexity and nuance than trying to label them 'Good' or 'Bad'.

Nor is it anything more than naive ignorance to presume that radical

feminism's issues with transmisogyny were what inspired the backlash against it. The reverence accorded to Serena Nanda's corpus of work alone should disabuse that notion, but one need only glance at bell hooks' essay on *Paris Is Burning*, or Judith Butler's commentary on the same, to see that the pathologization of transfemininity, together with the marginalization of transfeminine perspectives, would continue unabated into the era of "kinder, gentler, *inclusive*" feminism.

Just as there is still white feminism following the publication of Crenshaw's paper on intersectionality, transmisogynistic feminism remains alive and well in the years since Sandy Stone's 'postranssexual' manifesto. We still grapple with many of the same prejudices, structures, and institutional biases today that the feminists of the second wave did in their day, and part of the liberal-feminist mythology depends on the ahistorical narrativization denying that stark reality.

If we are to reckon with the failures of feminisms past and present, we have to be *honest* about where those failures lie rather than just patting ourselves on the back for being "so much more enlightened nowadays". We must ask ourselves why a materialist movement allowed itself to be polluted by idealist, essentialist thought, why putative social–constructivists found themselves associating amicably with theologically–inspired fundamentalists like Raymond and Daly. We must also admit that when it came to condemning the TERFs, modern feminists took far greater issue with the 'RF' than they did the 'TE'.

Simply put: Radical feminism saw the most definitive real-world proof of its own theories in the transsexual, and sought to destroy her instead of embracing her.

When perusing these texts, I am assailed, over and over, by the sheer irony of the radical feminist tradition sabotaging itself by vehemently rejecting the conclusions of its own theories. Womanhood is a social positionality constructed through misogynistic violence and sexual-reproductive exploitation, and no case confirms this more than the transsexual woman, whose 'male anatomy' does not spare her in the slightest. Every transsexual woman is the wretched, spurned daughter of the radical feminist thesis, the unwanted

validation of its most fundamental tenets that it sought to terminate.

For all their insight, clarity of purpose, rhetorical verve, and righteous conviction, when push came to shove, the radical feminists proved no better than the gender-essentialists they once sought to condemn. They felt greater sorority with the rambling lunatics babbling about 'sexed souls' than the women whose very existence was so unconscionable to patriarchal regimes that we are to this day faced with utter annihilation.

In these texts, I found the language to describe my own making and unmaking. From their words, I forged the fury of my own purpose. They were, in their own day, at their best, brilliant and brave women.

And they still abandoned their own ideals out of sheer disgust.

Look upon our faces, and see the truth none of you were able to bear.

The Radical Feminists are no more, not in any sense worthy of the name, not in any form that honors their original principles. Do not consider this a tragedy, however, especially when the conclusive chapters are yet to be written.

After all, it always falls upon disowned daughters to clean up their foremothers' messes.

The Measure of a Misandrist

This is, ultimately, where most critiques of radical feminism go wrong, even when supposedly made with trans women's vilification in mind. It is a too-popular idea that radical feminism was too harsh, too critical and too antagonistic towards *men*. After all—goes the reasoning—is not the fixation on trans women, the denial of our womanhood, and the maligning of us as ontologically predatory a consequence of their gender-absolutism? Is not resorting to 'misandry' in response to society's misogyny also wrong?

Such arguments fail to be compelling for two reasons, the first of which *should* be obvious: transmisogyny *is not misandry*. The transmisogynist does not treat trans women the way she treats men, even if she refers to a trans woman as a man in the process of degendering her. Even if a transmisogynist bears an authentic antipathy for men, there is a crucial

difference in how she regards trans women: namely, as an *acceptable target of misogynistic degradation*. Trans women's bodies are dissected and scrutinized, our behavior pathologized and sexualized, and our own testimony discarded as unreliable, insubstantial, and immaterial. We are dehumanized, third-sexed, and branded permissible targets for ritualistic, collective, and sexualized punishment. A fate that even queer men tend to be spared.

