

Abstract (English)

This master's thesis describes how, within the space of a single decade (2010-2019), transgender women's literature underwent significant development when it came to the production of novels and literary production more broadly. Written to be accessible to those unfamiliar with transgender literature and the internal workings of trans communities as possible, this thesis begins by describing in detail the socio-political changes in how trans people lived and were perceived over the past decade, with particular attention paid to the changes in the media landscape, the recent surge of people coming out as transgender and the conservative backlash.

Methodologically, this thesis utilises the viewpoint of transgender studies, which focuses to the material and socio-political conditions that facilitate trans cultural production and the ways in which trans literature engages with the politics of representation through the act of self-representation. It should be noted that this thesis only considers physically published literature written by trans women – a restriction that, the author acknowledges, helps reinforce the hegemony of the publishing industry – with special attention paid to the genre of the novel, and does not view works by cisgender authors that deal with transgender themes as belonging to trans literature proper.

This thesis deals extensively with the barriers existing both within the publishing world and the gay and lesbian literary spaces that made (and continue to make) it difficult for transgender women, particularly trans women of colour, to gain access to queer readers. The author presents the example of the Lambda Literary Awards, a queer literary award which took until 2011 to give an award to transgender fiction writers, 22 years after its inception. A small selection of trans women authors who wrote prior to the last decade are introduced, namely Roz Kaveney, Trish Salah, Julia Serano and Trace Peterson.

With this knowledge, the thesis proceeds to look at the development of the contemporary trans women's literary scene, pointing out the extent to which this scene has developed in Canada and the United States, with Canadian authors having written a surprisingly large share of the published books given Canada's relatively small position in the mainstream literary world. The international community of anglophone trans women writers that formed not only through the possibilities of social media, but also through the small number of publishers willing to publish trans novels, also has a direct impact on the literary texts with intertextual references to other trans novels and authors.

Moving past the material issues of publishing and literary production, this thesis then looks at some of the features shared by many trans women's novels that point towards trans women's literature constating its own genre and not merely existing as a minor subset of queer literature. The features listed are: Autobiographical elements; centrality of community and family (queer and biological); engagement with intracommunity discourses; the "Queero's Journey"; ambiguity of endings. This thesis argues that, while certainly not all works of trans fiction share these elements and their list is by no means exhaustive, they do point to a literary genre that is rooted in representing somewhat realistic trans lives (although diverge away from this realism in some novels is also noted) and in radical queer politics.

Rather than summing up the findings of this thesis, the conclusion instead attempts to actively utilise them as a way of looking forward into the potential future of trans women's literature. This future already began to take form not only through two novels analysed earlier which include elements of magical realism, but also through two anthologies of short stories which are already moving into the spaces of speculative and genre fiction – a move that, the author argues, was partly enabled by the realist streak of the works the preceded them. Lastly, this thesis considers how the recent rise of trans-inclusive neoliberal politics may eventually produce a trans literature that will no longer hold radical queer political positions, just as gay-inclusive neoliberalism had altered gay and lesbian literature in the decades prior. Nevertheless, this period of intense flourishing between 2010 and 2019 is sure to leave its mark on whatever is to come.