

*is there
a transgender
text in this
class?*

A ZINE ABOUT TEACHING TRANS
FICTION & POETRY

BY TOM LEGER & RILEY MACLEOD

TOPSIDE PRESS

what is tra

Transgender literature is a dynamic and ever-expanding matrix of texts in an array of genres, from novels and short fiction to poetry, non-fiction, memoir, drama, film, music, zines, and blogs.

We (the authors) tend to define trans lit broadly as texts that are products and artifacts of transgender culture. In this zine, we're choosing to focus narrowly on fiction and poetry because these genres tend to be especially under-represented. We hope that this zine will help professors of literature and related interdisciplinary studies include trans fiction and poetry in their courses, conferences, and discussions about literature.

In short, transgender literature *is literature.*

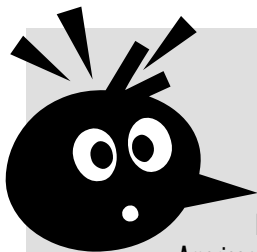
ns lit?

who is this zine for?

This zine is primarily intended for:

- » professors
- » graduate students
- » department chairs
- » scholars
- » conference organizers
- » critics

However, anyone who is curious about transgender literature might find it helpful.



some limitations

Even though transgender studies is a global discipline happening in dozens of languages, this document is focused on a small number of English-language texts from the US and Canada.

American imperial influence is as pervasive in the microcosm of LGBT literature as it is in the macrocosmic social, cultural, and economic realms. As such, it is incumbent upon the reader to remember that this zine should be considered a humble sliver of a much larger and more complex discussion.

why teach trans lit?



Trans lit is relevant

Trans texts are relevant to your students' lives, in your academic community discourse, and across the American political landscape.



Trans lit is emerging

As a genre of academic study, trans lit is comparatively new. Today there are opportunities to build courses, convene conferences, and start discussions that are exciting and fresh. Indeed, the conversations happening in today's classrooms and committee meetings will help shape the study of transgender literature in the coming decades.



Trans lit is fun

There are many talented authors to discover who will both entertain your students and lead them to those “lightbulb moments” in the classroom. Engaging your students with these texts will enrich their understandings of their own humanity and expand the world they live in.

can the subaltern transition?

One of the challenges of teaching trans lit can be determining which texts are rich, authentic representations of the genre. Transgender characters are often written by cisgender authors as a way to express their own notions of gender or as a vessel for ameliorating the author's own feelings of inadequacy and anxieties about masculinity, such as in the case with Jeffrey Eugenides in his 2002 Pulitzer-prize winning novel *Middlesex*.

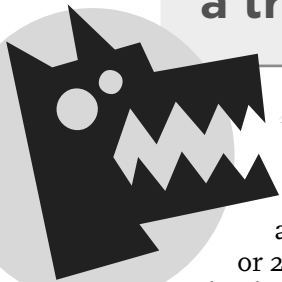
The discussion of authenticity is one we can't completely tackle in this small space, but to help you in your process of selecting texts, we'll share with you our own litmus test that we use as publishers to start (but not completely define and limit) discussions about manuscripts we consider for publication.

The Topside Test

- » Does the book include more than one trans character?
- » Do they know each other?
- » Do they talk to each other about something besides a transition-related medical procedure?

You might already recognize that our little test is heavily influenced by (stolen from, really) Alison Bechdel's classic test for women in film. Can you think of a book or movie that passes the Topside test?

but I already teach a trans book!

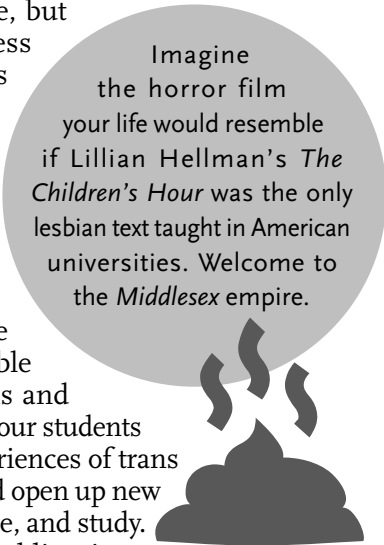


A number of university courses in the US today already include some transgender content, but anecdotal evidence suggests that 1 or 2 texts have largely monopolized this landscape. *Stone Butch Blues* is one that is not just included but in reality is over-assigned. Trans lit is diverse and exciting, working in a variety of different genres, styles, and ideologies. A single trans book, even an iconic and important one like *Stone Butch Blues*, can't possibly capture the diversity of trans lit out there today. As publishing becomes more accessible, and as trans lives change, new books can shed new light on trans lives and topics. We hope that this zine empowers you to choose from a wider diversity of texts.

