

Portfolio Exam

Due by 9:00AM on August 13, 2018 emailed as one continuous PDF (including cover sheet) to nsilverman@gc.cuny.edu. Exams received after 9:00AM on August 13 and/or not sent as one continuous PDF will receive a grade of Fail.

Student Number:

This exam includes:

Framing Essay (2000 words total)

Including:

Intellectual Autobiography (1000 words)

Reflections on the Portfolio Exam (1000 words)

Conference Paper (10 double spaced pages + works cited)

Including:

Conference Call for Papers

Abstract (200 words)

Plus two of the following three parts:

Review Essay (12-15 double spaced pages)

Annotated Bibliography

Including:

15 Entries

1500 word Rationale

Syllabus (5-8 double spaced pages in total)

including:

Teaching Statement (1-2 pages)

Syllabus (3-4 pages)

Analytical Explanation (2-3 pages)

This exam fulfills the comprehensive stipulations in the following ways (texts may be repeated):

1. Three different centuries:
 - a. Text: Part:
 - b. Text: Part:
 - c. Text: Part:
2. One Pre-1800 text & One Post-1800 text:
 - a. Text: Part:
 - b. Text: Part:
3. Two different national traditions:
 - a. Text: Part:
 - b. Text: Part:

FRAMING ESSAY

PART 1: INTELLECTUAL AUTOBIOGRAPHY

(Note: the surname of Levi X, which the student shares, has been changed to “X” in order to respect the anonymity of the Portfolio Exam)

In 1774, an ancestor of mine left my hometown of Branford, Connecticut and traveled to the Great Lakes to abduct indigenous children for Dartmouth’s re-education project. After discovering this in Craig Wilders’ *Ebony and Ivy* during my first semester, in a passage about American colleges’ roles in annihilating indigenous people and cultures in the seventeenth century, I did more research. The name Levi X sounded familiar. A text to my sister, the family historian in a family quite proud of its Connecticut heritage (since 1644), confirmed that Levi X’s son, Levi X Jr., has a well-preserved house that still stands in Branford. A Google search led me to Dartmouth’s digitized archive of Reverend Levi X Sr.’s writings. Among letters confessing doubts about his faith in God and doubts about his ability to lead the mission to the Lakes, I found X’s poetry. Like me, X was a poet. This white Christianizer of English heritage wrote heroic couplet after heroic couplet musing on the need to convert, or kill, the remaining “Savages.” One poem concludes: “May every Savage to you Christ have won/ Sparkle like stars in your eternal Crown.” Like most of X’s correspondence, this sycophantic kitsch was addressed to his powerful mentor, Reverend Eleazer Wheelock, who recommended X to the mission. X’s overwhelming verve in aestheticizing genocide and his arrival on the scene of my first week of graduate school provided a strangely intimate point of reflection as I decided how to direct my scholarship. In his letters and poems, X reveals a deep-seated belief in the benevolence his work. Down to the minutia of his poetics, he imagines and participates in an ideal of futurity. The

imperative mood is strong in X: “*may every Savage... sparkle like stars.*” It’s creepy that, on a basic level, I identify with X’s will to nourish an ideal via aesthetics and knowledge production, although our ideals, at least in content, are rather different. This experience reading a non-literary text—Wilders’ historical account of the origins of racism and genocide in American universities—and feeling compelled to do archival research was the first and most personal episode in a major shift. That is, I am moving away from using literary studies as a point of departure for examining questions centered in cultural studies. For me, the direction of that vector has reversed: I now plan to formulate research questions about sexuality and disability starting from cultural studies paradigms rather than literature studies.

As when I first entered the program, I am still drawn to the more affirmative, intersectional queer politics of Gloria Anzaldúa, Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, and José Esteban Muñoz. Muñoz’s declaration “we are not yet queer” still resonates with my belief that queerness is best construed as an unfolding of possibility on a horizon that we never quite reach. I take as foundational his notion that utopian “gestures” from forgotten histories must be recovered in a collective fragmentation to envision a more radical queer futurity rather than pitch any one blueprint of social reorganization. What has changed, however, is that I’m no longer only questioning the constructs of literary genre in my thinking on queer futurity. Because genres standardize verbal logics of perception, texts that re-map genre conventions had seemed to me profoundly utopian gestures. I wanted to study how genre reinvention in works by Oscar Wilde, Gertrude Stein, Anne Carson, and others represents a vital mobilization within queer utopia as such. Yet this year, especially in courses on African American studies and critical race theory with Robert Reid-Pharr and in Introduction to Doctoral Studies with Kandice Chuh, I was encouraged to consider the cultural contexts of aesthetic production with a critical intensity that

my undergraduate career studying twentieth century American poetry did not prioritize. Levi X has been just one specter haunting my turn to a more cultural studies based inquiry. In a key way, I am (we are all) Levi X: sometimes doubtful of my purpose, sometimes making or critiquing art as a vehicle for organizing my values, and ultimately confident in my ideological stance's well-meaningness. No matter how radically and intersectionally queer I may strive to be, I still operate in a cultural immediacy that blocks me from comprehending a futurity that includes unimagined people.

