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Maneuvering Past Meaning: Queering Language through Trans-Poetics

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**MANEUVERING PAST MEANING: QUEERING LANGUAGE THROUGH TRANS-
POETICS**

A thesis submitted to
the Graduate College of
Marshall University
In partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the degree of
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In
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by

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APPROVAL OF THESIS

We, the faculty supervising the work of Brooke Ingram, affirm that the thesis, *Maneuvering Past Meaning: Queering Language through Trans-Poetics*, meets the high academic standards for original scholarship and creative work established by the Master of Arts in English Program and the College of Liberal Arts. This work also conforms to the editorial standards of our discipline and the Graduate College of Marshall University. With our signatures, we approve the manuscript for publication.



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ABSTRACT

Queer studies today has seen a rise in analysis of the trans subject. While previous research has focused on the queer body and on the term queer, my interest in trans studies is in the form and function of language. That focus on the structures of language is what underlies this thesis. My claim is that queering language is visible in the authors I cover in the form of what I call trans-poetics. I focus on kerri edwards' *succubus in my pocket* and Moss Angel's *Sea-Witch Volume 1*. In edwards, I locate a displaced "I" and thus a displaced subjectivity that actually escapes the process of identity construction. For Angel, I consider her work as the disruption of the disturbance of meaning as we understand it in relationship to the binary system of categorization. Drawing on Maurice Blanchot's thought of the Outside, I make the point that trans-poetics is not just poststructuralist in its moves and configurations, it is queer; it functions as a sign of that which is neither one nor the other. In sum, through trans-poetics I offer a new perspective on linguistic strategies, a meddling in normative identities, and thus an enhanced perspective on the trans experience.

CHAPTER 1 (THEORETICAL INTRODUCTION)

OUTSIDE LANGUAGE: LOCATING A QUEER LINGUISTIC SYSTEM

I am interested in anything about revolt, disorder, chaos— especially activity that seems to have no meaning. It seems to me to be the road towards freedom— rather than starting inside, I start outside and reach the mental through the physical. – Jim Morrison

In recent years, the visibility, integration, and acceptance of a transgender identity has been on the rise. However, while progressive steps forward are being taken, transgender individuals remain a sub-culture. Because of this reality, the trans-community is compelled out of rejection from mainstream society to frame a counter-universe. It is through this counter-universe that these marginalized peoples are able to form the bonds and connections necessary to have better quality of life. This counter-universe, its community, and networking appears to take place mostly online through social media sites, particularly on Twitter and Tumblr. While a great majority of work continues to be circulated online, recently many transgender artists are publishing their work in print format through small presses and holding events in their neighborhoods or asking local bookstores to sell and market their work to audiences that may be unacquainted with the online scene.

My interest in this community concerns itself with the writing that is published and circulated both within the transgender counter-universe and in the mainstream world of academia. Not surprisingly, mainstream academia fails to canonize the works of transgender authors, contributing to their low visibility that I aim to shed light on. In my research of the transgender community and the literature it is producing, two authors stand out: kari edwards and Moss Angel.

The poetics of kari edwards are echoed in the work of her contemporary, Moss Angel, who has published various collections under differing names, including Sara June Woods and

Girdirt Angel Fog. Both authors produce powerfully disruptive prose that exists in a place of intangibility that not only reaches beyond current understandings of gender but also literary genre. My research of these two transgender authors, their lives, and published works investigates what Edwards deemed as a “Trans Genre” (Edwards, *succubus in my pocket* xiii) of writing and Rob Halpern, a close friend of Edwards, calls “trans-poetics” (Edwards, *succubus in my pocket* xii) in an attempt to analyze what is meant by those terms and what characteristics they display.

Loosely defined by Julian Brolaski in his book *No Gender: Reflections on the Life and Work of Kari Edwards*, trans-poetics is a form of “avant-garde writing following a mandate of reclaiming the very words we speak and write – writing our selves, our other(ed) bodies, into a foundational post-gender post-genre state” (Brolaski 1). Before discussing trans-poetics, it is important to briefly consider the term avant-garde, its various definitions and functions, so as to better contextualize trans-poetics’ foundational definition. The term “avant-garde” is traditionally understood to characterize an artistic style that challenges the status quo, often promoting social reform by opposing the mainstream media and cultural norms produced within Capitalistic society. In the first recorded use of the term, Saint Simonian Olinde Rodrigues, in his 1825 essay, “The Artist, the Scientist and the Industrialist” asks artists to “serve as the people’s avant-garde,” insisting that “the power of the arts is indeed the most immediate and fastest way to social, political and economic reform” (Calinescu 278). Ironically, avant-garde, in its modern application, is frequently misapplied to commercialized music, cinema, and writing as a marketing tool to increase the profit margins of work that does not advocate for social change, but rather promotes work that reinforces cultural norms.

Brolaski's labeling of trans-poetics as a form of "avant-garde writing" should not be understood as ironic, though. His use of the term avant-garde to describe trans-poetics is more traditional, positing that trans-poetics offers a linguistic and structural challenge to the governing social order. Avant-garde has since been used to describe the writing of kari edwards on numerous occasions due to her work's nontraditional aesthetic innovation. Her work offers readers a critique of the relationship between the producers and consumers of art and culture through experimentation with the structure and function of language's normative meaning. Moreover, the same can be said when speaking of the work produced by Moss Angel, whose texts repeatedly call into question the validity and worth of singular, "true" definitions of the self and the world we use to make sense of the human condition. What edwards, Angel, and trans-poetics are doing, as I noted earlier, is not just reaching beyond our current understandings of gender but also literary genre, where both gender and genre exist in "post-" state.

Other queer scholars, like Trace Peterson – transgender poet, critic, and editor of *EOAGH: A Journal of the Arts* – propose that the main characteristic defining trans-poetics is its queering of language. According to Peterson, to queer language, writing must "resist categorization, clarifications, and excuses" and should exist "hovering somewhere in the density-populated nexus between theory and practice" (Peterson, "Introduction"). While Peterson's interpretation of what writing looks like when its language is queered is a useful foundational definition, I claim that there is much more work to be done and plan to further develop this highly useful starting point, specifically through working with an important postmodern thinker, Maurice Blanchot, and his thought of the Outside as well as a leading voice in queer theory, Diana Fuss, and her figure of the inside/outside. Both thinkers, I contend, help us to see more thoroughly how moves common to trans-poetics—problematizations of insides and outside, for

example, and location of non-binary spaces—are able to constitute, in effect, a queering of language.

With that brief introduction in mind, I want to begin my investigation of trans-poetics and the queering of language by inserting myself into a conversation Peterson began in 2005, one that interrogates “the ways in which language, not just authors, could be queer” (Peterson, “Introduction”). Peterson’s investigation of queered language may have begun in 2005, but her analyses build from the work produced by foundational queer theorists of the late 1980s and 1990s, like Judith Butler, Judith Halberstam, and Gloria Anzaldua. While these theorists are not central to my investigation of the ways in which one can begin to queer the linguistic system, their individual research and discussion of the queer subject and queer language enables and provides a starting point in which I can further explore (and properly discuss) the manner in which, through queered language and trans-poetics, one can effectively begin to queer the linguistic system. Butler, for instance, has considered the term queer and what she calls the “performative force of the term” (Butler 223). She continues saying that the term queer “has been used as a paralyzing slur,” and as such, “produced the [term’s] normalization” (Butler 223). Additionally, Butler considers the utterance “queer” as a rhetorical act. That word, she contends, has a performative power – speaking the word, calling a subject “queer,” produces queer— it “brings [the queer] into being” (Butler 225). Halberstam and Anzaldua do not just consider the term queer but provide other useful analyses that problematize the act of naming, particularly through the use of “hybridity” to “begin destabilizing both the social hierarchies governing society and also research frameworks guiding critical inquiries” (Fotopoulou 25)— such is the case with both Peterson’s investigation of queered language, separate from the body, and my

own that questions what stylistic moves and language structure/meaning allows one to queer the linguistic system.

The foundational queer theorists mentioned above, those whose research into the term queer and performance/act of queering, set the stage for further inquiries that discuss how to determine difference, the fluidity of identities, as well as the social spaces and hierarchies governing society as a whole. With those theorists' research in mind, I would like to turn back to Peterson's conversation that questions what it means to queer language. Calling on a few poet-friends, one being Edwards herself, her goal was to solicit work from poets whose work they felt involved the queering of language and asked contributors to include an editorial statement that explained their choices and how they interpreted "queering language." What came from this inquiry was "many diverse takes on what 'queering language' might suggest and what kind of work it evokes as well as what kind of poetics it might imply" (Peterson, "Introduction"). My goal in this investigation is to offer another diverse perspective on what queering language suggests, looks like, and implies, specifically examining how queered language's trans-poetics allows for the queering of the linguistic system as a whole. Again, while Peterson makes a useful point, no one so far has applied this definition to theoretical configurations, but I hope to do just that. It should be noted that my use of the phrase "theoretical configurations" refers to Blanchot's thought of the Outside, and should be understood in the context of this investigation as the arrangement of parts (pronouns, nouns, adjectives, punctuation marks, and all other stylistic and grammatical choices) that work together (by way of queering language through the form of trans-poetics) to give shape to a text whose linguistic meaning disturbs the traditional, Western interpretations of language definitions and linear structure.

Edwards' first person singular "I" invites explorations of the connections between problematized subjectivities and a language against heteronormativity. The "I" in her work, one that is "divided by multiple entry points and explosive content wrapped in rambling overlays" (Brolaski 174), could be anyone or everyone but ultimately it is neither – an androgynous, faceless "I" if you will. Effectively, what Edwards' use of the "I" does is attempt to reject the idea of a coherent speaker – a move that implies a "corresponding rejection of identity" (Brolaski 47). The move to reject not only the speaker, but also identity is an important move I would like to highlight throughout the following chapters. This linguistic choice, I argue, is one of the central traits inherent to trans-poetics and is a form with which one could begin "queering language." The first person singular "I" that appears in Edwards' *succubus in my pocket* is one full of irony that critiques its standard academic usage. Along with the androgynous, faceless "I," a corresponding trait displayed in trans-poetics is the disruption of signification's habituated meanings, or better put as a disturbance of meaning as we understand it in relation to a binary system of categorization. The goal of this disruption is in the interest of the body's significance and "all the transitional intensities that interrupt and insinuate themselves in the fault between regulated meanings and gridlocked positions" (Brolaski 173), not just the "I."

Rob Halpern has written insightfully on Edwards and her collections, particularly her disturbance of normative language structure and form. In his chapter, "Reading the Interval, Reading Remains," in Brolaski's book, Halpern describes Edwards' use of trans-poetics as the source for activating "the space between sensation and expression, where movement rescues the body from its own image" and is the place where "language drives a wedge between thinking and naming" (Brolaski 173). For Edwards' writing, bodies and affects are "engendered and enraged, ungendered and enjoyed" (Brolaski 173) and are administered, formulated, and tallied

by an unidentifiable “I” that is not reducible to any particular person or place. While Halpern has not addressed Angel’s work, much of what he says is applicable to Angel due to her disruption of established meaning, disturbance of narrative structure, and the “multiple entry points” (Brolaski 174) available in both her and Edwards’ collections. These similarities, I feel, qualify her writing as one that is also employing the use of trans-poetics to queer language.

While both authors actively play with language and structure, Edwards’ collection, *succubus in my pocket*, is built on the idea of transcending the signifiers of established meaning to provide work that is “a troubling of the habitual life story at the edge of the recognizable” (Edwards xi). On the other hand, Angel’s collection, *Sea-Witch Vol. 1*, attempts to revive the system’s names, their signs and signifiers, to create a “sort of novel” (Angel 89) that renames, or more accurately, rebuilds a world of meaning through a mythological tale of origin. To analyze their work, and to generate an understanding, or multiple understandings, of what I believe constitutes the queering of language through the use of trans-poetics, I will, as noted earlier, use the work of Diana Fuss and her figure inside/outside, as well as Maurice Blanchot’s thought of the Outside; both are useful in my claim that the work being produced by Edwards and Angel is not just poststructuralist, it’s queer; it is through Edwards and Angel’s works’ queered language that one can begin to queer the linguistic system, specifically, its traditional structure and meaning.

