

Lupusization and Transfemininity:

How the Wolf has been used to Explore the Transfeminine

By Radha Hosad

As a child, the idea of the transgender, or even the idea of gender itself, was a mystery I slowly uncovered into adulthood, and the way that happened was mainly through shows. My most vivid memory of the first time I really saw a transgender person on screen was as a middle schooler, sneakily watching the raunchy adult cartoon *Family Guy*. *Family Guy* had an episode where one of the character's parents comes out as a trans woman and transitions. The dog Brian unknowingly has sex with her, and when he finds out he is mocked and he vomits in disgust. That image was many people's first exposure to transfemininity, as something more disgusting than a dog having sex with a human.

Looking back, I recognize how awful and bigoted the show was, but one thing still intrigued me, why the animal? Why, in this episode about a trans woman, is an anthropomorphic dog seen as the normal one? The truth is, canines, and more specifically the canine's ancestor the wolf, has been used to explore societal frustrations about transfemininity. I argue that similar to simianization and felineization, lupusization, which I define as caricaturing through making one's features more wolflike, showcases fears and anxieties around the transfeminine, or trans women and nonbinary people who have transitioned to a more feminine gender presentation in society and has shifted in use as fears around the transfem have shifted and trans visibility have risen. I also argue that because of the presence of lupusization in popular culture, the wolf and wolf adjacent animals have a reclaimed resonance with modern transfem people and lend themselves to reclamation.

It is important to note that I am specifically discussing transmisogyny, rather than transphobia in general. According to transgender feminist Julia Serano, who coined the term in the manifesto *Whipping Girl*, transmisogyny is the intersection of four things: transphobia, cissexism, oppositional sexism, and traditional sexism. Transphobia is an irrational fear of,

aversion to, or discrimination against people whose gendered identities, appearances, or behaviors deviate from societal norms. Cissexism is the belief that transgender people's identified genders are inferior to, or less authentic than, those of cissexuals. Oppositional sexism is the belief that female and male are rigid, mutually exclusive categories, each possessing a unique and nonoverlapping set of attributes, aptitudes, abilities, and desires. Finally, traditional sexism is the belief that maleness and masculinity are superior to femaleness and femininity.

In arguing for why transmisogyny should be examined rather than generic transphobia, Julia Serrano says,

When the majority of jokes made at the expense of trans people center on “men wearing dresses” or “men who want their penises cut off,” that is not transphobia— it is trans-misogyny. When the majority of violence and sexual assaults committed against trans people is directed at trans women, that is not transphobia— it is trans-misogyny. When it's okay for women to wear “men's” clothing, but when men who wear “women's” clothing can be diagnosed with the psychological disorder transvestic fetishism, that is not transphobia— it is trans-misogyny. When women's or lesbian organizations and events open their doors to trans men but not trans women, that is not transphobia— it is trans-misogyny. (Serano x)

In other words, a lot of experiences that transfem¹ people face are not experiences shared by the entire transgender community, and a lot of what has been historically simply labeled transphobia is specifically aimed towards transfem people and is transmysogyny.

In this paper, I will explain how lupusization fits in with Mel Chen's theory about animal caricature. I will then explore lupusization through three texts: 1936's “Big Bad Wolf”, The

¹ To clarify, the term transfem is an umbrella term that includes trans women but also includes everyone on the transfeminine spectrum. A lot of homophobia against gay men for being effeminate is thus considered transmysogyny, even if the gay men are cis identifying.

Shrek Franchise, and the anime series *Beastars*. The 1936 “Big Bad Wolf” is a Disney cartoon that uses the Big Bad Wolf character and presents that transfeminine characters are both dangerous precisely because of their transfemininity, and uses the animality of the wolf to do so. The *Shrek* movies have a Big Bad Wolf character who is explicitly made fun of for being gender non conforming and transfeminine, but is a non threatening ally instead of an existential threat. Finally, *Beastars* has a protagonist that is a wolf that struggles with allegorical transmisogyny but still exists as the main hero of the story.

Animality and Stereotype

The use of animalism to create a pointed stereotype is nothing unique. One of the most well known uses of this is simianization, or the use of monkey imagery to create racist character. This is something that persists in use to this day, with the extremely popular Bored Ape NFT’s being accused of being racist simianizations and attached to neonazism. The use of simianization persists more than just being an insult, but because it evokes something deep about the idea of who gets to be considered “human” in the first place. One of the most important texts that discusses how animalism and caricature intersect in addition to how the idea of what is human and what is not human intersects with queerness and transness is *Animacies* by Mel Chen. According to Mel Chen, animalism itself is at the core of the reason for simianization. When discussing a film where a white woman falls in love with a monkey, Chen says, “Here the ‘monkey’ stands in for something: a creature with limited, superficial identifiability...a presumably language- less, cognitively reduced beast; and finally, the example which serves as an example precisely because it is self- evidently extreme”(Chen 95). I argue that just as the idea of marrying a monkey stands in for the limitations of sexuality and of marriage, the idea of sleeping with a wolf or being romantically involved with a wolf serves as a sort of comic

exaggeration of the dangers of gender nonconformity and transness. As the old homophobic joke goes, if we let gay people get married, what's stopping X from getting married. In terms of lupusization, the joke would go if we let trans women exist, and we trust ourselves and others to be in relationships with trans women, we may as well be with a wolf in a dress. The wolf is this X, a fictional warning against real transgender relationships and trusting the transfeminine.