It is lessons like these, lessons that are really about rethinking humanism, that have filled me with a sense of obligation to more thoroughly justify the types of objects (whether a poem, a music video, or a cumstain) that I look at in my research. One facet of this distancing from Literature as my primary object is my enthusiasm for exploding the definition of a text. This year I wrote a book review of Ariane Cruz's monograph *The Color of Kink: Black Women, BDSM, and Pornography*. Cruz analyzes pornographic videos centered on "race play," or the deliberate thematizing of American slavery, racial violence, and racial differences in erotica. Cruz shows from black feminist and queer of color critique that this genre of porn is as not always already disempowering to black women, that it in fact may be a desired erotics that is politically useful. Sex acts are extremely elusive objects of inquiry that demand a more expansive vision of what constitutes a "text." Hence, my interest in how sexuality, narratives of queer being, and intersectionality are expressed through "high literary" poetic experiments has been readjusted through forays into fields like Critical Porn Studies. Granted, cultural studies and literary studies overlap in many ways, but I want to let my questions guide my choices of objects of inquiry and I will engage unlikely archives and media.

In the next phase of my graduate career, I will join the effort to theorize relations between sexuality and cognitive disability, using theories of objecthood, posthumanism, and autism to consider the radical forms of relationality and imagination involved in sexual fetishes. Discourses of queer assimilation and normalization often work by dissociating queerness's shared heritage with disability. As Michel Foucault and others have shown, medical and psychological institutions of the twentieth and nineteenth centuries viewed masturbation, homosexuality, and sexual fetishes as, in essence, sexual disabilities. In queer studies, "sexuality" often takes precedence over sex acts, and I hope to return to the acts of sex that supposedly define sexuality in order to ask questions about how fetishization, objectification, relationality, and disability intersect in the conceptual apparatuses around certain sexual cultures, such as BDSM, foot fetishes, race play, "bug chasing" (in which seroconversion is eroticized), and interspecies sex. My objects may range from a Nooklyn advertisement about avoiding roommates with "that creepy foot fetish," to John Preston's 1960's and 70's pulp fiction BDSM erotica, to African American writer Gary Fisher's confessional poetry eroticizing white dominance in the 1990's. This semester I will take Julia Rodas's course "Disability, Culture, and Society," in order to further pursue intersections between cognitive disability and fetishistic sexuality. I hope to craft publishable articles on these topics, and to bring my papers to conferences where I can share my ideas in a more public forum.

PART 2: REFLECTIONS ON THE PORTFOLIO EXAM

I have used the Portfolio Exam to investigate topics in national contexts that vary from American to English, and periods that stretch from the Early Modern to the early Victorian to the twentieth century. This collection of writings' thematic concerns may not seem to cohere neatly,

as I took it upon myself to splay across a broader set of loosely related topics rather than concentrate on a dissertation-minded premise.

The Review Essay enabled me to explore some of the above concerns about hierarchies of textual objects. I sought to review recent monographs that confronted questions about African American literary aesthetics. While the three books share an overarching attachment to poetry and novels, they also analyze multi-genre archives. For me, the review essay was the most difficult genre in the Portfolio because I've been trained to make an original argument in response to a text. The task of simply articulating the methods and trajectories of monographs was helpful in forcing me to cut back on my instinct toward argumentation. Moreover, my previous writing on aesthetic theories hewed much more toward sexuality, and this project encouraged me to think about the politics of aesthetics more substantively through dynamics of race.

As a student who took mostly twentieth century literature courses at my undergraduate institution, I appreciated the Portfolio Exam's mandate to explore various periods and took more pre-1800 courses than necessary: Chaucer, Early Modern transgender studies, and Jane Austen. My writing for each of these courses became concerned with issues of queer historicist methodology. A seminar paper on anal erotics in Chaucer's "The Miller's Tale" led me to the heart of recent debates about how to discern, describe, analyze, and imagine queer sexualities in epochs prior to modern LGBTQ+ identity categories and even prior to the cultural framework of "sexuality" itself. In my two pre-1800 papers for this portfolio, I tried out two different historical methods that represent opposing camps of queer historicism.

In the Annotated bibliography, which I wrote in preparation for a seminar paper for the spring semester course "Somatic Austen," I gathered sources that would allow me to test drive an

approach that respects the alterity of the past. An altericist queer methodology maintains that the queer critic must often make use of facts, periods, and sequences to track coincidence and convergence but also to reveal how categories inherently different than those of the present are constituted. The bibliography organizes sources for a paper on the long-windedness of two characters in Jane Austen novels. In their volubility, William Collins in *Pride and Prejudice* and Sir James in *Lady Susan* exhibit what is often labeled a “feeble” or “unpleasant” social affect that disability scholars have interpreted in terms of autism. I cover some of these diagnostic sources as well as progressive writing on autistic rhetorics and autistic queerness that could be used for critique. I collect sources that will help me to trace the opacities and blockages around knowing the disabled rhetorics and sexualities of these characters. Ultimately, I plan to regard them as categorically distinct facets of late eighteenth century culture. One of the most influential readings from the bibliography was Melanie Yergeau’s *Authoring Autism: On Rhetoric and Neurological Queerness*. Yergeau argues that autism’s relation to language, rhetoric, and expressivity represents a queer way of being in the world that also links to radical forms of sexuality. She defines “neuroqueerness” as a rhetorically, sexually, and cognitively divergent subjecthood that demands us to rethink rhetoric, humanity, and agency. Yergeau’s work will be vital to my continued writing on the relations between cognitive disability and sexuality.