Additionally, many of the representations of trans people in popular culture—books such as Jeffrey Eugenides' *Middlesex* or John Irving's *In One Person*, and films such as *Boys Don't Cry* or *Transamerica*—are inauthentic and rely on clichés that were already tired when they were written and by now, should be entirely exhausted.

Some texts featuring secondary characters who are transgender were written by cisgender people who use trans characters as plot devices to further the character arcs of their non-trans protagonists. (This phenomenon is similar to the use of a “magical negro” character or a disabled character.) This not only hurts trans people, but it also impedes the progress of trans literature. For trans lit to be a valuable part of your classroom, trans characters need to be fully fleshed-out characters in their own right, with goals and desires beyond having surgery or “passing” to mainstream society. The wide array of trans lit available today, written by both trans and cisgender authors, can give your students deeper insight into the experiences of trans people in the world today and open up new avenues for discourse, debate, and study.

Legitimizing trans lit by adding it to your syllabus is one of the ways that, as a collective, we legitimize trans people. The texts we select and how we present them have real implications for trans people and trans culture.



Imagine the horror film your life would resemble if Lillian Hellman's *The Children's Hour* was the only lesbian text taught in American universities. Welcome to the *Middlesex* empire.

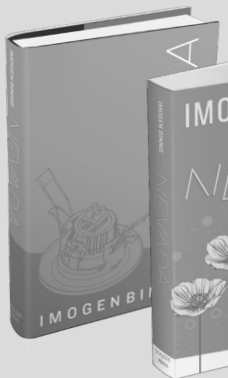
**Nevada is the darkly
comedic story of Maria
Griffiths, a young trans
woman living in New York
City and trying to stay true
to her punk values while working retail.**

**When she finds out her girlfriend has lied to her,
the world she thought she'd carefully built for
herself begins to unravel, and Maria sets
out on a journey that will most certainly
change her forever.**

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NIE



EVADA

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—MICHELLE TEA AUTHOR OF VALENCIA

“Unlike anything you’ve ever read before.”

—LAMBDA LITERARY REVIEW



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servicing suggestions

The Collection: Short Fiction from the Transgender Vanguard

Trans lit isn't just for LGBT studies or queer literature courses. Are you planning a syllabus for an upper-level literature or humanities course on a special topic or genre? You can include trans lit in your class! The Collection includes fiction from twenty-eight authors in portions that are small enough to easily fit into your reading schedule.

