

PLUNGE



AN AGENDER LIFE



Fall from Gender

“The personifications of a male Sky and female Earth, along with Chaos (female and mother of the gods) as the gap between them, set the stage for later efforts to understand and control a chaotic, unpredictable world often depicted in female terms.”

—Carolyn Merchant, *Autonomous Nature*, chapter 1.

Chaos does not need a watchful eye or a skillful hand to create works of beauty. Its storm is its creative impulse, which is only mystical if we choose to define it as such. There is no such thing as a permanent or entirely stable state except that of complete negation and cold. It's no surprise that human beings, as little storms in their skin, have often chaotic and indescribable experiences of their own bodies. Even though our consciousness is impressive and powerful, it scarcely covers our own internal feelings, much less the details of the social and technological complexes we find ourselves embedded in. So much of what we do and feel is tossed about like chaff or broken glass in a tornado. In so, so many ways, we are not our own masters.

On that note! When talking about gender, especially as a trans person, there is a tendency to ask questions that are somewhat misplaced. I, we, ask people whether they accept their bodies or not. Along those lines I thought of myself as a playful tinkerer, trying to trim and stuff my body in various ways until it fit into a mould I found livable. For many, this is an adequate, and therefore healthy and useful, way of thinking. But asking whether we accept our bodies does not produce answers that I can accept anymore.

Rather, I ask whether my body can accept the place it's been given, the location and dimensions it has developed over time. We are all immanent with our bodies, and for me being agender is a sign that my shifting, unstable body is rejecting the other categories. I'm not fixing my body—my body is finding the social and physical means to satisfy itself. If that means hormones and surgeries, so be it. If that means a new set of sounds and symbols to represent it, well! The body is wise, and should be given what it needs. And this is true regardless of many historical progressives' contention that seeking a less alienated way of being was only play-acting lifestyle-ism, a petty retreat from the hard realities of capitalism. I suppose these progressives and communists would deny bodies who needed food since hunger sharpens

progressives and communists would deny bodies who needed food since hunger sharpens your revolutionary consciousness.

But enough of busybodies and so-called friends who see us as decadent, worthless to the struggle if we try to transform ourselves to live better. This is a happy little piece, a celebration of a kind of living that rejects contented and static order. We see, like few others, that order and chaos are partners, structuring and embracing each other in a neverending process of self-organization and dissolution.

One more blue note. Sad and fearful souls often say that trans people are god-defiers or nature-defilers, creatures cobbled together from grafts, chemicals, and scalpels. We're industrial constructs, symptoms of sick and irrational hierarchies that we choose to embrace like willing guinea pigs desperate for self-satisfaction at any cost. But here we are: like all of us, creatures struggling to adapt to a self-destructive world-system and finding a way to live tolerably. We are the human being grasping for liberation from limitations and boxes we can't endure. Becoming agender, then, is a bodily response, conditioned by reason and social realities, animated by dreams. Dreams of falling, in my case.

I often imagine gender to be like a system of canyons rising out of a deep chasm. Everyone has to live and be secure, and for most there are niches in the many cliffs—some wide and comfortable, others narrow and brittle—that let them cling to one side or the other. Some are fastened to the edge by habit, some leap across or occupy unsteady branches that span the gap. These cliffs, however, do not have room for everyone despite the boosters and hucksters saying that they do. Some of us have to, or choose to, jump without being able to reach the "other" side.

Falling is the essential motion of the agender life. Identifying as nothing in particular, we can travel many arcs and trajectories in our fall. Sometimes that falling feels like the smooth grace of flight, while other times it is flailing and erratic. Perhaps some of us will find our niche on the walls and live a fuller life than we did in the air. Nevertheless, those who fall and fly, like those who jump and leap or occupy strange, rare outposts in this canyon system see further and understand more than those who are comfortable and complacent. This is not because we have a higher wisdom or some esoteric insight—not all of us are so gifted, anyway—but rather because we are in difficult and often terrifying positions and this gives us an incisive perspective that cis people lack. Falling is also a wonderful way to see just how flexible and

expansive the body can be when all of our limbs are free and we can spin and twist into odd, arcane shapes. But let's leave the canyons behind and talk good sense again.

Because we can't imagine that our choice or inclination to live agender lives is an isolated one. We find ourselves in our friends, in our relationships with others, and, I would contend, especially in our relationship to authorities. None of us can transition or refuse to transition or reshape ourselves in other ways without people we trust and, depending on what we want to do, without those in power approving of us. So there are positive and negative forms of dependence, hierarchical and horizontal, loving and consensual and crushing and alienating. In order to create our own lives, and to create healthy communal lives, therefore, the strictures of domination and control have to be shed. For me, at least, living an agender life means living *against* hierarchy and petty divisions, joyfully seeing what the future could be and bringing it painfully into reality. I know that I hate being subservient to doctor's orders and the dictates of insurance companies, clothing monopolists, agriculture firms, and state authorities who limit my ability to give my body what it needs—community with other free individuals, sustenance, joyful freedom of motion.