My Fundamental Claim: A Tri-Fold Theoretical Intersection

It is necessary, at this point, to explain the complicated theoretical intersection that allows me to make the above claim— that Edwards’ and Angel’s use of language is not just poststructuralist, it is queer. In brief, perceiving the queering of language functioning in their collective works demands the interweaving of three theoretical methodologies: (1) queer as a

verb, as a process of disruption and distortion in binary thinking; (2) trans subjectivity, which is founded upon a similar disruption of binary positioning; (3) linguistic theorizations of “the Outside,” specifically both the work of Maurice Blanchot and his efforts to write, through what he calls the Outside, a sign of that which is entirely other and Diana Fuss, who problematizes inside/outside as she articulates queer subjectivity. I want to show that pulling the three strains of thought together opens innovative perspectives on a linguistic strategy—specifically a queering of language—that is visible through Edwards’ and Angel’s trans-poetic oeuvre.

It is also important to note my application of queer theory to Blanchot’s thought of the Outside, since I posit that the Outside configuration is, in fact, queer. Even from its earliest inception, queer theory has been perceived as an act which, in an appropriation of Michael Warner’s words, “troubles the normal” (Warner 10). Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, in what is arguably the most comprehensive definition of this idea of queer and queering, famously states that “queer is a continuing moment, movement, motive— recurrent, eddying, troublant” (Sedgwick xii). Notable here is that Sedgwick refuses to frame queer as a stable subject. Queer is an act—it is a verb; it is an action. Built solely on refusing stability, queer is all about challenging, and crossing normative identifications (homo or hetero). As Sedgwick continues, calling queer “the open mesh of possibilities, gaps, overlaps, dissonances and resonances, lapses and excesses of meaning when the constituent elements of any one’s gender, of any one’s sexuality are not made (or can not be made) to signify monolithically,” she makes a highly useful point that queer, in her foundational approach to shaping it, refuses stable (i.e. “monolithic”) certainty, which is crucial in my investigation of what form(s) queering language may take (12). In other words, queer challenges all acts of stable signification, just as Blanchot’s Outside (as I will discuss at length) challenges all logical linguistic structures.

Implicit in Sedgwick's determination to locate an "excess of meaning" in the act of queering is one seminal concept from contemporary deconstructive theory, specifically what Jacques Derrida calls the "trace." Although Derrida will not be a leading figure in my study, spotting how his trace operates will be useful as I extend such "excesses of meaning" to transpoetics and the queering of language. What his idea of trace proposes is that what appears to be present is never, singularly, a full presence. Instead, any act of signification contains a "trace" of what it is not. Derrida explains: "No element can function as a sign without reference to another element which itself is not simply present. [...] Each [linguistic] element being constituted on the basis of the trace within it of the other elements of the chain or system" (*Positions* 26). The result is that Derrida's trace does not aim to destroy or eliminate categories of naming, but rather to muddle any supposedly stable act of signification. This complication is able to expose and distort such category's inherent instability as a means to question their widely perceived naturalness and division. This trace helps to understand theoretical moves I will discuss throughout this essay, specifically Blanchot's *Outside*, which can be described as a space that is "neither/nor," or what Gerald Bruns, in his mention of Blanchot, terms "a third kind" (Bruns, *Maurice Blanchot: The Refusal of Philosophy* 13). Derrida's trace also helps with understanding Fuss's problematized distinction between homo and hetero subjectivities, mainly her idea that the homo, in relation to the hetero, is an "indispensable interior exclusion" (Fuss 2). In all three, what develops is the distortion of stable signifiers. This act of distorting enables theorists, like myself (as I engage with Blanchot and Fuss) to open up a new space outside the dominant regime's governing order, a space for modern categorizations of naming to manifest while also allowing for a meddling in normative language standards. With Derrida's trace in mind, then, let us turn to considerations of Blanchot's *Outside*.

Linguistic Non-Knowing: Connecting Blanchot's Outside With the Act Of Queering

Because of Blanchot's centrality to this emerging idea of the queering of language, a close look at his work—specifically his idea of the Outside—is useful. A careful look at his work with the thought of Outside demonstrates how the problematization of binary positioning looks when placed in the realm of language. In one of his most eminent constructions of this Outside, Blanchot, in an essay on twelfth-century mystic Meister Eckhart, continually refers to the Outside as a place of “non-knowledge” (Hart 33). In this particular essay, Blanchot rhetorically sets up the non-binary arrangement of the Outside. As a rhetorical composition, “non-knowledge,” calls up the positivity “knowledge” and, by doing so, nullifies that positivity. To be more precise, Blanchot's chosen rhetorical structure does not simply overturn the positivity knowledge to call upon its opposite: ignorance. Rather, he chooses to attach to the positive signifier “knowledge” its negating term: the “non” (Sullivan 6).

It is important to note that Blanchot's conceptualization of the Outside is not a place meant to grasp language's foundations or justify its signifiers— it is an idea that reaches beyond binary divisions. The function of the Outside, drawing on Foucault's essay which interprets Blanchot's conceptualization, is a site that attempts to regain the space, this space being a void, an emptiness, rather than an identifiable place where language unfolds. Given that the Outside is an almost unimaginable concept in a culture that is fixated on establishing and enforcing meaning, to even come close to this void, to experience the Outside, Blanchot insists, Foucault believes, that one must ““step outside of oneself” in order to find oneself” (Foucault, *Maurice Blanchot: The Thought from Outside* 16). To “step outside of oneself,” one must attempt to defamiliarize oneself with the standard, binary understanding of language and what that language represents.

Thus, those submitting themselves to the void, “stepping outside” of themselves as Blanchot phrases it, must recognize that this is to take a step into a space beyond what is understood to constitute, to define, one’s self and environment. To submit is to step into a (not)space that neutralizes all histories and language which produce the “certainty” of meaning often sought. The Outside exiles and exempts, for those who enter into it, the world’s demand for meaning. Given that the Outside is a space void of any certain meaning, it is a space that lends itself to being filled with everything it is not.

What Blanchot is after here is an other, a neutrality, a “neuter”— *not* a binary. His formation of the Outside aims to express a neutral formation that cannot be contained by the binary processes of rational thought. The Outside, then, is some other formation that distorts the purposeful binary divisions. Further describing this Outside, Blanchot says that it is “neither a modality nor a moment of universal existence, nor a super existence, nor a god or a non-god, but rather the unknown in its infinite distance” (Blanchot, *The Infinite Conversation*, 77). In effect, this outside is uncontainable; it is a neither-ness. Like what he describes, in *The Step Not Beyond*, as “neither the one nor the other,” the Outside is *marked not by what it is, but rather by what it is not.*” (Blanchot 76, italics added). To that end, Blanchot’s conceptional formation of the Outside wants to effect a relationship not of opposition, and certainly not of exteriority, rather, the Outside wants to escape rational, binary-based thought. The Outside is an undefinable space— “neither the one nor the other” (76).

Effectively, what I am arguing here is that the Outside’s lack of meaning is its meaning. In *The Space of Literature*, particularly in his chapter, “The Outside, the Night,” Blanchot elaborates on this abstraction, claiming that in the Outside, “language completes and fulfills itself in the silent profundity which vouches for it as its meaning” (Blanchot, *The Space of Literature*

163)— signifying that the Outside’s lack of meaning *is* its meaning, if meaning, in this sense, is understood as a product of binary divisions. An engagement with the Outside, then, effectively reverses, or to be more precise, avoids, the tyrannical attempts at interiorizing the world. Blanchot further traces this Outside as he conjoins, once again, two more supposed opposites. Writing about what he calls the “first night,” he makes the claim that “day makes night” (Blanchot, *The Space of Literature* 167). Once more, Blanchot is problematizing logical, binary, structures in language. When one polarity – “day” – literally generates its opposing concept (when it “makes night”), the result is a place “outside” linguistic stability. Just like the non-knowledge that problematized logical oppositions in language, Blanchot is seeking to exceed rational thought.

Blanchot’s purpose in such challenges to language’s logical structure is to locate an “other” way of thinking, a linguistic formulation not dependent on inherited, Western, binary structures of logic, and thus, ultimately, to establish a new, potentially revolutionary way of viewing the world. While, so far, no one has called Blanchot’s non-binary Outside “queer” in its structure, there is certainly room to do so; in fact, that is the claim that will be central to my study. My argument is that there is a deep and consistent structural connection between Blanchot’s Outside and Diana Fuss’ seminal articulation of the queer subject, what she calls an “indispensable interior exclusion” (Fuss 2). Fuss’ formation follows what should, by now, be a recognizable pattern: she conjoins two opposites, with the resulting effect of locating a conceptualization (or subject, in her case) outside of binary thought. Fuss is dealing with the hetero/homo binary, and her point is that the homo is both inside and outside its opposing signification.

What Fuss is doing is building on Sedgwick's argument for queer's disruptive potential noted in earlier sections. What she does, however, is take the foundational idea that "queer" troubles stable signification and uses that idea to think about a similarly unstable queer subjectivity. As stated in her book, *Inside / Out: Lesbian Theories, Gay Theories*, Fuss believes that what exists is a "philosophical opposition between 'heterosexual' and 'homosexual'" and that this opposition is an "indispensable interior-exclusion" (Fuss 2) which I claim is the consummating statement of what best defines queer subjectivity. Using the idea that the act of queering is all about movement and the refusal of monolithic signification, Fuss argues that the queer subject—the real queer individual living in a real world—is—*at one and the same time*—both produced by and excluded from normative, heterosexual, models of sexuality (Fuss 3).

As stated above, there is an important connection between Blanchot's thinking of the Outside—specifically of a space marked by what it is not—and Fuss's "indispensable interior exclusion" (Fuss 2). In discussing the concept, Fuss states: "the homo in relation to the hetero, much like the feminine in relation to the masculine, operates as an indispensable interior exclusion, an outside which is inside interiority, making the articulation of the latter possible" (Fuss 3). At work in Fuss' statement is the very same thing we see in Blanchot: it is the non-binary process, she contends, that marks queer subjectivity. When the queer is an "outside which is inside [...] interiority," (Fuss 3) we have reached a space that, like Blanchot's attention to an uncontained Outside, demands we think beyond binary distinctions.

When we have reached a space beyond binary divisions, when the queer is neither inside nor outside but exists in some other, neutral space, we have located a challenge to logical, inherited, Western metaphysical systems. When such systems are challenged, then by extension also challenged are the binary divisions present in all aspects of society's meaning-making, all

the “meaning” that heteronormative society applies to things and people. That challenge to logical systems, as well as the binary thinking that underlies them, is at the heart of queered language I spot (and will discuss throughout this thesis) in trans-poetics.

What should come of these intense challenges to binary divisions is the problematizing of limits, a thought clearly addressed by both Blanchot and Fuss. Thus, in order to understand the important connections between these two theorists, we need to see how (and why) they challenge limits. Challenges to limits happen, most clearly, when Blanchot writes as “the first night,” and how it is not conceivable without its relation to, and opposite, the day. Blanchot feels that the day, or the inside, will “greet night as the edge of what is not to be ventured upon” and that because of day’s choice to do this, night, then, “is accepted and acknowledged, but only as a limit and as the necessity of that limit” (Blanchot, *The Space of Literature* 167). Blanchot’s statement echoes Fuss’ discussion of how to transgress a border: Fuss believes the divisions themselves must be present to have a border to transgress in the first place. She, too, along with Blanchot, considers border positions, particularly the location homosexuality occupies, a location where it “is neither completely outside the bounds of sexual difference nor wholly inside it either” (Fuss 6). In effect, then, this notion of the “first night” Blanchot introduces will further postulate the connection I find between the two theorists.