RACE AND GENDER

To the New World - Ryka Aoki

Runaways - Calvin Gimpelevich

SEXUALITY

An Exquisite Vulnerability - Cyd Nova

Malediction and Pee Play - Sherilyn Connely

MIGRATION AND HOMECOMING

Other Women - Casey Plett

Saving - Carter Sickels

To the New World - Ryka Aoki

NON-BINARY GENDER

Winning the Tiger - Katherine Scott Nelson

Greenhorn - K. Tait Jarboe

MEDIA AND CELEBRITY CULTURE

An Exquisite Vulnerability - Cyd Nova

Tammy Faye - A. Raymond Johnson

SEXUAL POLITICS OF MEAT/ECOFEMINISM

A Roman Incident - Red Durkin

To the New World - Ryka Aoki

MARRIAGE AND FAMILY

Masks of a Superhero - Mikki Whitworth

Birthrights - M. Robin Cook

SPECULATIVE FICTION

I Met a Girl Named Bat

Who Met Jeffrey Palmer - Imogen Binnie

A Queer Experiment - Donna Ostrowsky

Ramona's Demons - Susan Jane Bigelow

GENDER AND TECHNOLOGY

Black Holes - RJ Edwards

I Met a Girl Named Bat

Who Met Jeffrey Palmer - Imogen Binnie

EXPERIMENTAL FICTION

Stones Stand Still - Madison Lynn McEvelly

To Do List for Morning - Stephen Ira

SOUTHERN AND RURAL LITERATURE

A Roman Incident - Red Durkin

Two Girls - Alice Doyle

Saving - Carter Sickels

URBAN STUDIES

Tomboy of the Western World - Terence Diamond

I Met a Girl Named Bat

Who Met Jeffrey Palmer - Imogen Binnie

selected resources

Aoki, Ryka. *Seasonal Velocities*. Trans-Genre Press. 2012.
Print and ebook.

Banias, Ari. *What's Personal is Being Here With All of You*. Portable Press @ Yo-Yo Labs. 2012. Print.

Conrad, CA. *A Beautiful Marsupial Afternoon*. Wave Books. 2012. Print.

Ladin, Joy. *Coming to Life: Poems*. Sheep Meadow. 2011.
Print.

Lundy Martin, Dawn. *Discipline*. Nightboat. 2011. Print.

Melt, H. *SIRvival in the Second City: Transqueer Chicago Poems*. Haymarket Books. 2013. Print.

Salah, Trish. *Wanting in Arabic*. TSAR Publications.
2002. Print.

Tolbert, TC and Peterson, Tim Trace. *Troubling the Line: Trans and Genderqueer Poetry and Poetics*. Nightboat.
2013. Print.



poetry

fiction

- Anders, Charlie. *Choir Boy*. Soft Skull Press. 2005.
Print.
- Binnie, Imogen. *Nevada*. Topside Press. 2013. Print &
ebook.
- Cooper, T. *Some of the Parts*. Akashic Books. 2002. Print.
- Léger, Tom & MacLeod, Riley. *The Collection: Short
Fiction from the Transgender Vanguard*. 2012. Print &
ebook.
- Lemus, Felicia Luna. *Like Son*. Akashic Books. 2007.
Print and ebook.
- Pollack, Rachel. *A Secret Woman: A Mystery*. Minotaur
Books. 2002. Print.
- Posey, Rafe. *The Book of Broken Hymns*. 2011. Ebook.
- Spoon, Rae. *First Spring Grass Fire*. Arsenal Pulp. 2012.
Print and ebook.
- Whittall, Zoe. *Holding Still for as Long as Possible*. House
of Anansi Press. 2010. Print.

acknowledgments & references

TC Tolbert's syllabus for the course "Trans and Genderqueer Literature" at the University of Arizona (Spring 2014) was a major influence for the resources section on page 12-13. More info and full syllabus: uatransliterature.com.

David T. Mitchell and Sharon L. Snyder's book *Narrative Prosthesis* (2001, U Mich Press) describes in much richer detail (than we did on page 6) the way that disabled characters are employed in narrative as a device and crutch.

The texts listed in the resources section are just a thimble from the vast ocean of transgender literature available today and in the near future. We extend our apologies to all authors we were not able to include in this version of the zine.

Layout & design by Julie Blair.



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**Download or print this zine and future versions at:
topsidepress.com/zine**

suggestions, corrections, and additions to this zine are welcome and appreciated

about the authors

Tom Léger and Riley MacLeod have been writing together and fostering space for transgender artists for over 10 years. Their plays have been seen at HERE Arts Center, WOW Cafe Theater, Clemente Soto Velez Cultural Center, and included 9 sold-out episodes of their serial comedy *Butch McCloud: Your Friendly Neighborhood Lesbian Superhero*, which delighted audiences in New York for more than a year. Léger and MacLeod wrote the screenplay for the celebrated short film *F. Scott Fitzgerald Slept Here* (2007, dir. Jules Rosskam) which EMRO noted was “surprisingly blunt and humorous” and also “quite amazing.” The two also co-produced STAGES, the first international transgender theater festival, in New York City in 2003. They co-edited *The Collection: Short Fiction from the Transgender Vanguard*, which became a 2012 Lambda Literary Award winner. They coach authors and publish books at Topside Press.



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THE COLLEC TION

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