Another famous example of how animalization, racism, and transphobia intersect that Chen discusses is the infamous Chinese stereotype, Fu Manchu. Fu Manchu was the main villain of the television series *The Adventures of Dr. Fu Manchu* and is intended to be a racist caricature of Chinese people. Fu Manchu as a caricature is a use of felinization, which is simianization except with cat-like characteristics instead of monkey-like characteristics. In addition, Fu Manchu has a pet monkey who brings in simianization as Fu Manchu sort of uses the monkey as his hands. This is in addition to Fu Manchu being queer and trans coded beyond belief in his actions and mannerisms. According to Chen,

Such a sexual- racial polarization seems in the end untenable, and the Asian transgender body becomes both eminently possible as the logical (if socially disallowed) consequence of a signficatory overreach, while at the same time, the Asian transgender body survives as an impossible spectacle. Indeed, Fu Manchu's queer gendering poses an embodied threat; the filmic representation of this body, it could be argued, suggests the perceived toxicity of a racially gendered body that simply won't behave(Chen 121).

Fu Manchu in the nineteen fifties showcases how western anxieties about transgenderism and gender nonconformity intersect with sinophobia and racism, and it is no coincidence that animality is so integral to the character. According to Chen "In weaving between heterosexual, homosexual, and the asexual... he mirrors the ambivalently sexualized quality of animals" (Chen

120). In other words, it is precisely the animality that meshes these western fears together into a cohesive unit.

Chen goes on to connect these caricatures to gendering and undergendering. With monkeys, it is difficult to distinguish gender, so simianization caricatures work to make the subject of the caricature genderless. Cats have an association with femininity, and so felinization works to feminize the subject. This idea, of the lack of defined sexuality implies that animalism inherently challenges the human binary of gender and the tying of the false gender binary with the false sex binary. According to Chen,

In my attempt to bridge the methodological and epistemological gaps among queer of color scholarship, linguistics, ethnic studies, and white queer studies, I propose an optic— or, rather, a sensibility— that seeks to make consistently available the animalities that live together with race and with queerness, the animalities that we might say have crawled into the woodwork and await recognition, and, concurrently, the racialized animalities already here.(Chen 104)

The “human” is tied to strict gender ideas and the “animal” is a chaotic blurring or rejection of these ideas. Non white races, Non binary people, trans people, gay people, disabled people, anyone who deviates from White supremacist ideals is thus considered non human, and animal, and is portrayed as such. Animalism’s ambiguity serves as this stand in for all othering, and thus fictional works that tackle animalism itself seem to as a result explore othering itself.

Lupusization

I argue that just as felinization served to feminize Fu Manchu, and simianization is used to dehumanize in a genderless way, caninization, more specifically lupisization or turning into wolf is used to masculinize subjects that are desiring to be feminine, specifically the transfem in

all their forms. I define lupusization as the wolf version of simianization, of caricaturing through making one's features more wolflike. The Big Bad Wolf is a depiction of transfemininity and it is precisely as Chen would say the connection to animality and inhumanity that makes the depiction work so well.

Through lupusization, transfemininity is portrayed as being detached from humanity, unnatural and yet oddly shown to be this innate nature of animalism. In a way it is fascinatingly contradictory to the transphobe's appeals to nature to condemn transgenderism. Animal stereotypes serve to dehumanize people, to portray them as primitive or uncivilized or unevolved. However, by linking the subject to the animal, you are implying that the behavior of the subject is biologically natural. Subconsciously for the transphobe, there is an acceptance of the transgender framing that being transgender is natural, but combined with the racism of animalism and the racist suppression of indigenous and colonized gender nonconforming traditions, transgenderism is seen as animalistic and uncivilized. Lupusization exposes the true root of transphobia, not in its "deviation from nature" but rather its connection to nature. Lupusization, like simianization and felinization, comes from a white colonial perspective, with the crackdown on deviation from white conceptions of binary gender roles being due to the transgender cultures and experiences in many precolonial societies. The lupusization caricature presents the idea that the civilized, human way to exist is to exist in a strict white gender binary, while the uncivilized, inhuman, animalistic way to exist is to deviate from that binary. The transphobe does not genuinely believe the argument that in nature, boys are boys and girls are girls because, as Chen says, with a lot of animals there is no clear way for the average person to tell their gender. There is not an obviously visible gender deviance in a monkey, a snail, a bear, a wolf. The appeal instead is to the abstract notion of "human nature." This is why sharing

information of intersex animals and transgender animals and animals does nothing to combat Transphobia, because that is not really where the logic of the transphobe originates. If anything, the queerness and transness of nature will help them reinforce their innate bigotry. It isn't this question of biology, but instead of a white supremacist idea of the gender binary and a white conception of humanity.