While the two share the idea of challenging limits, it is vital to understand that the two theorists find differing results when problematizing borders. While Fuss’ figure inside/outside can only be “worked on and worked over” as a means to “expose [the border’s] critical operation and interior machinery” (Fuss 1), it is Blanchot’s formation of the Outside that is able to do more than just expose those borders and binaries operations. Blanchot’s Outside, its form and space, do not “belong to a category of habitual acts” as the space and figure of the Outside “is not even

an inhabitable place” (Blanchot, *The Space of Literature* 165). It is my claim that through “surrendering to [Blanchot’s] Outside” (Foucault, *Maurice Blanchot: The Thought from Outside* 16) that one is able to reach a place of queering language through trans-poetics, effectively thinking of the Outside, and thus allowing for one to not be the essential other to a binary division. Although, I must note, the Outside, the figure itself, is a place entirely other, as it is *always already* other, due to its separation from any perceived essentiality in meaning-making. Thus while Fuss is essential to my argument due to her foundational approach of problematizing the binary division of hetero/homo, my larger argument is that the use of Blanchot’s Outside will allow me to reach beyond Fuss’ figure. Because her figure ultimately does not offer a resolution, leaving us in an endless oscillation, a turn to Blanchot allows me to engage more thoroughly with queer subjectivity.

Such a way of thinking about limits and a place Outside of them, helps immensely in understanding my points about how one can begin to queer language. Unlike the need for established borders to transgress such borders in Fuss’ figure inside/outside – an act and formation that is stuck in a never-ending loop – to transgress, or pass into the Outside, Blanchot states that “there is no exact moment when one passes from the outside to the Outside” because “there is no limit at which to stop and come back in the other direction” (Blanchot, *The Space of Literature* 169). This Outside, when applied to queered writing, allows it a not-space to “belong not at all to the past but entirely to the future” and become something that “ceases to be in order to become solely [that which] will be” (Blanchot, *The Space of Literature* 165). What is meant by his claim that in the Outside, one entering into this void is able to “become solely he who will be,” (Blanchot, *The Space of Literature* 165) for me, is an other formation that, once immersed

within, strips the subject of its histories and the linguistic strategies assigning the labels and meanings that created the binary divisions the subject aims to escape.

The limitless potential of Blanchot's Outside is what makes it the most crucial formation in my analysis of queering language through the form of trans-poetics. It is in this not-space of the Outside where one can "exist outside of present limits and possibilities" (Blanchot, *The Space of Literature* 165) and where "everything [that] has disappeared appears" (Blanchot, *The Space of Literature* 163). While that statement is dense (or eerie as Blanchot phrases it), what this amounts to for one submitting themselves to the Outside, is that in the lack of all established linguistic meaning and knowledge of those meanings, there is the ongoing generation of potential meanings. These generated, infinite meanings are solely created by the one finding oneself in the Outside, not meanings influenced by pre-established knowledge because all meaning and knowledge is void in this space.

While, so far, no one has called Blanchot's Outside "queer," as I have already mentioned, there is certainly room to do so. If, as Sedgwick notes, "queer refuses monolithic certainty" (12) and if as Warner states, "queer troubles the normal" (10) then there is undoubtedly room to call Blanchot's thought of the Outside—which does indeed do what both theorists suggest—"queer." If queer is, as Sedgwick claims, an act, a "troublant" (12) gesture, and if that queer, as Fuss claims, is at one and the same time inside and outside of normative signification, then what we see in Blanchot is the ontologically unstable signification in which the Outside is (again, at one and the same time) both a positivity and the negation of that positivity, which, I claim, is how such queering looks when placed in conversation with linguistic structures and how I plan to investigate Edwards' and Angel's collections in the following chapters.

Why Blanchot's Outside Matters to Queer Theory

I'd like to pause for a moment and consider where queer theory has been and where I think it should go. One voice that has consistently guided queer theory is that of Michel Foucault, specifically his thoughts on the construction of the homosexual. In one of the most quoted passages from the *History of Sexuality 1*, Foucault states that the homosexual, the specification of the individual, can be "defined by the ancient and civil or canonical codes" where "sodomy was a category of forbidden acts; their perpetrator was nothing more than the juridical subject of them." Continuing this passage's thought, he mentions that it wasn't until the nineteenth-century that the "homosexual became a personage, a past, a case history, and a childhood, in addition to being a type of life, a life form, and a morphology, with an indiscreet anatomy and possibly a mysterious physiology" (Foucault, *History of Sexuality Vol. 1* 42-44). For many theorists, this claim has become "gospel," even leading renowned queer theorist, David Halperin, in his book *Saint Foucault: Towards a Gay Hagiography*, to refer to him as, as the title suggests, "a fucking saint" (Halperin 6).

In brief, queer theory has paid relentless attention to the Michel Foucault of the *History of Sexuality 1*. But there is another Foucault out there, one who is often overlooked, and one who is vital to my analysis of language. My analysis in this investigation will utilize this overlooked Foucault of language, specifically his essays on Blanchot's Outside, to not only foreground my tri-fold theoretical configuration, but to provide what I believe is a more conscious analysis of queer language and spaces through an interrogation of linguistic structures and their relation to power, due to Foucault's own interests in such matters.

In the highly quoted thought from Foucault mentioned above, what he did was construct the homosexual subject. While he did not work within an established queer theory framework, he

certainly laid the groundwork for future queer theorists, like Sedgwick and others, to engage in conversations that discussed the constructed nature of sexuality and the role power, culture, and society have in this construction. In fact, Foucault's ideas presented in the *History of Sexuality I* have become integrated with the gestalt of human culture and consciousness. I feel while this more political Foucault is important and valuable to queer theory, it is Foucault's "literature phase" of writing that is the key to allow my linking of Blanchot's thought of the Outside to queer studies. Working with the Foucault of language will provide validity to my interpretations of what queering language can look like, what influences enable linguistic configurations (or literature) to become knowledge, and how that linguistically established knowledge is transformed into an instrument for power and control.

I am not alone in making this claim about the Foucault of language; other scholars have noted this dynamic. For example, Kas Saghafi's claim that Foucault's work has been "sacralized" is an important one. He explains in his article, "The "Passion for the Outside": Foucault, Blanchot, and Exteriority," Foucault's 1960s essays but reserves the focus of his piece to explore Foucault's understanding of language, literature, and exteriority as delineated in his essay "Maurice Blanchot: The Thought from Outside" which I, too, am using in this exploration. Queer theory scholars view his concern with a "poetics of transgression" as a "naïve obsession with an outdated modernist sublime," favoring his work that turned toward "more 'specific' political struggles." (Saghafi 81). To Foucault, though, language and the literature it has produced has historically been "sacralized and accorded a privileged function and status in society" (Saghafi 80). This kind of language and the thought processes constituting it, Foucault believes, are "enclosed within certain codes and structures that have historically constituted and delimited them" and thus, the task, or the responsibility, of language and thought is to "attempt

to reflect outside these structures in which thinking has been historically situated.” To “reflect outside these structures” and to “move towards the realm of exteriority,” (Saghafi 81) I feel, one must begin to think in a new way that actively attempts to move thought outside of the realm of sacralized discourses and disregard any supposed ontological, established knowledge.

It is by way of his rejection of any thought that contains “a pure, interior space that is the repository of all meaning” (Saghafi 82) that he is also able to reject the traditional unities awarded to the author, the book, and subject matter literature details. According to Foucault, “all discourse takes place on a surface level” where the whole of discourse exists in an “exterior network of statements where interiority is always dispersed.” (Saghafi 82) To put it simply, what Foucault is postulating is that there is neither a “true” interior space nor is there a space outside of this “true” interior, denoting that there is no region, no zone above or below the surface of discourse that can reign it or reveal its secrets. This belief clearly echoes Blanchot’s thought of the Outside, where discourse and language exist in an other space, or rather a void, where its lack of meaning, *is* its meaning.

Trans-Subjectivity: Founded In the Spaces of the Not

Because the topic of the following chapters examines trans subjectivity and trans-poetics— specifically how both are shaped through the process of distorting linguistic stability— I want to look, briefly, at how trans subjectivity, just like the act of queering, revolves around the act of troubling binary thinking. T. Benjamin Singer makes a point that demonstrates the connection between the previous problematizations of binary thinking and trans subjectivities. Trans, Singer argues, “confronts us with a vision of potentially infinite specific possibilities for being human” (Singer 5) thus highlighting how trans cannot be contained to one or the other (i.e, binary thinking). Rather, trans is “infinite” in its realm of “possibilities.” Susan Stryker, a

transgender author, professor, and theorist, makes a related point. Stryker, in arguing that the trans body has, and continues to be, read as monstrous, speaks of the fear that is generated by the trans body. And, when Stryker then connects that fear to “the natural order,” she helps to explain the real-world implication of such a place between (or outside of) binary thinking. In trans, Stryker notes, when we “apprehend a transgendered consciousness articulating itself, is to risk a revelation of the constructedness of the natural order” (Singer 5). Stryker makes a good point, that the problem our hetero-hegemonic social order has with transgender embodiments, then, and most likely the reasoning behind dominant society’s refusal to recognize a transsexual body as human, stems from the fear that in recognizing and legitimizing a transgender identity and body, they will lose their sense of self, their identity, the “constructedness” of their order.

All the above authors make the point that it is in dominant society’s understanding of themselves as existing within a binary system of categorization—one in which they are either male or female and cannot stray from their birth-given gender if they are to be considered a “real” human being—that ultimately stimulates a normative, societal fear of the trans body’s ability. That body, they would claim, illuminates the arbitrary nature of gender itself while at the same time bringing into question the validity of all social constructions believed to originate from true, ontological knowledge. In their opinion, one I endorse, the governing body’s belief that alignment with the(ir) established ideals of normativity, that these ideals are the one reigning “Truth,” causes a transgender existence to be viewed as nothing more than a mere dysfunction. Such a point, moreover, returns me to my argument regarding trans poetics and the queering of language: inasmuch as trans- is largely viewed as a threat, queer subjectivity as a whole, I believe, facilitates a series of complex, paradoxical, and ambiguous movements—in the self and in the production of texts.

In thinking of the subjectivity faced by numerous trans individuals, and in regards to my interest in this counter-universe literary community and the lack of visibility stated in the opening of this chapter, it is important to make the distinction that it is not that transgender people have not been around and have not been writing, it is that their histories have been destroyed and not allowed to exist. For instance, in one of my conversations with Angel, she mentioned that in modern generations, many of the community's elders were lost to AIDS. Continuing, she noted that there have been many attempts to erase their history— such as when the Nazis burned Magnus Hirschfield's Institute for Sexual Science. It is because of issues like these that transgender individuals, specifically trans- authors, have been forced to create meaning-making strategies, forms and moves that have emerged from the histories they have been written out of. These strategies I will explore in the following chapters are, again, not just post-structuralist, they are queer.

The strategies I see surfacing due to such discrimination and subjectivity are what I have defined as trans-poetics. This form stems from a place of refusing to use the language that defines transgender individuals as Other. Instead of conforming to normative language (and gender) standards, authors like Edwards and Angel have chosen to forge a new linguistic structure, a form that allows them agency to speak, act, and define normativity from the perspective in which it appears to them – which is entirely other to their own existence and understanding of the world. They have chosen to break language in order to write from their own perspective because language, as we understand it, has historically been curated by those people in positions of power to reinforce and propagate both binary gender and heteronormative sexuality. As previously discussed, it is through interweaving three theoretical methodologies: (1) queer as a verb, as a process of disruption and distortion in binary thinking; (2) trans

subjectivity, which is founded upon a similar disruption of binary positioning; (3) linguistic theorizations of Blanchot's *Outside*, that I am able to provide the content and basic understanding needed for my analysis of Edwards' and Angel's work with trans-poetics and what it means to queer language.

CHAPTER 2

THE OUTSIDE, DISPLACED I-DENTITY, AND POETIC ANARCHY: THE EXPERIENCE OF KARI EDWARDS *SUCCUBUS IN MY POCKET*.

