The Strategic Use of Shifting Point-of-View Narrations in Imogen Binnie's *Nevada*

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Abstract

Imogen Binnie's *Nevada* has become a cornerstone for trans studies for nearly a decade. Since it was first published in 2013, it has become a staple in trans literature, challenging literary traditions and all-too-common coming-of-age stories that end in a predictable format of profound self-discovery, apotheosis, and personal transformation. Binnie's *Nevada* does not end with such a resolutive arc. It complicates and leaves open some of the complexities of the trans experience that cannot be captured by normative literary conventions. I will examine *Nevada*'s subversion of literary point of view conventions, specifically shifting and unstable point of view narrations—moving continuously between first-, second-, and particularly third-person limited and omniscient narrative structures—which complicate our understandings of the relationship between (a trans) self and larger sociality that the novel aims to reveal. In addition, I will argue that Cameron Awkward-Rich's concept of the "lyrical subject"—which posits subjectivity as a simultaneous experience of interiority and publicity—can be demonstrably portrayed and exemplified through the overall literary and shifting point of view structure in Binnie's *Nevada*. This showcases the ways publicity and sociality inform an interiority of withdrawal and uncertainty that Maria and James, the story's main protagonists, both endure. As such, I will analyze these shifting points of view in *Nevada* and read them as complicating traditional point of view narrations while discovering a deeper irony, instability, and complexity about the trans experience of subjectivity, illustrating why this novel should remain such a profound staple in trans literature for decades to come.

Keywords: lyrical subject; narrative structure; trans studies; trans subjectivity.

DOI: 10.37536/reden.2025.6.2743

> When she was twenty she figured out that she was such a mess not because she was trans, but because being trans is so stigmatized; if you could leave civilization for a year, like live in an abandoned shopping mall out in the desert giving yourself injections of estrogen, working on your voice, figuring out how to dress yourself all over again and meditating eight hours a day on gendered socialization, and then get bottom surgery as a reward, it would be pretty easy to transition.
>
> (Imogen Binnie, *Nevada*)

1. Introduction

Imogen Binnie's *Nevada* (2013) has become a cornerstone for transgender literature for over a decade, challenging literary traditions and all-too-common coming-of-age stories that end in a predictable format of profound self-discovery and personal transformation. Binnie's *Nevada* does not end with such a resolutive arc. It complicates and leaves open some of the complexities of the trans experience that cannot be captured by normative literary conventions. *Nevada* destabilizes literary conventions to articulate and highlight the nonlinear, socially mediated experience of trans subjectivity. Rather than adhering to the resolved arcs of traditional coming-of-age narratives or tragic queer tropes, the novel employs dynamic shifts in point of view—oscillating between first-, second-, and third-person limited/omniscient perspectives—to mirror the entangled relationship between trans interiority and the external world.

This narrative instability refuses cathartic transformation, instead foregrounding the process of selfhood as a contested site shaped by heteronormative social conditioning, media representation, and the ever-present dissonance between private experience and public perception. I will argue that by subverting point-of-view conventions Binnie not only rejects reductive literary formulas but also constructs a model of trans subjectivity that exists in simultaneity: a self both invented through sociality and withdrawn into uncertainty and precarity. I claim that this narrative strategy performs what Cameron Awkward-Rich terms the "lyrical subject," where selfhood emerges not as a fixed identity but as a dynamic negotiation between interiority and external cultural scripts. In so doing, *Nevada* cleverly implicates readers as co-constructors of meaning—one in which unwitting readers become the omniscient social fabric for the novel and its characters—reflecting the social pressures that police trans (in)visibility while prompting a critical engagement with the *very act of reading* and interpreting trans lives. Binnie's literary experimentation moreover becomes a powerful method for representing trans life not as a stable identity or category but as a constant negotiation—one that resists the closure demanded by (cisnormative) literary traditions. By denying fixed narrative perspectives, Binnie forces readers to occupy the unstable position of social interpreters, a reflection of the relentless scrutiny that trans subjectivity endures in public life. This strategic choice underscores how trans selfhood is not merely narrated but perpetually observed and reinstantiated, rendering the reader complicit in the very systems that the novel attempts to critique.

This innovative approach aligns *Nevada* with a broader movement in contemporary North American transgender literature, one that, as Stephanie Clare explores in "Contemporary North American Transgender Literature," "highlight[s] how bodies take shape in the intertwining of matter and meaning," suggesting that "attention to trans embodiment need not focus on questions of personal identity and truthful embodiment, but rather *on the social contexts that shape embodied experiences*" (Clare 2022,

118; emphasis added). "From Margins to Mainstream: The Evolution of Transgender Narratives in Media, Literature, and Digital Culture (1950-2024)" further contextualizes *Nevada*'s growing significance, observing that "[transgender] literature allows exploration of transgender interiority (thoughts, emotions, desires) in depth…[that] trans fiction challenges gender norms and invites readers to empathize with perspectives that might be unfamiliar." It goes on to say that "[b]y pluralizing transgender narratives in young adult literature and beyond, fiction opens imaginative space for thinking about gender beyond binaries. This evolving body of literature is expanding cultural perceptions of what transgender lives can look like" (GenderLibs 2025).