So, why the wolf? Why does the wolf work so well in creating transmisogynistic caricature? I argue that the wolf has a huge cultural association with masculinity. In a modern context, there is the concept of the alpha male, which is derived from the infamous study on wolves that falsely determined that wolf packs have an alpha wolf that leads and is the most masculine and beta wolves that follow because they are less masculine. The idea of being alpha has become synonymous with performances of masculinity. According to Heather Schell in her article "The Big Bad Wolf: Masculinity and Genetics in Popular Culture": "There is a cultural association between masculinity and wolfness, the pseudoscientific origins of this cultural link, and the 'alpha-male syndrome.' (Schell) Since the wolf is so heavily linked to the masculine, the feminization of the wolf is even more of a standin for transfemininity, and as a representation of the perceived degradation of masculinity. I argue that the wolf's masculine associations are the reason for the wolf in particular being so commonly used in these transmysoginistic stories. An animal that is perceived as "masculine" is the perfect one to use to masculinize figures for transphobic caricature, just as the cat which is associated with femininity is used to feminize subjects in felinization. It is troubling for the transphobic mind to see a symbol of masculinity "tainted" by femininity, as is the case in the Big Bad Wolf story itself.

Lupusization and Disney's "The Big Bad Wolf": Fear the Transfem

One of the most influential interpretations of the Big Bad Wolf was from the Walt Disney cartoon “The Big Bad Wolf,” which fused the Three Little Pigs and the Little Red Riding Hood story. This design of the character is a clear example of lupusization as used to masculinize feminine figures in a way that attacks Transfemininity. In this interpretation of the story, the transmisogynistic nature of the Big Bad Wolf is not subtle at all. The very first thing said about the Big Bad Wolf in the Short is “That Old Wolf is just a sissy.” (The Big Bad Wolf) According to the Online Etymology Dictionary, the use of the word sissy as a derogatory term for effeminate men and transfeminine people is dated at 1873, so the 1934 short is definitely using “sissy” in order to make fun of transfemininity. Even more than the mere use of the term, the fact that the first description of the wolf is of his crossdressing, rather than any other aspect of him, highlights that the fear and monstrosity of the wolf is in the crossdressing rather than another aspect of the depiction.

The people who say this are the two little pigs who built the stick and straw house in the other cartoon with the Big Bad Wolf, *Three Little Pigs*. The contrast with these two pigs and the wise older pig who builds his house of bricks is very interesting. I argue that The Brick Pig is a very overt symbol of American “pull yourselves up by your bootstraps” capitalism. The pig works hard and gets rewarded at the end, while the lazy brothers end up getting their homes destroyed by the wolf. This dynamic carries over to “The Big Bad Wolf” where the two younger pigs see the wolf as someone to laugh at, while the mature, capitalist, older pig sees him as a dire threat. Thus, the cartoon promotes the idea that it is not enough to mock transfemininity, it needs to be taken seriously as a threat to Americana, as represented by the hard working eldest pig.

It is also important to note that the pigs, despite being non-human, are depicted as far more close to humanity than the Big Bad Wolf is. The Pigs stand up straight, live in houses, and

play instruments, while the wolf is often bending over and lives presumably in the woods. Even though both are animals, there is a clear use of animality to distinguish the wolf from the pigs as someone that should not be accepted into “civilization” and as a societal reject. The pigs' associations with Americana work in tandem with their relative associations with humanity to contrast with the deviance and danger of the transfeminine wolf figure.

Then, as the pigs accompany Riding Hood to her grandmother's house, the Big Bad Wolf makes his first appearance. In an addition to the original story, the wolf appears before his scene as the grandmother in the costume of a fairy, which was also used as a homophobic slur at the time this cartoon was made. The wolf in the fairy costume displayed several transmisogynistic tropes. The wolf shows stubble and slight facial hair, with a black hair color that sharply contrasts with his pale white face. A real wolf would be completely covered in hair of the same shade, so why the white face? The answer is that the animators wanted to evoke the fear of a transfeminine human, rather than just a wolf in disguise. The body hair is similarly very pronounced and spikey, adding to the transmisogynistic caricature. The wolf as a fairy falls down from the tree and causes a great panic from the little red riding hood and the pigs, who he then decides to chase.

