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Programme	MA Creative Writing
Level	M
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Module Name	Creative Writing Portfolio
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Submission Date:	15 September 2015

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Becoming *Chloe*

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MA Creative Writing

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Abstract

In this transcription of the intended physical poem, two 21st century teenage trans-women and a narrator discuss many key physical, social, and psychological issues faced from the time of gendered self-discovery to success or failure of gender transition. Both trans-women are fictionalized amalgamations of real people.

Written in a format inspired by the gene-map of a human Y-chromosome, the work presents each character's story on one strand of a double helix of DNA, demarcated into topics titled as gene parts. In sum, this asks the question of the interplay of nature and nurture as key determinants of human life experience. The highly scientific language of the narrator leverages my scientific background in biochemistry, and takes some stylistic inspiration from the poetry of Allen Fisher (2004a). It then evolves into a less technical form as the storyline of the poem develops.

Of the two main characters, one trans-woman is an accomplished, intelligent university student – never comfortable in her assigned male birth gender – who decides to transition to female in her late-teens. Her story progresses from statement of her issues and inadequacies, to her discovery of a successful coping strategy: writing and speaking of her experiences for the edification of others. We only really hear her voice once – at the end – but she does find one. She is the 'Chloe' of the title.

The other trans-woman's half of this poem depicts a more tragic tale. Younger and less in control of her own life, her dialogue with the narrator elucidates her plight: living in a body that misrepresents her gender, exacerbated by sexual desire for her gender-satisfied identical twin. When her deeply Christian mother engages church representatives to conduct 'gender therapy,' it begins an entrapment that drives the young teen to suicide.

Acknowledgements

If I have been able to complete a coherent and worthy work, it is in part due to the assistance of many others, and I am grateful for their considered and insightful contributions.

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Robyn Percival of the University of Surrey's LGBT+ Society gave me her personal perspectives of being a transwoman. I am also grateful to the LGBT+ Society as a body. They welcomed me without asking about my sexuality.

Nicholas Johnson, University of Surrey Poet-in-residence 2014/15, gave me guidance and feedback on my poetic efforts. From him I learned the value of opacity in poetry.

Finally, B. (Chloe) and her family shared intensely personal and often painful anecdotal details on how her gender transition is affecting them all.

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Creative Writing Portfolio

Becoming Chloe

A transcription of the physical poem

“Gender is not something that one is, it is something one does, an act... a ‘doing’ rather than a ‘being.’”

(Judith Butler, 1989, p. 25)

“In the vocabulary of the shaman and the Scientist, death becomes a reunion with the lost self; a refusal to grow or recover which would require identification with loss. Cure may not rest here because alienation, this distinction between self and unnamed reality, cohabits with the dissolution of self and other.”

(Allen Fisher, 2004a, p.122)

“One is not born, but rather becomes, woman. No biological, psychic, or economic destiny defines the figure that the human female takes on in society; it is civilization as a whole that elaborates this intermediary product between the male and the eunuch that is called feminine.”

(Simone de Beauvoir, 2011, p. 330)

Y chromosome

Helix One – Chloe’s Story

Telomere

N^a_{ur}t_{ure}

Your dis-coherent memories, peri-chromosomal yet inherited

Father’s genitals; shape symmetry with yours, and yet

Female spirit negates phenotype.

Dichotomous against the molecular.

Allele A: Abridged Y

Problematic nexus of gender expression: shrinking and rotting Y chromosome

400 million years of meiotic chromosomal inversion

Isolating polymorphisms associated with non-recombining portions

Haplotypes of paternal lineage are your inheritance.

Against which you rail.

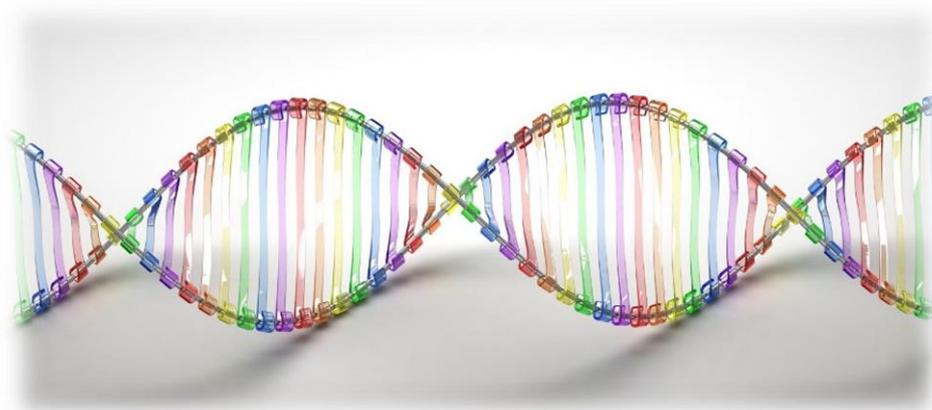


Figure 1 from the Anderson

Allele B: Body

Are we polarised?

God mistakes doesn't make, or dice play

So cut the dermis deeper / the fucking, lying, dermis

Then (un)conscious, cosmic conscious streaming

Directing Zen-focus ions to unknit DNA

Remake, metamorphose, restructure

Do we see you now? Performativity achieved?

You – so different, dangerous to yourself

Will we call you by the tender gender you feel inside?

Mutation One

I wonder Y you feel this way?

Unexpectedly labile gender elsewhere

Some lizards and fish change gender mid-life

Not so unnatural, then.

Allele C: Carbon

Wishing for scientific determinism of quanta to explain the carbon that binds us

Carbon woven ^weft ^a ^r ^p across everything yet known living.

Endlessly recycling.

Dihydrogen oxide / proteins wrapping a few other elements

Body worth less than seven grams of gold.

Carboniferous protein matter defined and directed by genes

To confound the eye

Male container for female chi.

XY? Y? *Why?*

Confusing Mum, clergy,

And all the insensitive bastards that set decency standards, without knowing fuck-all.

Bound by $\text{NH}_2\text{CHR}\text{COOH}$; G-C, A-T, and radical cations

A conspiracy of amino acids and chaining peptide hormones

Luteinizing and stimulating a teenage body / towards manhood

Stop them!

Cut again / lash out at yourself and the nucleic acids

Allele D: Dysmorphia

Who is that young man you see reflected – not you, surely? Darling sweet girl...

With Adam's apple, squaring jar, and dreaded undermining beard.

Hate the faux-father that calls you son, not daughter.

Hate the lachrymose mother.

Hate the falsifying, fun-house mirrors / distorting and lying

You don't think I understand. I do.

In your baggy clothes and lipstick, hide your testes

And imagine an abscissa at the root of your penis, forming like on an autumn leaf

Then silent falling, leaving concave infecund beauty as a clear statement of the feminine.

As I would expurgate years,

As perhaps others would fat.

Lying dermis. Cut it with sharps. *Cut* it.

N^ature is a bitch. Driven by forces weak and strong;

Periodic, rhythmic, and oscillating.

Replicating boundlessly, imperfectly;

Like a worn-out ink stamp of recursive fractals,

In ever decreasing increments of ϵ .

We swim in soup primordial

Of borrowed atoms, bound, in tissue oddly orchestrated along ancient evolutionary paths.