Similarly, canonical transgender novels like Torrey Peters's *Detransition, Baby* (2021), where the characters navigate a complex web of relationships, family, and identities, too, demonstrate this trend. *Detransition, Baby*'s groundbreaking depth and nuance adds to the trans experiences beyond the common tropes of transition narratives. Its importance engages with broader questions of social belonging, especially within nontraditional family structures, while breaking new ground for literary representation, offering complex views of transition, trans womanhood, and gendered expectations through the main characters of Reese and Ames. In a recent interview, Peters herself acknowledges that the work's chief concern is the same as anybody else's: What is our place in society and our sense of belonging? (Louisiana Channel). Indeed, as Mckenzie Wark illustrates, "Peters's book moves on from the 'sad trans girl' figure that *Nevada* consolidated and offers the trans reader more to think about in terms of ways to move forward through one's post-transition life" (Wark 2022). Casey Plett and her work *Little Fish* (2018) also exemplify this shift, portraying a trans protagonist grappling with faith, community, and personal history in ways that resist easy categorization and simplistic transition narratives.[1] This work resonates with Binnie's *Nevada* in its focus on the complexities of trans lives beyond just transition, portraying raw, realistic, and multifaceted experiences of community, resilience, and belonging in the face of systemic oppression and personal hardship.

These novels share a resistant thread against reductive narratives, offering instead an honest and detailed depiction of transgender existence that is reshaping the field.

[1]Casey Plett's work follows a similar model to Binnie's *Nevada*. Plett shares that "I've always felt very uninterested in, or even I would go as far as to say harmed by these bifurcated stories that you hear about. Really happy-go-lucky, I transitioned and now I'm happy and now I'm living my truth and everything's great, and on the other side, these really sad, mentally twisted people all die early deaths. I felt very conscious about being surrounded by those two kinds of stories that felt very detached from reality" (Plett 2020). This echoes Plett's intention to write more nuanced, realistic portrayals of trans experiences, moving away from simplistic narratives of either complete post-transition happiness or inevitable tragic outcomes, focusing on the complexities of everyday trans life beyond the common transition tropes.

While unable to cover the entirety of transgender literature in this essay, I will focus this analysis and reading of *Nevada* to unpack how it specifically portrays these theoretical and literary trends, providing close readings of and delving into the precise ways Binnie employs shifting points of view to represent trans subjectivity. Drawing upon the work of Harron Walker, Marty Fink, Cameron Awkward-Rich, Trish Salah, and Susan Stryker, I will demonstrate how *Nevada*'s narrative structure, particularly its strategic shifts in points of view, reflects the complex interplay between self and society that defines trans lives and the trans experience, adding to these growing literary trends within trans scholarship.

2. Literature Review: Subverting Narratives and Theorizing Trans Subjectivity

2.1 Breaking from Traditional Narratives

Scholarship on *Nevada* consistently highlights its rejection of linear, cathartic trans storytelling. For instance, Harron Walker (2022) traces its impact on the culture after a decade, pointing exactly to Binnie's recalcitrant and radical literary style. Walker attests, "Subverting conventions, *Nevada* doesn't hinge on a character's transition. It's about a trans woman who hasn't transitioned and a trans woman confronting the inevitable What now? that comes after having done so" (Walker 2022). Walker goes on to state that "[*Nevada*] challenges readers' assumptions, and it somehow manages to do that without being didactic, saccharine, or, worse, boring" (Walker 2022). Walker furthermore depicts how *Nevada* subverts literary conventions, which do not hinge on the finality and completion of trans characters' transformation. It defies readers' expectations that (post-)transition results in a typical *Bildungsroman* with a resolved dénouement, that self-discovery and personal transformation are traditional literary arcs that, too, can encapsulate the trans struggle. Rather, it leaves us with an instability, an irresolution, as Maria and James, the story's main protagonists, contemplate this difficult 'What now?' question that comes after, during, or even before transition.

In a similar vein to Walker, Marty Fink (2019) makes known the ways in which the novel evades these simple, normative, and redemptive self-actualizing plotlines.[2] Fink asserts, "*Nevada* ultimately offers no personal transformations or pithy insights about post-transition gender self-actualization; nor does the novel deliver on queer narrative expectations for downward spirals or tragic endings" (Fink 2019, 5). Fink thus also perceives the novel as confronting traditional literary structures of self-actualizations or

[2]Fink's work reads *Nevada* and insomnia as a radical site of resistance to hetero-, able bodied norms. It suggests that though this novel offers some promises of self-discovery, recovery, and trans epiphany/catharsis, it inevitably frustrates all possibilities for its heroine's self-growth, thus challenging fictions about using self-care to "overcome" disability and gender-based violence. *Nevada* ultimately disrupts traditional narrative techniques, leaving critical space open for alternate and subversive narrativizing practices.

tragic endings typically associated with queer narratives. It ends open-endedly with profound questions left unanswered, trying to paint a more authentic representation of what it is like to be trans. Moreover, this realistic take sets up Binnie's *Nevada* as an important site to better understand trans lives, which is why this novel has remained as salient to the field as when it was first published. Walker and Fink moreover both notice the literary complexity and irony of *Nevada*, identifying Binnie's narrative innovation as key to this literary subversion.