In both her life and writing, kari edwards approached language and the concept of gender in a radical way as a means to combat the oppression of forced identification that she and many others faced in everyday interactions, in their very existence. Much like her life, her work and its genre are often difficult to articulate and asks readers to challenge conceptions of how texts should function formally, linguistically, and thematically. Her texts are challenging due to their infinite attempts to unravel or subvert the systematized understanding of how language does or should function and how that language contributes to the way the world operates. A markedly difficult, but nevertheless essential, characteristic astir in edwards' poetics is the rejection of closure within the narrative(s)—a move, which, in turn, requires that the reader actively participates in her construction of meaning, while at the same time asks them to interrogate those processes of construction. Although her texts may be a grueling read for some, with their undefinability and contestation of meaning, what she has done and what her work continues to do, as I mentioned in my introductory chapter, is not just reach beyond our current understandings of gender but also linguistic structure and literary genre.

Given the subversive nature of her works it is to be expected, then, that edwards was a trailblazer in the experimental literary community in the early 2000s. The community she immersed herself within and the work they produced is often referred to as constituting the New Narrative movement, but more specifically edwards was, and continues to be, a key figure within the transgender literary community. She was ambitious and well-known in the academic world, having received her BA in sculpture, MA in psychology, and her MFA in writing from Naropa

Institute in Boulder, Colorado— she also taught at the institute for a number of years. During her lifetime, she published several poetry collections with two more published posthumously after her untimely death in 2006. Despite mainstream academia’s failure to canonize the work of transgender authors, edwards’ collections did receive some recognition— being awarded the New Langton Bay Area Award in literature in 2002, the Small Press Traffic’s Book of the Year Award in 2004, and just last year her posthumous collection, *succubus in my pocket*, won the 2016 Lambda Literary Award for Transgender Poetry. However, it should be noted that she was strongly opposed to being labeled a “transgender poet”— or being labeled anything at all, for that matter. A self-described gender activist, she did not want to be a “historical permanence with borders” (edwards, “Subject: Statement”) and actively fought for the right to evacuate gender all together.

Seeing how she strived to rid herself and others of gender, it should come as no surprise that one of her trademark moves, when she was asked to sign one of her books, was to always cross out her name and write “NO GENDER” in its place as a sort of palimpsestic refiguring of the name into a symbol, creating both a grammatical and political subversion, reflective of her life and writing. Seemingly ironic in nature is the fact that she was a gender activist, known for speaking out about trans issues regularly, but rejected labeling and was insistent on writing “NO GENDER” as a signature. However paradoxical this stance appears, it was a functioning one, and was one that would allow her to disturb the discursive, hegemonic binary that constitutes gender, and ultimately identity. Her symbolic “signature” was an act of rebellion driven by the desire to not write the self into a gender and to break free of imaginary boundaries. edwards recognized that history, as normative society understood it, needed to be rewritten in such a way

that an individual, specifically a queer individual, could exist without gender markers that would (dis)qualify them for “true” personhood.

It was not merely her “signature” that defied standard codifications, it was her life, activism, and creative works that pushed past what one believed was possible— both in verse and the world-at-large. She demanded a rewriting and re-visioning of inherent language and histories, a call-to-action that has not gone unheard. Even in death, her ideological non-position, in its infinite possibilities, continues to inspire authors, activists, anarchists, and any variation of persons experimenting with language. Her establishment of an alternative way to approach language, writing, and the self has encouraged a countless number of individuals, myself included, to intensely question the validity of all social constructions, constructions whose origins are believed to originate from true, ontological knowledge.

With that in mind, the following sections of this chapter will include my investigation of edwards’ posthumous publication, *succubus in my pocket* (2015), which is a collection assembled around the idea of transcending the signifiers of established meaning to provide work that is “a troubling of the habitual life story at the edge of the recognizable” (edwards x). Additionally, I will briefly discuss key moments, lines, and critical analyses by other authors, scholars, and friends who examined her earlier publications— *A Day in the Life of P.*, *Baharat Jiva*, and *Iduna*— to offer a sense of what has previously been said about her work and the ways that others are interpreting her texts since little to no scholarly analysis currently exists for *succubus*. Furthermore, this chapter will largely explore and discuss the ways in which I feel edwards’ collection is queering language through the form of trans-poetics— a form that, ultimately, provides a language arrangement enabling for a queered linguistic system that distorts, and challenges, the normative meaning applied within Western society. To analyze her

work, and to generate an understanding or multiple understandings of what I believe constitutes the queering of language, a queer space in literature, I will, as noted in my Introductory chapter, use Maurice Blanchot's thought of the Outside to illustrate how: firstly, that his theoretical configuration is not just poststructuralist, but is also queer; and secondly, how the queer-poststructuralist, non-position of his Outside helps illustrate the manner(s) in which edwards' problematization of gender and identity's borders, Western dogma, and language's heteronormative structure are all moves that create a language that is queered.

edwards' Interpretation of Queered Language & Blanchot's Outside

Before beginning my analysis of edwards' collection, *succubus in my pocket*, and how its trans-poetic form enables a queering of language to manifest, it is important to first provide a close-reading of her editorial statement in the third issue of the literary magazine, *EOAGH: A Journal of the Arts*, which was fittingly titled "Queering Language."¹ Through my close-reading I aim to provide a more grounded understanding of queered language and how I will be discussing queered language and trans-poetics throughout the remainder of this chapter which builds on edwards' interpretation of what it means and looks like when language, not the body, is queered.

In a style reflective of her poetry's form— little punctuation with zero capitalization— edwards' aphorism, "subject: statement," offers four short stanzas that provide, with purposeful ambiguity, a loose definition of queered language. To further contextualize her vague definition and to better understand what she believes characterizes a queered language, how it occupies a space outside of normative linguistic knowledge by refusing stable definition, we must look to

¹ This special edition issue was published in memory of and dedicated to edwards since she worked on their editorial staff, compiling work from authors she felt produced a queered language, but sadly passed away before it could be completed.

Blanchot's thought of the Outside. In short, his theoretical non-position of the Outside is described as a site that attempts to regain a space, where this space is not a space at all but is instead a void, an emptiness that is absent of language's signifiers and foundations. His thought of the Outside aims to express a neutral language formation that cannot be contained by the binary processes of rational thought, where it is an other that is always, already other. Given that Edwards' believes the queered text occupies a "nonlocation location" where the language's form is "fluid, outside inside" and must generate the self from "inside a body space with no / boundaries," (Edwards, "Subject: Statement") I claim that it is in Blanchot's Outside that one is able to produce and place a queered language.

In what follows, I will attempt to break down what Edwards believes qualifies for a queer language. However, to understand what characteristics warrant a language queered, I would first like to define what it is not since that definition, provided in the fourth stanza, is the easiest to grasp. In her statement's four stanzas, the structure of stanzas one through three are fragments of thoughts broken up by commas with no period until the end of the respective stanza, but it is the fourth that is different. In the beginning of the fourth stanza we find the two punctuated sentences, the shortest ones in the entire piece, which declare, "it is not imaginary borders turned into religious incarceration. boundaries are not queer, sovereign boundaries / are colonial, location of the self within the state" (Edwards, "Subject: Statement"). Her choice to make these sentences structurally different from the rest of the piece functions in two ways: by drawing readers' attention to their content and in doing so, signals their importance in her interpretation of what is not a queered language.

The two sentences cited in the above paragraph, in my opinion, are able to offer a foundational understanding of what kind of language structure Edwards believes does *not*

constitute a queered language. What she is positing here is that a language operating within the temperate boundaries of Western ideological belief, specifically one that enforces a binary system of identification as a means to locate both the self and the other (binary identities hegemonically defined) within the larger whole cannot represent a queered language. To that end, the not-queer language is described by its linguistic structuring as one both governed by and reflective of the supposed essentiality in Western practices. These practices, whose constrictive, ideological conventions are operative on multiple levels within our heteronormative culture influence our understanding of language and the self. As such, the language described above could be termed heteronormative language.

I would like to pause, now, to briefly discuss what I mean when I say heteronormative language, since that kind language, as I will show, influences a text's narrative aim. The kind of language I examined above (the kind Edwards believes is not queer) also rejects the typical plot structure— for if the language is queered then, arguably, the plot is also queered. In her refusal to use heteronormative language to craft her narrative structure, one that would shape its plot in a manner where everything is neatly wrapped up, she is refusing what narratologists, Marilyn Farwell and Judith Roof, believe to be a “heteronarrative.” The ideology influencing the heteronarrative insists that a text be structured in such a way as to lead readers toward an expected ending – some common closures include events like any sort of couple coming together and running off to live their lives or the death of a major character. Narrative scholars, like those noted, agree that the narrative structure is implicitly ideological, and, as such, brings with it a series of meanings.

The ideological meanings in a heteronarrative's trajectory are not guiltless and contribute to reinforcing the already constrictive Western ideological beliefs, and normative language, that

edwards aims to move beyond in her texts. Marilyn Farwell speaks on this claim, saying “readers are conditioned to expect a narrative pattern that sets up a series of events that are logically or chronologically related” and that “traditional movements toward closure, like linearity, can be interpreted as authoritarian” (48). Narratologists have posited that there is a similarity between many plot structures and the pattern of heterosexual sexual encounters. When considering the need for closure in terms of the narrative’s trajectory, Peter Brooks, in words that underlie Farwell’s claim, believes that heteronarrative plots work toward a climax, saying “the plot should stretch, extend, and project itself” (51) toward a climactic completion. The climactic completion Brooks notes is reflective of a heterosexual male’s penis growing erect, engaging in sexual intercourse with a woman, and finishing the act by ejaculating. In other words, edwards’ avoidance of heteronormative language and the heteronarrative allows for the production of a text that is always, already other. It is her queered language, her trans-poetics, that moves her work beyond the standard heteronarrative structure. edwards’ stylistic move queers the narrative structure by avoiding closure— this move, in turn, develops a queered text with a fragmented, circular narrative, which is evident in her book, *succubus in my pocket*, that will be examined in the final section of this chapter.

If one is able to gather multiple explications of what a queered language is not— where it is *not* “the space one holds,” (edwards, “Subject: Statement”) *not* “an essential objectification one is held in,” (edwards, “Subject: Statement”) *not* “mythological projections ... for further control of an imagined boundary” (edwards, “Subject: Statement”) — what, then, *is* queered language? It is my belief that, much like descriptions of Blanchot’s Outside as an uncontainable formation where its lack of definitive meaning is its meaning, the same can be said when discussing the form and definition of queer language. Queer language problematizes those binary

divisions, specifically the perceived essentiality such divisions offer in the meaning-making strategies of Western linguistic structure. For Edwards, queer language does not indicate the identity of a tangible body, nor can it be understood to mark a definitive location of the body as some essential other within a heteronormative system of binary division.

Queer, as she defines it, is not a thing, nor is it a place or person, queer is something entirely other, where it is “fluid skin, a body without organs, fingers, sweat, fists” which must take “responsibility for orifice potential” by adopting a “noncorporeal sensual connectivity with the body in space” (Edwards, “Subject: Statement”). Queer, in this sense, is uncontainable, a formation of limitless possibilities, temporally existing in a “moment to moment nonlocation location” that is able to transcend imagined physical and linguistic boundaries by producing an “awareness beyond compulsory reproduction” that can “account for the unaccountable” (Edwards, “Subject: Statement”). Assumedly, then, writing a queered language allows an individual to submit themselves to what Blanchot has termed the Outside - a space beyond what is understood by Western ideology to define one’s self and environment in language formations. When one queers language, they step into the (not)space of the Outside, placing this queered language in the “nonlocation location” Edwards believes is necessary to neutralize all histories that have produced the “certainty” of meaning often sought in normative linguistic structuring (Edwards, “Subject: Statement”).