Secondly and perhaps more importantly: the 'misandry' of the average transmisogynistic feminist is *qreatly* overstated.

Trivially, we can note how the modern Gender-Conservative movement is full of men and the women who gleefully encourage their violence against trans people, a modern incarnation that bears the most threadbare of claims to *any* feminist tradition. They are, more than anything, a project concerned with the obfuscation of the term 'feminist', so that staunchly patriarchal ideologues can claim the label simply for promulgating transmisogynistic rhetoric. The face of modern transphobia is a far-flung cry from the academic lesbian feminists of yore, and is these days definitively male. Men abound at transphobic rallies, threaten to follow trans women into bathrooms to beat them, and call for the abolition of transition care in publications the world over.

Is such an answer evasive, though? Surely conservative men's transmisogyny is a mainstream discursive force *now*, but was not the second wave chockfull of misandrist lesbian feminists aiming their ire at trans women? Can we not draw a line from their extremism to modern antifeminist backlash?

To get to the heart of that matter, we have to recall a little history.

April, 1973. The West Coast Lesbian Conference was, at that point, the largest gathering of lesbian feminists to date. Beth Elliot, a trans lesbian folk singer and feminist activist had been on the organizing committee for the event and was also scheduled to perform on opening night. Her fellow LA organizers had, in fact, insisted upon it.

When she took the stage at 9 p.m., she was accosted by two women, one of whom snatched the mic away to scream that Beth was a "transsexual" and a "rapist", and demanded that she be ejected. In the ensuing chaos, a few organizers took the initiative to hold a vote (or, two, by some accounts),

allowing the assembled audience to decide on Beth's inclusion. The vote passed—by a slim majority, in some accounts, or by an overwhelming two-thirds majority, in some others—and so a visibly shaken Beth Elliot, with the support of her sisters, gave a short performance before promptly leaving.

Robin Morgan, who was scheduled to give a keynote speech on the theme of 'unity' the following day, spent the night editing her address. Rather than speaking for forty-five minutes, Morgan spent twice that time on a meandering screed "attacking everything in sight", per Pat Buchanan—the conference organizers, women who work with men, and of course, *transsexuals*, blaming the continuing ills of patriarchy on a lack of feminist consciousness. Her caustic rhetoric shifted the entire tone and mood of the conference, forefronting the issue of biodestined womanhood. The Black Women's Caucus, who had prepared a position paper on Black feminist organizing and the relevance of race to their struggle, are often omitted entirely from accounts of the conference, in large part due to Morgan's troonmadness sucking up all the oxygen.

While some of the facts surrounding this incident are disputed, we know that Morgan's invective was circulated amongst lesbian feminists, drawing attention to the topic of transsexual inclusion. Her charges that Beth Elliot was an "infiltrator" and "rapist" accrued sufficient cachet to get Beth blacklisted from feminist publications and music scenes. Despite a measure of personal support, Beth withdrew from the public eye, and Morgan's bilious language found itself echoed in 1979's *Transsexual Empire*, this time levied at Sandy Stone.

In some sense, Robin Morgan, Sister Raymond, and their ilk set the discursive tone on translesbophobia. While 1960's *Psycho* attests that the idea of the deceptive, cross-dressing predator already held some sway in the cultural psychosexual imaginary, Morgan and Raymond—clumsily and soporifically—elevated that hateful trope to the status of "feminist concern". They provided a framework and legitimacy to complement the sexologists' pathologization of the "homosexual transsexual", transmuting the cultural idea of the tranny from a pitiable, somewhat tragic figure, to a rapacious and monstrous one. Although coercion through deceptive seduction had always

been core to the mythology of transsexuality, Morgan and Raymond enabled eradicationist sentiment towards trans women as a whole to be imbued with a certain feminist authority, recasting it as almost *righteous*.

We were, in the truest sense of the term, *constructed*, remade as biotechnological horrors seeking to traverse, fresh and bloody, from the scalpel to the women's bathroom.