Nature crafting temporary, gendered bodies; true or false,

And consciousness: extant in 100 billion neurons barely used

Powered by Krebs cycle

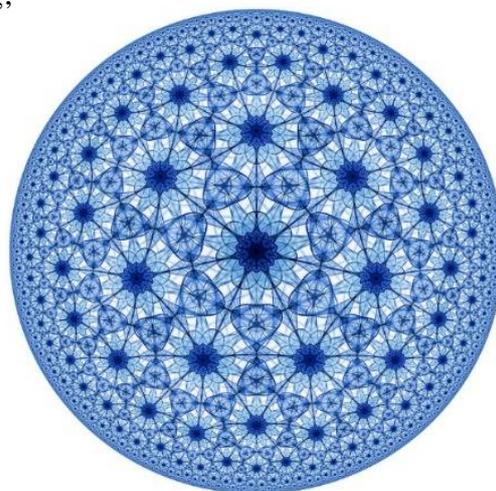


Figure 2 from the Hilbert

Tells us who we are.

Our physical structure informs others.

Correlation interruptus.

Centromere

Where is the social sanctuary?

Queer theories by academics

Forming a thick buffer of bullshit,

Through which you slowly wade

Sniffing for truth.

Allele E: Experimenting

They call you Gay. Or Tranny; that hated word.

They do not understand: this is not about sex. You've tried that.

You had a girlfriend down the road and a million miles from what you needed.

She made you feel. She said she loved you.

Impossible. She didn't know you. You aren't yet you.

Incongruity. Teary fucking parting.

Now masturbating to fantasies, the occasional real release.

Confused, demi-sexual feelings

Aroused by acceptance, love and caring more than visual.

Broken sexuality, broken relationships, broken confidence.

Apart-hide

Nocturnal Internet (re)search

Locked bedroom. Blue dress. High heels. Makeup.

Forums, community, photos...

Damaging pictures, arousing pictures, eros-confused

Masturbating for hours without release

Hormonal miasma

Perhaps it *is* easier to kill yourself; so cis-gender *cunts* regret.

Reach for something sharp /

Play the skin violin.

Mutation Two

Y *are* YOU to blame,

Born this way?

Or, is *this* the whole fucking point?

Allele F: Fucked up

THAT night. The story you never tell, never forget.

The club; emerging electroplated out of the women's toilet.

Accosted, beaten, sodomised by three disappointed drunks.

Lipstick, mascara smudged. Innocence torn.

Police dropping you off at the home you reluctantly describe.

Facing confused sibling, parents.

No coherent explanation from hurriedly wiped lips.

Unwilling to relive / share horror.

Unable to accuse the guilty.

Hot shower. Scrubbing like Gertrude.

Make it sore, make it raw, make the dermis pay.

Inflame the scars.

It's not you. Never was.

Manskin-clothed. A skin suit.

What if you succumb before transition?

Endure, you weak shit.

Allele G: Gonads

They dropped. Get over it.

You write:

“If will and hope could mould tissue!

If physique could be more ductile, malleable.”

Listen to you; little *Shakespeare*. Droning on.

Boohoo, Mootoo.

Ugly little scars hidden under sleeves

Myofibroblasts and collagenic evidence of self-loathing

Ah! Auto-endocrinologist, are we now?

Ingesting Internet-sourced estrogen, progestogen,

To cross that gender frontier...

Then, they will *have* to listen.

Expensive, risky to fight the testis alone.

Cherished orchiectomy

Too young to see a consultant. Fucking rules.

Grow your hair / change your gait. Soften speech.

Despair impermanent depilatory efforts.

Imbibe and medicate until insensate,

Awakening on a university corridor floor to another dispiriting day;

Wallet-less, cognizance zigzagging across the distinctive hell of the MTF spectrum.

Cut the fucking skin.

It's not the right skin, anyway.

Besides, you will probably kill yourself in the end.

Is there salvation?

Unnatural selection.

Allele H: Hobbies

Boot the gaming console-cum-stress outlet: anonymised FPS games.

Grab a controller.

Drug-like distraction from the mundane – reflex not reflect.

Think game. Think game. Think game.

Focus on the stupid game.

Which game? Tennis? Renee Richards. Athletics? Caitlyn Jenner.

No escape from self-obsession.

All this wasted time, University exams missed. Repeat the year.

Shit.

Put down that Diazepam / pick up that pen.

Channel anguish onto paper.

Compose in splattered ink.

Allele I: Intermediate

Testosterone still flows. Breasts growing.

Who are you *now*? Where can you *pee*?

A woman called you *Miss* in the supermarket.

Delightful! Miss!

Counselling sessions to guide and monitor.

Psychological investigations.

Dysmorphic blues lightening, until:

Someone asks. Someone always asks.

When they don't, they're thinking about it,

Searching your baggy clothes for a signal, wondering,

“Do you still have one?”

“Has it *changed* at all?”

“Will you really have them cut the deceitful thing off?”

Penis. Cock. Dick. Willy.

Princess Penis?

Assholes.

Allele J: Journal

Ink flows like semen onto your page.

The pen-is your cock.

Literary ghosts at your shoulder

Release the words, release the pain.



Figure 3 from the Cagle

Write *bitch*, **write**.

Words like ants - cooperating against nature's challenges.

Conjoining pheromone-laced into syntactic power ramblings.

Transforming paper into emotive heart-missives.

Paper Jesus. Writing like Coetzee. **Pen(ance)**.

Metamorphose through Nietzschean art, until it reflects you in perfection.

Write about your trans-friend Leelah

About the truck that ended her depression, and added to your nightmares.

Can *I* read the draft?

“Fuck off!” you say.

Allele K: Karma

Mutation Three

Y chromosome has lost all of Allele K.

Y is a weak fucker.

Males evolving out of existence.

Chromosomal inversion, mitosis, meiosis, telomere damage, recombination, replication errors

And mutation from chemical or radiation damage, rotting it away.

Only telomeres, SRY Sister Chromatid Entanglement, DAZL Autosome gene insertions,

And a few other protective measures protect gender

We all should be female -

Some of us just didn't get a solid pair of X chromosomes.

Thanks, *Dad*.

Allele L: Love

Forsaken. Forgotten. Unlovable.

Unworthy of love. Ostracized hermit.

You strove to drive us *all* away.

Many departed, weakening you. Justified self-loathing.

I remain. This knot holds.

Weave back into the fabric of us.

Let love salve your transition.

Then, finally:

“Help me?” you implored, last we spoke.

“Will you help me?”

Pain / weeping spirit / leaden heart: “*How can I help?*”

“Call me *Chloe*.”

Telomere

You've come far. It's not over.

Let words and affection extract toxins.

For now, I will be your telomere, protecting chromosomes

Protein and DNA preventing cell aging, death, or apoptosis

And in the process, eroding.

