

Literature, hermaphrodite: intersex-ions of writing, culture and media

Universidad Complutense Madrid

Edificio A

Salón de Grados

THURSDAY 4 NOV. 2010 Julia Ward Howe *The Hermaphrodite*

15.00 -16.00 Prof. Gary Williams. (Presentation followed by questions and brief discussion).

16.00 – 16.30 Prof. Renée Bergland

16.30 Cookie Break

17.00-17.30 Kimberly Engber. “The Monster Within Julia Ward Howe's *The Hermaphrodite*.”

17.30 -18.00 Cookie Break

18.00 - 19.00 Marianne Noble (Presentation followed by questions and brief discussion)

FRIDAY 5 NOV. 2010 *Literature, Hermaphrodite: intersex-ions of writing, culture and media*

10.00 - 11.00 Prof. Christopher Larkosh “Literature, Hermaphrodite: Genetic Messages in Jeffrey Eugenides’ *Middlesex*.” (Presentation followed by questions and brief discussion).

11.00 – 12.00 Prof. Steven Tötösy "Scharang's Documentary Film Tintenfischalarm (2006)" (Presentation followed by questions and brief discussion).

12.00 – 12.30 Cookie Break

12.30 - 13.30 Fran Zurian Film director of *Mi Querida Señorita*

13.30 – 15.00 Lunch

15.00 – 15.30 Sirpa Salenius. “Sexual Deviations and Identity Conflicts: The Memoirs of Herculine Barbin, a Nineteenth-Century French Hermaphrodite”

15.30 – 16.00 Xiana Sotelo. “The Afro-Suriname ‘Mati Work’ (I am a gold coin): The Destabilization of Western Normative Categories of Sexual Identity.”

16.00 – 16.30 David Asenjo. Jaime de Armiñán’s *My Dear Lady (Mi Querida Señorita)*(1971)

16.30 – 17.00 Maya Zalbidea Paniagua. “Web-Biographies of Intersex and Transgendered People Facing Issues of Discrimination: Teena Brandon.”

17.00 – 17.00 Asun López-Varela “Emotion Across Formats. *Kiss of the Spider Woman*: the novel, the movie, the musical.”

ABSTRACTS

Kimberly Engber
The Monster Within Julia Ward Howe's *The Hermaphrodite*

The Gothic novel explores a war within, as Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick reminds us in her 1981 article "The Character in the Veil." Sedgwick directs our attention to "ocular confrontation by which characters recognize themselves and one another." In Julia Ward Howe's manuscript of *The Hermaphrodite*, at least one such recognition of self and other occurs in the Gothic chapel attached to a "Lodge in the Wilderness." This place of seclusion to which the protagonist Laurent has fled (from his first and last kiss upon a woman's lips) leads to confinement, contemplation, transformation, and finally confrontation with a reflection. Facing an unfamiliar mirror image, Howe's protagonist is "terrified" and insists "I am no woman." I propose to explore particularly this early section of the novel in relation to conventions of the Gothic and the Female Gothic.

Certainly Howe's novel allows readers to explore in some ways "what it is to be a woman," as the doomed character Emma phrases it (15). Yet, her protagonist has "little conception" of this matter early in the narrative, and the novel seems to reveal more about Laurent's refusal to understand or even see women. Howe also explores "the disguise of art," a mask that Laurent bemoans as necessary for expressing "great passion of the soul" without offending "the narrow sense and breeding of the respectable world" (121). This might be a rallying cry for the Romantic avant garde, and Howe's protagonist might thus be a noble, if otherworldly ambassador to the Roman carnival that occurs late in the novel. Directly following this carnival scene, the protagonist has the chance to reaffirm his family ties but rejects them, leaving his father "sonless" after the death of the younger Phillip (126). Thus Howe might be commenting on the perils that family ties and inheritance present to selfhood and perhaps to nation. After all, Laurent learns to sing "the whole matrimonial scale" from one of the female characters, such that in the concluding scenes of the manuscript, Howe describes a "blessed country in which love and marriage are, so to speak, in a state of divorce" (153).