2.2 The Methodology of Cameron Awkward-Rich's Lyrical Subjectivity

Cameron Awkward-Rich's (2022) "Chapter Four: We's Company" poignantly clarifies and theoretically and methodologically buttresses Binnie's experimental point-of-view narrative style. Awkward-Rich's concept of the "lyrical subject," which I primarily draw on for this analysis, can also help us to understand and conceptually build upon the overall literary and shifting point-of-view structure of Binnie's *Nevada*. Awkward-Rich directs us to exactly this occurrence through his concept of the lyrical mode of the subject. He states:

> This form of representing subjectivity, which simultaneously captures both the self, formed in relation, and the withdrawn self, but which does not or cannot call them by the same name, is clearly identical to neither the immutable subject of the wrong-body model nor the willful subject of the gender freedom model nor the purely resistant subject of queer trans theory. We might call it a lyric subject, a subject defined—as lyric traditionally has been—by *a curious simultaneity of absolute interiority and publicity*. (Awkward-Rich 2022, 135-6; emphasis added)

Awkward-Rich therefore rejects the wrong-body, gender freedom, and queer trans models[3] in favor for a lyrical subject that understands trans subjectivity as both an 'absolute interiority and publicity.' Binnie's literary prose purposefully makes these shifts throughout the novel, specifically the ways in which Maria encapsulates both an interior withdrawal from her social world *and as* the social world or fabric for James in the second part of the book. Binnie's complex use of third-person limited and omniscient perspectives stresses how all subjects are constructed from a relational public social matrix, which is why the novel is primarily written from a third-person point of view. And through this third-person point of view, we can access, via limited and omniscient variations, the inner monologues and feelings of isolation that both Maria and James experience.

[3]The wrong-body model views trans individuals as born in the "wrong" body and emphasizes medical transition to align their physical body with their true gender identity, though it has been criticized for reinforcing binary gender norms. In contrast, the gender freedom model advocates for the right to express gender freely, rejecting binary constraints and medical gatekeeping and focusing on fluidity and self-identification. Lastly, the queer trans model challenges both binary gender and normativity, aligning trans identities with broader queer struggles and emphasizing fluidity and resistance to rigid gender structures.

This constant shift and juxtaposition from how Maria and James internally feel to the ways in which they are read by the outside world speak precisely to Awkward-Rich's lyrical mode of subjectivity. Through this first-person/third-person limited perspective, we—as the readers of the novel—can experience the withdrawal and internality of our main characters, of Maria and James from a relational sociality that emblematizes omniscient narrative perspectives. Binnie's complex and shifting point-of-view structure epitomizes Awkward-Rich's idea of the lyrical subject, as Binnie establishes and showcases a new literary depth to which transgendered people experience this messy and interconnected duality, especially the ways they are read by medical, legal, media, and social systems that shape the alienated interiority that they express throughout the work.

Awkward-Rich, however, makes sure to articulate the unique ways in which transpeople experience this duality. Transness itself may be defined by this misrecognition, an inherent feeling of withdrawal special to trans lives, suggests Awkward-Rich. The reason why the issue of publicity and interiority come up as a distinguishing issue in thinking about trans subjectivity is that, according to Awkward-Rich, trans identity is perhaps the *only* identity defined by such a mismatch between social interpellation and selfhood. He states, "Either the trans person misrecognizes their inner life as social reality or misrecognizes scripted social norms as their inner life; either way, transness is by definition a maladjusted relation to the 'the world'" (Awkward-Rich 2020, 119). Awkward-Rich furthermore acknowledges the special trouble for transpeople, a discrepancy between gender attribution and gender identity, as attributed, performed, and visible gender markers set the conditions for the recognition by others, helping to construct gender identity. Therefore, trans sociality, by definition, is fraught from the onset, since trans lives contest the interpretative primacy of the visible to challenge the overdeterminations from the outside world, and while all social categories entail forms of misrecognition, transness is perhaps a unique category *defined* by this very misrecognition (127).

While all social categories entail *some* misrecognition between interiority and sociality, something generally ascribed to all human subjectivity, trans subjectivity may be the only category that is itself demarcated by this misrecognition between the ways you read or identify yourself with(out) the lens of social norms, i.e., an inner life, and the dominant social, cultural, and visual overdeterminations that will read you through norms of gender attribution, i.e., the outside world. This results in a "grammatical awkwardness" toward bodily and identity integrity. In other words, transpeople do not experience the same bodily and identity integrity—a feeling that one is correctly gendered and attributed to a body and interiority that matches the norms of the social world—as non-transpeople or cisgendered people.