In the seminar paper, rather than continue with an altericist method, I cultivated a sense of trans-historicism, viewing subjects from the past as potentially subsumable into modern identity categories and/or reflective of them in ways that link them to larger umbrellas like “queer.” This paper considers gender variance as a trans-historical phenomenon. As with my inhabitation of Austen’s eighteenth century alterity of disabled speech and sex, my advocacy in the seminar paper for trans-historicism pushed me to understand it well enough to modify it

towards my purposes. I attempted to “trans” trans-historicism by connecting historical expressions of gender non-normativity to transgender studies’ radical inclusivity of additional gender categories, like bigender, gender-fluid, and agender. Even though the paper’s argument deals more precisely with Shakespeare’s Sonnet 20 and how the speaker eroticizes gender variance, the theoretical basis is that gender categories can be viewed as trans-historical. In this way, I experimented with a queer trans-historicism. This methodology broadly rejects teleology-informed modes of historicism. For them, chronology, periodization, and facticity must be suspended if not subverted. Various called “queer unhistoricists,” “teleo-skeptics,” or “homo-historians,” scholars in this camp call for a queering of the idea that pre-modern sexualities are traceable, along a sequence, to modern identities. As such, the past should not be viewed as an alterity; it must be imaginatively allied to a queer present.

After writing this portfolio, I feel strongly that my academic career studying histories of queer sexuality in ways that fruitfully connect to the urgencies of contemporary politics cannot be limited to any one period. Playing with these methods in analyses of different genres in different English historical contexts has only solidified my skepticism about periodization. During these projects, I improved my ability to spelunk into an historical period, acquaint myself with the parameters of its scholarship, and utilize my reading and writing skills to contribute to conversations going on in those fields. I think this conviction likewise stems from my shift away from a literary scholarly world in which periodization matters and toward a cultural studies framework. While my Portfolio contents do not quite cover the explicit themes I’ve outlined as pursuits for this year, I have branched into aspects of cultural theory that intersect significantly with my main interests: race, disability, and gender variance.

10-PAGE CONFERENCE PAPER

TITLE: Thy Love's Use: The Eroticization of Trans-ness in Sonnet 20

ABSTRACT: Recently there has been a flurry of attention from transgender studies scholars paid to William Shakespeare's Sonnet 20. These scholars have briefly noted the speaker's expression of sexual attraction toward gender variance. In this paper, I term this form of erotics a "trans-eroticism," and I analyze the dynamics of trans-eroticism through close readings and an integration of research on the theories of gender's relation to erotics, particularly regarding transgender sexual cultures. I also approach the sonnet by contextualizing its references to Early Modern sexual subcultures. My close reading includes a consideration the power relations involved in objectification, the roles of the interrelations of different genders in creating erotic attraction, and questions that push categories of sexuality past a gendered sexual object choice, as in "gay" or "straight." These considerations build my argument that Sonnet 20 does thematize a trans-erotics in a queer description of sexuality that insightfully explores the contours, motivations, and conditions of erotic desire. Moreover, in my method, I attempt to update queer transhistoricism, the mode of identifying with archaic forms of subjecthood by including them as forms of queerness. I explore the implications of "transing" transhistoricism in my alignment of that method with transgender theory.

CALL FOR PAPERS: PAMLA 2018: Gay, Lesbian, and Transgender Literature and Culture.

Deadline for submissions: May 30, 2018

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Pacific Ancient and Modern Language Association (PAMLA)

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This panel invites submissions which discuss intersectionality in literature, media, or culture pertaining to Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer representations. You may, should

you wish, engage in the conference theme of "Acting, Roles, Stages," but any topic on gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender or queer literature is welcome. However, you might want to explore such issues as acting as art and metaphor, theories of role play and theatricality, conceptions of the world stage and the public audience, and film adaptation, in connection to this session's topic

Submit your proposal via our online system here: <http://pamla.org/2018/topic-areas>

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The 116th Annual PAMLA Conference is meeting in Bellingham, Washington, Friday, November 9 - Sunday, November 11, 2018

An under-explored sexual orientation seems afoot in recent glosses on William Shakespeare's Sonnet 20. Valerie Traub notes that the poem clings to "erotic ambiguity" (244), Simone Chess suggests that the speaker "eroticizes and admires male effeminacy and androgyny" verging on a "genderqueer attraction" (430-431), and Colby Gordon discusses how the addressee's manipulation of gendered body parts—its "soma-techneis"—expands the "menu of erotic possibilities" beyond "a cisnormative frame" (15). Each of these remarks suggests Sonnet 20's eroticization of trans-ness. I deploy "trans" here through Leslie Feinberg's usage as taken up by Susan Stryker, as "a 'pangender' umbrella term for an imagined community encompassing" a range of gender variance (Stryker 4). Many Early Modern plays thematize sexual attraction to gender variance, or what I call trans-eroticism: Thomas Dekker and Thomas Middleton's *The Roaring Girl*, John Lyly's *Gallathea*, and Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night*, for example. In those works, trans-eroticisms typically link two cross-dressing characters or stage actors. In Sonnet 20, however, the addressee can't respond to what has long been presumed a (cis)male speaker eroticizing his love object. Unlike the above works, this sonnet locates a trans-eroticism fixed within the gaze of the eroticizer. Sonnet 20 does not just thematize desire but, more exactly, explores the dynamics of objectification within eroticism, gender, and power. This objectifying gaze offers an opportunity to probe the fine line between fetishization and validation that vexes the question of how to discuss trans-eroticism in keeping with a trans-sensitive ethics.