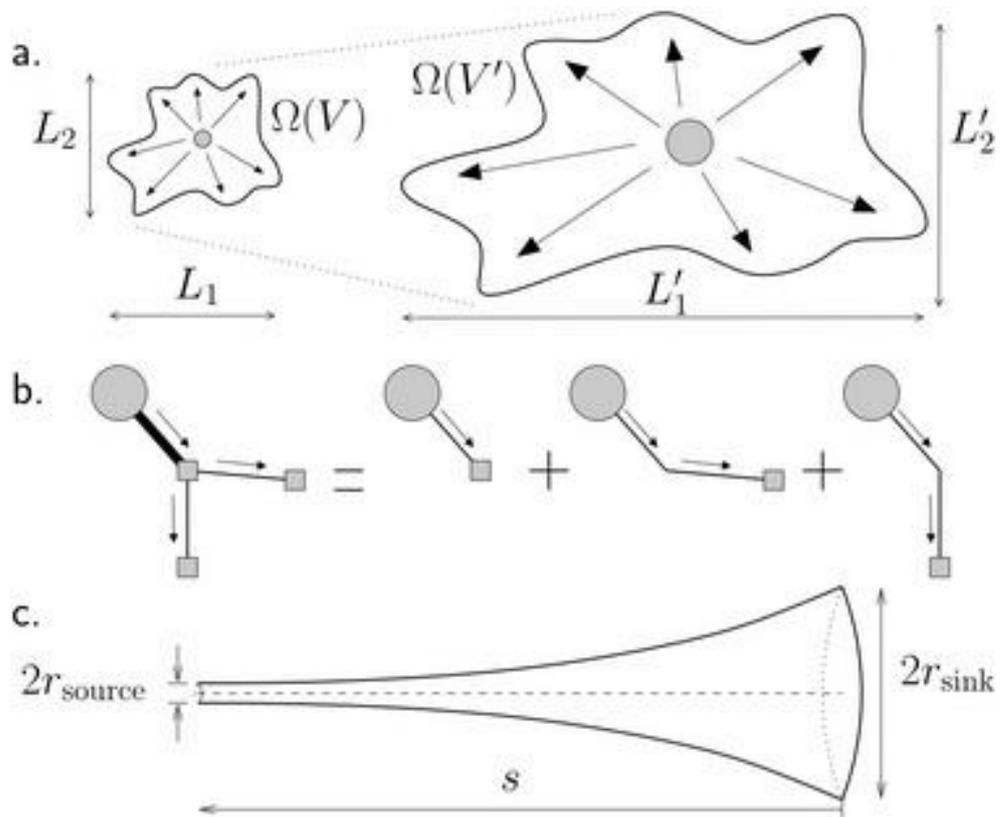


Figure 4 from the Dodds

Helix Two – Leelah’s Story

Telomere

Mutation Four

“I wonder *Y* I feel *queer*.

I am who, and why am I that?”

Who decides? Wrest endocrine control.

Not much protection when the telomere mutates.

Genetic destiny, *my ass*.

Allele A: Assertion

Evolution. Genetic delusion

Chemical gender or illusion?

Chromosomes expressing masculine form

Performative exposition past the gender fulcrum

Accession / retrocession

Puberty-crushed hope of a natural metamorphosis

Proved Bem’s lie: you are what you see yourself *do*

Not *you*.

Mirror on the floor reflects abhorrent penis

Tuck it away / moulding scrotum into semblance of vulva

Transgender pretender?

Depression, obsession, transgression

Blame the maternal crucifix-clutching fundamentalist

She didn't love identical twins the same

Sins of the Mother...

Now: act out, misbehave

Perhaps for love/attention?

Confused child.



Figure 5 from the 'B'

Characterized by an obsession with pronouns

Loves rhyme.

Allele B: Beliefs

"Mom says I was, I am, and will be / what Divinity made me.

So I pray to her God to forgive me,

For doubting the genders God gave me,

But it feels wrong -

To acquiesce to the gender to which my body belongs.

I have testes / masculine and hairy

The cleric preaches the genes I carry,

Will define me to the End.

Exhorts me pray to the God I offend

Damned sinner of the worst kind

Masculine body / feminine mind.

Treating me as misguided

Detesting what heredity provided.

God gave me dissentient voice

Like Calliope, I have to live my choice.

Freud, Foucault, fuck all of you.

Alex Drummond understands it, too.”

Allele C: Change

“All-consuming drive to transform,

Make phenotype match temperament

Cardinal humours in unnatural proportions

Trapped, yearning for a self-selected life-course

To evolve away from my identical twin

That sole beneficiary of Mum’s love.

But playing touchy-touchy twins never felt wrong

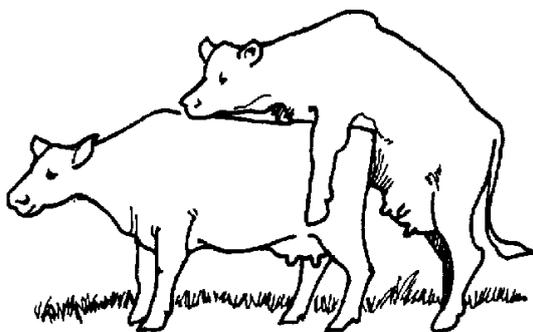


Figure 6 from the Human Info NGO

My desire for him still powerful

Need to morph, evolve, transmute

Too young without parental consent.

It's *not* just a phase, you cunt."

Mutation Five

"Y am I to blame?

You gave me life and chose my name,

Dressed loved and unloved twins the same.

Tried to make me feel ashamed

For behaving gender-proclaimed."

Allele D: Drugs

"So when feasible

I fled gender-hell.

Pharming home for chemicals

Drugs and alcohol proving scant escape

Spirit tautomer of ketone on my breath

Taking pills without caring what's inside

No ecstasy found.

Looking for answers in a syringe

Special K, Mary J, or MDMA

Or asking the masculine, mescaline, mescal gusano.

Wanting the ride, dreading the crash

But discovering chemistry of another kind:

Gonadotropins kicking in –

Puberty's gift.

Chemical battle within

Sexual destiny maturing

Perhaps drugs *can* save me.

But I have to hurry.”

Centromere

Your father's neck – stained generational blue

Machismo denying your Billy Elliot.

Confronting a destiny written in the QR-Code of your freckles

Transgirls face harm, self or external inflicted

Little victim you.

Allele E: Education

“School teaches more

Than algebra and world war

It teaches shame

Gender at variance with given name.

Little hope of happiness / acceptance

Drifting among those $\frac{406}{407}$ cis-genders

Read a blog somewhere

She was me, but six years older

More eloquent, stronger, bolder

Now named Chloe, born a guy

She'd found an online supply

Oestrogen and hormones she could use

Masculine proclivity to reduce

Can I follow her lead?

Self-administer the blend I need?"

Allele F: Feminility

“Reading, watching, surfing

Peters, Butler and Teich

Transparent, and Call Me fucking *Cait*

Online magazines. Pinterest. YouTube

Need guidance to express my femininity

Girls don't lisp. Girlie-girl.

Love the clothes at the Mall

(Lipstick on the lower lip first)

Great underwear, what did Ziegfeld say?

'This girl will know.'

What am I preparing for?"

Allele G: God

"Hiding erection while changing for sports.

Later confessing to repressed-queer priest,

(Heavy breathing and muffled grunt) as he jerked off to my whispered Hail Mary.

Listening, galvanized - thinking about his unrequited flesh

And my brother, and being desired.

Church; improbable erotic sanctuary -

God's not watching,

Because he doesn't fucking exist."

Mutation Six

Truncated lifeline on your palm

What did the carny fortune-teller say?

“An impossible love, an early death.”

Only the young die good.

You are getting too old for that.

Allele H: Heterodox

Usurp God’s role in an un-Christian evolution

Re-forming yourself with heretic zeal.

Parents united against you,

Rebuffing determination and resolve,

Blocking all air of freedom,

Suffocating, working-class bastards.

Allele I: Identity

Coming out at school to applause and ridicule

Chose a name; ‘Leelah,’ your few friends know.

Fury at home

Bright girl, identity-deprived

Will you get to adulthood?

Can you suffer that long?

Allele J: Journey

Baby-steps by shackled feet

Chained to your mother's denial

Trans-Girl Scout

Until Mom called religious counsellors

Forced you to heed admonishment,

Gay conversion therapy.