It should be noted that the interpretation I offer above is only able to provide how I understand Edwards’ statement of what forms a queered language in writing can take, but to claim my take is the right one would go against the very principals I am exemplifying. However, while my interpretation might not provide the one “right” definition— where “right” means to be solely correct and “wrong” means to be totally incorrect— what I am providing is an other

interpretation that warrants value. Value, in this sense, is not a term that restricts interpretations of what forms queered writing embodies to two categories (one being “right” and all others marked as “wrong”) but rather, my analysis of edwards’ statement adds content to the conversation surrounding the topic of queered language rather than offering any supposed absolutes in linguistic meaning. Queered language, like those entering into the Outside, resists, better yet refuses, categorization within the boundaries of ontological true/false dichotomies in normative language structure. However, this isn’t to say that the characteristics of queered language I propose are not true and instead are false. In the same manner that language existing in Blanchot’s Outside is always other and occupies a not-space outside the logic of differentiation that distributes things along the plane of identity and difference, queered language does not exist in the world’s discursive semiotics. Reflective of Franz Kafka’s experience of grappling with writing and existence (an experience that influenced Blanchot’s literary theorizations), queered language’s written formation and existence should be understood as always interminable—its indeterminacy raises questions of if one is excluded from or forever a prisoner in its form and existence. Its indeterminacy, then, places queered language in a place that is an elsewhere that will never stop being elsewhere.

The Poetic Anarchy of Queered Language

If the place of queered language in literature can only be understood as inaccessible, resisting any separation into contexts, categories, and totalities, where its condition enters into a singular mode of existence (the Outside), what sort of poetics does it imply? As I mentioned in the Introduction chapter, a number of edwards’ emails and personal correspondences productively illustrate her determination to introduce this “inaccessible” element into language. It is therefore useful to look closely at her personal correspondence, before delving deeply into

her poetry. In an e-mail to her friend Ellen Redbird after returning from a conference on experimental prose, edwards states that she finds language to be “oppressive” and that “it freezes identity”— so in her creative process, she tries “to write/create fluid identity and non-stable subject” (Brolaski 97) in her work. edwards is making the very point I have discussed earlier, in relation to trans subjectivity and trans poetics: her goal is the “non,” that which escapes stability. In a similar manner, by conjoining, through the bar, the actions of writing and creating, she makes the point that she is about neither one nor the other.

edwards furthers this point, as she mentions to Akilah Oliver in their 2003 interview, that she is presenting texts that “challenge the notion of what writing is and can be” because she believed that writing, but more specifically queer writing, had an obligation “to move beyond the typical narrative form of: ‘I am this. This is what it’s like to be me’” (Brolaski 44). Effectively, edwards is explaining that her trans poetics is *always already other*. Continuing that thought, in a 2001 lecture titled “Writing a Queer Text,” she notes that to construct a queer narrative, one must “disrupt and deconstruct [a language system] through an on-going process of disidentification” by trying to “not use gendered language” so that the writing can exist in “a pre-verbal place” (Brolaski 100). As such, and given edwards’ discussion of narrative cited above, it is my belief that what she is after is a poetry of the “beyond,” of one that escapes a heteronarrative form, through a language and poetics that exemplify a thought from the “Outside,” that require one to think and write from a different space, specifically a “non” space, that “pre-verbal place,” without identification of neither the self, nor the other.

Also useful in understanding edwards’ points is modernist scholar Gerald Bruns, specifically what he calls “anarchic temporality,” a concept which references a sort of aesthetic anarchy, one of unruly conditions (Bruns 161). In short, Bruns’ theory of anarchic temporality

grew from the countless debates within the worlds of art and academia of what could, or rather, should be considered art or poetry— essentially, he wanted a theory against definitions of “true” art and poetry, ones that required viewers have a conceptual context of the theories, arguments, appeals to or rejections of the piece in question. An aesthetic anarchy, then, is one that defends a doctrine of nominalism: where there is no universal criteria for determining what is art and poetry, where nothing is forbidden and everything goes, where there is, as edwards says, a “fluid” sort of writing, and anything, thus, is possible within the historical limits of the particular situations in which modern and contemporary art and poetry are created. Just like what edwards says of the writing that moves beyond typical narrative forms, this anarchic temporality is pure artistic freedom without reproducing what is understood and accepted as absolutes. One way to think about the anarchic temporality of trans-poetics is to think of it as language’s resistance to the structures we place upon it. This resistance to language structures is not only the main quality of edwards’ trans-poetics, but more broadly, is the point, or goal, of all work that creates a queered language through trans-poetics.

As a way to solidify and strengthen my assertion that edwards’ trans-poetics can be seen as possessing an anarchistic aesthetic, I would like to turn to another interview Redbird conducted, one in which edwards discusses her feelings about anarchism. While she feels anarchists get a “bad rap” she claims that “as much as possible, I am an anarchist” but recognizes that sometimes “it’s hard to be disruptive” and constantly rebel against “the subtle way we unknowingly get caught up in language”— she advances this statement declaring that “there is no anarchy— just anarchists and anarchism” (Brolaski 103). Saying that there is no anarchy while at the same time claiming to be an anarchist herself is paradoxical; what we have in this statement is an impossible logic, an Outside kind of non-logic. edwards’ paradoxical, non-logic

echoes that of Blanchot's rhetorical formation of the Outside when he calls it a place of "non-knowledge," where the "non" does not overturn the positivity "knowledge" to imply ignorance but instead is a way to nullify, or neuter, that positivity (Sullivan 6). In this same way, the non-logic evident in Edwards' claim nullifies any positive or negative demarcations.

To break that down a bit more, what we have instead of anarchy is a repetitive, circular process: where people (i.e. anarchists) regularly attempt to create a space void of the restrictive power regimes by continuously making/creating moves that step outside the symbolic and signifying order (i.e. anarchism). In other words, if a state of pure anarchy existed or was possible, there would be no need for anarchists or anarchism because there would not be any system to reject if there were no government and no laws to dispute. By labeling herself an anarchist, Edwards is doing two things: firstly, acknowledging that there is a system which governs and structures all aspects of our society; secondly, that she must find a way to move beyond such restrictive structures of identification and control, specifically the language structures built on binary divisions. I postulate that she does find a way to do this: through her trans-poetics which create a non-discourse, a queered language, that moves a text (and the self) Outside the restrictive structures, and, thus, can exist in temporal anarchy.

Blanchot's Novel as the Outside

To further postulate my claim that *succubus* is a text that exists, due to its queered narrative structure and plot, in the "non-location location" of the Outside, I would like to return once again to Blanchot, specifically looking at what he, as he was himself a novelist, believed was a text existing in the Outside. Scholar Georges Poulet posits that Blanchot was obsessed with a text's form, claiming that, for Blanchot, a text had no solid form, but rather was in a continual state "outside" stability. Poulet explains Blanchot's interest in a text as an always

destabilized place: “every element [of the novel] ought to be returned to a doubtful status...in which [the novel] would be obliged to invent and authenticate, as it was being written, its own existence and its own universe” (77). In this sense, it appears that Blanchot was not so much concerned with a character’s fictional existence, nor did he care to create a supplementary reality reflective of a pre-established world within his novels; rather, he was after a work that would enter into and wander endlessly through nameless spaces. Characters’ relationships would remain undetermined and their communication questionable. There would be knowledge, neither of language nor of laws governing this world. Put more simply, what he was after was a strange, foreign world that would, in the same way I described edwards’ *succubus*, unfold, refold, and unfold once more into itself within the novel’s pages to disrupt all signification.

Most importantly, however, is that in Blanchot’s novels— like edwards’ collective texts, but more specifically for *succubus*— consciousness often takes the place of the first-person singular “I” and all other characters which that subjective “I” would address in situations occurring in the standard novel plots. It is in their shared move, one that aims at creating an imaginative work, where consciousness never ceases being the subject and the observer of an anonymous happening, situating consciousness as the imperishable existence carrying on an endless meditation heading in no direction and occupying no definitive space. Accordingly, then, both Blanchot’s novel and edwards’ non-novel are constantly beginning again; in many ways they are repetitive, and as such can never escape a cycle of metamorphoses continuing in the Outside of the inside/outside binary of definition and difference. The experience of their works, of the language construction, of the syntactical logic, is exactly that: an experience; more fittingly, the content on the page is an unending experience where “everything begins emerging

from nothing” (Blanchot, *The Space of Literature* 308), where there is no point of origin to trace, forever existing and re-existing in a strange world, in the thought of the Outside.

In Blanchot’s own novel, *Thomas l’obscur*, the character, Thomas the unknown, offers readers a line, exclaiming, “I myself, have become a creator in protest against the act of creating” (Blanchot, *Thomas the Obscure* 83). His claim that he is a “creator in protest against the act of creating” echoes what Bruns calls “anarchic temporality”— a theory against the established definition(s) of “true” art and poetry— where what he is protesting is the ideology governing what is believed to be the “correct” way to create something (or someone) (Bruns, *On the Anarchy of Poetry and Philosophy* 161). Thomas’ statement epitomizes exactly what Blanchot aimed to do, which was to create a nothingness— this nothingness did not make his novels totally negative works, though, but instead he wrote a nothingness that did not aim or attempt to achieve an absolute, positive experience with the world of the Western signifying economy.

It was Blanchot’s belief that the novel was both a literary and philosophical form, one that should be “both a discourse and a method,” where its methodical discursive action would nullify, or to use his terminology, *neuter*, everything fictional. It is in the neutral space of literature, in the Outside of normative linguistic ordering, and through the “hyperbolic destruction of apparent existence” (Poulet 79) that his novel of consciousness could be created – it should be noted, though, that consciousness for Blanchot was nothing more than the awareness of infinite isolation, a singular site with no sure space or an exact length, where truth as one is told is truth and one’s choice to either accept or deny the posited truths could be located and worked over. His notion of consciousness as nothing more than the consciousness of an existence, where it is neither the existence of the self one considers self, nor the existence of the other considered as other, a “non-location location” (edwards, “Subject: Statement”) as edwards

would say, one that is both inside and outside, both personal and impersonal, was the aim of all his novelistic work.

To be more direct, consciousness for Blanchot is simply “what was there” when everything, all ontological truth, has been “reduced to nothing by repudiation” and, thus, exists as an indeterminate presence that can never manifest itself— it is what he has in other works termed “existence without being” (Blanchot, *The Space of Literature* 263). This feeling of “existence without being” is articulated a bit more in his work *The Step Not Beyond*, which states, “This exists: beginning nowhere, finishing nowhere, it assumed form indiscriminately from all directions” (237). The “this” he is referring to in that quote is consciousness. Furthermore, he felt that the novel of fiction, which he often viewed as a novel of consciousness, was an easily accessible means that would enable the reduction of all the supposed truths, of the repetitive narrative schemas dictating our worldview. In this light, the novel was a way to destroy all inherited ontological knowledge to reveal the immortal existence that exists beyond binary divisions of the self and the other.

My Experience with the Non-Novel *succubus in my pocket*

Before addressing Edwards’ *succubus in my pocket*, I feel it would be helpful to recapitulate the key concepts I am applying to the text in what follows. In short, I have offered a close-reading of Edwards’ editorial statement, “subject: statement,” that provided what she believed constituted a queered language. While her definition does its best to obscure a definitive meaning, I posited that queered language, like the Outside, like her statement itself, refrains from all categorizations. Because queered language is inaccessible, the trans-poetics Edwards uses in her writing allows her to introduce this inaccessibility into normative structures as a way to disrupt and deconstruct the current, hetero-hegemonic understanding of linguistics, literature,

and the self. Thus, it is the structure of her queered language, in its trans-poetic form, which, together display an aesthetic anarchy. As such, her writing is freed from binary divisions and, ultimately, granted access to Blanchot's conceptual non-space of the Outside— where, again, the text is “neither one, nor the other” (Blanchot, *The Step Not Beyond* 76) because it is *always, already other*. With that in mind, let us now turn to edwards' *succubus in my pocket*.