I am unabashedly utopian in this regard. My body's appetites for activity are endless, and I am inspired by the vast power and beauty of the human animal in all of its forms. To be utopian is to see what life could be and ask why it can't be so. And even if it falls far short of what it could be, we can always ask why it's not better than it is now. While of course a lack of a fixed or definable gender identity is not at all *necessarily* intertwined with anti-capitalist, revolutionary, and utopian politics, for me these are inseparable from how I see, hear, and feel my way around. All I know for sure is that the current world cannot provide me with the life I need, that my body makes possible. And that's reason enough to try bringing another form of life into existence.

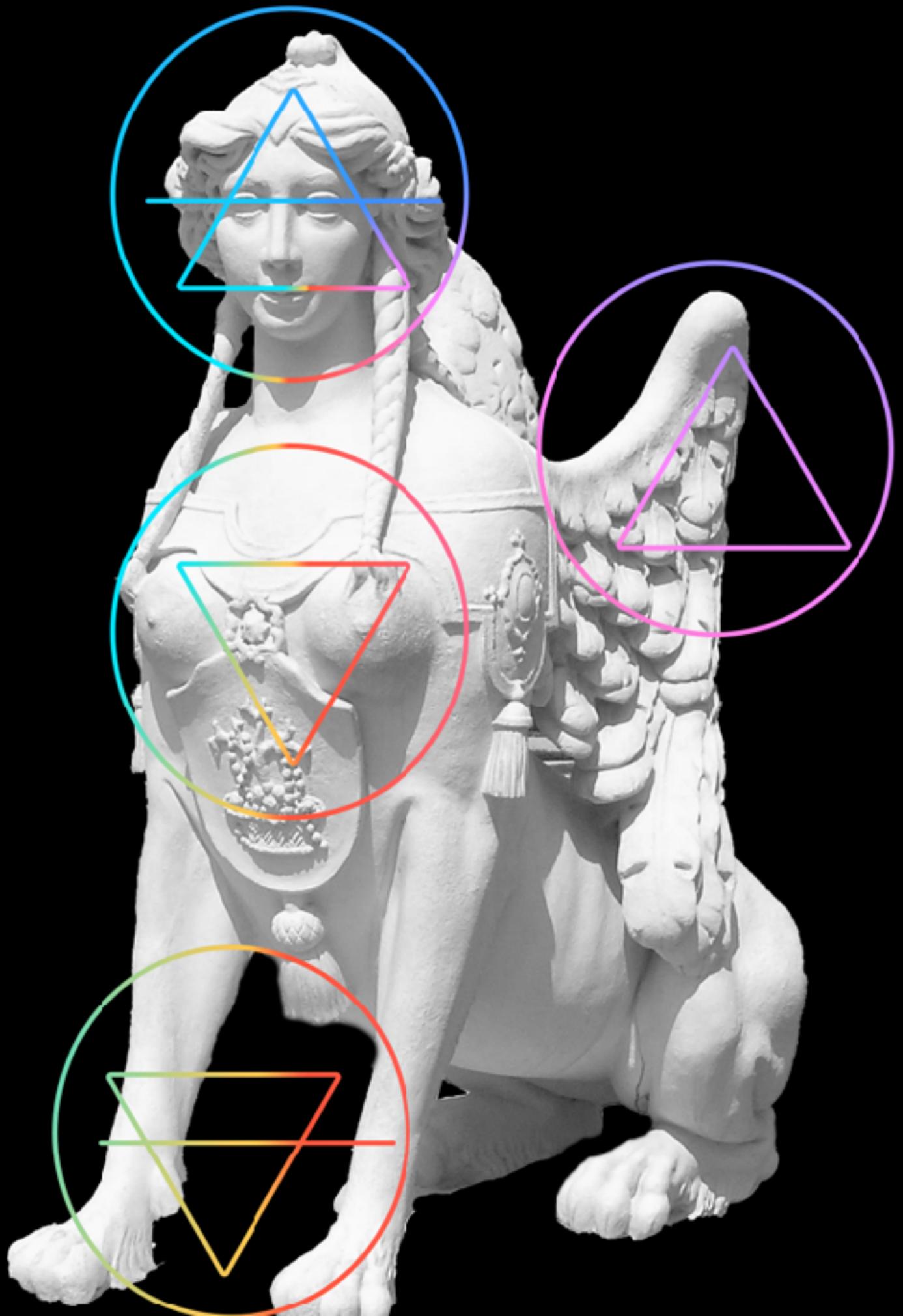
As a slight aside, this fact points to another aspect of being agender that might be difficult to grasp at first. Though agender obviously means without gender, that does not mean that our identity is empty or that our presentations are necessarily neutral or androgynous. Our lives are just as abundant and complex as others', and my experience of a gender chaos or void is that it's creative and generative rather than a restriction. I present in a highly femme manner when I have the energy, and this does not render me less agender. It might complicate the act of telling people about my position and my body, but it certainly doesn't mean that I am violating

of telling people about my position and my body, but it certainly doesn't mean that I am violating some cardinal law of being agender.