Affirmation, acceptance, hope, denied.

Partway is nowhere.

Or, like Jenner, suicide considered.

World closing in, choices contracting.

If you can make it to college, perhaps...

Allele K: Knots and Memory

You've planned it,

If they won't relent.

Tie your quipu now-

A knot for each passion,

One for each pain.

Tell us where to find it,

And leave it as your story

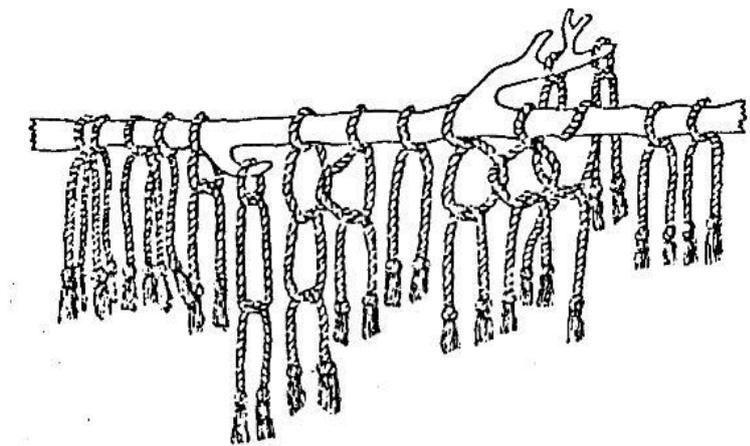


Figure 7 from the Vygotsky

I hope we never see it.

Allele L: Loss

The media widely reported

How the traffic stopped abruptly

Birth name toe-tagged.

Everyone knows your story now.

So sad without you. Empty.

Telomere

We found your Tumblr quipu.

Tied to inform a lesson

If only we knew how to read knots...

Reflective Critical Commentary

Background

Becoming Chloe aspires to address questions asked in my first semester proposal for this module: “What are the emotional, interpersonal, ethical and spiritual issues, impacts and ramifications arising from an individual’s transgender journey in 21st century western society? How can this be communicated in a poetic form?” (Davids, 2015b, p. 1) For this work, I decided to focus on what I had already observed: teenage male-to-female (MTF) gender transition.

My inspiration for these conjoined poems derives from the conflation of two local and impactful transgender events. In 2013, my neighbour’s child B., (redacted for anonymity) having suffered years of undiagnosed Body Dysmorphic Disorder, decided and declared that her assigned male birth gender was wrong. She then commenced MTF gender reassignment therapy. Contemporaneously, sociopathic teen S. (redacted) achieved ataraxis through female-to-male (FTM) transformation. Both events occurred deep within my social circle, providing uncommon access and insights. I began to wonder what gender is, and what the world had to say about it.

With new sensitivity, I followed subsequent media coverage of other transgender successes and suicides, and began making related journal notes; ultimately forming a collection of links, observations and sources.

Early on I noted where Judith Butler (1990, p. 25) influentially asserts, “Gender is not something that one is, it is something one does, an act [...] a ‘doing’ rather than a ‘being.’” I interpreted this widely cited quote (1) as Butler’s version of Will Durant’s (1926, p. 87) popular phrase, “we are what we constantly do,” which is commonly misattributed to Aristotle.

I began to disagree with Butler’s concept that it is necessary to *act* in order to *be* after I

learned from LGBT+¹ individuals I interviewed that people felt gendered long before they took *action* to modify themselves or their behaviour.

I found congruence with Edgar Allen Poe's (1849, l. 10-11) poetic lines, "Is all that we see or seem / But a dream within a dream?" Allen Fisher (2014, p. 101) also addresses this, when he writes, "There is no matter- or mind-independent reality / and what we erroneously think exists outside / is an idea or image in some mind." I considered that perhaps there is no *empirical* gender reality at all; yet transgender humans are 'obsessed' with appearance, to the point that the struggle and the obsession threatens their existence.

I continued my research by studying social psychologist Daryl Bem's (1972, p. 2) "self-perception theory," which posits that we "know [our] own... internal states by observing our own behaviour." I concluded with contemplation of the notion that we might possibly 'be' what *others* believe we are, whether Hans Christian Andersen's (1949, p.1) "ugly duckling," or "swan."

I decided that regardless of the derivation of gender, we *communicate* it to others. Where physical and behavioural cues fall short, words seemed a fitting way to augment the interchange. This justified my insistence in *Becoming Chloe* that Chloe must 'Release the words, to release the pain. Write bitch, write,' (11-12) as an emotional outlet that might keep her from self-harming. This derives in part from my own experience with clinical depression, which I ameliorated somewhat by composing morbid poetry.

Underpinning the philosophy and psychology of gender is the question of competing influences of nature versus nurture, which I concatenated into the invented word "N^a_{ur}ture," (2, 5)

¹ LGBT+ stands for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and others

in part calling to mind Ted Hughes' contemplation of nature as "the goddess" (Hughes, 1993, p.11, p. 69). I went further, structuring the poem on a cartographic Y chromosome metaphor. The concatenation works well, as it suggests that these interwoven concepts are inseparable.

I discovered through research that gender is an important element of current social debate. It influences and relates to religion, science, art, health, literature, and even law. For example, in the *Independent* newspaper, Jon Stone (2015) reported that Russia has "characterised people who change their gender as having a 'disorder,' [and banned them from driving cars,] as part of a crackdown on people with mental health issues." An appalling prejudice.

As contribution to the debate, I resolved to write *Becoming Chloe* as a physical poem account of two teens aspiring to gender transformation, which proved to be a unique approach.

Process

With the assistance of my lecturers, I established and documented potential themes for this work in a *Writing Project Proposal Plan*, as part of the University's Research and Writing Skills I module. (Appendix C) These were:

1. The transgender journey
2. The body
3. Being different / unconditional love
4. Class and gender
5. Religion and gender transition
6. Writing and literature as an emotional outlet.

I considered the material structure of the work: to construct a physical poem combining words and shapes suggestive of DNA's double helix, as DNA determines appearance. I decided to unite knots, fabric, words and pictures to imply connectivity and communications older than writing. Once fabricated it would hang from a ceiling as a mobile, and rotate freely to give the reader perspective-dependent glimpses of sections of the work. (Appendix B) This is what Umberto Eco, in *The Poetics of the Open Work* (1989, p. 8), called a "work in movement, [where] elementary structures which can move in the air and assume different spatial dispositions. They

continuously create their own space and the shapes to fill it.” Fabric torn from clothing would allude to the value of dress as a visual cue to gender, but I would also incorporate religious garments; calling in the theme of the divine versus free will in gender selection.

To add inventive depth to the poem, I planned to research both technical *and* literary works on the subject. I started research in November 2014 at the British Library, investigating how the body of both scientific and lay ‘queer’ writing debates sex and gender. I discovered an overwhelming catalogue of related academic material (Butler, 1990; Cotton, 2011; Ekins and King, 2006; 2008; Hines, 2013; Salamon, 2010; Stryker and Whittle, 2006) and navigating through it proved daunting. I also read queer creative works (Drummond, 2012; Eugenides, 2007; Mootoo, 1999; Peters, 2004; Spott, 2014) and a large volume of queer writing on the Internet. I read an assortment of recommended books on writing dissertations and theses. The plethora of research content proved a major turning point. I needed to focus deeper on fewer facets of the subject, specifically the body, religion, and writing, to keep my scope manageable and within the deadline and line count. I chose these themes for personal interest and prior exposure, although I also touched on all my remaining themes in varying depth.

