 Interdisciplinary Genre Studies Network

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Workshop two

**Genre, Gender and Identity**

24 November 2012

**Speakers’ bios and abstracts with weblinks to access papers online**

**Dr Mary Flanagan**, **Dartmouth College, USA, ‘Digital Aesthetics and Gender’**

Dr Flanagan is an artist and theorist focused on how people create and use technology. Known for her theories on playculture, activist design, and critical play, Flanagan has achieved international acclaim for her novel interdisciplinary work, her commitment to a theory/practice dialogue, and contributions to social justice design arenas. Her work examines the boundaries between the personal and the public, perception, power, and what technology can teach people about themselves. Her collection of over 20 major art works range from game-inspired systems to computer viruses, embodied interfaces to interactive texts; these works are exhibited internationally at venues including the Laboral Art Center, The Whitney Museum of American Art, SIGGRAPH, Beall Center, The Banff Centre, The Moving Image Center, Steirischer Herbst, Ars Electronica, Artist’s Space, The Guggenheim Museum New York, Incheon Digital Arts Festival South Korea, Writing Machine Collective Hong Kong, Maryland Institute College of Art, and venues in Brazil, France, UK, Canada, Taiwan, New Zealand, and Australia. She has written numerous critical essays and chapters, and her books in English include *reload: rethinking women + cyberculture* (2002), *re:SKIN* (2007), *Critical Play* (2009), and the forthcoming *Values at Play in Digital Games* (2012) with MIT Press.  Flanagan founded the [Tiltfactor game research laboratory](http://www.tiltfactor.org/) in 2003, where researchers create game interventions for social change. She is also a distinguished professor at Dartmouth College (<http://www.maryflanagan.com>; <http://www.tiltfactor.org>).

Abstract: Gender in games has been a thorny subject for some time. From the invention of US Board games to the creation of digital "portals," women have created inventive games that have broken existing play paradigms. How do the aesthetics of digital games and the new games created by independent game developers today challenge this role? Can the aesthetics of games and game genres influence, or be influenced by, notions of gender?

The paper can be accessed online at the following address: <http://as-coursecast-1.adf.bham.ac.uk/Panopto/Pages/Viewer/Default.aspx?id=93561bd1-e3b1-4611-aae3-5f1fea20cd9c>

**Dr An Goris, Katholieke Universiteit Leuven, Belgium, ‘Authorship in Feminine Genre Fiction: The Case of Nora Roberts’**

Dr Gorisis a postdoctoral research fellow at the University of Leuven (Belgium) where she has recently (2011) received her PhD with a dissertation on American romance author Nora Roberts. Goris’ research focuses mainly on dynamics of genre and authorship in contemporary popular culture, specifically the popular romance novel. She has published papers on romance authorship, romance writing handbooks as a form of constrained writing, and the translation of romance novels. She is currently working on a monograph about Nora Roberts for McFarland. Goris was a Fulbright Visiting Research Fellow at DePaul University (Chicago) in 2009-2010 and will be a Visiting Postdoctoral Fellow at Princeton University in 2013. She is one of the founding members of the International Association for the Study of Popular Romance (IASPR) and Managing Editor of its peer-reviewed online *Journal of Popular Romance Studies* (JPRS).

Abstract:

No other genre in contemporary popular culture is as strongly and exclusively associated with women as romance fiction. Popular romance novels are not only predominantly read by women but also chiefly written by female authors and focus on a topic – romantic love – that is still considered a mostly feminine concern. According to many critics this strong gendering of the romance genre is one of the elements that underlie its decidedly low cultural status. Popular romance fiction is located at the very bottom of the literary hierarchy and is generally perceived as a formulaic, repetitive, unimaginative genre in which one novel or author cannot relevantly be distinguished from another. In line with this conceptualization, the female romance author is considered a mere craftswoman who supposedly lacking the true creative genius, inspiration and talent that mark the (male) author-artist of high literature, mindlessly executes the predetermined generic formula. Romance writing is perceived as the literary equivalent of the children’s game paint-by-numbers, the romance writer is reduced to an inconsequential, even invisible figure in our culture, which effectively perceives romance as a genre without authors.

