is there a transgender text in this class?

A ZINE ABOUT TEACHING TRANS FICTION & POETRY
BY TOM LÉGER & RILEY MACLEOD

TOPSIDE PRESS
what is trans

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.
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?
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.
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.

Retail distribution for Topside Press is handled by Ingram Book Company. Education discounts available. Please email info@topsidepress.com for assistance.
EVADA

by IMOGEN BINNIE

“A powerful new literary voice.”
—MICHELLE TEA  AUTHOR OF VALENCIA

“Unlike anything you’ve ever read before.”
—LAMBDA LITERARY REVIEW

978-0983242239
$17.95 paperback

AVAILABLE AT
NWSA 2013
BOOTH #308
serving 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 McEvilly
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


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.
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 Roskam) 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.

CONTACT TOM & RILEY

Tom Léger
tom@topsidepress.com

Riley MacLeod
riley@topsidepress.com

twitter: @topsidepress
tumblr: topsidepress.tumblr.com
web: topsidepress.com
facebook: facebook.com/topsidepress
THE COLLECTION

SHORT FICTION FROM THE TRANSGENDER VANGUARD

EDITED BY TOM LÉGER & RILEY MACLEOD

A dynamic composite of rising stars, The Collection represents the depth and range of tomorrow's finest writers chronicling transgender narratives. 28 authors from North America converge in a single volume to showcase the future of trans literature and the next great movements in queer art.

978-0983242215
$19.95 paperback

2012 LAMBDA LITERARY AWARD WINNER
AMERICAN LIBRARY ASSOCIATION OVER THE RAINBOW LIST BEST LGBT BOOKS OF 2012

Also available in DRM-free ebooks, on kindle, Amazon.com and wherever fine books are sold.