I researched gender’s genetic and environmental precursors in technical depth, to ensure scientific authenticity in my writing. I also investigated perplexing psychological aspects of gender. As a cis-gender male, I realized that the personalities of my transgender characters were too challenging to fabricate solely from research literature and academic papers. To improve writerly empathy, I joined and attended the University’s LGBT+ Society; meeting communicative transgender representatives like Robyn Percival, who shared her story with me, and patiently answered my many probing questions. (Appendix E)

From LGBT+ meetings I learned that gays and transgender individuals socialize together because they both face similar social stigmatism, but they have very different self-perceptions and aspirations, and that gender identity and sexual partner preference are completely separate. I

emphasize this in my work, with lines like, “Girls don’t lisp” (21), to imply that lisping is an occasional gay affectation, and though ‘queer,’ my character is not gay.

I met and interviewed psychiatrist Dr Hilary Offman in July 2015, after reading her article about her transgender patient (Offman, 2014). Offman encouraged my intent, emphasizing, that gender in today’s social environment is highly binary, therefore transgender “stories like these and that of my own transgender patient ‘Sam,’ are different and fascinating because they expose non-stereotypical aspects of human nature.” (Appendix D, Offman Conversation, 2015, p. 4)

I designed some aspects of my fictional character’s backstory based on the Offman conversation and article, including the non-fiction divergent gender aspirations of identical twins raised by a mother that “didn’t love identical twins the same.” (16)

From a recent study (Reisner et al., 2015, pp. 274–279), I discovered that “transgender youth represent a vulnerable population at risk for negative mental health outcomes including depression, anxiety, self-harm, and suicidality.” On the theme of the body, my growing awareness of the physical risks to those whose gender performativity mismatches their gendered appearance (phenotype) influenced me to incorporate much threat to my characters from self and external harm. Chloe is constantly ‘cutting herself,’ as in “So cut the dermis deeper / the fucking, lying, dermis,” (3). This is a literary nod to the frequent real life self-harm practised by the transgender teens I spoke with, all of whom had emotional and physical scarring.

In addition, the form of suicide chosen by trans-teen Leelah Alcorn when her religious parents refused to allow her to continue to transition towards female, is the inspiration behind my tragic character Leelah’s implied suicide, as well as her social media “public suicide note” (BBC, 2014). I write that “The media widely reported /How the traffic stopped abruptly,” (24) and

allude to a suicide note in, “Tie your quipu² now / A knot for each passion / One for each pain / Tell us where to find it.” (23) This seemed a compelling metaphor for the knotty problem of Gender Dysmorphia, and fit well into my original concept for the structure of the poem.

Having mentioned quipu, I found a treatise (Vygotsky, 1936) that also contained line drawings of quipu I could incorporate within my poem. Adding this and several other figures was justified by the phenomenology of doing so; the figures adding design and intertextuality, to what Eric Mottram called “the interface between notation and performance.” (2005, p.9) The figures appear beside or near the words that inspired my search for them. They add a layer of complexity that, in hindsight, addressed my theme of ‘writing and literature as an emotional outlet,’ by obliquely suggesting to the reader the competition between the verbal and non-verbal layers of gender communication.

In consultation with my tutor, we considered how I could draw on my scientific background to execute the poem in an inventive and thought provoking way. We resolved to utilize my specialist knowledge of biochemistry, and to that end, I read several creative works with their own scientific character and style (Fisher, 2004a, 2004b). Compare these lines from Fisher’s *Pirate’s Walk*, “short tandem repeats of DNA sequences / signal different individuals with different repeats,” (2004a, p. 97) with my line, “Problematic nexus of gender expression: shrinking and rotting Y chromosome.’ (2) Both use scientific jargon to add a mixture of opacity *and* clarity to the issue.

Becoming Chloe evolves stylistically and syntactically towards a less technical vocabulary, using the evolving language as a veiled commentary on the evolution of humans, genes, and

² A quipu is a story or memory told with knots in string or rope

gender. My second trans-teen, Leelah, speaks in a mixture of prose and rhyme, mimicking the song lyrics she “loves.” (16) This is both to differentiate her from my narrator, and because that is the way it came out of me, for example, “Mom says I was, I am, and will be / what Divinity made me. / So I pray to her God to forgive me, / For doubting the genders God gave me.” (16) The word ‘genders’ works particularly well, as in context the pluralized word calls to mind the friction of duality that permeates the whole gender question.

Some of my lines required hours of research and painstaking formulation, although in completion they are hopefully elegant. As an example, “God mistakes doesn’t make, or dice play,” (3) originates in my research into what great scientific minds think about humans and God. I already knew Albert Einstein’s famous comment about God not playing dice with the universe, and added Stephen Hawking’s commentary on Einstein, where Hawking (no date, p. 1) states, “the future of the universe is not completely determined by the laws of science.”

I worked hard to be original, editing out and revising anything I later felt was clichéd or imitative – unless it fulfilled a valid purpose – for example, by giving my characters their voices. Even when using familiar language I attempted to conceal alternative sub-meanings, as an encouragement to the reader to think again or re-read. An example is my use of repeated references to weaving and fabric, as in “Carbon woven ^{weft}_a_r_p across everything,” (3) and “Weave back into the fabric of us,” (13), where fabric is a symbol with many levels of meaning:

1. Carbon as the chemical thread that unites us into the *‘fabric’ of living organisms*.
2. The *social* fabric wherein gender exists.
3. The *clothing* we use to display our gender to others.
4. *Ancient fabric art* predating written language, which communicated meaning and membership with pictures and symbols.
5. *Religious garments* that call to mind the influence of the divine.

I also used ‘Y’ in lieu of the word ‘why’ on four occasions, the repetition representing duplication in biochemistry.

I chose my title as *Call me Chloe* back in November 2014, after B. explained that was how we could help her cope during her transition. Unfortunately, in July 2015 *Vanity Fair* published Bissinger and Leibovitz's (2015, p.1) cover story about Caitlyn (formerly Bruce) Jenner's "journey from Olympic icon to transgender woman," under the title *Call Me Caitlyn*. The impressive international attention this story received, ultimately resulting in television docu-series *I am Cait*, vaulted Jenner into an unofficial role as spokesperson for American transgenders and LGBT. I felt I needed to change my title, and my tutor agreed. After many attempts, including a survey of my peers, I stumbled across a small change in word selection that solved the problem. I consequently renamed the work, *Becoming Chloe*. I then mentioned Jenner and other famous transgenders in lines like, 'Which game? Tennis? *Renee Richards*. Athletics? *Caitlyn Jenner*.'" (10)

As I considered philosophical questions raised by my evolving work, and in consideration of the preceding points I began to believe Nietzsche's claim that "in art man enjoys himself as perfection," (2004, p. 44) especially when I thought of hair, clothing, and makeup as artistic efforts on behalf of the transwoman to 'perfect' herself. In a literary sense, the human need for self-decoration as gender indication is a well-established theme in queer literature. For example, Shani Mootoo's (1996) protagonist in *Cereus Blooms at Night* is a male nurse who needs to dress as a female. In addition, one of the few successful mainstream queer creative works, Jeffrey Eugenides' popular novel *Middlesex* (2007), centres on an ambiguous-gendered protagonist, raised female, who ultimately adopts fully 'masculine' dress and lifestyle. As a nod to these literary gender pioneers, I mention them in my work directly, and by citing Eugenides' protagonist "Calliope." (17)

I further expanded on the theme of 'writing and literature as an emotional outlet,' after I was inspired to learn from Floyd Robinson's paper (2012) on J.M. Coetzee's (1992) that "Coetzee's ultimate objective, 'self-cancellation,' is a goal whose achievement requires that one

first accept the risk of self-exposure that accompanies all writing.” (2012, p. 27) Coetzee himself states that, “the fiction itself is the penance imposed on the pursuit of silence, rest, and death.” (1992, p. 43). I address this in my own work: “Paper Jesus. Writing like Coetzee. Pen(ance)” (12) raises the question of whether Chloe considers her writing to be in part a penance for the pain she is putting her family through, by her self-exposure in search of her own peaceful or silent heart. For this hint, I joined the word ‘pen’ and the word ‘penance’ into my word ‘Pen(ance).’ I constructed words partly in brackets to reflect gender bracketed within a non-matching body.