This state of divorce or failure to consummate a love plot in this novel returns us to the early failure to recognize oneself in the image of a woman. *The Hermaphrodite* is a "monster" to Emma, but terror wears a woman's face for the protagonist.

Initial definitions of the female gothic suggest that its function is to socialize and educate women readers. At the same time, gothic novels by women challenge patriarchy and oppression based on gender difference. Julia Ward Howe's novel includes several gothic conventions: a tyrannical father figure and questions of inheritance, unfamiliar settings through which the protagonist travels, tangled if not entirely terrifying landscapes, secluded houses and images of confinement, anxiety about the body and about the female body in particular. Given these markers, to what extent should we read this as a gothic

novel? How or to what extent might a transgender protagonist transform some of these seemingly gendered gothic conventions? And what place might Howe's novel occupy within an American gothic tradition?

Bio:

Kimberly Engber is Assistant Professor of English at Wichita State University, Wichita, Kansas. She received a PhD in English and Women's and Gender Studies from the Graduate Centre of the City University of New York and has taught in New York, Japan, and Zagreb, Croatia. She has published articles in *Spaces of Utopia*, *Prospects*, and *Leonardo*, and she is currently revising a book manuscript about observations of intimacy in American women's fiction and anthropology in the nineteenth and early twentieth century tentatively titled *Foreign Objects, Domestic Acts: American Writing in an Ethnographic Age 1839-1939*.

Literature, Hermaphrodite: Genetic Messages in Jeffrey Eugenides' *Middlesex*
Christopher Larkosh (University of Massachusetts Dartmouth, USA)

How can an intersex construction of subjectivity, whether real or fictional, dialogue with and complicate present modes of articulating identity and alterity? Jeffrey Eugenides' 2002 novel *Middlesex* departs from this singular perspective: that of a sex that speaks from in-between, and in which the mysteries of genetics and heredity create a literary voice that resonates across a broad social, cultural and historical spectrum: connecting disparate spaces such as the ethnic conflicts of the Eastern Mediterranean in the early 20th century, a racially divided Detroit at the apogee of U.S. industrial power, and a 1970's San Francisco in the years of sexual and cultural liberation. Each is recontextualized from the post-national perspective of 21st-century Berlin, in which the dissolution of borders, continued transnational migration, multiculturalism and multilingualism once again interrogate and displace the resistant vestiges of 20th-century nationalism and attendant discourses and politics of identity.

If societal norms do in fact teach children to "speak Male or Female", as Eugenides' narrator and main character Cal/Calliope suggests, how then does this novel begin to teach an additional, third language, drawing the reader and his/her social, cultural and linguistic milieu into a conversation with a series of interstitial spaces, not only those of gender, but also of nationality, languages and cultures, all in which "normality is no longer normal"? Ultimately, it is not only Cal/Calliope who appears as a fugitive from the oppressive dictates of mid-20th century Western societal norms—whether from those of identity, sexuality and desire, but perhaps more importantly, towards a more comprehensive "being in the world": one that challenges along the way the conventional and institutionalized conventions regarding the very name and nature of scientific views on pathology (and at times, outright monstrosity).

Through a work like *Middlesex*, literature may well reclaim a place as an art of re-imagining a new world that is both familiar and unheard-of. This time, it might be one that takes its sense of promise not from migration and assimilation into other nation-states or from an accompanying economic prosperity, but from the continued crossing of

all ostensibly fixed boundaries of self and other, including those presumably hardwired into our own genetic composition.