Awkward-Rich's lyrical subject also understands this affective and phenomenological awkwardness through the role of media, e.g., the cosmetics Maria uses to perform womanhood, TV and the internet's representations of transwomen, the films James uses

to help him identify his internalized gender and sexuality, etc., which shapes Maria's and James's feelings of unease. Awkward-Rich insists:

> Media, whether in the form of explicitly trans narratives or not, provide schemas for organizing inchoate feelings of unease; reading makes sense of experience, fleshes it out…reading provide[s] self-organizing schemes and schemas that might help one more substantively recognize others…In particular, this function of reading explains the compulsiveness of trans bibliographies, why trans projects of self-making are so often extensive research projects: continuous reading is a way of continually confirming and populating a world for oneself in books in the absence of the possibility of recognition outside of them. (132)

Awkward-Rich conveys the ways media, explicitly trans narratives or not, produces 'inchoate feelings of unease' in which reading attempts to make sense of an internal experience. He sees reading as a means of creating new self-organizing schemas by which we can better recognize others, pointing to the importance and purpose of creating trans literature and projects in the first place, so that one can continuously confirm and multiply (fictional) worlds for oneself in lieu of the misrecognition from the outside world.

In a similar line of thought, Trish Salah advocates that what makes *Nevada* so unique is precisely that this work is intended and primarily written *for* trans people for reasons noted above, but not exclusively so, making this an exceptional and inviting work in evolving trans literature (Page 2014). These theorizations pertain directly to *Nevada* for two reasons: firstly, it captures this inherent state of unease, misrecognition, and withdrawal as transpeople self-organize themselves due to the schemas available, schemas ascribed to them by the outside social world, and secondly, the novel itself offers us with one of these 'continuous readings' that 'continually confirm' a world for oneself in the absence of regulated social recognition, providing us with a meta-social commentary that gives transpeople a world that does *not* misrecognize them. In doing so, Awkward-Rich brilliantly notes the ways the trans interiority represents its own unique social category, depicting the depth and complexity of detachment that is not seen to the same degree in non-trans or cisgendered subjects.

I argue that Binnie's *Nevada* epitomizes this reading of Awkward-Rich's lyrical subject, a trans subjectivity that is based on and defined by this social misrecognition and misrepresentation, being constantly misread or misgendered by society or being homogeneously read by social norms and stereotypes via media that do not cohere with one's invented or fictionalized sense of self and interiority. This further instructs and reinforces this reciprocal relationship between selfhood and sociality, between inside and outside, something Binnie's *Nevada* and her shifting point-of-view narrations attempt to evoke.

2.3 Trans Subjectivity and Literature in Relational Context

Susan Stryker (2013), another hugely influential thinker in trans studies and trans subjectivity, also alludes to this "inside" and "outside" structuration shaped by one's social,

material, symbolic, and linguistic conditions. Stryker highlights the ways transgender rage[4] is situated by the inextricable relationship between language and materiality, providing a field of signification that informs the fictions of an inside (first-person point of view) and outside (third-person point of view). Stryker states:

> The rage itself is generated by the subject's situation in a field governed by the unstable but indissoluble relationship between language and materiality, a situation in which language organizes and brings into signification matter that simultaneously eludes definitive representation and demands its own perpetual rearticulation in symbolic terms. Within this dynamic field the subject must constantly police the boundary constructed by its own founding in order to maintain the fictions of "inside" and "outside" against a regime of signification/materialization whose *intrinsic instability* produces the rupture of subjective boundaries as one of its regular features. (Stryker 2013, 248-9; emphasis added)

This, then, helps us to unravel the ways we experience an internalized and bodily 'fiction.' While having to police the boundary between inside and outside experience, transpeople are subject to an 'intrinsic instability' by the significations of the outside world, e.g., being read as either woman, man, cis, trans, gay, straight, etc. More simply put, subjects are always in a field of signification that demands 'perpetual rearticulation,' one that reproduces the signifiers of what it means to be and perform a (gendered) category. Accordingly, this establishes the ways in which the fiction of the outside world, i.e., social, legal, media, medical, cultural systems, etc., ground the formation of a 'bodily ego' that signifies and transfers meaning in and to an internalized fiction, an interior first-person perspective.

This showcases why Maria and James feel withdrawn, confused, and alienated, conveying this 'intrinsic instability'—much like Awkward-Rich's trans misrecognition in the lyrical subject—that they both inherently feel due to not being able to be read in the ways they would like to by the larger normative significations of gender and sexuality represented in media and culture, by the larger cultural milieu and symbolic assemblage. They are inextricably part of the symbolic order and its relational context structured by cultural scripts that give them the very ability to discern or perceive a fiction of interiority (inside) and publicity (outside).

Stryker consequently helps us to unpack and makes more visible the ways in which gendering is a mainstay in this symbolizing field, one that inhabits the deep signifying structures of personhood, and one that we cannot easily or readily escape. Stryker continues, "A gendering violence is the founding condition of human subjectivity; having a gender is the tribal tattoo that makes one's personhood cognizable" (250). In this way,

[4]Although Stryker is depicting the transgender rage of monsters and monstrosity in trans text, an idea that lies outside the scope of this article, we can see a similar line of thought in the ways the public or outside world manufactures the significations, symbolic order that allow subjects to have a first-person perspective, experience, or sense of self at all.

gendering is a way of making people (re)cognizable, making known the implicit and explicit harm and violence of (mis)gendering them. As such, this relational interplay of reading the symbolic order of the world, a third-person point of view, to an interior experience, a first-person point of view, gives literary theorists and trans scholars a more dynamic, entangled, and authentic approach to the trans struggle.