The wolf next crossdresses in the iconic part of the story, where he chases Riding Hood's grandmother into a closet and decides to wear her clothes to trick riding hood. This outfit is far less revealing than the fairy outfit, but it still has the tufts of body hair leaking from the outfit, as well as the pronounced stubble. The wolf initially has a deep voice, before changing to a softer, more feminine one. The voice change is directly linked to gender rather than just a wolf dressing up as a human, so it is clear that this scene is drawing its tension from transphobia. The short replaces the common reveal of the wolf being “all the better to eat you with” to a more gruff

“You ain’t seen the half of it dearie!” with the wolf slowly going towards Riding Hood and his hair popping out of his grandmother outfit. The wolf is defeated not by a woodsman but instead by the eldest pig, who decides to fight him off by putting popcorn in his pants and putting hot coals in to set it off. Given the context of the rest of the short, It is not a stretch to say that the wolf getting repeatedly chased away with explosions to his butt was intended to be deeply homophobic, a possible conflation of gender non conformity with homosexuality and intermingling of homophobia with transmysogyny..

While this may seem too mature for a kids cartoon, at the time these were not necessarily seen as kids cartoons. According to E.O Costello, “It might be supposed that newspaper advertisements would be a fruitful source of knowledge regarding how animated films were presented, but an examination of advertisements, at least as they were presented in the upscale New York Times, seems to indicate that in the main, there simply was not enough room to present a complete picture of the program.”(Costello) In other words, you would not really plan to see an animated short, you would just go to the theater and it would play. Thus the audience would include people of all ages, and while these shorts were geared towards kids, they were intended to be enjoyed by older audiences as well. For example, the short has another dark joke where the pigs house has portraits of the family where the uncle is a pigskin football and the dad is a pork leg. Thus, the cartoon having a joke about gay sex is not out of the ordinary. In addition, it is important to note that the wolf’s design when not crossdressing is a very antisemitic depiction of a Jewish Peddler, with both the outfit, the snout being much longer than an actual wolf’s would be, and several poses and hand movements associated with anti-semitic caricature. (Lippi-Green) With Disney being so blatant with its anti-semitism, as well as racism in other cartoons, any interpretations of homophobic and transphobic stereotype were likely intentional.

The impact of this version of the Big Bad Wolf on American Culture was enormous. According to Mari Ness,

The cartoon became Disney's hands down most financially successful cartoon short, leaving even the Mickey Mouse shorts far behind; adjusted for inflation, it holds this record today. "Who's Afraid of the Big Bad Wolf" was even more popular, taken up first as a theme song for the Great Depression, and then by U.S. troops heading off to Nazi Germany. Critics and industry insiders were impressed as well. The Three Little Pigs won an Academy Award in 1934 for Best Animated Short in recognition of its popularity and animation breakthroughs. (Ness)

The impact of the short was huge, and thus this version of the Big Bad Wolf was cemented as the definitive version in American culture. As such, the transphobia of the story is also spread and cemented into American culture. The link between American soldiers, a defining aspect of traditional American masculinity, singing the song deriding the Big Bad Wolf into battle, is an example of how the transfeminine wolf seeped into culture and how Transfemininity has been positioned as the enemy of American masculinity.

Lupusization and Betty Boop: Fetishize the Transfem

In contrast to The Disney cartoon, Fleischer Studios' 1931 short "Dizzy Red Riding Hood" is a far more trans positive take on the Big Bad Wolf story. In this short, Red Riding Hood is played by the mature and sexual Betty Boop and the Big Bad Wolf never crossdresses. Instead, the hero of the story is Bimbo the Dog, who is jealous of the Big Bad Wolf, fights him, wears his skin, and accidentally gets dressed in the grandma outfit at the end. In the end, Betty Boop sings a song about how Bimbo's masculine features mix with the granny outfit, ending with Bimbo

exiting both the wolf skin and the grandma outfit and the two kissing, cutting to them kissing on a hammock.

One clear reason for the difference in tone of these two cartoon's is the creation of the Hays code in 1934, after "Dizzy Red Riding Hood" and before Disney's "The Big Bad Wolf." "Dizzy Red Riding Hood" is far more risqué than "The Big Bad Wolf", with several scenes that sexualize Betty Boop's Red Riding Hood. The infamous wolf in grandma's clothes scene is reframed to have the "wolf" be the object of Boop's attraction. Bimbo follows her and fights off the wolf because he is lustful towards Betty and thinks the attire of the wolf will make him more attractive, saying "She loves wolves!" as he puts on the wolfskin of the Big Bad Wolf.

This added twist of Bimbo wearing both the Wolf's skin and the Grandma outfit plays with gender even further than the original story. Bimbo is cloaked in Masculinity and then cloaked again in femininity, rendering him as the strange concoction of stylized genders. Whatever it adds up to, Betty Boop is fascinated by it. This cartoon explores the taboo and fetishized allure of transness from a female gaze, which seems to showcase a counterculture to the fear and mockery of transness by the Disney cartoons.