As much as I would love to look at the world and say "it's all mine," though, I recognize that agender persists in a tense ecological relationship with gender as a whole. It's an emergent outgrowth of a particular arrangement of gender relations, one that buffets and defines our lives for us more often than we would like. Even if we can't escape gender, however, we can choose how to relate to it. Some imagine that we should have a mutually beneficial symbiotic relationship with our surroundings, and indeed we should be creating spaces where others can thrive and find their own way without fear. Nevertheless, I also think it's right to be a cruel parasite on this world. Our spaces and our loves are not given to us freely by the society that produced us, and so we have to greedily steal them away and protect them with fire and venom. Gender is itself a kind of death, a system that prevents people from living their lives in a fulfilled way. So I must, I feel, hasten the destruction of my host as ruthlessly as I can. A parasite that destroys its own host, we might say, is irrational in nature, but I think we can agree that in our human realm of nature, the capitalist and patriarchal host we live off of is better off reduced to dust.

Appreciating the chaotic and necessarily unpredictable reality of nature—including human bodies and societies—means understanding that we cannot live as if we have all the answers. Agender might just be a word, a tool that we can discard or pick up as needed, but like anarchism, transgender, queer, and other words and traditions, they are ways of coming together as human bodies to sort out how we want to live and get our means of living. My greatest wish is that we can all abolish systems of classification and hierarchy that value one gender, form of presentation, or way of living over another. That way, we can live with the trouble and the uncertainty inherent in all life with a renewed confidence and solidarity, taking care and treading lightly without the burdens of anxiety and oppression.

*For the body, tentacled and monstrous, falling and flying,
hungry and restless!*



II. Sphinx-Aspects

Furries are often the butt of jokes. And I'm not going to say that we don't always deserve it. Yet I always thought that our often sincere and honest behaviour merited more respect than we get, especially since most of us are basically harmless. But of course being a furry is another kind of retreat from normalcy and the mundane, and I like to think that we have a healthy sense of humour about ourselves. Queer furries, in particular—and no, not all furries are queer—are some of the most genuine and fiercely compassionate people I know. But as a gesture to good humour and in the interest of keeping things both light and slightly occult, I wanted to examine my body and agender life through the prism of my fursona: a sphinx.

The sphinx is in many ways a familiar or daemon for me, a symbolic way to show my own alienation from humanity. If I'm going to be treated as non-human by most people, after all, why not try to find myself in the weird and animal? This section will also, yes, examine sexual aspects of my life through the lens of non-humanity. Kink and other forms of idiosyncratic sexuality are not part of every queer experience, but they form a vital aspect of how I embody my (lack of) gender and all the quirks associated with it. There are four aspects of the sphinx, four essential components that make it what it is and these aspects make excellent prisms for explaining my life in a bit more detail.

The four sphinx-aspects are:

1. The human
2. The cat
3. The wings
4. Mysteries and Esoteric Knowledge

1. The Human

The sphinx is a speaking creature, and speaks through a human face. What comes out of its mouth is not always clear, but there is an unmistakable identity or sameness between the human and the sphinx. Despite all of its alien features and bizarre riddles, it looks outward through human eyes. This both allows human beings to get some understanding of its

intentions and deepens its mystery. Something completely or utterly alien provokes a defensive and uncomprehending, or even indifferent, response, whereas the uncanny humanity we see in the sphinx renders it more grotesque and exalted. The frustration of the sphinx, as in my own introspection, is in seeing the head leading the body but in not being able to understand what it says or even its intentions for speaking.

When I probe the mind of the sphinx, that familiar of mine, I understand how opaque and distant even the most similar human creatures are. What a pity! It's a cliché to say that the more you know the more you grasp the limits of your knowledge. For the sphinx, though, I suspect the situation is quite different. Sphinxes understand both the limits of knowledge and the limits of our ability to convey it. They know that your understanding cannot come quickly or easily. Not that the sphinx fetishizes hard work or arcane jargon in itself, only that it recognizes that certain truths can only be communicated indirectly. But it's very frustrating to confront my own human face on the sphinx and find it passive and unknowable.

So the reality is that the sphinx is anchored somewhere between humanity and inhumanity, a vessel or conduit between us and the vast domain outside our knowing. We see the human face first if we approach the sphinx honestly. We see that it can understand us and wants to communicate itself but can't do so in simple terms. It faces a barrier to communication, often slipping into silence while we see its expression twist slightly at the edges. Signs that it recognizes us while stuck in its own strange limbo. No point being so bleak all the time, though. Sometimes, all we need is the knowledge that something strange and different, so distant yet so near to us, can understand our problems and offer us questions that might lead somewhere yet.

Sphinxes embody the agender form well because of this hovering and indecision. Agender people are indeed recognized and recognize others as fellow humans and yet, for me, the recognition only goes so far. Various forms of trauma and a scarred inner life have given me a tongue that can only speak in words people half-remember and half-understand. What for me is a native tongue, learned through hard searching and the teaching of loved ones, is to others a foul cascade of riddles sapping their imagined security. As much as we might love and cherish each other, those who are not queer, not trans, and not agender, treat my words like invitations to a long and arduous journey. I am only inviting people closer to hear my stories, and feel sad when they are not understood or not remembered. I can sing my song to many,

and feel sad when they are not understood or not remembered. I can sing my song to many, but only a few can sing with me, and the sphinx understands this all too well.