A disproportionate power marks the cisgender person who states a preference for transgender partners, and exoticism, hyper-sexualization, or savior complexes are often attributed to trans-eroticism. For transgender people, the high risk of epistemic, psychological, and physical violence stems from such potential essentialisms. Yet the belief that a trans-erotics is pathological or needs justification risks presuming gender-variance to be fundamentally

unattractive. Also, labeling trans-eroticism as taboo problematically equates trans-ness with victimhood. C.E.M. Lloyd proposes that countering the problem of fetishization by policing discussions of trans-erotics can work to further objectify “the shamed trans subject” because it risks foreclosing the topic of transgender people’s participation in sexual cultures (14). Likewise, Avery Tompkins argues that the epithet “tranny-chaser,” which maligns people sexually attracted to trans bodies, bars conversation around trans sexual cultures (768). Even more controversial, cis individuals who prefer trans partners have started to organize in an effort to destigmatize their sexual orientations.¹ As these contexts show, the repercussions for trans people’s lived experience and sexual ecologies make trans-eroticism’s intelligibility into a necessary inquiry.

Asking after the fetishizing gaze enables me to ask questions about the meanings, processes, and concepts surrounding “objectification.” As Eunjung Kim explains, the concept of objectification frames one side of a power relation as a dehumanized object and the other as an inhuman animal, designations that together make it difficult to “examine more closely the lived [human] realities involved in objectification.” Kim proposes that embracing the process of becoming an object can “disrupt the political efficacy of ‘objectification’ as a label to condemn morally challenging phenomena” (298). Following Kim, what are the objectifications involved in trans-eroticisms? How can an analysis of agency in trans-eroticism, fetishization, and objectification challenge the model of sexuality in which the eroticized person is always abject?

Moreover, why use Shakespeare’s Sonnet 20 to situate this question? First, the Sonnets were written prior to the institutionalized ordering of sexuality into a hetero/homo binary. In the Early Modern period, multiple sexualities functioned in less fitted orthodoxies than they do today. Also, trans-eroticism has gone unexplored in the number of early modern works in which

¹ See, for example, <http://transoriented.com/>

it appears. Third, the Sonnets are canonical structures of erotic desire, and analyzing their trans-erotics can both exploit their supposedly durable thinking on eroticism while also queering or denaturing their presupposed cis-ness. A major line of transgender studies concerns “anything that disrupts, denaturalizes, rearticulates, and makes visible” the mechanisms of gender, so here I venture a *trans*-historical purview. My trans-historicism is trans in two senses: both transgender-historical and trans-historical, bridging contemporary transgender studies with Early Modernism. I view Early Modern gender under the “trans” umbrella’s expanse. This trans-trans-historical mode brings together temporally local gender expressions without collapsing them into a definitive identity category. Additionally, the Sonnets themselves have a critical history that shows them to act less as time capsules for Early Modern culture and more as trans-historical virtual reflectors for whatever cultural present interprets them (Franssen 86-87, 94). I take the poem both as a tool of self-reflexivity across time and as a canonical artifact that can be both queered and exploited for its historical, poetic, and theoretical knowledge.

To begin, I locate Sonnet 20’s addressee within a theatrical tradition of sexualized gender-variance. Male cross-dressing onstage was standard in Early Modern England. As Valerie Traub demonstrates, this unusually English phenomenon founded an economy of aesthetic consumption that mediated homoerotic liaisons, public sexual cultures, and sex work economies in a social life surrounding the proscenium (*Desire*). Whereas Traub focuses on homoeroticism, it makes sense that a trans-erotics was also mediated across the gender-variant performativities of Shakespeare’s cross-dressing actors and their sex work. The first line of Sonnet 20 primes us to read the love object as the type of androgynous prepubescent actor who would have cross-dressed as a female character on stage:

A woman’s face, with nature’s own hand painted,
Hast thou, the master mistress of my passion—
A woman’s gentle heart, but not acquainted

With shifting change, as is false women's fashion;
 An eye more bright than theirs, less false in rolling,
 Gilding the object whereupon it gazeth;
 A man in hue all hues in his controlling,
 Which steals men's eyes and women's souls amazeth.

This opening sentence's description of the love object not only tropes them as a performer but situates performative gender along a binary of falseness or authenticity. The self-correcting interruptive clause, "with nature's own hand painted," contrasts nature with the falseness of fashion's "shifting change," yet the phrase still invokes non-artificial nature as aesthetic, since nature performs handiwork in painting the face. Colby Gordon calls this turn to nature's "authentic" artifice the "non-cosmetic" technologization of facial features (10). Leveraging nature's authenticity, the sentence stresses that the addressed love object *has* a woman's real face. Appending feminized organs onto an otherwise non-gendered body continues with "A woman's gentle heart." While the addressee's naturalized fleshly prosthetics and masks are explicitly gendered and rendered by nature, the whole of the body is not. Even as the performer is a "Man in hue all hues in his controlling," the word "hue" implies an "application" of manhood. Stephen Booth indexes, "hue" as denoting "form, shape, appearance, complexion, color," and even "apparition" (163). Since the word is used twice, "the permutation of overlapping meanings and suggestions in the line are too numerous to spell out" (164). Even more elusively, the line's more local seventeenth-century connotations may be lost to twenty-first century readers. Still, these infinite hues and moveable gendered parts are under the power of both nature and the addressee. By contrasting the addressee's technesis to that of the "false women's fashion," the speaker extols the addressee's hyper-flexible soma-technology. In Gordon's analysis, the poem lifts body modification out of the abject, demonized state that religious orthodoxy had assigned to it. Gordon shows how Sonnet 20 legitimizes soma-technesis. In building on his argument, I propose that the speaker not only validates but eroticizes the

addressee's gender variability. In the poem's opening eight lines, this multi-gendered body becomes not merely a prepubescent boy actor who plays women better than women do but an occasion for exploring a more general matrix of desire premised on gender technesis.