Another benefit to Chloe taking up writing is for her to temporarily escape from herself, as Fisher propounds when he writes, “In the poem I am never myself, but speak beyond myself, the poem is that transportation of the self evident before the invention of wheels, perhaps evident in the ecstatic.” (2004a, p. 124)

As I progressed in my research, I observed the social, physical, and psychological issues and impacts that arise in transgender lives, and became cognisant of the self-harming practises common to 30-50% of transgenders. For example, in an important survey (Grant, J.M., Mottet, L.A., et al., 2010, p.1) based on roughly 6,500 responses to an extensive questionnaire, the authors determined that the attempted-suicide rate for transgender women and men was “a staggering 41 percent, compared to 1.6 percent in the general population.” I could not ignore such a fundamental problem, and addressed it extensively in *Becoming Chloe*. The topic of self-harm is one of my central themes, appearing in over twenty lines. Both my main characters are suicidal, and Leelah is successful.

Skills

Writing was exciting, and words came easily. Despite this, when revising and editing I discovered that almost every line benefitted from adjustment. Once I drafted some lines, I played the work over in my head frequently. As a result, many of my favourite phrases in the final

version came to me during rest or sleep. I kept a pen and paper by my bed to record them, and I would revisit them in the morning.

I enjoyed the longer format of this assignment, as it furnished much more space for self-reflection. For the creative work itself, I am most pleased with *Helix One*, and would have stopped there if it had met the expected word count. Instead, I pushed on, evolving in style and voice to prevent fatigue for myself and for my reader.

Some innovative word combinations worked well, and I particularly enjoyed, “Will we call you by the tender gender you feel inside?” (3) The wordplay between tender and gender succeeding as an allusion to femininity, and to the nascent, unseen, or unborn self, labouring to emerge. Compare this to Fisher’s (2004a, p. 135) elegant, “Between the figures of Adam & Eve / How individual cells know / What to become how they resemble.” His third line is an entertaining and meaningful play on words, and I worked hard in my own piece to achieve a similar high standard.

I am not a natural researcher, and it required much discipline to select the sources that would inform my work, in part because there are so many. I read extensively, and had to restrain my investigation of any one aspect to ensure I stayed within scope. I became adept with Internet search and Google Scholar as tools to accelerate my access to sources. I gained much from primary research meetings and conversations with credible sources, and became obsessed with my thesis in a way that my social circle found dull. I began to love the research. On many ‘writing days’ I became unapproachable, causing conflict at home.

I have always had a tendency to write expository poetry that rhymes. With my tutor’s coaching, I moderated this during editing, instilling more opacity in my work to bring readers back for a second reading to discover what they did not originally see. There are so many

subtexts in *Becoming Chloe* that this commentary cannot encompass or address them all. That delights me, and reassures me that I have made significant progress during my degree.

Gender helps us understand who we are and where we fit (or not). Therefore, this topic is important to pursue further. My work, for brevity and creative license, is narrow in focus: MTF gender transition for teenagers. I hope other writers will go further, and address the issues from the perspective of my excluded parties: older or younger transgenders; their parents or offspring; their friends, siblings, lovers, and the FTM population.

My wish is that my work may help encourage tolerance.

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Appendix A – Source of figures used

Figure 1 (page 2), a rainbow model representing a segment of DNA “from the Anderson” is sourced from Anderson, G. (no date), *DNA of a Rainbow*. Available at: <http://divineerror.deviantart.com/art/DNA-of-a-Rainbow-8226336> (Accessed: 6 August 2015).

Figure 2 (page 5) a two-dimensional blue fractal “from the Hilbert” is sourced from Hilbert, R. (2004) *Fractal Generator*. Available at: <http://www.fractalsciencekit.com/> and <http://ih0.redbubble.net/image.14378007.3840/flat,800x800,070,f.jpg> (Accessed: 25 June 2015). *A hyperbolic transformation applied to a symmetric attractor based fractal. Created using the Fractal Science Kit fractal generator. The method used to produce the symmetric attractor is based on information in the book “Symmetry in Chaos” by Michael Field and Martin Golumitsky.*

Figure 3 (page 11), a cartoon of a pen held as if a penis “from the Cagle” is sourced from Cagle, D. (2104) *Very Manly Pen*. Available at: <http://www.cagle.com/2014/03/very-manly-pen/> (Accessed: 6 August 2015).

Figure 4 (page 14) a diagram of erosion formulae “from the Dodds” is sourced from Dodds, P. S. (2010) ‘Optimal Form of Branching Supply and Collection Networks’, *Physical Review Letters*, 104. doi: 10.1103/physrevlett.104.048702. (Accessed: 13 August 2015)

Figure 5 (page 16) two identical toddlers (except for their hair) “from the ‘B’” is sourced from B. (2013), *Gender Strangers, Theory and Practice for Queer Life* Available at: <https://genderstrangers.wordpress.com/> (Accessed: 7 August 2015).

Figure 6 (page 17) a line drawing of cows mounting each other “from the Human Info NGO” is sourced from *Ethnoveterinary medicine in Asia - An information kit on traditional animal health care practices - Ruminants: Breeding* (no date) Available at: <http://www.nzdl.org/gsdldmod?e=d-00000-00---off-0hdl--00-0---0-10-0---0---0direct-10---4-----0-11--11-en-50---20-about---00-0-1-00-0--4---0-0-11-10-0utfZz-8-00&a=d&c=hdl&cl=CL1.5&d=HASH0173b8ba971d4ea75c7de167.29> (Accessed: 13 August 2015).

Figure 7 (page 23), quipu or kvinus knots as memory aids “from the Vygostky” is sourced from Vygotsky, L. (1930) *Works of Lev Vygotsky, The Memory of Primitive Man* Available at: <https://www.marxists.org/archive/vygotsky/works/1930/man/ch04.htm> (Accessed: 12 August 2015).

Figures in Appendix B:

The picture of quipu knots is sourced from *Museo Chileno De Arte Precolumbino*, (2003) Available at: <http://www.precolumbino.cl/en/exposiciones/exposiciones-temporales/exposicion-quipu-contar-anudando-en-el-imperio-inka-2003/> (Accessed: 30 August 2015).

