

Seminar 46 (Trans/Philologies) Abstracts

Gabriel Bloomfield

The Gender of George Herbert's Love

“The Gender of George Herbert's Love” draws on recent work in queer and trans studies in order to reread the most famous lyric by early modern England's most famous devotional poet. While critics have sometimes struggled to determine the genders of the two characters who appear in “Love (III),” this paper will look to the creation myths of Genesis 1–2 for a model for Herbert's depiction of the creation and imputation of gender within the poem. Part of a larger project on the imposition of gender in early modern lyric, this work troubles the normative gender systems that so often condition our readings of early modern poetry by arguing that the poem's characters exist without, or rather before, gender. It seeks to understand how Herbert might have attempted to cultivate within his readers a form of negative capability—a resistance to the irritable reaching after settled binaries—with regard to gender.

Drew Daniel

Futures of Beardlessness (from Shakespeare to Puberty Blockers)

Drawing upon previous work in early modern sexuality studies such as Mark Johnston's *Beard Fetish in Early Modern England* and recent work on trans embodiment by Hil Malatino, Grace Lavery, and Kadji Amin, I want to think about beardlessness as a condition tilted towards unknown futures. What is / what was beardlessness? How does this always already ontologically queer phenomenon—the presence of an absence of a secondary sex characteristic—manifest itself? Within Shakespeare's “Venus and Adonis”, beardlessness names a somatic state of intimate distance from adult sexuality; in the history plays, the phenomenon is associated with urban gallants and homosocial competition, when “gibing boys” and the “beardless vain comparative” are evoked in *Henry IV Part One*, or when Philip the Bastard denounces a “beardless boy, a cocker'd silken wanton” (5.1.2265) in *King John*. In a short paper I hope to connect these instances to their cultural surround in order to gesture at answers to the following questions: What developmental logics cluster within this concept? Do Shakespeare's texts potentially activate trans capacities via this term? How might a philological examination of beardlessness allow us to re-orient ourselves temporally at a moment when forms of trans care—including access to puberty blockers that would extend beardlessness indefinitely—are the object of scaremongering legislation and media campaigns by reactionary and transphobic political actors?

Mario DiGangi

Pregnant Enemy

In Viola's 2.2 soliloquy, she identifies herself with the devil when she laments that disguise is a "wickedness" through which the "pregnant enemy" does harm. According to *EEBO*, the phrase "pregnant enemy" appears only in *Twelfth Night*. Despite both this compelling philological fact and the striking implications of Viola's self-demonization, little work has been done on the significance of the "pregnant enemy" reference. I argue that at this moment in the play, Viola is using a racial reference (i.e., the devil as black) to express the alienation she feels, as Cesario, from her female gender identity, just as she had earlier done when identifying as a "eunuch" (1.2). In having Viola imagine herself as a disguised devil, Shakespeare draws on the cultural trope of the "white devil," a figure drawn in part from 2 Corinthians 11:14 (KJV): "Satan himself is transformed into an angel of light." *Twelfth Night* in fact contains other allusions to the white devil to represent the fair and feminine, but supposedly morally compromised, bodies of Olivia and Sebastian. That Talbot (in *1 Henry VI*) calls Joan La Pucelle the "devil, or devil's dam" [mother]—essentially, the "pregnant enemy"—suggests that the demonic encodes an underexplored racial subtext in Shakespeare's representation of transgendered women. Although I am aware of the objections to considering crossdressed figures such as Viola transgendered, I will argue that doing so in an ethical way can still be productive, in part because of what we might learn from embodied language like "pregnant enemy."

Sandra Goldstein Lehnert

Hermaphroditical Effects: Nature, Artifice, and Trans Embodiment in Margaret Cavendish and John Bulwer

In her *Observations upon Experimental Philosophy*, Margaret Cavendish writes, "I have declared that Art produces Hermaphroditical Effects, that is, such as are partly Natural, and partly Artificial." In this seminar, I will look to investigate Cavendish's deployment of "Hermaphroditical" as a specifically natural philosophical term indicating a key "Effect" in her vitalist materialist theorization of the world—both our own and the blazing worlds of her fiction.