If the ability to change is what the speaker eroticizes, that attraction complicates the logic of objectification wherein the desired person becomes a static object. If trans-eroticism is premised on an attraction to transitivity, transition, transversality, and/or the capacity to transform genders, it opens up objectification to something other than stasis. C. R. Snorton, quoting Bill Brown, says that "the process by which an object becomes a thing tells a 'story of how the thing really names less an object than a particular subject-object *relation*'" (6). Within that relation, validation, denigration, and erotics flow across unclear agencies. As Sonnet 20 unfolds, the act of validating the addressee's soma-technesis occurs within a narrative of changing agencies, and the erotic agencies involved in this narrative are not as unilateral as they initially seem.

The speaker first appears to exert power over the love object by describing them univocally. The Sonnet summarizes, persuades, and asserts an erotics that is, within the form itself, unanswerable. Yet the addressee is explicitly a "master-mistress." Their mastery over all "hues" makes them sublimely talented in effecting life-likeness in any shape or form. And even if the gilding eye wows an audience, making the master-mistress into an objectified spectacle, their position still exerts dominance in the limelight by "stealing" men's eyes and "amazing" souls. Meanwhile, the speaker adores the addressee's hyper-capacitated and hyper-malleable agency, which is still surveilled and constructed in the speaker's language. Ultimately, the addressee is not in control of the conditions of being the recipient of a Sonnet. The Sonnet is a power move.

Yet as the speaker grows more submissive, Shakespeare complicates the Sonnet's dominant relation to its recipient. This shift gets fleshed out in the Sonnet's volta:

And for a woman wert thou first created,
 Till nature as she wrought thee fell a-doting,
 And by addition me of thee defeated,
 By adding one thing to my purpose nothing.

The preposition “for” suggests that the master-mistress was born with male sex traits *for* fucking a woman. In a gender-reversing read, the master-mistress was first created *for* a woman’s mold—made in the gender of a woman. Dominating nature, which has become a doting suitor, the addressee abolishes such binaries by making them collapsible into a gender fluidity. Hence, the addressee’s swift navigation of multiple genders marks an attractive form of power.

The speaker’s submission to that power climaxes in the word “defeat.” This defeat is vague and perhaps refers to the sonnets as a sequence. The sonnets leading up to number 20 have often been dubbed the “breed sonnets,” since their speakers try to coax the addressee to procreate (Franssen 87). These speakers cite the need for an always-younger clone of the addressee. Thus, the breed sonnets evoke fetishization; their obsessions with the youthful beauty of the addressee seem to disregard the interiority and individuality of the objectified body that will age. The addressee’s agency only emerges through their inferred refusals, since the speaker keeps on begging for clones in breed sonnets. In Sonnet 20, this “defeat” at the end of twenty-odd breed Sonnets admits the speaker’s failure to force the love object to procreate. In this context, the “one thing” that was added and disobediently *subtracted* into “nothing” was the breeding that had for so long been the speaker’s “purpose.” Whereas the demand to reproduce tends to be associated with heterosexual sex, here its failure, or its transposition into poetic composition, mingles with the master-mistress’s multi-gendered sex organs: by adding “one thing” (phallus) the master-mistress has also added “nothing” (vagina/anus). In other words, the subverted desire for a clone intersects, however incongruously, with the technogenesis of gendered sex organs. In its parallel with nature’s doting, the defeat itself is further eroticized. The refusal to reproduce only serves to

intensify the speaker's desire. The master-mistress's refusals, in this sense, stick their "thing" into the speaker's "purpos[ive] nothing," penetrating him. More than eroticizing defeat, the speaker eroticizes, as "trans," the transition from dominant to submissive, in many of its gendered connotations. Begging for clones then becomes a performative construction of failure that clears the way for the speaker's desire to immortalize the love object via poetry, or more accurately, to immortalize the transitional processes of capture at work in loving the love object.

This construction of the conditions for desire develops the speaker's own sense of self in the erotic scenario. For instance, the final couplet's puns begin to link the speaker's own gender-identifications with the master-mistress's trans-ness:

But since she pricked thee out for women's pleasure,
Mine be thy love, and thy love's use their treasure.

Again, slippery prepositions abound. To be pricked "out" connotes the act of pricking a hole into a surface as well as grafting a phallus onto a body. To be pricked out "for" pleasure may mean to be equipped with a phallus in order to penetrate or, alternately, to be divested of a phallus in order to experience vaginal (or anal) pleasures. The two meanings of "since" put these dual-gendered organ-pleasure-vectors in an equally sprawled relation to the final line. At once contrastive and causal, "since" could denote "because" or "despite." The pronoun "mine" then inherits this excess: whatever is "mine" may be either direct result of or a contrast to the transitive duality of the master-mistress. Although the possessive "mine" would first seem to mean the speaker's own "pleasure," the overdetermined puns on "pricked thee out for woman's pleasure" contextualize "mine" as radically open-ended.