2. *The Cat*

Beyond the head stretches a long, powerful cat's body. Set up on a lion's proud legs, perhaps bearing tiger-stripes or simply the arched grace of a house cat, the sphinx is not only a speaking creature but a moving one as well. Desire has led me to a strange relationship with cats. It's not so much that I can't relate to them as pets or as simple companions, of course. But! The perverse power of the anthropomorphic cat, as with the sphinx, is that it causes me to identify with an imaginary cat's life, one that I find more desirable than the one I know now.

Like any cat, the sphinx folds its legs up and sleeps more often than not. Its long tail rests on the floor, the sandy ground, twitching only in the throes of dreams. One of the beautiful things about sphinxes is that they tend to be confronted in their holds and palaces. They are sought out, and do not do the seeking. Even though I think the characterization of sphinxes as always having the answers is probably mistaken, from a distance the life of a sphinx is a tantalizing fantasy. Like the domestic cat, the sphinx is honoured and served, given a life of relative ease and dependence. In the dream, the cat lives a decadent life, one where it is served and yet retains its independence of will.

And, although it's a rather touchy subject, part of the way I've explored the edges of my own humanity has been through pet play or other related fantasies. Whether sexual or not, the act of embodying a trusted and pampered pet, one that is earnest in expressing pleasure and often fearsome or disobedient yet always willingly subjugated—this is something I embrace. I will not pretend that anthropomorphic fantasies are purely good or that my kink would express itself in this way without the context of trauma and capitalist degradation I endure. Nevertheless, this is part of my being inhuman. My dysphoria and desire for Other bodies, even those of animals, burns intensely, and the cat aspect of the sphinx most closely matches my own indulgent fantasies of physical perfection and decadence.

Now, a prisoner who dreams of escape does not trouble the warden. The cat's body is never my literal existence, nor is it a way out of my predicament. Yet, surrounded by anxious and thorny spaces, the often traumatizing world of activism and the deadening monotony of work, it

represents a kind of utopian storytelling space. It's neither noble nor ignoble, but it soothes a deep physical need for affection and unmediated companionship. I can only stride through another day on a cat's legs. I am so frequently treated as less than human that it appears to me to make no difference what kind of nonhuman I might be. The sphinx flexes itself, stretches on its throne, and falls into slumber. Spirals and long trails of unstructured thought slide freely in the dark behind its eyelids, and it feels content to rest there awhile, while it remembers how to endure another waking day.

3. *The Wings*

If the cat aspect of the sphinx satisfies the fantasy of sleep, decadence, and power, the wings engage me on a different level. Flight is a widespread human desire, and dreams of flying were so common as to make dull nights by the time I reached adolescence. Nevertheless, wings represent the less weighty and more ethereal difficulties my body encounters. Though flight is often connected with escape, migration, and seasonal change or disruption, the wings themselves have a curious interaction with the rest of the sphinx's form. Depending on the rendering, a sphinx's wings are usually large enough to carry it into the sky. Sphinxes are not just agile on the ground and baffling to speak to, but also capable of escaping us altogether. We can't follow them into the sky.

Sphinxes' wings, therefore, "complete" their bodies. Despite differing greatly from dragons in appearance, sphinxes share with dragons a kind of terrifying physical and intellectual perfection. But although dragons are permitted to be unintelligent and vice-ridden hoarders, sphinxes are typically much more neutral figures. They don't fit into a straightforward system of moral absolutes. Their wings make them more capable and more powerful, of course, as well as connecting them to the spiritual and to the heavens. Despite this, however, these feathered limbs are also soft, capable of tenting the face and hiding the eyes from the world.

Why attach myself to such an image of human/animal, flying/running, enigmatic intelligence? Well as I hope I've made clear, the purpose of the fursona is to express oneself in some way as well as to fulfill some kind of internal fantasy. The wings are another aspect of the fantasy blueprint, the body I wish I had on some level. Many nights I've spent speaking to myself and thinking about the euphoria I would experience if I could fly above the clouds and

myself and thinking about the euphoria I would experience if I could fly above the clouds and contemplate the shape of the stars without caring about the approval or petty flaws of others.

So yes, the sphinx's physical perfection makes it an ideal. But unlike many other idealized bodies, its sheer improbability makes it a space to play in and explore rather than an exacting social standard. If we must adopt an idealized body, I say, let's choose winged serpents, cat-monsters, and riddle-spinners. Tell our children to be dragons and spiders, great burrowing worms or spindly faeries. It's an ideal I chose, and one I know is in the realm of fantasy. It's disarmed, subject to what I want it to be. Sphinxes, like all mythological and fictional beasts, can be immensely strong yet bend to our every whim, and exploring that furry affinity—if you will—is one potentially harmless way to explore power fantasies that are all frustrated by reality.

4. Mysteries/Esoteric Knowledge

Agender life is itself not much of a mystery. It involves all the same moving parts and associations that any human being has. Day-to-day, being agender is an omnipresent but subtle part of my social interactions and self-presentation. Honestly, there is not a thing that is esoteric or inaccessible about simply lacking a gender. Denying gender, fighting against its pernicious structuring influence on our lives, is a sport everyone can engage. And yet, I find myself constantly identifying with riddles, mysteries, and mazes. They exert a gravity on me that I suspect others do not experience. It's as if I'm magnetized to them, to mix metaphors.