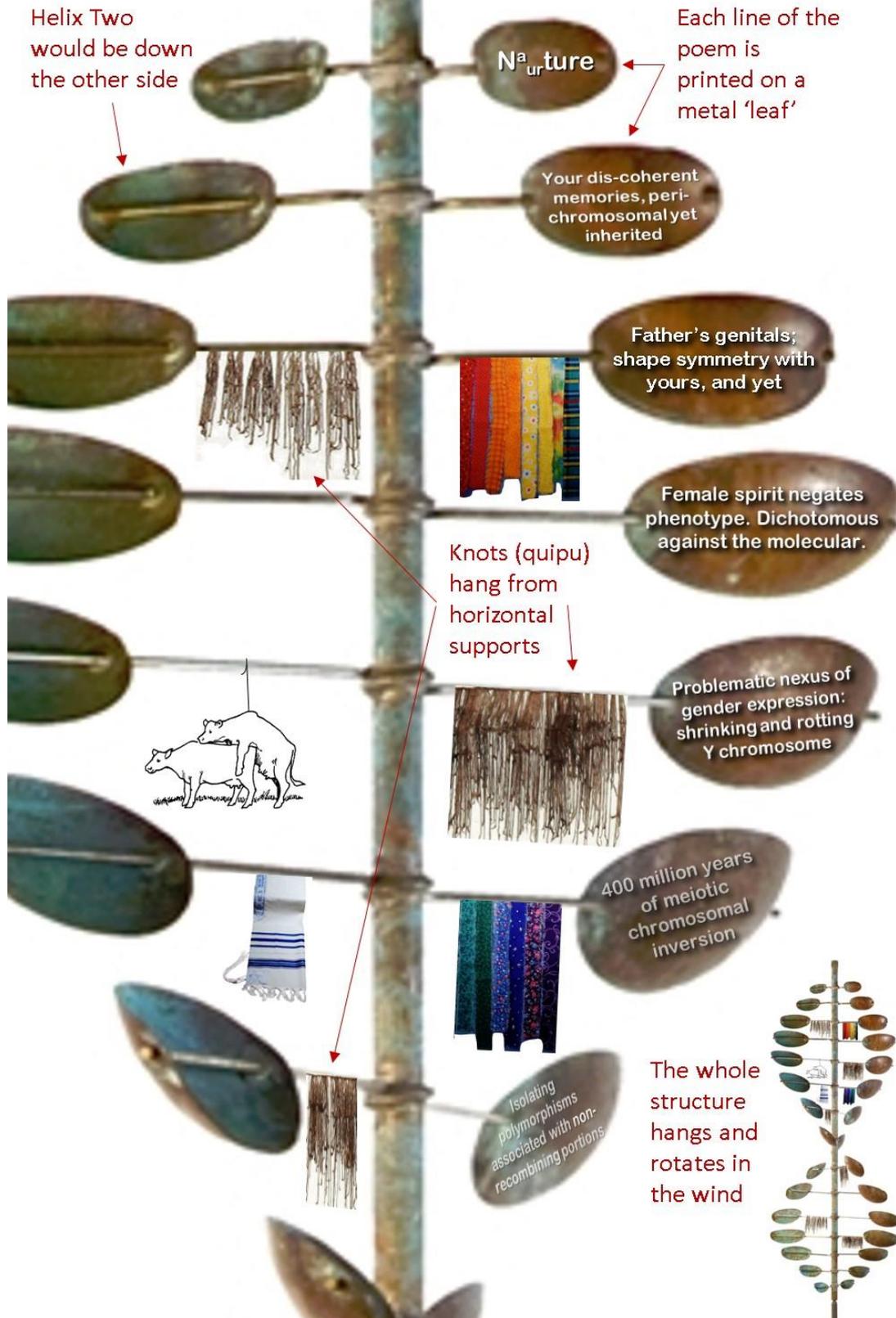
The metal art sculpture, on which I imposed the poem’s words, is sourced from Whitaker, L. *Double Helix Horizontal- small*. Available at: <http://www.artcollectormaine.com/art/double-helix-horizontal-large> (Accessed: 30 August 2015).

The picture of a Jewish Talit prayer shawl by Talitania is sourced from *Jewish Blue/silver Tallit Wool Talit Prayer Shawl*, Gefen Judaica, (2015) Available at: http://ecx.images-amazon.com/images/I/413i%2BP1S-qL._SY445_.jpg (Accessed: 31 August 2015).

The picture of hanging coloured fabrics is sourced from Cates, K. (2010) *Writing Up A Storm: The Journey*. Available at: <http://www.writingupastorm.com/writing-up-a-storm/2010/03/> (Accessed: 31 August 2015).

Appendix B – A rendering of a possible segment of the Physical Poem

Sculpture adapted from Lyman Whitaker



Appendix C – Excerpt from Writing Project Proposal Plan

Submitted as a University Assignment for Research and Writing Skills 1

(Davids, 2015)

Below are the key themes I planned to develop in this work:

1. The transgender journey.

Newly available medical tools have facilitated an adjustment of physical appearance to the extent that an individual can now change physical gender by choice. This raises massive new social, emotional, interpersonal, ethical and spiritual issues, impacts and ramifications. My main characters are... taking this journey.

2. The body.

Body Dysmorphic Disorder (BDD) is not just gender related. We do not see ourselves as others see us, nor do we necessarily internalise empirical information about ourselves, rather we have our own ‘interpretation’ of our bodies. Although some eating disorders and BDD, etc. have always been extant in the population, I focus creatively on the specialised case of body/mind gender conflict in an attempt to add to the discourse on this important issue, which first became a literary topic in the late 18th century.”

3. Being different / unconditional love.

All properly functioning humans value love. Those who are ‘different,’ have occasionally struggled to find love, and... to learn to love themselves – considering social expectations of conformance. Unconditional love from families and close friends is the kind usually needed by transgender men and women. Others, who were in their lives pre-journey, should ideally stay supportive through the journey. I... show the benefit of unconditional love, and the destructive nature of its absence.

4. Class and gender.

I will explore the metaphor of social class for the expectations of the parents of their children, as related to gender stereotypes. Think of Billy Elliot (Hall, 2000), where a working class boy is expected to follow his father into the mines, but instead - in this exceptional case - successfully breaks away from the gender stereotype to dance ballet. My characters have similar challenges, and I will attempt to have them voice these.

5. Religion and gender transition

In the second half of the poem, I will address the conflict between traditional Judeo-Christian ethics and gender transition, focusing on the fundamental belief that 'God does not make mistakes.' Through my character's voice, I will confront this important barrier to the free expression of sex and gender.

6. Writing and literature as an emotional outlet.

In (the first part) of the poem, the main character, (Chloe), will find solace and empowerment through reading and writing. My poem will accentuate the power of words to aid or subvert transgender success. There is a long tradition of writing for emotional release; those undertaking gender transformations also need tools to achieve peace and serenity during the turmoil of change.