Given the centrality of that hastily–rewritten keynote speech to modern transmisogynistic propaganda, Morgan's awareness of its discursive relevance is fascinating to witness. As Finn Enke notes in *Collective Memory and the Transfeminist* 1970s, when Morgan published her own account in 1977, her comments from the 1973 speech condemning the organizers for "inviting" Beth Elliot are omitted entirely. Morgan deliberately edited the speech to extend her critique of transsexuals and Beth Elliot specifically, dubbing them "gatecrashers" who sought to undermine and destroy the feminist movement from within. She consciously chose to erase Beth's involvement in organizing the event, in addition to eliding that the majority of second–wave lesbian feminists present chose to defend and protect her.

Perhaps the most telling omission in subsequent accounts of this speech is an interesting detail about Morgan herself. Once she was done berating "women who work with men", Morgan launched an impassioned defense of her *husband*. Before she derided Beth Elliot as a "male gatecrasher" with no place in lesbian feminism, Morgan advocated for her male husband's place in lesbian feminism, on the grounds that he was a "feminist", a "feminine man", and—I still cannot help but marvel at this term whenever I encounter it—an "effeminist faggot".

Seriously.

It is impossible to overstate just how utterly pathetic this pantomime of radicalism is. Morgan sublimated her own sexual and gendered anxieties into unrestrained transmisogyny, as many people often do, seeking to secure her own place as a lesbian by defining her legitimacy against the seeming illegitimacy of an "outsider". Her arguments for doing so hinged on staining transsexual womanhood with the original sin of reproducing manhood, even as she pleaded the case that her husband, through his proximity to

the feminine, had successfully absolved his own! Morgan's audacity and insecurity drips off the page, revealing her charade to be nothing more than a performative, incoherent, inconsistent, bigoted farce.

Additionally, this revelation demonstrates how even here, in the holy of holies, at the epicenter of lesbian–feminist transmisogyny, *misandry* could hardly be claimed as a motivation. Beth Elliot was condemned for her *transsexuality*. Her putative 'manhood' was invoked only to degender and dehumanize her, while the avowed transmisogynist slurring her asked for the inclusion of men in the same breath!

Nor should we discount those who stood by Beth Elliot and Sandy Stone, even if their efforts were ignored, silenced, and erased. Enke's paper meditates on a photograph of Beth on stage, framed to depict her alone, isolated, besieged. The woman holding Beth's hand is left just out of the picture.

Meanwhile, for all their condemnation of trans lesbians' "male energy", the transmisogynists who so revile trans women's "manhood" had no compunctions when it came to allying with the "male institutions" that have surveilled us, vilified us, marginalized us, and tried to erase our very stories, our connections, our *sisterhood* from history. Even the scraps that remain cannot escape reframing, rewriting, revisionism that insists: *you were always unwanted*, and stood apart.

Except when we weren't, and didn't.

Radicalized Feminist

Of course, even if "radfem misandry" were the beating heart of feminist transmisogyny, it bears repeating that the radical feminist tradition is not a particularly well-known or influential one today. Ideas such as "gender is a social construct" and "heteronormativity" are uncontroversial in modern feminism, but their radical feminist roots are rather obfuscated, in addition to the foundational tenets of sex-class theory and heterosexuality as a political regime being far from widespread.

Indeed, for all the gesturing at gender-as-social, the average person conversant in pop-feminist jargon retains solidly essentialist notions. "Gender

is social, but *sex* is innate," goes the common-sense adage, allowing even "trans allies" to leave their conception of natural, immutable sex untouched. Many cis people are all too comfortable declaring that trans women are "male women" or that "no one believes trans people change sex", statements that go hand-in-hand with the widespread ignorance, misinformation, and indeed propagandized scaremongering surrounding the topic of trans healthcare. Whilst it would no doubt be an excellent party trick, I did not sprout tits through my sheer mastery of the social fabric. I had to take oestrogen for that.