2.4 Subverting Trans Tropes as Trans Justice

In speaking to this gendering violence, Fink elaborates upon and reminds us not to forget the real-world consequences that affect millions of transpeople's lives. Fink remarks that "*Nevada* plays with readers' narrative expectations, raising the question of what happens 'when you take away the mystification, misconceptions and mystery' created by media about trans women, and deal instead with representing the 'boring', 'exhausting' daily impact of gender-based violence" (Fink 2019, 5). Fink thus reads *Nevada* as challenging normative narrative expectations when you take a hard look at the ways trans women are read and constructed by broader cultural mediums and relational formations. It emphasizes and underlines the trans reality, considering the real gender-based violences that occur worldwide and how society and public representations facilitate these real-world harms and inequities. *Nevada* importantly attempts to make these injustices visible to its' readership through its unconventional narrative techniques that creatively implicate its readers in co-creating this larger symbolic order through the very act of reading literature and gender from a societally produced positionality. It tries to emphasize the open-endedness of the trans reality via the unresolved nature of the novel's ending. Fink reinforcingly reminds us that:

> Rather than finding her own story 'interesting' like the stories of 'trans women on television', Maria instead narrates trauma as that which keeps a person 'stuck in a state of perma-meta' and involves increasingly 'repressing and policing yourself'. Binnie thwarts the possibility for readers to enjoy a narrative progression from Maria as 'energetic little college kid' to self-actualized, post-transition trans adult. (7)

Fink further underscores the authentic reality of being a trans woman by being 'stuck in a state of perma-meta' that involves constantly policing oneself according to the publicity of the outside world. It contests one-dimensional and normative narrative readings that lead to self-actualization, catharsis, and apotheosis, that of a finalized, fixed, transformed, and resolved trans adult or subject. Moreover, Fink makes known the ways in which Binnie muddies our stabilizing narrative progressions in order to make strides toward trans justice and nonhegemonic representation.

Casey Plett, another fellow Canadian writer, also appreciates the honesty of this work in the broader culture of what trans women are allowed to be in the world, that the "Positive Narrative stuff," that of self-actualizing arcs, is starting to give way so that we can go deeper into the truer and uglier things that historically have had few platforms

(Page 2014). Binnie's perma-meta state and anti-'positive narrative stuff' speak to and include her lack of self-transformative resolutions. Unlike 'trans women on television,' Binnie's *Nevada* describes something deep and profound about the phenomenology and interiority of trans understanding juxtaposed to the real gender-based violences ingrained in our cultural norms, practices, and depictions. It reminds us that the trans experience exposes a permanent state of instability, uncertainty, oppression, and repression, something that shifting points of view help to elucidate, delineating a move toward (un)doing trans (in)justice via addressing the historical underrepresentation of the trans experience through the creation of new trans literary and cultural works and movements.

Having established the theoretical landscape and key critical perspectives on *Nevada*, the discussion now turns to a close examination of Binnie's narrative techniques. By exploring specific instances of shifting point-of-view narrations, the following analysis will demonstrate how *Nevada* enacts the complex interplay between self and society, internal experience and external publicity, ultimately rebuking traditional notions of trans identity and literary form.

3. Unstable Selves and Unstable Narrations: A Close Reading of Shifting Point-of-View Techniques in *Nevada*

Binnie's *Nevada* follows Maria, a trans woman, and her experiences and travels in New York as she suffers a tough break-up and loses her job, comprising the first half of the novel. She then steals her ex-girlfriend's car and buys an ample amount of heroin before heading west on a journey of self-discovery. In the second part of the novel, Maria sojourns to Nevada and meets James Hanson and immediately recognizes him as a not-yet realized trans woman. While contemplating and sharing their experiences, they travel together to Reno as James leaves her there after stealing her heroin, ending with no resolution or profound self-transformative sequence. It leaves us unsure of how to read this abrupt ending, with Maria's thoughts of gender, heteronormativity, and social conditioning left lingering.

Nevada uses an interesting, innovative, and ambivalent point-of-view structure for strategic literary purposes, however. This structure oscillates among first-person, second-person, and third-person limited/omniscient points of view in nontraditional ways. These shifts force us to ask several tough questions: are we supposed to read this work from an objective observer, a (pre-/post-) trans person, a cis heteronormative reader, etc.? This unconventional usage of point-of-view narrations, I suggest, serves as a profound challenge to common categorizations and fictional writing practices, especially in transgendered contexts. Yet, this nontraditional point-of-view construction allows literary theorists and trans studies scholars to acknowledge the deep intricacy and inextricable interconnection between interiority and withdrawal and the sociality and publicity that contextualize internal experiences, e.g., to see oneself as different, (in)visible, or

misgendered through a larger social and mediatized lens. These unstable points of view implore us to engage with the byzantine interplay between self and society; therefore, these unconventional literary uses of point of view in *Nevada* allow us to analyze the socio-cultural milieu in which the constructed or invented self and sociality interact in tangled, messy, and dynamic ways, obscuring a simplified, facile, and dichotomous reading of self and sociality that reproduce dominant, violent, and often hegemonic modes of (trans) representation.