Moreover, I wish to situate Cavendish's formulation and its resulting "monsters" in a broader natural philosophical discourse in the mid 17th-century. Particularly, I will argue that Cavendish produces her theorization of Nature, Artifice, and the "Hermaphroditical" in dialogue with John Bulwer's tome of early comparative anthropology, *Anthropometamorphosis*. While Cavendish describes the mixing of Nature and Art as one with "Hermaphroditical Effects," conceptualizing that produced beyond Nature's purview through a trans metonymy, Bulwer builds his logic of Nature and Artifice through an intertextual, paratextual, literary, and visual bibliographic spectacle of "unnatural" bodies—the "artificer," the "Native," the "effeminate," the "false Coppy," and indeed the "Hermaphrodite"—from around the "whole world."

This paper will put Bulwer and Cavendish in conversation, in hopes of revealing the complexities of a trans natural philosophical metaphor. It is not simply that this term maps a premodern trans figure (the "Hermaphrodite") onto a distinct scientific or metaphysical project.

In fact, through investigating the “artificers” of Bulwer’s treatise—racialized spectacles across the world accused of “abusing” their bodies against Nature—the very logic of the “Hermaphroditical” unveils the co-constitutive work of early modern trans antagonism in colonization and racialization.

Natasha Korda

Transing the Crux

A “crux” is a material “cross” or (not unlike the prefix “trans-”) a literal “crossing.” Its figurative extension to knotty matters of textual interpretation, however, is freighted with the symbolic and affective weight of crucifixion: the OED thus defines a “textual crux” as “A difficulty which it torments or troubles one greatly to interpret or explain” (“crux, *n.*” 1, 3.a), further referencing the figurative sense of the verb “to crucify” meaning “To torment, to prove a ‘crux’ to” (2c.). The purported torment of the textual crux is thereby sutured to the excruciation of fleshly mortification. Building on Colby Gordon’s exegesis of the crucifixion as a “rich repository” of trans possibility (“A Trans Crux,” 9), this paper reconsiders the trans potential of the crux in Cesario’s “As I am man . . . As I am woman” soliloquy in *Twelfth Night* (2.2), read in light of a neglected chapter in the play’s editorial history: Charlotte Endymion Porter and Helen Archibald Clarke’s collaborative First Folio edition (1903) and study guide (1914), and Porter’s account of their “intimate” “companionship” later published in *Poet Lore* (1926).

James Mulder

Conveying the Body: Trans Affect in *The Revenger’s Tragedy*

This paper examines the language of conveyance in *The Revenger’s Tragedy*. In Act IV of the play, Vindice, the titular revenger, praises his brother Hippolito for a bit of improvised misdirection: Vindice proclaims, “’Twas well conveyed, / Upon a sudden wit.” This sense of the verb “to convey,” meaning to play or perform a part, reverberates in Vindice’s repetition of the word a few lines later. He reminds Hippolito that the recently-murdered Duke’s body remains “dead but not conveyed,” by which he means that the Duke’s corpse has not yet been borne to its final rest. In short order, Vindice and Hippolito devise a plot to convey the corpse to a new scene entirely: they cast it in the role of Vindice himself for the purposes of yet another act in their spectacularly campy revenge plot. In constellating Vindice’s multiple senses of *convey*, this paper will explore what I propose is the transgender capacity (a phrase I borrow from Marjorie Rubright and David Getsy) of this play’s fragmented, unruly, undead, reanimated bodily matter. This capacity of the body to act, to misdirect, to move, to carry meaning, and to persist in unexpected configurations produces, as Rubright puts it, “semantic opacities that refuse to render the body an ontological site of decipherability.” Ultimately, the paper aims to put the play’s insistence on the uncanniness and *untruthfulness* of the body into conversation with trans affect, dysphoria, and what Cameron Awkward-Rich terms *trans maladjustment*.

Scott Trudell

The “Boy” Slur

The word “boy,” as Jeffrey Masten and others have shown, could open up queer trajectories of desire in early modern usage. It also acted as a pederastic, racial, status, and gerontocratic slur. “Boy” puts apprentice actors in their place, dismisses the virtuosity of child performers, reinforces a patriarchal vantage point, and (as its valence in histories of slavery suggest) bolsters the discourse of racialization and empire. This paper explores how and why “boy” becomes a slur of “measureless” outrage at the conclusion of *Coriolanus* (5.6.123), not only because of its pederastic connotation but because it tethers Marcus Caius to mother, Rome, and racialized service. I also touch on how “boy” confers subordination and exchange value, and how the word becomes a means of compulsory gendered and racial differentiation, in *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* and *Romeo and Juliet*. I conclude by arguing that “boy actor” is an under-interrogated and inadequate term for child performance during the period.