When a sphinx looks out at the ocean, it can see that great, full and roiling depth as a kindred being. The ocean, the fields, the great forests are seemingly impassive. They can even seem silent. In most of the stories about sphinxes, the sphinx gives the protagonist or another character a riddle to solve, guarding the entrance to some treasure or critical path. But when we get into the sphinx's head, I wonder, what would we find? Would we find that the beast understands the riddles it asks? Is it really more wise and powerful, or has it just been obsessed with the mysteries and chosen to inflict its pathology onto others for its own amusement? Again, silence.

I ask myself these questions all the time. What is the truth of my living? What about the labels I use? Asking these questions day-in and day-out is an exhausting process, and I often

twinge with guilt when “talking gender” with friends and partners, especially those who do not have as much experience with dysphoria and gender confusion as I do. Though our capitalist world makes us all (some much more than others) slaves to inhuman machines and subject to the will of those who mean us harm, for some reason others do not “separate” from their bodies as I do. When I touch my body and ask, “what is its name?” or “what kind of thing is it?” I’m not sure how alone or together I am. Heading out to the groceries in a more masculine outfit and getting misgendered simply triggers dormant doubts that never truly leave.

Esoteric knowledge. It’s the knowledge that only a few can have. Esoterica is separate from the mundane and the common. It is not necessarily better, but for those who can hold and cherish it it can be a lantern in a world they might otherwise not understand. Truth be told, I think of myself as esoteric not so much because I am incapable of understanding myself or think that others cannot understand me—beautiful people have proven that not to be the case! Instead, I am esoteric because I feel that I am removed, niche, the subject of so much expert analysis. I am a weird bit of data, a social problem to be solved, more than a human being. I’m an object of curiosity in a gendered world. I’m also, crucially, much different than I first appear to most people.

And so I cherish the sphinx, and it treats me well. In the soft and smooth space of fantasy, the sphinx and I converse for hours in the stratosphere, trying to figure out why our speech seems so troublesome to people. We share in our autism, our “self-oriented” thinking, our compulsive habits. We run like lions and fly like eagles, debating like old friends. It’s in the sphinx’s body, and with it in mine, that I feel most stable and perceptive.



III. Transit

A witch with many lovers, in a modern city, must ride the subway. Toronto's underground train line glides in straight lines and gentle arcs around the city, rattling the ground underneath the youths making out in the park. For about an hour per trip, however, the city-witch (concrete witch, witch of glass, sparks, scavenging, you know the gamut) must put up with a considerably less stimulating experience. Once under the ground, the train is virtually windowless. Sheer darkness, maybe an obscured pipe or shielded wiring zip by. As for speed, it is unnaturally slow or fast. Lurches around corners, screeching brakes, or the doldrums of stasis, waiting, waiting.

At a certain point, the city-witch looks out the window nearest to xem regardless of whether there is anything else to see. Xey already miss the sky--not out of any nostalgia or a distaste for concrete and steel but because it has an almost curse-like effect on the body. Besides, there is a longing for shadows and obscurity. All the lighting in the subway cars is even and smooth or, in less optimal situations, flickering in maddening patterns. Vaguely hostile--perhaps just sad?--people make fleeting eye contact with each other, and everyone looks vaguely concerned about their well-being. Well, this is true of people who, like the witch, ride the rails by xemselves. Some well-dressed teenagers speak in a variety of languages, the old woman and her slightly younger companion chat gregariously and draw mild ire from those around them. The only loners who look at all peaceful are the fitful sleepers. Sleep-deprived commuters steal back their healing time from the capitalists forcing them to ride while sleepy, trying to sleep, sleep under those fluorescent lights.

Well, the witch has never been able to manage that feat of exhaustion. And xey persist.

One thing that must be clear about the queer, the agender queer in particular, is they dislike being subjected to harsh and bright scrutiny. Witches have always sought a kind of kinship with the dark, whether they had any malicious designs or not. Shadows and anonymity are friends of rebels, escapees, saboteurs, and conspirators. Witches are all of these and then some. Ah, the dusty, sunstarved tunnels. Though xey like to keep an eye on cis men riding with them, the witch wishes for all the world they were not so easily visible and vulnerable here. Xyr imperfect makeup, bold, glittery eyeshadow, legs hastily waxed, eyebrows slightly

asymmetrical--such a spectacle under these stage lights. Xey know that the straight couple a row down from xem took a few too many looks in xyr direction. Xey are very tall, too tall for xyr feminine figure, and wearing unfashionable shoes that don't quite match xyr outfit. The straight couple keeps trying to keep their brood of 2.34 children entertained. But witches can snare the meaning of a single look. That placid, probably unconscious attempt to keep their children's eyes away from xem is all-too-transparent.