Instead, *Nevada* primarily asks us what it mean to be trans: a withdrawn 'self' constructed by a violently gendered society? Is it solely this first-person experience of interiority? Or is it a form of publicity or performativity filtered by media and a wider socio-cultural matrix? "That's what it's like to be a trans woman: never being sure who knows you're trans or what that knowledge would even mean to them. Being on unsure, weird social footing," answers Maria (Binnie 2013, 8). Binnie illustrates early that this novel will probe the experiences of trans women, who often undergo uneasy feelings and awkward social interactions. In an early scene, Maria describes her initial experiences as a trans woman in a party setting that symbolizes sociality. Through inner monologue, she reflects:

> And it's not even like it matters if somebody knows you're trans. Who cares. You just don't want your hilarious, charming, complicated weirdo self to be erased by ideas people have in their heads that were made up, by, like, hack TV writers, or even hackier internet porn writers. (8)

Nevada quickly takes up questions of representation and the ways our senses of self get 'erased' by ideas people have in their heads produced by larger cultural representations and mass media. Media in our culture today, such as TV, social media, films, the internet, etc., normalize the social category and construction of trans women. And we see how Maria begins to interrogate her sense of the self and the ways she interacts and communicates with broader societal constructs that pugnaciously (mis)gender, obfuscate, and situate Maria's internal feelings of withdrawal, anxiety, and frustration. This gets to the heart of Binnie's purpose for writing this novel: to illuminate and reveal the reality of transpeople's lives via the mixture of our interior and internalized senses of self that intricately commingles with dominant societal narratives that frame the performative, mediatized, and publicized category of 'trans women.'

Nevada's shifting point-of-view structuration further explicates and makes visible this dynamic interaction between self and sociality. Binnie's unique and curious shifts of point of view deeply contest a facile split between first- and third- person and limited and omniscient perspectives, blurring the lines that give us a clear, fixed, and distinct point-of-view category, which reflects and symbolizes the trans experience. The overall structure from the first to the second part of the novel also helps us to comprehend the ways Binnie confuses the lines between a clear third-person limited and omniscient

perspective. Binnie deliberately uses a third-person perspective throughout the novel, using proper names and gendered pronouns such as "she" and "he," notably while detailing the main characters of Maria and James in the second half of the work. Yet, her third-person style is conveyed in ways that attempt to understand the subjective "I" *in terms of or through public spheres* given that we are sparsely privy to all the characters' thoughts and feelings—i.e., omniscient narration—throughout the novel.

A few key sections speak to this interchange, starting with Maria's contemplation of how to engage with bureaucratic, medical, and legal procedures as a trans woman: "I don't care, whatever, I'm trans…It comes from the fact that you have to prove that you're Really Trans in order to get any treatment at all. Meaning hormones. It is stupid and there are these hoops you have to jump through, boxes you need to check" (Binnie 2013, 45). Here, Binnie is speaking about Maria's first-person understanding of being trans through the personal pronoun "I", which she rarely uses, while juxtaposing it with the second-person collective pronoun "you". She uses "you" in this case to loosely speak about a collective trans experience, and she refers to how one must 'check boxes' to be recognized as trans by society at large. She thereby is writing from a subjective position while at the same time speaking for and to a wider trans category, muddling a simple reading that sees these shifting points of view as clear, separate, and distinct. Binnie notices the ways in which transgendered realities need to be verified by social and public networks, especially medical and legal apparatuses.

Maria later comments that "It's expensive to get your documents [driver's license] changed, plus you have to go to city hall and be like, I am trans, please put that on a record somewhere, which gets harder and harder with every minute that people aren't reading you as trans" (62). In this context, Maria uses her first-person perspective and experience to bring attention to the ways she must reconcile with bureaucratic, legal, and social spaces, again by identifying a collective trans experience and a contextualizing social field of which she is inseparably connected. This emphasizes the complexity of both being a subject of interiority whilst at the same time negotiating herself in a situated public world, experimenting with multiple and transitory shifts in points of view that help us to better understand her internality in and of a broader social order.

Binnie also uses Maria to bring to our attention to the frustration and pain that goes with being trans, creating a feeling of withdrawal precisely because the world either sees or does not see you as trans or as a clearly marked gender. For instance, describing a Christmas party Maria attended with her then-girlfriend Steph while using a third-person limited perspective, Binnie emphasizes,

> [b]eing trans, at that point of [pre-]transition, was characterized by this intense feeling of inferiority toward pretty much everyone…Maria felt like she didn't [know how to perform womanhood]. *She internalized this idea that trans women always take up too much space*, so she was trying hard to disappear. (Binnie 2013, 57; emphasis added)

This exemplifies Maria's 'intense feeling of inferiority' toward everyone, toward society itself. Maria herself observes that she has internalized the idea that trans women 'take up too much space,' highlighting the ways being in the social world makes her feel inferior, subjugated, and marked, further propelling her to withdraw into herself. Because of the ways this social world reads her, she desires to be left unseen, to be made invisible, indicating a two-way interaction between interiority and sociality. Interestingly, then, this third-person point of view take discloses Maria's in-depth and complex interiority, her inner state and feelings of inadequacy shaped by outside stereotypical notions of (trans) women that were prescribed to her by media and the cultural landscape she occupies.