Her identity-exploding, genre-busting text was not published until 2015, but the original manuscript was completed in 2004, two years before edwards' sudden death in 2006. It was her lifelong partner, Fran Blau, who graciously shared it with EOAGH press' editor, Trace Peterson, who also happened to be a personal friend of edwards during her lifetime, and believed it deserved to be printed and shared. As previously mentioned, in the original submission letter accompanying the manuscript, edwards described the book as “a troubling of the habitual life story at the edge of the recognizable” (edwards, *succubus in my pocket* x). By claiming the above, what we see in her book, I argue, is a problematization of the conventional memoir and/or narrative that has restricted and appropriated the transgender individual's existence – in both literature and the world-at-large. This “troubling” edwards notes is made possible by queering language, which, through the employment of trans-poetics, is the driving force that unravels, re-ravels, and unravels once more, edwards' life, a transgender life, that is, itself, unrecognizable under normative, binary divisions used to mark one's identity.

Throughout the entirety of *succubus*, edwards gives readers a trans-genre text that challenges the authoritarian notion of identity through innumerable voices that enable the evasion of subjectivity. Through this text's disorderly syntax and grammatical structure, edwards illuminates the fundamental instability in the structures that establish and dictate the relationships between subjects and objects. Moreover, one of the main characteristics of trans-poetics and

queered language evident in *succubus*, is the displacement of the subject, of the first-person singular “I” that the text appears to be organized around. For example, in the chapter-section “4.-5,” edwards writes that “a persona hung around me like a scent; an image of an image that had neither details or persuasion” which was “nothing more than a vague shadow-show in front of me that may or may not have been” (edwards, *succubus in my pocket* 54). Effectively, what edwards’ is producing here is a decentered “I,” or a “me” that can be viewed as nothing more than the essence of an unnamed someone examining their escaping of subjectivity. This line can also be used to exemplify edwards’ point that the qualities believed to establish the subject are nothing more than a supposed truth, a “shadow-show” (edwards, *succubus in my pocket* 54) of a stable subject.

I want to draw attention to the unending experience, like the one Blanchot speaks of, with no point of origin that is a driving force in edwards’ text. In the chapter-section “1.” the displaced “I,” who again, could be anyone or no one but ultimately is indefinable, grapples with the terms “lying and thief” because for this unnamable “I” these words were used to label them by “the unionist” in the previous stanza-paragraph. “The unionist” referenced here and repeatedly in the text could be a person, but could also be a term edwards uses to represent an “it” or a “thing.” In its ambiguity, “the unionist” is a name that personifies our normative language structure, which transforms the once non-subject, an ideology, into a subject that is available for evaluation under the same standards it uses to impose subjectivity upon a person. The words that “the unionist,” or possibly the governing rules of language structure and meaning, employed were “words without position, words without definition” that “tended to label the particularities, even if the particularities were unknown” (edwards, *succubus in my pocket* 26). What we have here is an example of language in the Outside, because the words held

neither a position *nor* did they possess a definition, and thus, avoid classification. Moreover, edwards is making central here an absence, a “without,” one which makes a repeated call to that which is not.

edwards makes a point, through *succubus*, of juxtaposing repeated references to “the unionist” with a string of other signifiers, which themselves are repeated. Furthermore, references to “the unionist,” or the governing social order, is often in close proximity to mentions of “soldiers,” “war,” and “automobiles” that are “always promising, promising anything and everything” (edwards, *succubus in my pocket* 27). I want to highlight these specific references for two reasons: one, because they are repeated in every chapter-section of this text; and two, because it would be impossible to discuss every stanza-paragraph that mentions them.

Generally, I have taken references to “soldiers” as meaning those who are in alignment with the regimes of power, the “war” as a label for the struggle faced by those who refuse a subjective identity, and “automobiles” as indicative of one’s body that is often treated as an object to be fine-tuned so that it can run correctly and become a subject – where, correctly running means that the body, or the subject, engages “plato’s ideal” (edwards, *succubus in my pocket* 28). In short, Plato’s ideal, according to scholar W.D. Ross, is the philosophical discussion, originating from Plato’s *Theory of Forms* that considered the notions which constituted the recurrent themes of dialectical disputations (10). For edwards, the dialectical disputations *succubus* considers is the language of the signifying economy that, through the use of pronouns and the first-person singular “I” to create a subject, that once marked as either one or the other, becomes a static position in discourse.

Furthermore, as mentioned in the Introduction chapter, Derrida’s concept of “trace” provides a framework with which one can better understand how the “I” in *succubus* creates

multiple subjects in attempts to move the “I” into the outside by refusing to a static position in discourse. To reiterate, “trace” does not aim to destroy or eliminate categories of naming, but rather to muddle any supposedly stable act of signification. (Derrida 26). This complication is able to expose and distort such category’s inherent instability as a means to question their widely perceived naturalness and division. What Derrida, as well as Edwards in *succubus*, are positing is that no signification is stable in itself; all objects and signifiers function by reference to something that they are not (Derrida 26). It is in representation that the non-subject becomes a thing, an object, a situation, a position and ceases to be the “I” that is making the judgement and evaluations of the position the “I” claims is its identity (Derrida 27).

As the text continues, Edwards makes the point that she located endless options for being. She discusses what she calls the “splattering terms of trauma options,” for instance, and the narrative “I” that can exist “in the in-between worlds” (Edwards, *succubus in my pocket* 29). She also rails against being held in a stable place as she talks about the “essential objectification one is held in” and the “belts and mechanical devices for objects to fasten to” (Edwards, *succubus in my pocket* 29). In each case, what is happening is that Edwards is applying trans-poetics and queered language as a way to problematize, as she remarks in her editorial statement, the “mythological projections” offered by “the unionist” (Edwards, *succubus in my pocket* 29). In fact, it is in her text’s fragmentation (which is always structurally choppy) that the displaced “I” in the narrative can exist “in the in-between worlds,” i.e., the Outside, where, in its ideological non-position, this “I” discovers “different names and a different size in chiffon” (Edwards, *succubus in my pocket* 30) which present endless options for being. However, the text, or the displaced “I,” turns back in on itself and recognizes that “as with everything, a thing becomes a

place and a place begets a name and I would be the name that took a place of a child that never existed” (edwards, *succubus in my pocket* 28-29).

In the last section of *succubus*, titled “xxx,” there exists another example that ties together all above mentioned points, but specifically how edwards’ queered language is and creates a non-stable, non-subject that “hovers in the densely populated nexus between sensation and meaning” (Brolaski 67). The displaced “I” notes that they “could go anywhere that is somewhere that would be a perfect anywhere [one with] no more positions to delete, no more tunnels to dig” (edwards, *succubus in my pocket* 128). The “I’s” desire for a categorical non-where, in which “the mass wave of distortion has reached the last will and testament” (edwards, *succubus in my pocket* 129) is the desire to reach a neutral space that is void of all histories and language that have created a “certainness” of meaning in Western ideology.

The neutral space sought is a non-space, is the Outside, one where “the light in the button that rings expectations has long since faded and the dead are just dead” (edwards, *succubus in my pocket* 132) and where, now, “in every dark corner, there is only emptiness and silence” (edwards, *succubus in my pocket* 135). Conclusively, what edwards is postulating, and ultimately what the whole of *succubus in my pocket* offers, is a hallucinatory departure from the bureaucracies and binaries trying to interiorize the world. Her text enters into the Outside, beyond the violent linear world, and through its queered language and trans-poetics creates a narrative explosion where the limitless prevails.

CHAPTER 3

A MAGICAL MANIFESTATION OF THE OUTSIDE: A CLOSE-READING OF MOSS ANGEL'S *SEA-WITCH VOLUME ONE*.

“The scanning, uploading & distribution of this book via internet or any means without the permission of the author is awesome. Please show everyone this book by any means possible. Pirate other books too while yr at it. Shoplift them from bookstores. Fuck capitalism.” – Moss Angel, Sea-Witch Volume One

In the epigraph above, pulled from the front matter of *Sea-Witch*, Moss Angel clearly expresses her dissatisfaction with current economic and political systems that both inform, and are informed by, the American social condition. By exclaiming, “fuck capitalism,” and urging her readers to “pirate other books” and to “shoplift them from bookstores” (Angel, front matter) it is evident that the capitalistic conditions of society do not sit well with her. The choice to place statements like these on the first page is an indication that in the text that follows, laws will be broken and power systems overturned in favor of a text that breaks free, stretches beyond, the restrictive ontological ideologies of Western thought and literary genre.

In other words, instead of constructing yet another heteronormative narrative, Angel produces a text that is entirely other, a narrative of resistance. *Sea-Witch Volume One: May She Lay Us Waste* fervently challenges, by way of its trans-poetics and queered language, the normative classifications of literary genre and established linguistic meaning within Western ideologies. Rather than writing a text of the Outside, such as we saw with kari edwards' text *succubus in my pocket*, what we get with the “character” Sea-Witch in Angel's text is a manifestation of Maurice Blanchot's Outside. Sea-Witch gives shape to the Outside—effectively producing an entity that presents itself as both body and place, Sea Witch becomes a non-body; as I said, a manifestation of what the Outside *is*.

Before jumping into my reading and application of theory to *Sea-Witch*, it is important, at this point, to provide a little information on Moss Angel's preferred writing platforms, her previous publications, and pertinent details from some of the conversations that I have had the pleasure of sharing with her via the social media platform Twitter. Awareness of her background helps one to understand how she functions as an underground poet, as one who calls her work "punk lit" (Angel, @8deadsuns; @unloveablehottie) (a term I will return to in following sections), and as someone deeply opposed to composing her texts in traditional, academic forms. Additionally, I will include numerous personal tweets and re-tweets from Angel since there exists absolutely no other resources nor any scholarship in academia which discuss, what I contend, is a very important text more than worthy of academic inquiry.

In the previous chapters I have examined an identity that is only recently beginning to be considered in academic discourses—the trans- subject—and I have also considered a type of writing never discussed—queered writing. With Moss Angel, the subject of this chapter, we see how queered writing not only makes non-traditional choices in language application and structure, but also uses an innovative digital platform, one often considered as counter to academic discourse—specifically, Twitter. My use of Twitter as a primary source within academic discourse is one example of how the platform can be considered both academic and non-academic and ultimately avoids stable categorization of either. This resistance is reflective of *Sea-Witch*'s existence as a non-body that refuses a singular definition of being. As I will discuss in greater lengths in the final section, the linguistic choices common to internet-language—Angel's spelling of "you're" as "yr" in the epigraph, for example, is a form of internet-language—challenge what is considered "valuable." Twitter, as a platform, is itself a series of fragments—disordered comment-threads with a limited character-count, memes,

personal photos, random thoughts without context, links to music and/or websites—ones that give shape to queer writing's challenge to normative structures of meaning. More importantly, Twitter's structure is reflective of the fragmented form found within both Angel's and Edwards' texts.

This chapter's application of tweets and non-traditional source material serves as a model to further demonstrate the resistance of which I spoke earlier. My use of non-traditional source material legitimates the value in and the utilization of non-academic source material and non-academic sites in academic research. In what follows, I illustrate how non-academic sources and sites disturb traditional beliefs that to produce true academic writing, to get the writing published and respected within the academic community, and to have your ideas taken seriously, strongly depends on whether or not the author applied information from peer-reviewed journals and scholarly texts to their research/article/project. Not surprisingly, though, the credible sources favored are often published in and by large universities' publishing presses. Despite its lack of academic credibility, had it not been for my casual browsing of Twitter, specifically the accounts of online literary journals/zines and small press publishing organizations, my investigation of both Angel's and Edwards' work would not have been possible.

One notable difference between Edwards and Angel is that Angel does not have the extensive academic training in writing as Edwards had in her lifetime. However, Angel has had numerous pieces of her work published in journals and online literary zines such as *TheNewerYork*, *22nd Century Literature*, and *Potluck Magazine*—just to name a few. The lack of formal training and engagement in the world of academia does not take away from her powerfully disruptive prose that, like Edwards, exists in a place of intangibility that is able to push past our current categorizations of genre and naming.