What we can say for sure, however, is that the couplet reorients the speaker toward himself, especially in the final clause that positions whatever is "mine" as objects in "use". "Thy love's use" could refer to the speaker's use of the master-mistress's "love" or vice versa. "Use"

especially connotes instrumentalized objects. If “thy love’s use” will be “their” treasure, with “their” referring to the unknown possessed objects in “mine,” the poem’s closure eroticizes the self-instrumentalizing matrix of that use. In other words, the sonnet concludes on the role of a gendered self in a seemingly self-objectifying eroticism. These dynamics displace the technogenesis of the master-mistress onto the speaker’s sense of being a desired object, where “mine” refers to an ecstatic everything, throwing the speaker’s own gender into disarray.

Talia Mae Bettcher, in an effort to revise “the standard way of viewing sexual attraction” as primarily based on a love object, analyzes self-gendering’s role in erotics (605). Bettcher argues that sexuality is not wholly “determined” by a “stable object preference” but also entails an erotically charged “gendered self” (607). Since sexual attraction eroticizes increased intimacy, aroused individuals necessarily imagine themselves on a track to intimacy, a track that moves through social boundaries in a graduated progress. Those boundaries are gender-sensitive. Each phase of intimacy recalls self-gendering through its invocation of one’s own sex organs. For instance, when a cis-man imagines receiving a blowjob from a cis-woman, his own cock plays as much a role in the erotic imaginary as the vision of a woman fellating it. Is this an auto-erotics or another kind of challenge to the model of sexuality as based on object-choice? The final couplet of Sonnet 20 may flirt with an answer to that question in its ecstatic blurring of boundaries between bodies, body parts, agencies, pronouns, and uses. As I have argued, the speaker’s sudden self-reference reconfigures their own gender in its manifestation within erotics: “mine” acquires the hyper-flexible technogenesis attributed to the master-mistress as a kind of relation. The final line is therefore a multiplying of erotic relations shared between a multi-gendered addressee in sexual congress with a constitutively and sexually multi-gendered speaker.

If the trans-ness of partner and self in relation marks a trans-erotics, there may not be a strictly gendered object-choice defining the desire at all. In Sara Ahmed's work on the phenomenology of sexual orientation, she describes how a range of unlikely dispositions may affect sexual object-choice. In Ahmed's words:

Sexuality would not be seen as determined only by object choice, but as involving differences in one's very relation to the world—that is, in how one “faces” the world or is directed toward it. Or rather, we could say that orientations toward sexual objects affect other things that we do, such that different orientations, different ways of directing one's desires, means inhabiting different worlds... (68)

Ahmed decenters object-choice by describing sexuality as an orientation of relations. At the same time, she explains object-choice's performativity: “in directing one's desire toward certain others and not other others, bodies in turn acquire their shape” (86). Perhaps, then, in directing one's desire toward certain genders, bodies would in turn acquire their gender. On a larger scale, Ahmed's queer phenomenology proposes that one's sexual orientation may stem from other non-erotic orientations that shape object-choices rather than the other way around. As Zowie Davy and Eliza Steinbock suggest, in some erotics, “genital sexuality becomes decoupled from bodily pleasures, and the phenomenological experience of erogenous body parts can become transferred to other parts and even inanimate objects,” including, I suggest, embodied power relations like those I have charted in Sonnet 20 (280). The cisgender person who eroticizes a trans person may be already engaged in a lifeworld orientation that leads to a preference for gender-variant partners. In Sonnet 20, given the speaker's eroticization of his own defeat, transitivity is figured as an attractive power to which the objectifier, paradoxically, submits.

If I follow Gordon's analysis that shows Sonnet 20 legitimizing gender-technesis, my take could suggest that an embodied transitivity may be an ideal worth validating as attractive. Early Modern theologians largely viewed “the cosmetically-enhanced subject” as one who

“commits a kind of sacrilege by transforming the human body into an atrefact, a technical object, rendered material” (Gordon 7). This threat of technicity persists in trans-phobia today. As Gordon says, cherishing technesis combats transphobic stances that demonize gender-variance. Yet asking after how eroticization relates to validation may require the addressee’s perspective.

On the other hand, to know trans-eroticism, perhaps one must revise sexual orientation by resisting its adherence to sexual object-choices, as in “gay,” “straight,” and “bi” sexualities, or even the addendum of “trans,” with trans conceptualized as both a gender and a sexuality. In Sonnet 20, we can see an erotically flustered speaker groping toward an understanding of how worlds, agencies, and directionalities inscribe a body that is turned on. The ending is messy, rife with ambiguity and porous barriers between genders, eroticized selves, eroticized others, and words whose meanings exceed their more finite capacities. The poem almost exceeds orientation, perhaps figuring trans-eroticism as an erotics of disorientation. At the least, the poem’s protean orientations teach us about our own translations of erotics into statuses rather than relationalities in flux. If “trans” can be useful as a category of sexual tendencies, the same category may include some cisgender and some trans people. Yet I hesitate to conclude that cisgender people who tend toward trans-ness may not be so clearly gendered after all. That seems beside the point. Instead, my analysis has begun to push discussion of trans-erotics beyond recourse to fetishization. Sonnet 20’s trans-eroticism has led me to refocus sexuality as embedded in eroticized power relations more so than static identities or fixed embodiments. Fetishization, as we conceive it, simplifies erotic attraction in a reduction to object-choice that brackets all else. Moving forward, one essential step in making space for that “all else” of relations entails tracing those fuzzy, crumbling, ever-shifting edges of the thing that “fetish” tries to name.