Yet in the romance community itself the female romance author is an important figure. Recent studies indicate for example that the author is one of the decisive factors in readers’ romance novel acquisition behaviour, which implies that the writer is an important commercial agent in romance’s generic matrix. These contradictory dynamics between genre, gender and authorship are further explored in this paper on the basis of a case study of American romance novelist Nora Roberts who is one of the most popular authors in the world yet hardly a well-known figure. The paper argues that Roberts’ lack of (name) recognition is related to the feminine genre in which she writes – a genre that, at least in the male-driven public imagination, is not prone to recognize individual authorship.

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**Prof. Ann Heilmann, Cardiff University, UK, ‘Gender, Genre and Neo-Victorian Impurities: James Miranda Barry in 20th and 21st-century Biography and Biofiction’**

Ann Heilmann is Professor of English Literature at Cardiff University. She previously held chairs at the Universities of Hull and Swansea. The author of *Neo-Victorianism: The Victorians in the 21st Century* (with Mark Llewellyn, Palgrave 2010), *New Woman Strategies: Sarah Grand, Olive Schreiner, Mona Caird* (Manchester UP, 2004) and *New Woman Fiction: Women Writing First-Wave Feminism* (Palgrave 2000), she has (co)edited a multi-volume critical edition of *The Collected Short Stories of George Moore* (with Mark Llewellyn, Pickering and Chatto 2007), three essay collections on Victorian to contemporary women’s writing, and four anthology sets on Victorian to Edwardian (anti)feminism. She is the general editor of Pickering and Chatto’s *Gender and Genre* and Routledge’s Major Works *History of Feminism* series. At present she is working on an essay collection and a monograph on George Moore (both with Mark Llewellyn).

Abstract: In ‘the Law of Genre’ (1980) Derrida invokes the ‘principle of contamination, a law of impurity, a parasitical economy’ as the prime denominator of genre. Contamination, impurity and parasitism might be said to be key to neo-Victorianism too: contemporary culture as it engages with the Victorian is a genre which is not one since it exists in myriad forms (novel, screen, drama, poetry, TV adaptation, photography, graphic art, performance art, steampunk festival). My paper will explore the instability and multiplicity of gender and genre through a discussion of neo-Victorian biography and biofiction focusing on the gender-ambiguous 19th-century doctor James Miranda Barry. If engaging in genre studies involves, pace Derrida, ‘a sort of participation without belonging – a taking part in without being part of, without having membership in a set’, how much more does this apply to the reinvention and representation of an historical subject whose gender has been under dispute for two centuries? How do twentieth-century authors and biographers approach the project of reconstructing the ‘woman’ behind the enigma of Dr James Miranda Barry? A notable surgeon who pioneered medical reforms, a compassionate Inspector General of the army, and famously not a friend of Florence Nightingale’s, Britain’s first female physician in drag concealed her identity throughout a very public career in Cape Colony; her ‘real’ sex was discovered only after her death in 1865. In this paper I examine five textual configurations of this figure from the 1930s to the 2000s: Olga Racster and Jessica Grove’s fictional *Journal of Dr James Barry* (1932), biographies by Isobel Rae (*The Strange Story of Dr James Barry*, 1958), June Rose (*The Perfect Gentleman* (Hutchinson, 1977) and Rachel Holmes (*Scanty Particulars: The Mysterious, Astonishing, and Remarkable Life of Victorian Surgeon James Barry*, 2002), and Patricia Duncker’s novel *James Miranda Barry* (1999).

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**Dr Sarah Parker, Manchester Metropolitan University and Newman University College, UK, ‘The** Muse Writes Back: Lyric Poetry and Female Poetic Identity’

Dr Parker is currently an Associate Lecturer at Manchester Metropolitan University and Newman University College. Her monograph *The Lesbian Muse and Poetic Identity, 1889-1930* is forthcoming in 2013 (Pickering & Chatto, Gender and Genre Series).  Her publications include ‘“A Girl’s Love”: Lord Alfred Douglas as Homoerotic Muse in the Poetry of Olive Custance’ (*Women: A Cultural Review*, 22. 2-3, September 2011) and ‘Whose Muse? Sappho, Swinburne and Amy Lowell’ (in *Algernon Charles Swinburne: Unofficial Laureate*, Eds. Catherine Maxwell and Stefano Evangelista, Manchester UP, forthcoming 2012).