Steven Totosy de Zepetnek

"Scharang's Documentary Film Tintenfischalarm (2006)"

Abstract: Following a brief introduction of eroticism and sexuality in German-language literature and film, Steven Totosy de Zepetnek discusses the film Elisabeth Scharang's 2006 documentary film Tintenfischalarm. The film is about Alex, an intersexual (hermaphrodite), who is thrown into confusion about the division of the world into male and female. Born in 1976 in Austria, Alex undergoes surgery to be a girl at two years of age, has penis amputation at the age of six, testicular amputation at the age of ten, and vaginal plastic surgery at the age of fifteen. In 2002 Alex outs herself as an intersexual person on a radio show. Totosy de Zepetnek's discussion revolves around the ideological and cultural aspects and perspectives of the documentary in the context of eroticism and sexuality as the "other" in contemporary Austria including audience response to the film.

Sirpa Salenius

Sexual Deviations and Identity Conflicts:

The Memoirs of Herculine Barbin, a Nineteenth-Century French Hermaphrodite

For centuries people considered hermaphrodites to have two different sexual identities. The two sexes were mixed in one single body in variable proportions. The sexual irregularity and the ensuing confusion of Herculine Barbin are the central issues of the memoirs published as *Herculine Barbin: Being the Recently Discovered Memoirs of a Nineteenth-Century French Hermaphrodite*. The narrative follows the protagonist's life from the age of seven until the premature death of the thirty-year old Abel Barbin, whose body was found in Paris in February 1868. He had committed suicide.

Herculine – or Camille, as she calls herself in the memoirs – is brought up in Catholic convents and boarding schools that could be defined as asexual environments. The suppressed sexuality of the nuns and priests who surround her until her adolescence can be seen to contribute to her identity conflict. When she reaches puberty, Camille realizes that there is something abnormal in her feelings, behavior, and even her body. At the age of seventeen she recognizes that her condition, as she puts it, “although it did not present any anxieties, was no longer natural” (Herculine 19). Yet, the growing confusion about her identity and sexual ambiguity does not prevent her from finding happiness and tenderness in an intimate relationship with another girl. Although she could have continued keeping her sexual irregularity a secret, it is the feeling of guilt and yearning for social acceptance that pushes her to reveal her condition.

When she confesses the secret of her physical ambiguity, everybody around her shows signs of great disturbance. They find her condition socially disconcerting. They consider her a freak. When she finally finds help with searching a way to make a new place for her in society, Camille feels anxiety and anguish in her solitude when she legally becomes male and is given a new name. He soon becomes the object of hateful rumors, and since he has no experience of male companions because s/he has always lived with women at

convents and boarding schools, his inability to relate to men makes him despise them. S/he had grown up without a father, and the male models – if there had ever been any – had been weak men, either physically, mentally or morally. The identity conflict after the legal sex change drives him to suicide as, in vain, he searches for social acceptance. His crisis arises from the impossibility to ignore his female characteristics that were enhanced through his upbringing. Rather than being either – or, man or woman, Herculine Barbin can be seen to embody the full potential of a human being, both male and female. His ultimate conflict stems from his desperate search for social approval. This paper discusses the nature of his identity conflict and the confusion surrounding his gender ambiguity, while addressing the social pressures that had an inevitable impact on his crisis.

Biography: Sirpa Salenius is an independent scholar, native of Finland. Since 2003, she has been teaching British and American literature at American university study abroad programs in Rome and Florence, Italy. Her publications examine the nineteenth-century American Grand Tour and influence of Italy in the lives and works of such authors as James Fenimore Cooper, Nathaniel Hawthorne, Mark Twain, Constance Fenimore Woolson, and Henry James. She is the editor of *American Authors Reinventing Italy: The Writings of Exceptional Nineteenth-Century Women* (2009) and *Sculptors, Painters, and Italy: Italian Influence on Nineteenth-Century American Art* (2009); she is the author of *Set in Stone: 19th-century American Authors in Florence* (2003) and *Florence, Italy: Images of the City in Nineteenth-Century American Writing* (2007). Her Ph.D. is from the University of Joensuu, Finland (now University of Eastern Finland). Her recent research focuses on nineteenth-century American images of Finland and Fredrika Bremer's travel writing of the United States and Cuba.