The train comes to a halt, and the voice on the intercom explains something about a security situation on a train in front of this one. The witch fingers the last subways tokens in xyr pocket, compulsively wrapped inside their proof of purchase. Xey will not be humiliated by being caught without a pass again. Now the tunnel-dark stands as still as the train, and as it piles and roils within itself images begin to entangle each other. The lover xey left, the lover xey is going to see. A passing thought about suicide, no! it's not important right now. After noticing that straight couple's attempts to hide their child from xem, xey start to burn on the inside. A hot stone ignites, always dormant. Even if some enlightened individual saw xyr strange-fitting clothes and bold makeup and correctly addressed xem as a "woman," xyr actual feelings, the body xey know xey have, will remain obscure. A body without a firm grip on gender that remains too feminine for some and too masculine for others, cloaked in black lace, leather, and bands of pewter.

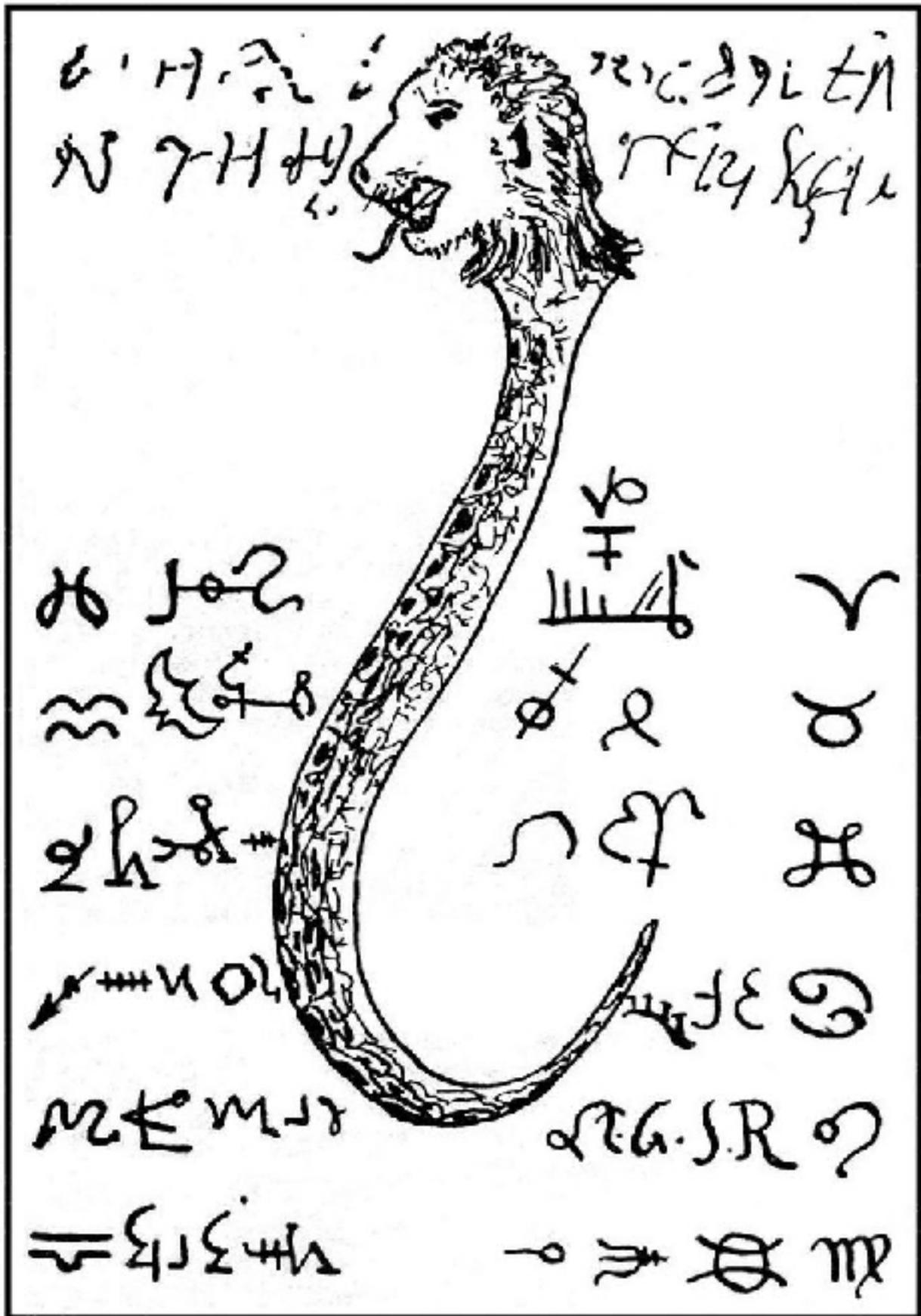
Xey think: those who reject either "side" of the gender balance, even if hanged naked and made into a public spectacle, are not visibly agender. There is no way, at present, to "come across" as agender, to make that aspect of oneself visible and legible. It's, in some ways, like a ritual or esoteric bit of knowledge that one passes only to trusted friends. To be agender is, at the present moment, to be in some ways a conspirator against one's own appearance. Even if one identifies on a social media network as agender, that epithet has little meaning to most and a tangled and impossible one even to those in the know, the ones to whom one can "come across" to inform in whispers. Like the dark to which many witches have retreated, the shadowy, tentacled nothingness of "the agender body," the fact that it can never quite be revealed except through conspiracy is empty of moral meaning. It helps some nights, it hinders at other times. Sometimes, on some subway rides, as xey contemplate all the pain and horror coiling outside in the most livable city in North America, xey almost come to tears.