Abstract: This paper addresses a key problem at the heart of issues of gender and genre: the concept of the muse. Throughout literary history, the roles of ‘poet’ and ‘muse’ have been consistently and traditionally gendered; women have been associated with the role of the passive, inspiring muse, whilst poetic creation has been characterised as an exclusively masculine occupation. The problematic concept of the female muse, persisting throughout literary history, has therefore made it difficult for women poets to assert their own poetic identity, or to claim their own sources of inspiration.

My paper will trace the gendered tradition of the muse, particularly as it is expressed through lyric poetry — the poetic genre most readily associated with the concept of the muse and thus, the natural arena in which these issues of gender, desire, inspiration, objectification and poetic identity are to be tackled. I will endeavour to show that lyric poetry provides both the vehicle for the literary tradition in which women were consistently depicted as silent inspirers *and* the medium for potentially rewriting this tradition; enabling women poets to claim their own muses and to assert their right to poetic identity.

To this end, the second half of my paper will begin to explore the ways in which women poets of the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century re-imagined the concept of the muse — moving from the passive muse figure associated with male poetic tradition, to a contemporary, living figure, who could answer back to her own objectification.

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**Dr Lindsay Rose Russell, University of Illinois, USA, ‘Patrons of Virtue, Patterns of Honour: Women Audiences and the Manufacture of Exigence in the Emergent English Language Dictionary Genre ’**Lindsay Rose Russell is Assistant Professor in the Department of English and the Centre for Writing Studies at the University of Illinois (USA).  Her primary areas of research include rhetorical theory; genre theory; English language histories, descriptions, and management; and feminist historiography and rhetoric.  Her current book project is a historical account and rhetorical analysis of how women have been involved in the English dictionary from its bilingual beginnings in the early modern period to its present-day array of instantiations.  Russell's most recent article, “This Is What a Dictionary Looks Like: The Lexicographical Contributions of Feminist Dictionaries,” appeared in the March 2012 *International Journal of Lexicography*, and she is currently Chair of the Modern Language Association Discussion Group on Lexicography.Abstract: We conceive of genres as patterns in place.  Such a statement might seem to undo Carolyn Miller’s insistence on genre as social action.  Her work has rightly infused stable form with dynamic activity, and calling genres ‘patterns in place’ seems to drain them of their energies, to anchor them.  But, in important ways, genres are anchored: they are ideas already in mind, and it is by virtue of their already-ness that genres can be, to quote Miller, ‘pragmatic, fully rhetorical, a point of connection between intention and effect, an aspect of social action’.  Before genres can pattern expectations, roles, relationships, and exigences, though, early iterations must cut that pattern.  The cutting of the pattern entails the manufacture of exigence, the casting of roles, and the modeling of expectations of and relationships to texts.  Looking to the dictionary as a generic case, this presentation explores how early instantiations of an emerging genre define their exigence by aligning themselves with certain audiences.  The first dictionaries of the English language appeared in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries and were consistently addressed to women, often British royalty (e.g., Mary Tudor, Mary I, Anne Boleyn).  These women served as what Andrea Lunsford and Lisa Ede have termed ‘audience addressed’ (roughly, knowable flesh-and-blood persons), but in so doing, they defined the possible roles and expectations of the ‘audience invoked’ (roughly, the ‘constructed fiction’ of dictionary readers).  Women continued to be a primary audience for dictionaries into the eighteenth century, though, in their capacity of audience addressed, they signalled different kinds of relations to the text—first as persons accomplished and competent in languages and honoured by the text, next as adventurous travellers served by the text, then as ambitious social creatures improved by the text, and finally as speakers in need of governance by the text.  Hence, the audience addressed models different roles for the gendered audience invoked and marks shifting arguments for the genre’s exigence.