In the second part of the book, *Nevada* generally shifts perspective from Maria to James, prompting us to see how Maria's character functions as the contextualizing social grid that then becomes the audience/reader for James and his interior and first-person experience. Maria, while occupying a third-person positionality and describing the ways in which she has been read by her social environment in the first half of the novel, becomes the reader and relational framework for James in the second half: "As soon as Maria Griffiths sees James Hanson in the Star City, Nevada, Wal-Mart, she's like that kid is trans and he doesn't even know it yet" (Binnie 2013, 172). Maria herself thus shifts and becomes the public for James in this section of the book, reading James as trans in ways that he himself might not yet be aware. This underlines the intricacy of an omniscient perspective, since the narrator uses the proper noun "Maria", not the personal pronoun "I" in this instance, denoting that we, the readers of the novel, objectify and read Maria's experience in a multilayered, metanarrative fashion. Binnie thus forces her readers to unwittingly become the omniscient readers or social fabric for Maria and James throughout the work.

To further analyze this point, Binnie positions Maria simultaneously from both a third-person limited and omniscient perspective. Maria occupies both positionalities in that we are primarily just given Maria's thoughts for huge segments of the novel (limited), but in a unique way that acknowledges and centers the omniscience of a public sphere, including us as readers, other characters in the story, the historical and material context outlined in the book itself, i.e., early 21st century, etc. More simply put, all subjects are constantly being read by others *at the same time* they read others. Maria is *read* by us as she instantaneously *reads* James, complicating a standard point-of-view structure. For example, when James finally asks Maria if she is trans in his apartment after they initially meet, Maria responds, "Yes James H., I'm trans. How did you know? Which, she realizes as she's saying it, is exactly the worst possible question she could have started with…Wait, she says. James H., are *you* trans?" (Binnie 2013, 202-3; emphasis in original). Here, we are clearly given a third-person limited reading of Maria's internal thoughts, which regrets answering James's question the way she did. Yet, moments later, James, who just asked and interpreted Maria as trans, replies, "I dunno. The way he looks over

at her after he says that though—scared, maybe a little bit aggressive, but mostly like, do you believe me—makes his answer clear" (203). This demonstrates a complex, imbricated move from a limited to an omniscient narrative construction. We are clearly given James's internalized thoughts and feeling of fear and anxiety by means of both first- and third-person pronouns, speaking to the frustrated sense of uncertainty conveyed by trans ambivalence, as James 'makes his answer clear' to Maria (and us) that he is, in fact, trans; Binnie interestingly uses a nonnormative omniscient structure to reveal the depth of his withdrawal. We are the readers of Maria at the same moment that Maria is the reader of James, and we are the readers of James at the same moment that James is the reader of Maria. This adds to the multifaceted, multilayered, and overlapping narrations at play, fluidly moving from a third-person limited point of view to an omniscient style in ways that capture the in-depth interiorities of Maria *and* James while attempting to make its readership aware of itself as a participating audience, signifying that this is not a straightforward limited/omniscient narrative formation. This unravels the point-of-view dynamism and strategy of describing the embodiment of the trans experience, which cannot be fully understood by strict and traditional point-of-view methodologies and fictional writing practices.

Likewise, Walker compellingly comments that Maria deliberately makes herself the public audience who reads James to help him transition. In speaking about James, Walker notes:

> *He's* [James's] intrigued by Maria's rock-star vibe; she becomes convinced that *he's* actually a trans woman in desperate need of saving from his dissociative male facade. 'I'm gonna go talk to that girl and tell her that *she's* a girl,' Maria decides shortly after they cross paths. 'We'll talk, and *she'll* cry, and I'll set her up a Livejournal so she can sort through all her feelings and then I'll leave and totally learn something about myself too.' Maria is not wrong to assume this about James…but you can't just tell someone *she's* trans before *she* comes to that conclusion *herself* or *she'll* steal your drugs and ditch you in a casino. (Walker 2022; emphasis added)

Moreover, Walker identifies how Maria is reading James as a 'dissociative male' who needs saving. Maria intriguingly already reads James as a "she" in stating that 'she's [James's] a girl,' who will cry and set up her own Livejournal account much in the same way Maria has done, reading James objectively through her own first-person, experiential, and developing categorical lens of and as a trans woman. Maria also claims that she will learn something about herself by helping James understand his own interiority, pointing to this reciprocal interaction between subjectivity and sociality. This epitomizes the finding that Maria does in fact read James in a way that makes him trans *without* his own authorial, first-person, or subjective input. Maria correctly assumes that James is trans, and as such, Maria is reading James and looking to be, perhaps ambitiously or overzealously, an important social figure, role model, and trans representative for him to

follow. In using the pronoun of "she" to describe James in that moment, Maria is *rereading* James from a nonnormative social standpoint, a new audience or cultural configuration that reads James as a trans woman, establishing Maria as this new social public for him in ways that he may not have had, reconceptualizing and reinventing a social script that he might otherwise never be exposed.