A whole world tries to burst through a gap in xyr teeth, "I am here," it proclaims and shouts. There are, xere are people like me and I am not alone. I am not a shameful secret! All the glories and wounds of coming out as trans boil back to the surface for a moment. The train stutters back to life and continues its linear journey. Xey long for sunshine, for a body that can be seen. And yet.

And here is the riddle in its simplest form. Its most unsolvable state. In becoming visible, xyr power decines. Xyr meaning is no longer just the purview of confidants and fellow-travelers but also of enemies, the bewildered bystander, and the skeptical bureaucrat. Perhaps, xey think as xey stand up and exit the train, thoughts of wild sex and midnight meals shimmering under xyr eyelids, we must destroy the sad, flickering light and live in the dark, to burn out the pale light and let our rage, our dark power, speak for us. My body will never be visible as what it is, but it will blaze in a Chthonic glory nonetheless.

To the new emergence, the awakening of the light of blood, the invocation of fire. To the death of all the false lights and common truths.





IV. Demiurge

Demiurge as conceived by the Gnostics is a misogynist fantasy. The Demiurge is the being in Gnostic myth that created the physical world, that inaugurated sexual passion, birth, rebirth, and death. Gendered male but often described as effeminate, the Demiurge is the child of a holy being, the aeon Sophia, who gives birth to him without the input of her male counterpart. One old text, the Trimorphic Protenoia, describes the earthbound creator of matter as a foolish, decadent layabout:

"He has neither form nor perfection, but on the contrary possesses the form of the glory of those begotten in darkness."

Without adequate form, the Demiurge is confined to the sphere of matter, the place where mortality and biological life play out in all their imperfections. Because the Greeks believed that feminine beings were deformed, a break from the perfection of male, logical being, the hateful Demiurge accrues feminine characteristics. After all, the perfection of the true and nameless God could not be responsible for this polluted and mortal plane. In *The Hypostasis of the Archons*, another Gnostic writes, "What Sophia had created became a product in the Matter, like an aborted foetus...It was androgynous...because it was from matter that it derived." That which issues from the feminine spark alone, without the breath of Man in it, so the Gnostics reasoned, can only be malformed, aborted, misshapen, and unable to achieve the perfection of perfect knowledge. Yaldabaoth, one of the Gnostic terms for the Demiurge, means the god of the blind, the creator of the blind, the Lord of the blind. Ignorant of its origins, contemptuous of the light, its works are broken before they are finished.

Yet Yaldabaoth has children with human partners, and one scholar has speculated, "Could Yaldabaoth be a 'female from female' in a male disguise?" And Yaldabaoth sometimes even has a sister of sorts, the equally foolish and ignorant Achamothe. Closely related to this is a bit of writing on the origin of the soul, which states that the soul is feminine in nature, even possessing a womb. And yet this "soul" has externalized genitals like that of a "man," "running around everywhere copulating with whomever she meets." Only by repenting of her awful