Bluntly, the popular conception of trans people today is frustratingly concomitant with historical tropes regarding us as pitiable wretches who engage in elaborate costuming to make up for the tragedy that is our unchangeable birth sex. Many seem mystified at the thought that we alter our embodiments on a more fundamental level than clothing and address, and learning the degree to which hormones alone can enable trans people to 'pass' tends to elicit discomfort.

Epistemic injustice and the silencing of trans perspectives certainly plays a role, but more concerning is the extent to which transphobic ideologues are allowed to dictate the discourse on trans issues without encountering a meaningful counter-narrative. I've often observed that if a Gender-Conservative insists that trans people do not change sex, the well-meaning ally agrees implicitly, though is quick to remind that trans people do change our *gender!* Both the eradicationist and the ally are in agreement that transness is this superficial, social charade, and seem to principally deviate on the extent to which trans people's delusional performances ought to be humored.

Such an attitude is most evident the second a 'trans ally' happens upon a most disconcerting, destabilizing concept: a trans person who *disagrees* with them! Or worse, one who has her own thoughts, opinions, and perspectives on trans issues that challenge normative assumptions about her life and self-conception. The first time you witness a cis person call a trans woman "TERF" for insisting that she changed her sex, or for describing herself as a "transsexual", the spectacle elicits a hearty chuckle. The absurdity and novelty quickly wears off around the dozenth-or-so time.

That the label of "TERF" can be levied against a trans woman who insists upon her own sex is a function of the total cultural victory of the Gender-Conservative project. Feminism has been indelibly associated with transphobia, transmisogyny is considered a function of 'misandry', and the trans woman is instrumentalized as a voiceless pawn by a myriad of cultural forces that seek to exploit her symbolic significance. The conservative antifeminist can point to her as a consequence of leftist overreach threatening the most fundamental underpinnings of society's (patriarchal) organization, while the liberal antifeminist can use her woes to bemoan how unfair and extreme feminism has grown towards *men*, advocating for an ever-kinder, ever-gentler feminism even as abortion rights are undone and ideological investment in rape culture resurges.

After all, that is one thing the conservative and liberal and even leftist man have always agreed upon: the woman's rightful place, and the necessity of silencing her attempts to protest it.

This environment is not merely conducive for transmisogynistic radicalization, but is one where it absolutely thrives. Imagine, if you can, what it is like to be a woman keenly aware of her culture's intensifying misogyny. Young men—not simply the men "from a different time"—are growing disgruntled with the financial independence that allows women to be more selective in matters of dating and marriage (if they choose to marry at all!). "Men's Rights Activism" is increasingly becoming a part of mainstream conservative politics, and media figures engaging in patriarchal extremism are becoming normalized. In addition to targeting abortion access, reactionaries are openly organizing against contraception, no-fault divorce, and even women's right to vote! Openly male–supremacist politics have not been this popular in decades.

All the while, the media is obsessed with the plight of men, running article after article on the 'male loneliness epidemic' and lamenting the 'feminization of education' that has them giving up on college. It appears having to compete with women who value autonomy over 'traditional family' has soured men on the very idea of upward mobility. Even anti-capitalist politics are taking on a chillingly antifeminist bent, with women's issues dismissed as "idpol", a mere distraction from the primary contradiction of class.

Amidst all this, the topic of trans people seems to come up over and over, given outsize emphasis relative to how many of them there seem to be. Publications of repute run stories constantly, sounding the alarm on the threat "men in dresses" pose to women's bathrooms, sports, prisons, shelters—to the very notion of a sex-segregated space. This deluge is accompanied by a discursive environment where any mention of feminism seems to invite accusations of being a "TERF", a nebulous charge levied at anyone who even mildly suggests that men are systemically empowered to exploit women.

The lip-service paid to trans issues on the left, by those who outright dismiss feminist concerns, in tandem with the barrage of misinformation and the neartotal exclusion of trans voices and self-advocacy, leaves the field wide open for Gender-Conservative recruitment.