As I explained in the second chapter, edwards was aware that one does not create an identity but that it is imposed upon one by others. Due to this, she engaged, through her queered language and trans-poetics, in constant acts of self-recreation and self-negation as forms of self-mastery. All such acts worked together to trans-form language and identity to create a space that was a non-space, or what Blanchot termed as the thought of the Outside: an “ideological non-position” where all assumptions are up for grabs and numerous potential narratives appear to happen simultaneously (Blanchot, *The Space of Literature* 167). The queered language through trans-poetics evident in edwards’ *succubus in my pocket* is refigured in the work of Angel in her collection, *Sea-Witch*, which I will close read in the following sections of this investigation in which I posit that the character of Sea-Witch gives shape to, is a manifestation of, the Outside.

Connecting Blanchot and edwards to Angel

To reiterate, in Angel’s text, the same as with edwards’ text, what we are given is distinctly disruptive prose that, again, like edwards, exists in a place that is entirely other, a place Outside the normative system of linguistic meaning, that pushes past our current categorizations of genre and naming. In *Sea-Witch* we are given diary-like fragments, quotes that may or may not be introductions to different chapter-sections, pictures without context, and scattered scribbles/doodles that overlap with and/or blur the words and photographs within its pages. The childlike doodles mentioned above bear resemblance to what one would expect to see in a normative “girl’s diary,” but much more adultlike in that the doodles are often uncouth in nature; most frequently the word “FUCK” is in all caps and written over both the text and the photos. As such, Angel, through these linguistic moves, is blending text with photography, with drawing, thus creating a work of excess. I call Angel’s text a “work of excess” as a nod to Eve Sedgwick’s foundational definition of the term queer, which she describes as being an “open mesh of

possibilities, [...] of lapses and excess of meaning” (Sedgwick 12). The mixing of mediums, the hybridity of *Sea-Witch*’s composition, is another factor that qualifies it as a queer text, largely because of its refusal to belong to any one category of being, one “Outside” of any one definitive genre.

Angel’s choices in representation, specifically the text’s interplay of words and images, can be understood as a W. J. T. Mitchell-like “imagetext,” or what he calls a “rupture in representation” (1). In further discussion, Mitchell explains that the imagetext displays the “relations of vision and language in memory [through] the nesting of images inside discourse” but most importantly, the figurative imagetext is “the murmur of discourse and language in graphic and visual media” (1). Rhetorically, what the imagetext does is produce a dialectical paradox where the image and text evoke differentials and similarities that fuse the relation of image *versus* text with image *as* text to reveal a strange discontinuity, a shift in levels of (normative) meaning, a neither-text-nor-image which places the imagetext into Blanchot’s Outside.

Among the most prevalent of Angel’s imagetexts is the continual repetition of the mark of the tilde— in Latin the tilde is a signifier of suspension. In modern day deployments of the tilde around words on social media posts, like those found on Twitter and Facebook, signifies something a little different. The tilde, or rather a pair of tildes, to paraphrase BuzzFeed News’ Joseph Bernstein (who discusses the modern usage of tildes on social media), does something a “little uncanny” (Bernstein, “~Tilde~”) to the words held between them. In his own observations of the tilde on Twitter, he believes it is often used to “signify a tone that is somewhere between sarcasm and a sort of mild and self-deprecatory embarrassment over the usage of a word or phrase” (Bernstein, “~Tilde~”). What he is positing is that no pair of tildes react the same with

any set of words or word, nor can the tilde(s) be understood as possessing universal definition for operation or signify one specific meaning when applied to a set of words or a word. So, then, the modern-day tilde is able to destabilize the meaning of the word(s) it encompasses and, as such, this problematization gives rise to an as yet undiscussed stylistic move of trans-poetics that is able to queer standard linguistic structures and permit the text entrance into the always, already other non-space of the Outside.

Throughout the pages of *Sea-Witch*, one imagetext consistently appears: the tilde applied as a bracketing mark that overlaps with an underlying image. Specifically, this connection among the tilde and imagetext enable a destabilization, a reconfiguration, of the normative meanings for both the text and the image. A particularly important example of this appears on page eight where the word “~ dying ~” is hand-written over a close-up photo of a shoulder and bits of someone’s hair seem to be positioned against a wall. Important in the imagetext are the tildes placed around the word “dying,” which, to use Bernstein’s definition, imply that “~ dying ~” should not be taken in a literal sense of in the process of becoming dead, but instead should be taken as denoting a more sarcastic tone. The word “~ dying ~,” it is possible to claim, is being used in the colloquial sense, where it can function as a synonym for words like exhausted and fatigued. If taken in that colloquial sense— “~ dying ~” in combination with the partial body photo it overlaps— the imagetext suggests that the body in the photo is worn-out and tired, either of itself or possibly its environment, or even its circumstances. However, another reading of the imagetext, if the tildes are understood in their Latin definition as marking a suspension, could be indicative of a body that is held in-between life and death, suspended in a neutral state of being where it is neither fully living nor totally dead. If taken in this manner, where it is neither one nor

the other and instead exists in a neutralized space, the partial body (and the total imagetext) pass into the Outside.

As I demonstrated above, Angel's use of the tilde distorts the normative meaning associated with the word "dying" which the tildes encapsulate. Whether the tilde is understood in the Latin sense as a mark of suspension or in the modern-day sense as a mark capable of destabilizing the word(s) it surrounds, it is undeniably a figure-of-distortion. The reason I refer to the tilde as a figure-of-distortion is because, in either of its understandings, it indicates that the word or phrase it surrounds or is placed in front of will be problematized, held in an in-between space, an almost-separate space that is neither completely removed from nor positioned within the text. In other words, the tilde interrupts the linear flow of the heteronormative plot structure and the coinciding linguistic meaning. Moreover, its facilitation of the "neither/nor" construction that neutralizes meaning by refusing binary categorization, again, qualifies the tilde as marker of the Outside.

I would now like to discuss the most important and certainly the most graphic of all Angel's imagetexts; located on page fourteen, what we have is a close-up photograph of someone (possibly Angel) bent over and spreading open their anus. The phrase "L'Origin du Monde" is situated at the bottom of the imagetext with numerous doodled circles around the anus photo that combine it with both the phrase and a doodle-heart. This imagetext is Angel's refiguring of French artist Gustave Courbet's 1866 controversial painting also titled "L'Origin du Monde" (*TotallyHistory*). While both Angel's imagetext and Courbet's painting display close-up images of genitals, there is a crucial difference between, a disturbance, amid the two.

Specifically, the difference between Angel's imagetext and Courbet's oil painting is that in his painting we are given a close-up view of the genitals and abdomen of a naked woman,

lying on a bed with her legs parted and no genital orifice spread open (*TotallyHistory*). In Angel's imagetext, though, the genital orifice (the anus) being spread and held open; it is even encircled multiple times, drawing attention to that specific feature of the imagetext. I note these differences because the French phrase "L'Origin du Monde," found in both artists' works, when translated to English, means "origin of the world" (*TotallyHistory*). Given that Courbet's painting's focal point is a naked woman's vagina and is subsequently titled "the origin of the world," his painting can be read as a heteronormative celebration of women's ability to give birth, to reproduce life, a positivity. On the other hand, Angel's imagetext resembles its predecessor only in its display of uncensored genitals (the anus). However, the shared phrasing of "origin" is, for Courbet's painting, indicative of a specific origin: that of human life (the vagina). Alternatively, this same phrasing and use of "origin" takes on an other, a distorted, meaning in Angel's imagetext since the anus cannot reproduce life, and is a neutral location.

Particularly notable about Edwards' and Angel's texts, specifically how their work exists, in different ways, in the Outside— which is *not* a place meant to grasp language's foundations or justify its signifiers but is a conceptional space (or non-space) that reaches beyond all binary divisions— *Sea-Witch* varies from *succubus* in that its trans-poetics are slightly more experimental but are able to create a queered text that not only distorts, but reconfigures a world of meaning. The most noticeable difference between the works is that while Edwards' text plays more with language's syntax, narrative structure, and offers no pictorials, Angel's text mixes (as I remarked above) photography, quotes, personal doodles, prose-y writing, and provides readers with a cast of thirty-one characters (all of whom are introduced at the beginning of her book). The most compelling and distinct variance from Edwards' text is Angel's introduction of characters and meticulous commitment to attaching the preferred pronouns to the character

description— a move which Edwards' actively avoids. In *succubus*, the narrator/main character, or rather the ambiguous "I" that may or may not be one person but is ultimately unnamable, weaves readers through a post-gender landscape and steers clear of the careful attention to the backstory and personal qualities available (and listed) for each person and place in Angel's texts.

Moreover, in the blurb on the back cover of *Sea-Witch*, Angel describes the book itself as being a "genre-phobic novel-in-fragments" exploring "contemporary transsexuality" (Angel, *Back Matter*). Just as with Edwards' *succubus in my pocket* and the briefly mentioned fictional novel, *Thomas the Obscure*, from Blanchot discussed in the second chapter of this thesis, what we see in Angel's text are similar moves that aim to create a cacophony of voices, places, and events that refuse stable signification. In fact, as should be clear by now, the typical elements of a linear, heteronormative narrative plot are not to be found or utilized by Angel in *Sea-Witch*. Instead, what we are experiencing in the reading of this text is more like a dream state/sequence that, expectedly (and more often than not), is not easily definitive or traceable from a sure beginning that we follow through to a neatly organized completion. Angel's text has readers jumping back and forth through protagonist Sara's self-meditations, labeled as numerous "Trans Memoir(s)," and her engagements with the other thirty characters are placed under the label "Sea-Witch"— additionally, there are other sections titled "Bone Death" that appear to be from the narrator, Sara, or Angel's reflections on her transitioning, but that, like the queered language employed, is undefinable.

Exhibited in this "occult fairy tale" (Angel x) is, like with Edwards and Blanchot, *not* a linear narrative with a protagonist that is able to be marked as holding a specific categorical position, one with definitive thoughts and actions one can say is solely the narrator's own, but instead we are given an unending echo of one's consciousness, possibly that of Angel herself,

that is reverberating and repeating throughout the pages of the narrative. While there are a cast of thirty-one characters listed in the index section at the beginning of her text, there are very few clear, sequential conversational exchanges or engagements with other characters. As author Precious Okoyoman phrases it in his review of the *Sea-Witch*, what Angel's text is doing "cannot be written directly" and instead "must be written around, must be unearthed" because this text is a "trans-mogrification of the pure body" that is representative of the "violence of conceiving ur body" (Angel, *Back Matter*). Another author, Nikki Wallschlaeger, said in her review of *Sea-Witch* that Angel has created a world "where history is at last continuously non-linear and water – volcanic" and is a book that "spills over with laborious life and death" that is like a "prayer cartography of spontaneous elemental becoming" (Angel, *Back Matter*). In other words, Angel's text is a construction and projection of a world of origin for a body, or more fitting, a consciousness whose history is non-existent, who was never socially "constructed" to be a "real" person (likely due to continuous efforts of erasure/destruction from governing regimes of power) and, thus, must be written in the fragmented manner in which it has been understood.

Sea-Witch: A Manifestation of the Outside

In *Sea-Witch Vol. 1*, the character of Sea-Witch is both a person and a place, something Angel describes as "a glittering cascade of water that froze in place to be lived in but accidentally ended up capable of true emotion. Precious & needs to be held. Gets cold like all living creatures. ETC ETC You get the idea. She/Her" (Angel viii). At the conclusion of a previous publication, *Careful Mountain*, Angel briefly mentioned her newest project, *Sea-Witch*, which had yet to be completed at the time *Careful Mountain* was published. She described it as a "book of gay mythology about living inside a transsexual witch god" and believes it to be "sort of a

novel” (Woods 89).² The choice to call her work a “sort of novel” (89) further develops my earlier argument about Angel’s lack of literary categorization and genre. In what is the most outstanding quality of Trans Genre writing, Angel’s work constantly incorporates and experiments with styles from all major genres and forms currently accepted, studied, and understood in academia.