The existence of this cartoon shows just how instrumental the Hays Code was in propagating transphobic views in culture, the ramifications of which last to this day. Enacted in 1934, the Hays code was this self-imposed industry set of guidelines for all the motion pictures that "prohibited profanity, suggestive nudity, graphic or realistic violence, sexual persuasions and rape." According to Chelsey O'Brien,

with the Hays Code, one of the things the film industry just assumed was that its audience was white and straight and only white, straight males... They would do things that appealed to that audience base, really. Anything that was going to be questioning a

woman's sexuality or women's sexual preference or even men's sexual preference, there was this real return to traditional values. A little bit of that is we're coming out of the Depression, we're coming out of World War I, so there's this general American sentiment that is returning to conservatism. (Lewis)

All of the potentially liberatory things in *Dizzy Red Riding hood* would have been rejected by the Hays Code. For example, the female gaze towards Bimbo, Bimbo's crossdressing being framed as erotic, and the implied consensual love at the end of the short would not have been allowed to air. In fact, according to O'Brien, the Hays Code ended up being the downfall of Betty Boop: "When you think about characters like Betty Boop, who started out as this incredible flapper who was sexually unrestricted and incredibly interesting, but later due to the Code goes on to become this sort of conservative house wife figure and basically writes herself out of production." (Lewis) This short in comparison to the Disney "The Big Bad Wolf" short is a showcase of how effective conservative moral panic over the media is in enforcing Transphobia in culture. It is difficult not to imagine that a world without the Hays code would be a world with more shorts like this one exploring gender in interesting ways and a world with less transphobia and transmisogyny. As Betty Boop faded into irrelevance due to censorship, Disney grew and grew, and its version of the Big Bad Wolf stuck as the definitive animated take on the character for quite some time.

Lupusization and Dreakwork's *Shrek*: Mock the Transfem

The Disney Big Bad Wolf persisted as the most well known version of the character, helping form an association, whether consciously or subconsciously, of the Big Bad Wolf being linked with transfemininity. Thus, when *Shrek*, a movie that intended to make fun of Disney and everything it stood for, came along, it was primed to explore the Big Bad Wolf character in a

different way than before. *Shrek* is at its core a rejection of the Disney fairy tale, which has been critiqued for its moralizing stories of typical idealistic patriarchal romance, and as a result is a rejection of cisheteropatriarchy. (Butler, M 60) As such, it serves to make the marginalized and villain coded groups that Disney has often villainized into comic protagonists. Thus, since the Big Bad Wolf, especially the Disney version, is a transmisogynistic caricature, the Big Bad Wolf is recast as a comic ally in the *Shrek* movies.

Shrek's take on the wolf differs from the Disney Big Bad Wolf in that it not only makes fun of trans people but also serves as a reclamation of the trope. The Big Bad Wolf in *Shrek* is portrayed as a crossdresser, and there are jokes about it, but all of his evil attributes are stripped away. According to Martin Butler, "The wolf's female clothes.. Have here become a standard feature of his appearance and reveal him to be a rather harmless and good natured character." (Butler, M 62) He's just a member of the group like all the rest and has no ill will towards the three little pigs. This depiction solidifies the idea of the Big Bad Wolf being transmysoginistic and directly addresses it, even if it is not as positively as it could have been. It was the first time a popular retelling of this story has explicit empathy for Transfeminine people. *Shrek* also has the trans character Doris, the ugly stepsister, who while being a transmisogynist caricature also is a full and equal part of the princesses in *Shrek the Third*. The series showcases an interesting dynamic of trans acceptance at the time, with trans characters being seen as jokes but not threats. Aspects of the Little red riding hood story are scattered throughout the movies but in a subverted way. Little red riding hood appears in the beginning but is scared off by Shrek, putting our protagonist in the place of the Big Bad Wolf in the story. The very beginning of *Shrek 2* replaces the Archetypal Princess in the Tower with the Big Bad Wolf, which twists the morality of the story because the wolf is now the hero and the villain is the masculine Prince Charming.

The movies portray the heroes as these queer deviants just trying to live their lives while the villains are conventionally attractive “normal” people who fear societal deviance.

This is not to say that *Shrek* is a net good in terms of Transfeminine representation. On the contrary, its depiction of transfemininity as a punchline ends up further ostracizing trans women. It is nice to see a trans woman alongside the other princesses, but it is made abundantly clear that the audience is supposed to laugh at this, at the inherent comedy in a trans woman being seen as the same as a “normal” woman.

The design of the *Shrek* Big Bad Wolf serves to accentuate its transphobia. Fitting with the style of the movies, the wolf’s design is somewhat hyper realistic, with none of the stylisation of the Disney wolf. This hyperrealism in some ways works better with the lupusization because it is a clearer connection to the real wolf, strengthening the “comedy” in a masculine wolf being in a dress. The Wolf also wears a garish pink ill fitting dress, which like the ill fitting outfits of the Disney Big Bad Wolf serves as a way to mock transfem people for not performing gender “correctly.”