An oft-overlooked factor in the appeal of hate movements is that they *feel good*. The politics of male grievance has wide appeal to men who, faced with an increasingly hostile world that is unashamedly denying them the economic security their fathers enjoyed, turn to misogyny as an outlet. Sublimating impotence, despair, and rage into organized hate, directed at a target you can actually hurt, who is actually within reach—unlike the faraway, untouchable concept of 'the ruling class'—provides an immediate psychic relief that "class-consciousness" simply cannot rival.

There is a similar kind of unrestrained, psychosexual *glee* among the radicalized women who eagerly turn to the Gender-Conservative pipeline and make the tranny an effigy for all the male figures who have actually done them harm. Organized groups surveil trans people online and collate their social media interactions, distributing the material for adherents to leer at and mock, a *Der Sturmer* for the information age. Post-surgery images are mined for their apparent shock value, and long-forgotten misogynistic invective such as "axe wound" is resuscitated to be applied, anew, to the spectacle of the 'mutilated' trans woman.

Indeed, the chief utility of the trans woman here is as a lesser, *failed* woman at whom one can justifiably direct misogynistic abuse, while simultaneously chastising her for 'perpetuating patriarchal stereotypes'. If she is too feminine, she is a sex-role upholding handmaiden, or she is a "man in drag" if not

feminine enough. The trans woman, no matter her deeds, words, or politics, can be tied to the stake and set aflame, over and over. She is a pressure-valve for women looking to hurt something the same way they've been hurt—and feel 'feminist' for doing so. Trans women are *just* male enough for misogynistic abuse directed at them to 'not really count', or to even feel like 'punching up'.

After all, who's going to stick up for us? The same 'allies' who rush to call us 'male-socialized' the second we assert ourselves or act like we deserve dignity?

That is the reality of trans advocacy today. In an era of utter institutional capture, even those who believe themselves to be on our side tacitly endorse the transmisogynistic consensus.

How could this have happened? I mean, the picture of the horse was captioned 'chair'!

Should have been a slam dunk, right?

Just Answer the Damned Question

Last year, I chose to participate in a mediated conversation with a self-described 'moderate' GC, who claimed to be interested in the transfeminine perspective. 'Moderate', here, refers to the contingent of Gender-Conservatives who had somehow conned themselves into believing their virulent hatred of trans women was in fact a feminist crusade, and were growing increasingly alarmed at the overtures towards and alliances with right-wingers that movement leaders were making.

It was a short exchange. While she was kind enough to not use any slurs, the GC could not help but ask insistently, "How are you different from a gay man, though?"

Wasn't what I experienced really homophobia, not misogyny?

Amused, I brought up my complete lack of attraction to men, and pointed out that I wasn't seen as a man in public. I hadn't been seen as such for some time, in fact. Regrettably, I could not deny biological reality for the sake of her feelings.

I never got a reply to that.

A colleague of mine has opined that GCs exhibit a sort of "nationalistic protectionism" regarding sex-categories. Even when the GC was willing to acknowledge my oppression under patriarchy, I still had to know my place and make it clear I understood that I wasn't *really* a woman. I could be the closest thing to a woman-shaped male individual that her schema allowed, but I must not insist on tainting the purity of Womanhood by claiming it included me.

If I could just concede that sex was essential, impermeable, immutable, then she'd meet me halfway.

That is what The Question is actually getting at. The reason there's no point in debating category errors with a conservative is because *they know they are operating under a limited*, *exclusive definition*. Conservatism is an *exclusionary ideology*, by *choice*, by *intent*, by *design*. You cannot shatter someone's worldview with an epic burn about imperfect classification, when their classification was never meant to be perfect.

A Gender-Conservative *knows* what a woman is the same way *you* know what a woman is, because *we all fucking know what a woman is.* Their definition of 'woman' is the patriarchal definition of woman: a member of the subordinate sex-class whose domestic, reproductive, and sexual labor is meant to be exploited by the hegemonic sex-class.