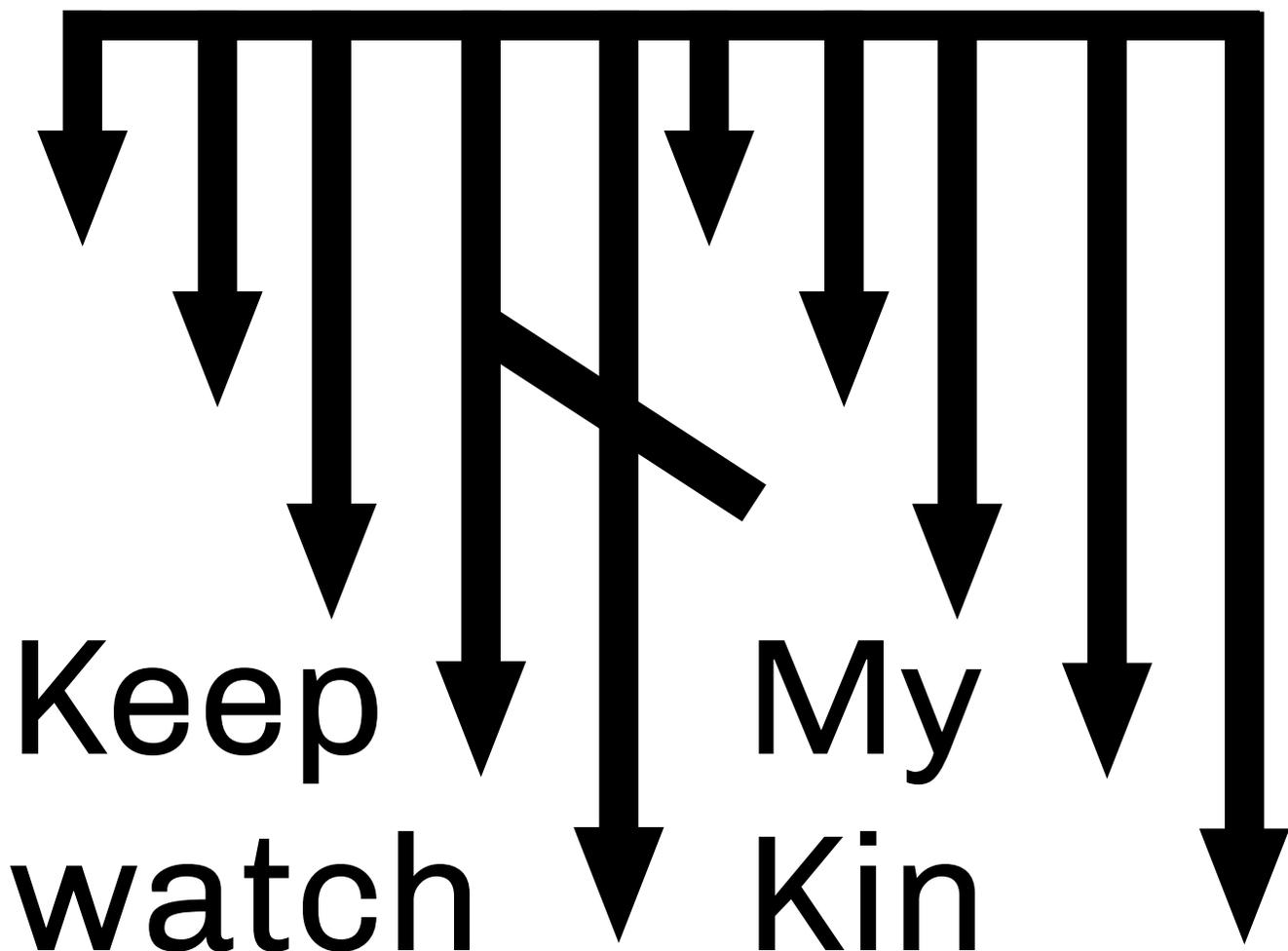
around everywhere copulating with whomever she meets." Only by repenting of her awful deeds will this Soul attain salvation and have her womb restored to her inner body.

For those who can appreciate monsters and recognize the impurity of the world and its beauty, these passages begin to suggest that these misogynist speculators and prophets saw more than they could possibly comprehend. In the femme, prodigal, lascivious Yaldabaoth, the "inverted" Soul, the foolish sister Achamoth, and many other figures of ill repute in the Gnostic imagination, we have a rich cast of queer villains. These are interlopers who stole a bit of the light and drenched it in black ink. Now it radiates like a sickness, draining the vital male spirit of its power. We all inhabit a world tailored to the specifications of Men's logos, the gendered desert of capitalism. Little oases spring up here and there for us, our chosen kin who provide us with the tools to make a life worth fighting for. We are, as queers, the arrogant Demiurge-- we forget our origins gladly, fuck and dance and retreat to our little shelters in the shadows-- and we are self-creating, self-organizing, self-loving. Our love produces monsters, not the beautiful Child of the Future the straights were promised. Our pollution is a life-giving respite in the suffocating sterility of the straight world. Against the common Wisdom of capitalism we pose the foolishness of revolt, of destruction, of joy and sex for their own sake, of platonic kinship so strong it freezes blood. And when the capitalists and landlords and the bio-parents call us back home, force us to work, and turn our lives into spectacles for sale, we recoil and strike ever harder until we are too much of a nuisance to govern anymore.

When the witch, the sphinx, and the cliff-climber all meet they are haunted by the slow torture of the life chosen for them. Achamoth and Yaldabaoth are there, sitting as equals with their younger children, their chosen successors. Emerging from the discussion is the realization that when everything is in its right place, when people do the right thing, the prudent thing, the expected thing, their lives are hardly worthy of the name. All the lines the Gnostics prized, the sensible separation of ideas into boxes and dualisms, have no place in our world. All living systems thrive on the edge of chaos, constantly dissolving and reforming into new things. Everything is in flux, messy, painful, and seemingly impossible. Everyone hurts everyone else, almost without fail. Sometimes it can seem like the rigid order of the old life is superior since it takes painful choices out of our hands and slips them behind our backs. But as humans we are environment-makers, space-makers. And if we don't create our own spaces, ones that we take ownership of, we won't learn how to be free among others. Service

teaches service, and only trying to be free can teach us how to be free. Risk is inherent in whatever choice we make, so let's cling tightly to one another as we take a few falls.

Loss is one of the only unifying queer experiences. In the Earth of Men, to be queer is to lose one's place and usually one's community. In its place we have "here be monsters" as our only home. My agender life is difficult to see, difficult to describe. Let's walk with monsters, you and I. Let's terrify the comfortable and bring life to their nightmares about us. Marx often described capitalists in monstrous terms, as vampires and werewolves. While crediting the good Karl's literary talents and taste for the Gothic, I would propose an amendment. The bosses are the hunters who stoke paranoia and raise false alarms. Burning their candles long into the night, they try to parse the dark for signs of our approach. But we are fast learners, and when we snuff out the last lantern, we will finally be free in a world free of the normal, a world of monsters. That is our home, our impossible goal. Keep watch, my kin.



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