In Angel’s *Sea Witch: Volume One* she begins the “sort of novel” with a quote that is indicative of her determination to create a narrative that does not use normative language meanings to denote or place within a linear time, but instead one that is determined to rip language apart. The quote I reference is from Elena Rose’s “The Seam of Skin & Scales” which reads, “What I say may be in a language incomprehensible, but there is a time for that, and it is right now, because this is a monster’s creed” (Angel 3). The fact that she chose to open her text with this quote is an important example of my claim that she, too, is queering language and the linguistic system. Through her queering of the heteronormative linguistic system, her trans-poetics disturb the normative meaning and language structure used to make sense of both the physical and literary universe. Again, Angel’s use of trans-poetics in her text are not structured the same as Edwards – which, is exactly the purpose of queered language: to be a language unnamable within current Western linguistic standards, a language that is fluid in its form. Through using her own form of trans-poetics, Angel is, as Rose’s quote exclaims: creating a text in a “language incomprehensible,” and is, in fact, a language queered through the use of trans-poetics.

² The “Woods” I have cited in the in-text citation above is referencing author, Sara June Woods. As mentioned in the Introduction chapter, “Woods” is one of Moss Angel’s various pen names she adopted when publishing her second poetry collection, *Careful Mountain* (2015).

In the section titled “Sea-Witch 1 & 2” Angel makes clear that she has located in the character of Sea-Witch (that is both a person *and* a place) an identity, a subjectivity, which is neither one nor the other at the same time. To provide a more thorough explication of the person and place that is Sea-Witch, Angel states that “she is a monster & this would always be the case in a world that had created the idea of monsters to use to describe things like her” (Angel 6). By claiming that Sea-Witch is and always will be a monster due to the fact that the world, assumedly the heteronormative world, created the idea and subsequent label of monster as a way to categorize something that is both a person and a place, but is neither one nor the other at the same time, one is able to link Sea-Witch to Susan Stryker’s and Blanchot’s theorizations discussed in the Introduction chapter. In discussing the trans- body, the trans- individual’s subjectivity, Stryker comments further on Singer’s claim: that trans- is able to offer “potentially infinite specific possibilities for being human” (Gellar 5) which means that trans- is “infinite” in the realm of “possibilities” – and as such, trans- continues to be read and described as monstrous. The trans- body, like with the person/place of Sea-Witch, generates a sense of fear, of monstrosity due to their limitless potential and avoidance of categorization within binary oppositions.

Furthermore, since both the trans- body and Sea-Witch exist as “infinite” in a realm of “possibilities” and Sea-Witch is both a person and place, but is neither one nor the other, this neutralization of meaning with the possibility of being everything and nothing all at once, marks the character-concept of Sea-Witch as someone and something that exists in Blanchot’s thought of the Outside. Sea-Witch, it seems, not only exists in the Outside, but that she *is* a manifestation (if there ever could be such a person/place/thing) of the concept itself. To continue the above analysis and to strengthen my claim the Sea-Witch takes the non-form of the Outside, I would

like to look to another description of her in “Sea-Witch 1 & 2” where narrator, Sara, states that in Sea-Witch, “there is no cause & effect” and that “everything happens at once” (Angel 6).

Angel’s words call up Blanchot, and his related discussion of the Outside, specifically his remark that one can “exist outside of present limits and possibilities” (Blanchot. *The Space of Literature* 165). What Angel is after, when she posits that all action happens in one moment, is an interrogation of limits.

Another instance where Angel’s text situates itself in the Outside, specifically in her questioning of a word’s limitation in meaning, is in the section-chapter “Sea-Witch 9.” The narrator, Sara, when discussing words in Sea-Witch, mentions the “words whose meanings don’t hold together within Sea-Witch’s person” which include the words “deserve, crime, alphabet, drug, animal, border, & joke” (Angel 16). So, if Sea-Witch is a manifestation of the Outside, it would make sense that the meanings of the words within her don’t hold together, and thus, neutralize all histories and language that produce the “certainty” of meaning normative language pursues. The Outside, Blanchot believes, is a non-space that exiles and exempts, for those who enter into it, the world’s demand for meaning.

The same concept Blanchot offers can be applied to those living within Sea-Witch (which is the Outside) for once they enter into her, “meaning don’t hold together” (Angel 17). The most important word that has no meaning in Sea-Witch that Sara lists is the word “border” because, if the word and meaning of the word “border” does not keep its form, then we have something/someone who is entirely other, completely undefinable. If we do not have borders, we do not have divisions, categories, or power structures, but instead, we have a neutral space that is void of all histories and meanings as they are understood by normative, Western linguistic categorizations. Thus, what we have here is an illustration of how language in *Sea-Witch* is

queered and problematizes borders and avoids containment within the binary processes of heteronormative ideology.

The strongest example offered in *Sea-Witch* that demonstrates how the language within the text is queered due to its rejection of pre-established meanings and histories, is located in the section “*Sea-Witch 3-5*” where narrator Sara is seen to be participating in the recreation and renaming of herself and does so more than once. While living in *Sea-Witch*, Sara notes that she “called [her]self danger & sadness, mountains & sand.” Not only does she give herself multiple names, she mentions that “the various positions of [her] bodies were different words: mountain, sand, sadness, frustration, defeat, shrub” (Angel 7). Of importance here is the fact that she pluralizes the word body, indicating that she has more than one body, and that each of the separate bodies occupied “various positions” which are all “different words.” Of the six words that are her multiple bodies’ “positions,” three of the words are tangible things (mountain, sand, shrub) and the other three are intangible feelings (sadness, frustration, defeat). Sara, having multiple bodies and multiple names for herself and her bodies’ positions, is another example of how this text is queering language and traditional, linguistic meaning: by its refusal of a Sedgwickian “monolithic” certainty, of a static position within set boundaries (binaries) that categorize gender.

Twitter, and the Multiplicity of Being

What cannot be ignored is that Angel, in her current writing, chooses to use—almost exclusively—the platform of Twitter. Such a choice is of notable interest because, as I stated in the Introduction chapter, the trans- identity has (until recently) received little to no critical attention or inquiry in academia. As such, trans- individuals, like Angel, have had to locate other platforms and spaces (Twitter, in this case) to share, market/promote, sell, and conduct

conversation with other users about their ideas and writing through commenting on posts and creating a thread. Additionally, Twitter's content, what is tweeted, is never "monolithic" (Sedgwick 12) but rather constantly changes and updates what has recently been posted, shared, and/or favorited. Even users on the site refuse stable signification and have the ability to re-name themselves as frequently as they would like by simply changing their display name.

In a recent series of tweets posted on March 21, 2018, Angel discusses how she frequently re-names herself— both her pen name and her display name on Twitter. Similar to the way Sara's character in *Sea-Witch* gives herself multiple names, Angel says she now describes herself as a "polyonymous poet" so as to avoid "apologizing for publishing every book under different names." In the same thread, she expands her personal description, saying she feels that there is something "powerful and queer about renaming yourself, about constantly renaming yourself" because to her, it feels "anti-brand, anti-capitalist, or something" (Angel, @8deadsuns). Currently, her Twitter account's display name is "Never" with an always-changing string of various nouns and adjectives following after. She notes, in a later comment on the same thread, that the name "Never" is one that truly "speaks to [her]" because "it is more of a placeholder than a name. it's about what I'm not instead of what I am— there's a freedom to describing yourself through negatives instead of positives" (Angel, @8deadsuns).

In doing the above mentioned, Angel, through her use of Twitter, disturbs normative methods of identification by refusing restriction to a singular, positive identity-marker. In changing her name to reflect how and what she feels like at any particular moment in time, Angel is enabling a multiplicity of being to manifest. Furthermore, provided that the Outside, as Blanchot has described it, is a space void of any certain meaning, and is a space that lends itself to being filled with everything it isn't— through the constant act of re-naming herself using

negatives, Angel submits herself to the Outside by refusing any certainness of being that positive signifiers often denote.

In fact, Angel and the character-place, Sea-Witch, both actively refuse to be reduced into a singular category of being in favor of remaining uncontainable within the rational processes of binary systems of classification. This refusal to stay within the bounds of a singular identity— a refusal to exist within what edwards believes is a “gridlocked position” possessing a “historical permanence” (edwards, “subject/statement”)— demonstrates how both Sea-Witch and Angel (as well as edwards and the displaced, “I” guiding the narrative in *succubus*) present audiences with numerous examples for what should be understood as displaying a multiplicity of being. Sea-Witch, for instance, is both a person and a place, so by being both at the same time, while also unable to independently be *just* a person or *just* a place, to place Sea-Witch into a neat, stable category of being would be impossible due to the multiple options with which it exists. It is through Sea-Witch’s neither/nor status, where it is neither a place nor a person, where it is existing as a manifestation with the possibility of being everything and nothing all at once, that permits a neutralization of meaning. This neutralization marks the character-concept of Sea-Witch as someone and something that is entirely other, and as such, moves it beyond binary classifications and exists in Blanchot’s non-space of the Outside.

In closing, I would like to remark on what is perhaps Angel’s summative statement on her own writing and linguistic choices. Harking back to my use of the term “punk lit” in the opening of this chapter, Angel, in a Twitter conversation with fellow transgender poet, Zelda June, agreed that the work they both are producing should be called “punk lit” (Angel, @8deadsuns; @unloveablehottie). Continuing that thought, in a separate comment on the same thread, notes that she feels her readers should know that the “things [she] make[s] have “punk”

underpinnings” and that “she is so not an academic” (Angel, @8deadsuns). For Angel and June, the “punk lit” they create, one opposite of the traditional writing favored by academics, must be “art that is complicated and messy but also political & sincere & with a strong moral center” (Angel, @8deadsuns). Their decision to begin calling their work “punk lit” closely resembles a notion I proposed in Chapter Two’s discussion of edwards’ trans-poetic oeuvre— specifically, that of the pure artistic freedom, the denial of what is accepted as absolute, characteristic of anarchic temporality. Seeing as the term “punk,” regardless of its grammatical category, is, more often than not, closely associated with the term “anarchy,” it makes sense to further link the two terms together. The cumulative effect of their linking, when applied to critical linguistic inquiries (as illustrated in this thesis), I contend, provides another diverse interpretation, building on both Peterson’s and edwards’ own understandings of queered language, of what stylistic and political implications queered language’s trans-poetics offer: which, simply put, produce narratives of resistance, texts comprised of language that fervently challenges normative linguistic structures of meaning.

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- . "It also feels anti-brand, anti-capitalist or something. But maybe in a bullshit way. Maybe in some sort of annoying "never gonna sell out" baby punk way. Idk." *Twitter*, 21 March 2018, 2:35 p.m.
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APPENDIX A: OFFICE OF RESEARCH INTEGRITY APPROVAL LETTER



Office of Research Integrity

January 23, 2017

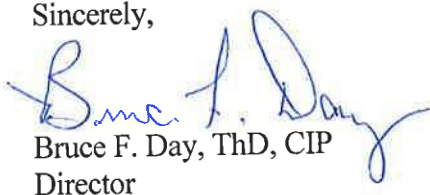
Brooke Ingram
Graduate Assistant
Department of English
Marshall University

Dear Brooke:

This letter is in response to the submitted thesis abstract entitled "*Trans-cending Genre: An Analysis of Trans-poetics in the Work of kari edwards and Sara June Woods.*" After assessing the abstract it has been deemed not to be human subject research and therefore exempt from oversight of the Marshall University Institutional Review Board (IRB). The Code of Federal Regulations (45CFR46) has set forth the criteria utilized in making this determination. Since the information in this study does not involve human subjects as defined in the above referenced instruction it is not considered human subject research. If there are any changes to the abstract you provided then you would need to resubmit that information to the Office of Research Integrity for review and a determination.

I appreciate your willingness to submit the abstract for determination. Please feel free to contact the Office of Research Integrity if you have any questions regarding future protocols that may require IRB review.

Sincerely,



Bruce F. Day, ThD, CIP
Director

WE ARE... MARSHALL.