In addition, the films often use trans women as a way to make fun of the film's villain prince charming. Charming wants to be with the beautiful princess at the start of the *Shrek 2*, but instead gets the disgusting transgender wolf. At the end of *Shrek 2*, Charming does not get to marry the princess he wants, Fiona, and is seemingly punished by the trans woman Doris aggressively flirting with him, which perpetuates the idea that trans women are sexual Predators and the idea that a cis man being with a trans woman is disgusting and a form of punishment. The general disdain these films have for trans people overcomes any normalization it has for gender nonconformity.

Legoshi and Trans Reclamation

With all of these examples of wolf figures being used to spread transphobic ideas, the question arises, can a wolf figure be used to explore ideas of transfemininity in a positive way? One work that I argue does exactly that is the 2020 Netflix anime series *Beastars*. *Beastars* is a show that takes place in a world where humanoid animals live in a society similar to that of modern Earth. However, unlike the human world, predators and prey coexist, despite predators eating prey. The story's main character is a wolf named Legoshi, who struggles with his societal perception as a predator and tries to be more preylike and present as less preylike.

So, what does any of this have to do with transfemininity? I argue that the predator-prey binary explored throughout the show *Beastars* is an allegory for the gender binary, with the societal concept of predators in the show being coded as more masculine and the societal concept of prey being presented as more feminine. Legoshi, as a character who tries to transition from an assigned predator identity to an identity that is more akin to prey, is thus an allegorical transfem. In addition, because of the lupusization that we have discussed so far, the wolf figure is the perfect character to be the lead in this show about allegorical gender nonconformity.

There are several ways in which the predator-prey binary in *Beastars* works as an allegory for the gender binary. Predators in *Beastars* are expected to show physical strength, machismo, and aggression, all of which are traits that are societally associated with masculinity. Bill the Tiger, who is Legoshi's classmate, is a foil to Legoshi as an exemplar of what a predator is expected to be in society. Bill is strong, bold, and aggressive, one of the buffest characters in the entire show with a deep masculine voice. He fits right into the real world's societal expectations of what a man should be. On the other hand, prey are societally expected to be weaker, submissive, and needing to be saved. One of the prey characters, the rabbit Haru, resents

the feeling of being pitied and underestimated by society, saying “When they smile at me, they are just feeling sorry for me. They only see me as a defenseless creature who’s bound to die eventually, I grew up being used to those smiles of pity.” (*Beastars* issue 38 pg 7) Similar to patriarchal views on womanhood, prey are seen as weak, submissive, and in need of protection.

However, just like the gender binary is not real and numerous people do not fit into societal expectations of gender roles, the predator prey binary in *Beastars* is a social construct. Numerous animals in the show deviate and complicate the supposed binary between predator and prey. The Panda Gouhin for example is societally marked as a predator but is a vegetarian and only eats bamboo. A bear character threatens to eat Legoshi, so does that make him prey? These societal rules do not make sense, and almost every character in the show feels a sense of discomfort in being forced to play their role in the binary.

The idea of playing a role and presenting a certain way is a huge theme in the Show. Legoshi is a member of the drama club, and the school stage is a common location in the show. Just as the characters put on costumes and play characters on stage for the school play, they have to put on the costumes of being predator and prey to exist in their daily lives. This is a clear parallel to Judith Butler’s idea of gender as performance. When the character Louis rejects his prey identity and acts as a predator, he returns to the play stage and says “How nostalgic, had I been on stage all this time in such a cheesy light?” (*Beastars* Season 2 episode 1) This shows the idea of presenting as predator or prey as just a theater, just as Butler argues that gender is a performance.

So, if the predator prey binary is an allegory for the gender binary, then Legoshi, as a wolf who wants to be less of a predator and more of a prey, is allegorically transfeminine. Legoshi tries to minimize his perceived danger by constantly slouching, acting quiet, and being

as nonviolent as possible. This desire is met by bigotry by most other members of that society. There are numerous examples of people distrusting Legoshi for being a predator and trying to be in prey spaces. This mirrors transphobic and specifically TERF ideology, which is very dominant in Japan. According to Akiko Shimizu, terf ideology is extremely prevalent in Japan as attacks on the Japanese feminist movement, calling it a slippery slope to the breaking of gender roles and transgender people, have resulted in many Japanese feminists trying to distance themselves heavily from LGBTQ people. This thus informs why Legoshi's experience as an allegorical transfemme is based more on these stereotypes of infiltrating womens spaces rather than the stereotypes of tricking men. This is not to say that Legoshi does not face "transphobia" from other predators, but it seems more akin to the pressures of toxic masculinity. Legoshi is often attacked on the other side for being "afraid" to embrace his masculinity, even in toxic ways like eating meat and taking blood.