Instead of normative or dominant narratives that will forcefully and violently read James's gender as solely male, Binnie, through the concurrent lens of first-person perspectives, proper names, and gendered pronouns (a third-person perspective), provides another dynamic avenue that can read James in a way that helps us to capture James's composite, complex, and processual interiority along with his sense of withdrawal, uncertainty, and internal instability. This promotes and supports the idea that Binnie's *Nevada* subverts traditional literary styles and asks us to remain in this ambiguous space between subjectivity and the social public as engaged, active, and co-constitutive readers, addressing an inevitable interconnection between publicity of the outside world and the interiority of a personalized inside world.

4. Conclusion: Expanding Literary Strategies Through Trans Narrativity

The novel's strategic use of fluid point-of-view narrations—oscillating between first-, second-, and third-person limited/omniscient perspectives—does more than simply tell an intricate story; through this narrative form, it enacts the very phenomenology of trans identity formation. This literary technique, as I conceive it and argue, moreover makes several salient contributions to transgender literature. First, it disrupts the reductive binary of self and society by illustrating how trans subjectivity is constantly renegotiated between personalized senses of self and societal norms and expectations. Secondly, *Nevada* rejects linear narratives of transformation and traditional coming-of-age or transition stories. Instead, it presents trans experience as an ongoing process of "perma-meta" self-reflection and social navigation. By denying both triumphant self-actualization and tragic ending plotlines, Binnie forces readers to confront the mundane yet profound realities of trans life and the trans struggle. Thirdly, it expands the scope of literary representation as the novel's unconventional structure pushes beyond simple pronoun politics to engage with deeper questions of perspective, social recognition, and the construction of selfhood. Lastly, *Nevada* exceptionally illuminates Awkward-Rich's lyrical subject, showcasing how trans subjectivity exists in a state of simultaneous interiority and publicity.

Interestingly, in reflecting and thinking about how in some scholarly circles trans issues collapse into having to do more with the politics of pronoun choice, I believe there is something deeply insightful here in that pronoun choice is not the heart of the issue; point of view is. While point-of-view narration is a different form of attentiveness to pronouns and/or personhood, it certainly relates to them and invites us to attend to first-

person as well as third-person perspectives in challenging and novel ways. This shift could steer some of the conversations in trans scholarship today in new heuristic directions, since it engages with a different—and perhaps more penetrative—way of conceptualizing the dialectic of interiority of personhood and subjectivity that recognizes an uncertain and withdrawn sense of self, something pronoun choice in itself cannot capture, speak to, or expound upon.

This subversive approach to narration does more than just represent trans experiences; it expands our understanding of *how literature can function*, especially the role of point-of-view narrativizing. *Nevada* reveals that point of view is not just a formal or literary choice. It is a powerful tool for exploring the interwoven entanglements of identity formation, embodiment, and sociality while denouncing the injustices of an oppressive heteronormative society. By resisting easy categorization and refusing to offer crude, disingenuous resolutions, *Nevada*, notwithstanding some important critiques[5], opens up new possibilities for literary and cultural expression. It invites readers to consider how narrative structure itself can be a site of resistance against normative expectations, both in literature and in our culturally (techno-)mediatized lives. Binnie's *Nevada* moreover stands as a transformative work in transgender literature. By employing shifting points of view, Binnie crafts a new narrative form that mirrors the complex interplay between perceived interiority and overdetermined social perception that defines trans subjectivity, unpacking "how reality is shaped by myth and fantasy," that "[t]rans community, vitality, and survivability require new myths, new fantasies we can embody…because trans bodies are real" (Clare 2022, 129).

As such, the significance of *Nevada* extends far beyond its status as a transgender novel. It offers insights into the limitations of the traditional Western literary canon, the power of experimental narrations to confront social norms, the potential for fiction to articulate nuanced philosophical ideas about selfhood, society, and materiality, and the role of literature in shaping cultural understandings of gender and identity construction. In pushing the boundaries of narrative conventions, Binnie's work, I propose, invites us to reconsider not just how we read trans stories, but how we read and construct all stories about self, belonging, publicity, and the human experience, experimenting where, as Clare puts it, "narrative and materiality intertwine" (Clare 2022, 128). Because of this, *Nevada* remains not just an important work of trans literature and justice, but a significant

[5] *Nevada* is not without its limitations. While it breaks new ground in trans representation, it is important to note some of its lacunas. As Wark pointedly observes, the novel's sole focus on the *white* trans experience leaves unexplored how racialization intersects with gendered misrecognition. She asserts, "Most of all, [*Nevada*] doesn't help us think about how the ways we inhabit gender are always connected to the ways we inhabit race" (Wark 2022). This gap points to the need for more diverse voices in trans literature that can address the compounded effects of racial *and* gender-based marginalization, misrecognition, and violence.

contribution to contemporary fiction as a whole, pushing us to expand our literary conventions and embrace the complex and often contradictory nature of (trans) subjectivity.

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