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12-15 PAGE REVIEW ESSAY

TITLE: Black Aesthetics at the Limits of the Literary

BOOKS REVIEWED:

Harper, Philip Brian. *Abstractionist Aesthetics: Artistic Form and Social Critique in African American Culture*. New York University Press, 2017

Edwards, Brent Hayes. *Epistrophies: Jazz and the Literary Imagination*. Harvard University Press, 2016

Edwards, Erica R. *Charisma and the Fictions of Black Leadership*. The University of Minnesota Press, 2012

The naming of an aesthetics—the practice of determining operations of particular styles, forms, pleasures, and affordances in a specific artwork—that could be associated with black American culture requires presumptions that are both necessary and absurd. On one hand, the oversimplification fundamental to such an endeavor risks foreclosing the power of aesthetic objects to complicate our understandings of boundaries, identities, and human experience. The lurch toward that definition would homogenize what are surely multiple black aesthetics. Also, to define a black aesthetic would be to accept the need to differentiate it, quasi-segregate it, articulate it against the default landscape of the non-black. One thinks of Zora Neale Hurston’s famous dictum: “I feel most colored when I am thrown against a sharp white background.”

On the other hand, recognizing sets of shared experience, collective struggle, and political sensibilities in the service of art-making can cue us to new uses for the ways that aesthetics structure perception, power, and persuasion. The Black Arts Movement of the 1960s, for example, called for a more radical cultivation of black aesthetics that need not answer to the tenacious whiteness of “mainstream” and “avant-garde” arts. The fact that this incitement continues to resonate with so many contemporary artists suggests that the movement opened up an enduring field of aesthetic self-reflexivity.

Three recent monographs interrogating the relations between racialized blackness and creative praxis indicate that the question remains very much alive: what constitutes the black American aesthetic? Here I review Philip Brian Harper’s *Abstractionist Aesthetics: Artistic Form and Social Critique in African American Culture* (2017), Brent Hayes Edwards’ *Epistrophies: Jazz and the Literary Imagination* (2016), and Erica R. Edwards’ *Charisma and the Fictions of Black Leadership* (2012). As a set, these projects reveal both overlapping and distinct senses of

political responsibility in delineating a black aesthetic in literary projects of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries.

* * *

Philip Brian Harper announces in the first line of *Abstractionist Aesthetics* that the book is a polemic, and the target of Harper's polemic is realism, which he portrays as a worn-out aesthetic standard that nonetheless remains a nearly compulsory mode for African American artists engaged in radical politics. Realism, even as it innovates tactics for reality-simulation, also labors to conceal its own contrived nature. This concealment is essential to realism's desired effect: a self-evident naturalism that absorbs an audience in such a way that representation seems to speak directly, or unmediatedly, to lived social dynamics. Hence, realism's blueprints for political action, whether collective or individual, can more fluidly materialize in readers. This makes realism, on its surface, a powerful vehicle for African American cultural critique. Yet the configurations of any "reality" are too contested, relative, or unknown to supply a fixed baseline for mimicry. Reality will always escape realism. In the mockery that lived experience performs upon the realist project, realism proves to be tethered to a rather pessimistic or compromising view of aesthetic viability. These limitations lead Harper to explore works of art that abandon realism by exaggerating and thematizing their own artifices, works that he seeks under the banner of "abstractionism." Rather than patronize a reader by attempting to replicate their preconceived lifeworld, as if that were possible, abstractionism prompts one to explore the representational logics that structure art, subjectivity, relationality, social arrangements, and political commitments. Harper calls this abstractionism's "social-critique effect." In Harper's assertion, abstractionism holds by far the most promise for an updated twenty-first century

African American aesthetics, one that can loosen realism's stranglehold, revise our commitments to critical thought, and enable a more ideal black futurity.

The major hurdle to advancing a broader paradigm of abstractionism, Harper claims, is African American people's general distaste for abstract forms. This aversion developed over centuries of white artistic practices that continue to present black bodies as undesirable, excessive, and killable. Whereas Piet Mondrian and Agnes Martin's abstract grids performatively "clear" the visual field of painting to install a sense of primacy that smoothly presents as originary, American slave culture does so with people, territories, and cultures. To view a person as enslavable, one must abstract them. Racist caricatures in American art do exactly that. However, some aesthetic inventions of African American culture, like bebop jazz, are said to be formally abstract, working within the same non-concrete domain that produces the violence of misrepresentation. With this paradox, Harper underlines African American culture's ambivalence toward abstraction's legacy. All of this context works to support Harper's other claim: that African American literature is best suited to hone and utilize abstractionism's largely untapped power. But Harper doesn't start his substantiations with literature. He uses a logic of deduction, organizing chapters by genre—first visual art, then music, and finally theater and literature—so that he can analyze the potentially valuable abstractionist predispositions of each genre, only then to explain how it ultimately fails to realize a satisfactory social-critique effect.