There is a reason that Legoshi works so well as a wolf character, and it is the history of Lupusization as a tool for transmisogyny. The show often parallels Legoshi with the story of the Big Bad Wolf, and this is most notable in the first opening credits of the show titled Wild Side by the band Ali. The opening theme of Season one is in a stop motion style which is meant to evoke a fairy tale like those of japanese stop motion animators. Legoshi huffs and puffs in the opening as well, an allusion to the infamous "I'll huff and I'll puff and I'll blow your house down!" line in almost every Big Bad wolf story. It is clear that there was an intentional inspiration from these fairy tales in Legoshi's character. The intro also serves to explain Legoshi's internal struggles with his predator identity. He starts off chasing the rabbit Haru, huffing and puffing and drooling just like Disney's Big Bad Wolf. It is no coincidence that Legoshi is wearing Overalls, just like The Big Bad Wolf in the Disney short. An artistic zoom out reveals that the trees he is

running past are in fact the antlers of the Deer Louis, who in this moment represents Prey's fears and bigotry against Predators. Legoshi is in one Antler and Haru is in the other, showcasing how this bigotry, social prejudices against predator and prey relationships, is what is keeping the two apart. The opening then transition to Haru and Legoshi in love, dancing and kissing, Legoshi's dream for what he wants to have, before transitioning again into a nightmare, with Haru's skull on the ground, blood everywhere, and Legoshi shaking, horrified, and breaking out in tears as a blood moon rises. Legoshi has internalized the societal prejudices that have been forced upon him, that a predator being like a prey, or getting in a relationship with prey, ends in disaster.

Legoshi as a result has this deep fear of his inner beastness coming out. According to Mel Chen, this idea of letting out your primal, inner animal, is called "Letting Go". Chen uses as their example the famous Michael Jackson video, Black and White, where Jackson transforms into a black Panther and back. Chen says that "'Letting go' means relaxing into a tendency, a placement, an embodiment, and detaching from some alienable thing. "Being" a black panther (or a Black Panther) permitted (a moment of) the impermissible, both for Jackson as a political figure impassioned by justice and for Jackson as a man whose masculinity was undeniably queer?" (Chen 150) "Letting go "implies this division between the primal, natural, animal and the trappings of society and "humanity." In Chen's example, Jackson is able to break through the complexities and oppression of being unable to truly express his feelings on racial justice by becoming an animal, specifically becoming a predator, becoming a black panther. It is an expression of true emotion and it feels like it is breaking through the "red tape" and "social expectations" he has trapped himself. In *Beastars*, despite strength and power being valued in predator animals, "going wild" in the way that Legoshi does is seen as societal deviance, as something not allowed. Despite his fear of it at first, Legoshi as the show goes on learns to

channel his wild side, and use it in a way that he wants. Thus, Legoshi is able to “Let go” in a Chenian way and show his true, deviant identity on his own terms, without the restrictions of societal pressures.

Legoshi’s storyline in season two is one of self discovery, and it is a direct mirror to the story of his rival foil, and lover Louis. Just as Legoshi is a Wolf that is trying to be more like a prey, Louis is a Deer that wants to be more like a predator. While Legoshi trains to be able to fight without using his fangs, Louis joins a gang of lions and helps the illegal meat trade for carnivores. While Legoshi refuses to eat any form of meat, Louis forces himself to eat meat in order to assert dominance and fit in. If Legoshi is an allegorical transfemme, Louis is an allegorical trans masc.

The two characters' paths cross when Legoshi learns that Louis joined the lion gang and wants to get him back home. After a failed attempt to convince Louis to come back, Legoshi is forced to disguise himself in order to meet Louis again. The connection between Legoshi’s deviance from being a predator and gender deviance is made more concrete in a scene where Legoshi crossdresses in order to meet with Louis. The scene, like so many scenes of crossdressing, is comical, but aside from one of the guards calling Legoshi an unattractive woman, there is little poking fun at the crossdressing itself. Comparing the scene to the previous examples of a wolf wearing a dress, there are no visual cues like hair spilling out or a sense of danger from Legoshi. Instead of being portrayed as danger shrouded by feminine attire, or just being a comic side character, Legoshi as the lead of the show gives Louis a heartfelt plea to help him fight the antagonist of the series. Unlike the outfits of Disney’s Big Bad Wolf and *Shrek’s* Big Bad Wolf, Legoshi’s dress is well fitting and elegant, and his makeup is well done. His transfemininity is positive precisely because it fits with his allegorical transfemininity that has

been explored throughout the show, the two meshing in this integral scene that comes right before the climax of the first two seasons of the show.