Truthfully, Gender-Conservatives have always demonstrated a thorough knowledge of gender-as-social. They demonstrate it when they degender women of color or queer women for not falling within their narrow schema of femininity. They demonstrate it every time they feminize and "unman" any man whom they deem insufficiently reactionary. They are perfectly aware that gender is a social enforcement mechanism because they themselves wield it as one.

Is sex mutable or immutable to a GC, then? If you've finally realized that seeming contradictions do not matter to them, you'll also see that for a GC, it's neither.

For a Gender-Conservative, sex under patriarchy is policed.

When you're being asked what a woman is, you're not actually being asked for a perfect definition that includes all cis and trans women. (Trust me, I've

been ignored after I gave them one.) Look past the words to see the *intent* behind the question, and realize whose *humanity* it is meant to put up for debate. "What is a woman?" actually translates to:

"Are you really buying this shit?"

"Listen. You know it's a freak, I know it's a freak. I get that you want to appear all virtuous and high-and-mighty. But c'mon! At the end of the day you *know* what a woman is. I *know* you know what a woman is. And that's not a woman."

"How long are you going to keep humoring it?"

Just until I decide to voice an opinion, usually.

The question is meant to remind you that trans women are *male women*, that we *don't change sex*, that we *don't really experience misogyny*. It is meant to evoke a shared understanding that our genders are *inauthentic*. When a GC asks this question, they're asking whether the person they're questioning really thinks that trans women are worthy of respect as women, are worth taking seriously, or are worth *defending*.

Frankly, when push comes to shove, most people reveal that they don't.

Men's investment in transmisogyny is easily understood, but transmisogynistic women, especially GC women, display an interesting aspect to theirs. To a degree, the idea that a male person could ever experience misogyny, *actual misogyny* like they do, is existentially terrifying. A world where patriarchy is natural, biological, and absolute is an unfair world, an unhappy world, but it is still a world with *order*. A world where even *male anatomy* doesn't guarantee a freedom from misogynistic violence, where gender is proven to be unstable and revocable, confronts them with the reality that their place in the gender hierarchy is only so stable, too.

The tranny is a reminder of how women with no reproductive utility are treated, and the idea that they could share a classification with us—that it is possible for them to be considered *the same kind of thing* as us—is unconscionable.

"A woman is not the same thing as a *mutilated man*," you can almost hear them hiss, forgetting that their quarrel is with Aristotle and not me.

I wish these folks were receptive enough to understand that their hang-ups

are not my cross to bear. For I have never seen myself as a "man, made lesser". A failed man? Yes, and proudly so, but *never lesser*. I am, if anything, man perfected in form and spirit, in a way only a being who fulfills her true potential can be.

Faulty conceptions of trans womanhood are a recurrent point of failure for feminisms past and present. When presented with the dilemma that is the trans woman, most people have chosen to recoil in horror and emphasize their separation from us, rather than accept the notion that we might have common cause. Our revelation of gender's porosity is sometimes regarded with a macabre fascination, often fetishized, but rarely taken as proof that our point of view is one worth considering.

We are, currently, at just such an inflection point. The trans moral panic has been (predictably) revealed to be a singular facet of a wider patriarchal agenda to retrench male-supremacy and regulate people's gendered autonomy under the heterosexual regime. Under these nativist, natalist logics, the state cannot permit reproductive assets any bodily autonomy, and must deny them the right to shape their own sex. Your body is a resource for The Nation to mine, and will be legally enshrined as such.

Which leaves you with a choice.

You can take the same option that many have taken before you, time and time again. You can tell yourself that if you agitate loudly enough against her and declare that you are nothing like her, distinguishing yourself sufficiently from the trans woman will spare you her fate. You can try to convince yourself that if you sacrifice some bodies to the gaping maw of the beast, surely it won't hunger for yours.

Or, on the other hand.

You can declare, for the first time in history, that maybe the tranny has a right to exist. That maybe, her freedom to determine her embodiment is indelibly tied to yours. That maybe, just maybe, she's worth fighting for.

And we can see just how far advocating for a radical gendered autonomy takes us.