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**Dr Jane Sunderland,**  University of Lancaster, 'Gender, Genre and Identity: the Small but Growing Sub-genre of Children's Picturebooks Featuring Two-Mum and two-Dad families'

Jane Sunderland is a Senior Lecturer in the Department of Linguistics and English Language at Lancaster University, where she teaches Gender and Language on a range of postgraduate courses, and is Director of Studies of the PhD in Applied Linguistics by Thesis and Coursework programme. She has a long-term interest in gender and has recently (with Mark McGlashan) been exploring multimodality, identity, and the gender-sexuality relationship in children's picturebooks featuring two-Mum and two-Dad families.

Abstract: Children's picturebooks featuring two-Mum and two-Dad families, of which there are now around 50 in existence, can be seen as a 'sub-genre' of children's picturebooks in general. Such picturebooks can be said to 'construe' identities for their characters, and to also arguably and potentially 'construct' identities for their readers and those children to whom the books are read. The construed identities of the gay parents are of a largely positive, often celebratory nature, whether the picturebook belongs to a 'fantasy' or 'realistic' genre; whether it is explicit about gay identity or whether it simply takes it as given. With Mark McGlashan, I have examined multimodal representations in these picturebooks, in particular in a selection of the picturebook covers (title and cover image), which have a clear role in marketing the books. Although there is a diversity of 'explicitness' here, with some titles and some cover images being more explicit than others in terms of the gay identity of these parents, we argue that none of the text-titles or images alone are fully explicit, and that this gay identity is only properly interpretable through the text-image interaction. We suggest that this particular multimodal relationship (referred to as 'mutual enhancement'; Unsworth and Cleirigh, 2011) may be characteristic of sometime-transgressive (sub-)genres such as children's picturebooks featuring gay parents.

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**Dr Susan Watkins, Leeds Metropolitan University, UK, ‘Rewriting Genre and Gender: Contemporary Women’s Apocalyptic Fiction’**

Dr Watkins is Reader in Twentieth-Century Women’s Fiction in the School of Cultural Studies and Humanities, Leeds Metropolitan University. She is the author of Twentieth-Century Women Novelists: Feminist Theory into Practice (Palgrave Macmillan, 2001) and *Doris Lessing* (Manchester University Press, 2010). She is also co-editor of *Studying Literature: A Practical Introduction* (Harvester, 1995), Scandalous Fictions: The Twentieth-Century Novel in the Public Sphere (Palgrave Macmillan, 2006) and *Doris Lessing: Border Crossings* (Continuum, 2009). She is Chair of the Contemporary Women’s Writing Association (CWWA), associate editor of the Oxford University Press journal, *Contemporary Women’s Writing* and co-editor of the *Journal of Commonwealth Literature.* In 2006 she co-edited, with Mary Eagleton, a special issue of *The Journal of Gender Studies* on 'The Future of Fiction: The Future of Feminism' and she is currently working on contemporary women’s post-apocalyptic fictions.

Abstract: A number of contemporary women writers have recently published dystopian fictions of apocalypse, including Margaret Atwood, Jeannette Winterson, Doris Lessing, Maggie Gee, Sarah Hall, Tama Janovitz, Jane Rogers, and Liz Jensen. These texts are difficult to classify, drawing as they do from a number of different literary and popular genres and traditions, including utopia, dystopia, apocalyptic and post-apocalyptic narratives, science fiction and adventure stories.

This paper will examine how these fictions rewrite and transform generic conventions through the use of a number of different devices that include generic mixing, palimpsestic accretion and different kinds of repetition.Such practices of rewriting generate, I argue, a new kind of writing, one that challenges the patriarchal and colonialist assumptions of earlier work in the apocalyptic and dystopian genres and, by implication, the conventional gender politics espoused there. These fictions are therefore an extremely useful way into thinking about the politics of genre and particularly the gendered politics of genre.

The paper can be accessed online at the following address: <http://as-coursecast-1.adf.bham.ac.uk/Panopto/Pages/Viewer/Default.aspx?id=02673083-a7ac-4545-a125-dd85e79c8f15> .