Xiana Sotelo (Universidad Complutense Madrid)

The Afro-Suriname 'Mati Work' (I am a gold coin): The Destabilization of Western Normative Categories of Sexual Identity

Abstract

Approaching the intersectional nature of sexuality, gender and ethnicity, this paper seeks to provide a critical reading into hegemonic Western normative labels (hetero- homo-bisexual) used to categorize different types of sexual orientation in the theorizing of homoerotic bonding in cross-cultural perspectives on women's same-sex erotic friendships. Specifically, it's an attempt to name the multiplicity of the sexual self without falling into hetero-homo normative discourses implied to these labels. To do so, I draw on the work of feminist scholar Gloria Wekker¹ and her research on an old institution among the Afro-Surinamese (ex- Dutch colony) working class, known as 'mati work' ("I'm a gold coin"), in which women have multiple sexual relationships with both

¹ Gloria Daisy Wekker is a Surinamese - Dutch (Netherlands) feminist, professor of Women's Studies in the Arts at the Institute for Media and Representation at the University of Utrecht in The Netherlands. See (1998) "What's Identity got to do with It? Rethinking Identity in light of The Mati Work in Paramaribo, Suriname." In: Blackwood, E. and S. Wieringa eds. *Culture, Identity, and Sexuality: Cross-Cultural Perspectives on Women's Same-Sex Erotic Friendships*. New York: Columbia University Press

men and women. These women reject marriage because of the bonds of dependency it fosters, preferring to create their own families of kin, lovers, and children. Hence, rethinking sexual identity in light of the 'mati work', western categorization of 'unruly sexuality' unravels not only the ethnocentrism implied in dominant heterosexual discourses, but mostly, the failure of Western labels to identify other ways of living sexuality. By foregrounding the voices of Afro-Surinamese women, Wekker thus illuminates how sexual acts do not carry a universal social meaning and therefore, neither sexual acts nor sexual identities should be restrained into fixed categories of sexual identity.

David Asenjo

Mi querida señorita (1971)

El largometraje *Mi querida señorita* (1971) de Jaime de Armiñán fue producido en el Tardofranquismo, un período en el que se recrudece la censura cinematográfica y en el que, paradójicamente, obtienen mayor visibilidad representaciones de género y sexualidad hasta entonces no permitidas. Estas representaciones -que respondían a la demanda de un público ávido de temáticas eróticas y que, según Marsha Kinder, veía en ellas un significado político- debían, sin embargo, ajustarse a un discurso implícito. Como señala Román Gubern, la censura toleraba representaciones que transgredían el ideario del régimen sobre la sexualidad, siempre y cuando la conclusión del relato fílmico restableciese los "valores morales" defendidos por el Franquismo. Así, *No desearás al vecino del quinto* (1970) negaba la aparente homosexualidad de su protagonista y, en la mayoría de comedias de la época, el protagonista masculino terminaba aceptando el matrimonio y renunciaba a sus -por otro lado fallidas- aventuras sexuales.

Mi querida señorita introduce una de estas representaciones transgresoras: la reasignación al sexo masculino de una solterona de provincias. El término "reasignación de sexo" ha sido elegido en lugar de "cambio de sexo" porque la tesis aquí defendida es que la caracterización del protagonista de la película se orienta hacia la intersexualidad o el hermafroditismo, y no hacia la transexualidad y el travestismo como algunos exegetas han señalado. A pesar de la cripticidad del texto fílmico, se identifican en él dos discursos históricamente vinculados al hermafroditismo y que son, entre sí, contradictorios.