Appendix D – Conversation Notes: Psychiatrist Dr H. Offman, MD FRCPC

Scans of notes taken from my meeting with Dr Offman on 26th July 2015 at 14 Ward Avenue, RR2, Orillia, ON. Canada L3V 6H2 (Bass Lake)

BASS LAKE, 26 JULY 2015 page 1 of 4
 CONVERSATION NOTES
 DR HILARY OFFMAN,
 PSYCHIATRIST
 AUTHOR OF "THE PRINCESS AND THE PENIS"
 "IT FELT UNUSUAL TO BE EXPLAINING SAM'S ^{PHASE'S} ~~PHASE'S~~ ANONYMOUS TRANSSEXUAL PATIENT AND SUBJECT OF HER APOCALYPTIC ISSUES WITHOUT FIRST BEING TRAINED IN TRANSSEXUAL ISSUES. I WORDED THAT ADVISORS AND COLLEAGUES WHO WERE EITHER SEXUAL SPECIALISTS OR WERE TRANSSEXUAL THEMSELVES, BUT SAM SAID 'HE' TRUSTED ME AND WE HAD MADE SOME GOOD PROGRESS ALREADY, SO I PERSISTED, ALTHOUGH AS A CIS-WOMAN A LOT OF IT WAS NEW TO ME.
 ALSO MY HUSBAND IS A TEACHER, AND HE HAS HAD TRANSSEXUAL PUPILS SO ALTHOUGH I DIDN'T DISCUSS SAM'S PARTICULAR CASE, WE DID DISCUSS ISSUES COMMON TO TRANSSEXUAL

page 2 of 4
 BETWEEN US AT HOME
 "AS SAM WAS SURE SHE ^{WAS NOT} MALE AT THE TIME SHE WANTED TO UNDERGO FTM (FEMALE TO MALE TRANSITION) SAM WAS IN A RELATIONSHIP WITH A MALE AND THEY DECIDED SHE WOULD HAVE A BABY TOGETHER.
 THIS WAS AFTER SURGERY FOR FEMALE TO MALE WARSO SURGERY AND SAM HAD BEEN TAKING TESTOSTERONE. SAM STOPPED THE HORMONES FOR A FEW MONTHS GOT 'TRADITIONALLY' PREGNANT, AND GAVE BIRTH TO A HEALTHY BABY SHE THEN WENT ON TO BREASTFEED AS MUCH AS WAS POSSIBLE WITH HER MALE BREASTS. - AFTER THE BABY STOPPED BREAST FEEDING, SAM WENT BACK ON TESTOSTERONE AND COMPLETED THE FTM TRANSITION.
 NOW AN OUTSPORT AND WELL-LIVED

page 3 of 4
 ADVOCATE FOR TRANSSEXUAL + SORT OF AN 'ACTIVIST' WITH A GOOD JOB AND A STABLE RELATIONSHIP. SAME LIVES AS A MAN (TRANS-MAN) (SAM IS A BRITISHMAN)
 "AS I LOOKED AT THE ROOT CAUSES OF SAM'S PROBLEMS IN LIFE, SOME OF IT SEEMED TO STEM FROM SAM'S MOTHER WHO HAD PSYCHOLOGICAL PROBLEMS, INCLUDING SOME INABILITY TO CREDIT OR PUNISH BOTH IDENTICAL TWINS" (SAM WAS AN IDENTICAL TWIN - HIS SISTER DID NOT CHANGE GENDER)
 "PERHAPS IF THERE WAS EQUALITY OF TREATMENT SAM WOULDN'T HAVE NEEDED TO BE DIFFERENT FROM HIS/HER TWIN.
 BY THE WAY, BOTH TWINS WERE BEAUTIFUL, INTELLIGENT GIRLS AND SAM'S TWIN Grew UP INTO A BEAUTIFUL WOMAN

page 4 of 4
 I'M PLEASED TO HEAR THAT YOU (STEPHEN) ARE DOING THIS FOR YOUR MASTERS. AND IT IS INTERESTING THAT YOU ARE CIS-GENDERED TOO. I GIVE YOU PERMISSION TO USE (CITE) MY PAPER - IT'S NICE TO KNOW SOMEBODY READ IT AND FOUND IT USEFUL. THANKS FOR YOUR QUESTIONS AND FOR COMING OVER TO TELL ME ABOUT YOUR WORK AND HOW I CAN HELP.
 (ASSORTED NICETIES EXCHANGED)
 QUOTE TO USE: STORIES LIKE YOURS AND THAT OF SAM ARE DIFFICULT AND FASCINATING BECAUSE THEY EXPOSE NON-STEREOTYPICAL ASPECTS OF HUMAN NATURE. GOOD LUCK STEPHEN

Appendix E – Conversation Notes: Robyn Percival

Scans of notes from my meeting with Robyn Percival on 1st December 2014 after the LGBT+ Meeting, University of Surrey, Guildford, Surrey, GU2 7XH

MEETING NOTES: 1st DEC. 2014
ROBYN PERCIVAL

- It's about the way people see you.
- > PHYSICAL DYSPHORIA.
- MORE THAN SOCIAL DYSPHORIA
- WAS HAPPY TO LIVE FOR A LONG TIME IN "STEALTH MODE" IN PART
- BECAUSE NO WORKPLACE LEGAL PROTECTION FOR GENDER DISCRIMINATION.
- NOW FEELS SOMEWHAT OSTRACIZED SOCIALLY.
- WANTS TO GO FULL TIME LIVING AS THE ROLE
- WISH - TO TRANSITION FULL TIME
- EATING DISORDERS ALSO COMMON AMONGST TRANS GENDERS.
- THE HORMONES FOR GENDER TRANSITION HAVE SIDE EFFECTS AND THE INFORMED CONSENT MODEL IS

2

IMPORTANT.

- ROBYN KNOWS THE SIDE EFFECTS NOW
- THERE ARE SOME USEFUL BOOKS, ETC. THAT A TRANS. SHOULD READ:

1. NEVADA BY IMOGEN BINNIE (ROBYN HASN'T READ IT)
2. NATALIE REED'S BLOG.
3. WHIPPING GIRL - JULIE SERANO
4. "EXCLUDED" (IT'S A BOOK)

ROBYN PLAYS ROLLER DERBY AND HAS TROUBLE GETTING ON THE GIRLS TEAM.

SHORTLY AFTER TAKING HORMONES ROBYN'S STRENGTH REDUCED BUT SHAPE STARTED TO LOOK MORE FEMALE.

EVERYONE ALWAYS WANTS TO KNOW ABOUT WHAT ROBYN NOW HAS

3

"DOWN THERE"

ROBYN IS WILLING TO EXPLAIN WHAT SEX ORGANS SHE HAS IF SOMEONE WANTS TO ASK HER PRIVATELY

- TRANS ARE CONFUSED WITH GAY - BUT IT IS NOT ABOUT SEX PREFERENCE FOR TRANS.
- REALLY TRANS GENDER SHOULD NOT BE IN LGBT BUT MANY OF THE SAME SOCIAL ISSUES ARE FACES BY BOTH SO IT'S OKAY FOR NOW
- LANGUAGE OF THE TRANS COMMUNITY IS IMPORTANT TO THEM VERY.
- DON'T SAY "TRANSNY-MATED" WORD IMPLIES TRANSSEXITE (COMPLETELY DIFFERENT THAN TRANSGENDER.)
- DON'T USE TRANSSEXUAL EITHER

4

AS IT IS OLD OR WORD THAT DRAMS TO MISREPRESENTATION TO THE "SEX" ASPECT. IT'S NOT ABOUT SEX.

ROBYN IS RARE IN WILLINGNESS TO DISCUSS OWN SITUATION. BUT ROBYN TOOK ON ROLE AT SURREY LGBT+ OF TRANSGENDER SPONSOR AND SO MUST TALK OPENLY TO HELP SELF & OTHERS.

- ROBYN IS WILLING TO HELP "BROODER" IF HE WANTS TO TALK TO ROBYN ABOUT TRANSITION MTF.
- OR IF I HAVE ANY MORE QUESTIONS.
- I CAN USE HER PRESENTATION, SHE'LL SEND IT TO ME OR POST ON FACEBOOK PAGE.

Adapt