The scene is soon followed with a deep confession from Louis about how much he cares about and loves Legoshi. Louis says, “I love carnivores. Why am I realizing it now? Could it be because he, that idiot [Legoshi], has been in my heart since a long time?...He is too dazzling for me.” (*Beastars* season 2 episode 11) This confession of love shows a sense of trans solidarity. Louis trans awakening, of realizing that he wants to be a predator, is because of Legoshi’s very struggle against being a predator. This shared journey of transness echoes the solidarity between transmascs and transfems in the real world. Louis then rushes to help Legoshi fight the villain of the story, Riz the Bear.

The dual journey of the two characters culminates in a really complicated scene in which Louis asks Legoshi to eat his leg in order to get the strength to fight Riz. Legoshi has been spending the whole season training to fight without eating meat, but here Louis is willingly offering up his leg for legoshi to eat. The leg is branded with a number from Louis' childhood as a victim of the illegal animal trade, so getting rid of it is a full circle moment for Louis. For Legoshi, this moment is a turning point, a betrayal of his journey of becoming more prey-like.

Is it a contradiction of his trans journey? I argue no. Trans journeys are rarely linear because gender is more complicated than that, and Legoshi eating meat signals not a moment of detransition, but of reacceptance of their unique identity. Legoshi never felt like a predator, and in his season-long quest to be prey-like he forced himself to act in a specific way to be more prey-like. I argue this parallels the journey of many transfem people, who will sometimes abandon anything non-feminine early in transition because of fears of not passing and not being accepted as their gender identity. Over time in a gender identity exploration, these shunned

presentations and interests can be reclaimed as one grows more confident in their gender, and are in a more supportive environment.

Legoshi's struggle with the predator/prey binary is a very solitary one, with Legoshi not having many substantive interactions with other people. When Legoshi decides to leave school in order to dedicate himself to his journey of training, his friend Jack says "What is this? You really think I don't know? You've been distant for months now. You're never coming back are you? I've always hoped for you to overcome your awkwardness and obtain normal happiness... The stronger you become, the more unhappy you get." (*Beastars* Season 2 ep 4) Legoshi's journey of self discovery, of transness, is pushing him away from his old life and his old friends. Legoshi responds to Jack that "My strength doesn't exist to make me happy." Despite Legoshi's journey being something he wants to do, he is still trapped by societal pressures. Legoshi's loneliness is framed by constant inner monologue, with most of Legoshi's dialogue actually being him thinking to himself, more so than any other character. Many of these inner monologues with another character revealing that Legoshi was just blankly staring into space the whole time. These monologues are often framed with a side profile of Legoshi's head with his brain area having video of what he is thinking about over it, isolating Legoshi by making him the whole frame for long stretches of time.

Going back to the eating the leg scene, Legoshi is finally no longer alone, sharing a moment of true intimacy with another person struggling with their identity. The scene of eating the leg is framed almost romantically, with the dialogue between the two being said in an affectionate and intimate voice, with Legoshi asking for consent, with Louis showing true vulnerability for the first time in the whole show. It is only through this act of love that Legoshi is able to win the final battle at the end. It is, in a strange way, a showcase of trans solidarity and

intimacy as a tool for liberation, of the necessity of trans intimacy in protecting and uplifting each other. The strangeness of this moment being almost cannibalistic only adds to its impact, its taboo being a source of further connection between the two, mirroring the societal illicitness of trans solidarity and intimacy.

By flipping the transfeminine “Big Bad Wolf” eating an animal into a positive from the negative fears of lupusization caricatures like Disney’s Big Bad Wolf, *Beastars* is directly combatting the root of the transmisogyny of the story. The great fear of the Disney’s “The Big Bad Wolf” is that the Big Bad Wolf would eat Riding Hood, which is why trans women are a threat, but *Beastars* says that Legoshi eating Louis’ leg is a moment of triumph and love and defeating evil, meaning that transfems are a source of love and triumph and defeating evil. It is a true subversion of every way that the Disney cartoon “The Big Bad Wolf” propagates transmisogyny, in a way that *Shrek*, which was sold as more of an overt subversion of fairy tales failed to do. It recasts the taboo of the deviance of the wolf as a positive, similar to *Dizzy Red Riding Hood* but by taking the time to further develop Legoshi and by taking him more seriously, he is able to be more than a fetishised admiration of transness but a well-rounded exploration of transness.

Critiques almost naturally arise for this praise of *Beastars*. How can *Beastars* truly be a reclamation of a transmysoginistic trope if Legoshi is not overtly transfem? Is the equivocity of consuming flesh to trans liberation not itself transphobic? Is a story about predators, a term that has specifically been used to demonize transfems, really the best place to have a trans-coded story? I argue that this unease about the show, its uncomfortableness, is why I think it represents transness so well. The truth is that transness is uncomfortable and taboo in society, and trans people feel that every day. A sanitized perfect representation is nice escapism but fails to reflect

our realities, while an exploration of trans trauma reads more as begging cis people for sympathy than actual representation. That is why *Beastars*, not despite its imperfection but because of it, is such a compelling reclamation of lupusization.

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