El primer discurso es el descrito por Michel Foucault en su artículo *Le Vrai sexe*. Foucault señalaba cómo la Medicina y el Derecho decimonónicos negaron la existencia del hermafroditismo humano al afirmar que prácticamente todos los individuos pertenecen a uno de los dos sexos, masculino o femenino, aunque en ocasiones éste se encuentre oculto o confuso tras rasgos anatómicos del sexo contrario. Aplicado a *Mi querida señorita*, el "sexo verdadero" del protagonista es revelado al espectador, en primer lugar, y al propio personaje, a continuación. Las elipsis y metáforas visuales como el túnel o el espejo significan en el relato fílmico los procesos de reasignación quirúrgica y legal que inscriben definitivamente al personaje dentro del sexo masculino. Este discurso explicaría, por tanto, parcialmente cómo la película consiguió pasar la censura al desmentir y/o corregir lo que al comienzo de la película se consideraban ambigüedades fisiológicas y psicológicas del personaje.

El segundo discurso se correspondería con el arquetipo del hermafrodita, definido por Carl Gustav Jung a partir del estudio de los relatos míticos, y su aplicación al proceso de

maduración de la “psique” humana. El arquetipo del hermafrodita supone la reintegración en el individuo adulto de su inconsciente femenino como culminación de su evolución personal. Este discurso se observa en la segunda parte de *Mi querida señorita* cuando el protagonista, que cada vez está definido de forma más nítida en el sexo masculino, reintegra su antigua identidad femenina como medio de supervivencia y, sobre todo, a partir del reencuentro y consumación de su amor por la que fue su sirvienta mientras vivía como mujer.

Perfil biográfico de David Asenjo

Licenciado en Periodismo en la Univ. Complutense de Madrid y Master en arts du spectacle: orientation écriture et analyse cinématographiques en la Univ. Libre de Bruselas, efectúa en la actualidad el programa de doctorado Técnicas y procesos en la creación de imágenes: aplicaciones sociales y estéticas en la UCM, que compagina con su trabajo de gestor cultural. Sus líneas de investigación son las representaciones de género y de las migraciones en el cine español, particularmente en el de los años 1970.

Maya Zalbidea Paniagua (Universidad Complutense Madrid)

Web-Biographies of Intersex and Transgendered People Facing Issues of Discrimination:
Teena Brandon

Keywords: hermaphroditism, intersex, transgender, Herculine Barbin, Teena Brandon, Shu Lea Cheang, cyberspace, queer theory.

Abstract

Intersex and transgender people’s narrations invite the reader to reflect on questions of gender, sex and identity. In most of them the protagonist’s search of identity is tortured by patriarchal attitudes, intolerance, religious restrictions and transphobia. Julia Ward Howe’s *The Hermaphrodite* is an example of a person’s case who suffered rejection by his own father. The father’s repression can be considered as an incentive that will provoke the child’s asexuality. Another similar story of an intersex individual from the 19th century is Herculine Barbin’s biography, which was discovered and republished by Michael Foucault with the title: *Herculine Barbin: Being the Recently Discovered Memoirs of a Nineteenth-century. French Hermaphrodite*. Barbin was raised as a girl and sent to study in the school of an Ursuline convent. In puberty, she had not begun to menstruate, she had a masculine body and she only fell in love with girls. A doctor found that she had "male pseudohermaphroditism", she was obliged to make a legal change of sex and as Foucault states: “he was incapable of adapting himself to a new identity and ultimately committed suicide” (Foucault 1980, p. xi).

These conflicts of social inadaptation are supposed to have been solved in our century with psychological treatments and surgical interventions. But social discrimination is still present in contemporary real cases as in Teena Brandon’s, a transgender man who was raped and murdered in 1993 by a group of friends when they discovered that he had female genitalia. Teena Brandon had a female body but he/she felt as a man and wanted to have a sex change operation. Brandon’s story is known for the documentary. The

Teena Brandon's Story. In 1999 a film about his life called Boys Don't Cry was released and in the same year the multi-media artist Shu Lea Cheang created a Web-based project called Brandon (in homage to Teena Brandon) with the aim of exploring the ambiguity of gender and identity in contemporary societies in space, as well as in cyberspace. In this paper we will compare Barbin's memoirs with Teena's story to debate on how social intolerance and patriarchal systems promote discrimination and hate crimes. To finish, we will discuss on the identity politics and role of biology from the perspectives of Queer theory.