Kara Walker's silhouettes serve as Harper's go-to example for a now canonical black visual artist who verges on abstractionism but fails, as a result of her medium, to flex its aesthetic potential. In the 1990s, by playing with images of racist stereotypes, Walker's signature silhouettes were accused of uncritically disseminating bigoted imagery. Her supporters defended that the silhouettes offered up that imagery for viewers to reflect generatively on the social

tensions involved in viewing, say, a portly overseer with a peg-leg thrusting into what seems to be a naked black teenager offering her behind. In Harper's analysis, the question of whether these silhouettes perpetuate the violence they describe or force critical reflection is irresolvable. Because of this difficulty, the abstractionist objective in visual forms remains vulnerable to a mix-up rooted in abstraction's violence. So, such forms are not the ideal vehicle.

In formalist discourse, music is often labeled as the most abstract medium; it is both "nonreferential" and nonconcrete. This is why jazz, the blues, hip-hop and other traditions present a challenge to Harper's hypothesis. He works around this in two ways: first, when artists as visionary as Billie Holiday and saxophonist Lester Young collaborate, they enter an abstract zone of mutual listening so intimately hyper-sensitive that the rest of the world is excluded; only the musicians themselves access their music's best abstractionist effect. Harper names this the "antisocial character" of jazz. Second, any line of reasoning that associates blackness with jazz produces a social-critical effect that is always "recruited to the function of narrative discourse" (87). In a sweeping move, Harper argues that all music exists within narrative due to its reliance on linear time. Hence, we must turn to literature as the abstractionist medium par excellence.

In the chapter on literary abstractionism, the argument starts to feel more genuinely exploratory. Using examples of misinterpreted and stereotyped black male characters, Harper shows how realist fiction presents a double bind. First, realism aims to craft a naturalistic representation whose 1:1 ratio to "reality" should enable the reader's self-identificatory reflection on the text. However, this aim is naïve because a fictional world is "restricted in what [it] can accommodate... constrained to present what it presents, emphasize what it emphasizes, and omit what it omits." What realism does to characters, especially in minoritarian literature, is make emblems out of them, which renders realism ill-equipped to approximate the more

complex dimensions of real people in the service of socio-political critique. While realist prose distorts reality while impersonating it, poetry more frankly engages issues of representation via lineation, which continually draws attention to a poem's artifice. But prose, for Harper, is an even better candidate for abstractionism because prose is expected to be linear, realist, and/or logical. Frustrating this expectation maximizes prose's abstractionist effect.

Harper's appraisal of anti-realist prose in Carolyn Forché, Gertrude Stein, and John Keene makes a strong case for that category's political potential. For instance, Keene's pronoun play, his dispersal of characterization across objects, people, and moods, and his temporal disorientations create a textual universe no longer reliant on identifiable, emblematic characters. Keene messes with systems of identification while still problematizing and experimenting with blackness. In Harper's favorite kind of abstractionism, racialization (not to mention other social forces that affect African American people) can be envisioned as an experimental and pliable dimension of worldmaking rather than merely characterization. Political hermeneutics such as the ongoing impacts of racist housing policies on communal dynamics are no longer consolidated within the conceit of a protagonist, or a set of protagonists, but scattered and sown into a field of objects in the text.

While Harper's close readings of marginal texts and his excitement for experimental literature feel vital, there is something archaic about the way he conceives of genres as discrete entities with clear boundaries. So much potentially abstractionist art is trans-medial: music lyrics, installation art, performance art, and memes, to name a few. The difficulty of Walker for a critic so immersed in a New Critical formalistic analysis is that her audience's seemingly out-of-control reactions are actually programmed into the work itself. Walker's work could be said to deliberately theatricalize the complex interplay of realism and abstraction within audience

reception. At times, Harper seems to believe that audience reception should be conflict-free. He romanticizes the relationship between individual and art form, constraining our sense of the possible types of aesthetic encounters. For instance, doesn't jazz provide a vibrant heterogeneity of sound and rhythm that is, perhaps, abstract, but around which people gather to enjoy and discuss how those sounds make them feel? Hence, isn't there a profound critique-effect innate to African American musical abstraction's shaping of audiences? And if, as Harper contends, "the blackness in black music is a function of narrative," does that mean "narrative" is originally literary? The generalization of narrative in Harper makes it so profuse and applicable that the word loses the specificity granted to it in literary studies. These are consequences of both obeying a genre orthodoxy and bracketing culture too faithfully.

Transmediality—the big omission in Harper's account—is what Brent Hayes Edwards, in *Epistrophies: Jazz and the Literary Imagination* (2017), takes up as a primary measure of black aesthetics. Edwards examines how the relations between jazz and writing illustrate transmedial exploration as a black aesthetic principle. What basic premises, Edwards asks, can be gleaned from viewing one of the most quintessential and globally influential black inventions of the twentieth century as indebted to a self-constitutive conversation with the written word? In Edwards' definition, "jazz literature" means the writings by jazz musicians themselves, whether Duke Ellington's letters, Sun Ra's poetry, or Henry Threadgill's song titles. Within this overlooked genre, jazz and experimental literature are pursued by Edwards as forces magnetized by one another. Their synergistic intimacies engage a "crossing, rethinking, expanding of the potential of each medium" (19). Questioning the limits of articulation—or "articulacy"—emerges as a through-line characteristic of this black aesthetic. Yet rather than follow and nourish a master trope such as "abstractionism," Edwards insists on a more nuanced approach.

The book structure is nonlinear; each chapter presents a self-contained case study that builds off the central thesis. In a sense, the chapters of *Epistrophies* enact “epistrophe”—the repetition of a word or phrase at the end of a line of poetry. Epistrophe creates spontaneous eruptions of meaning by placing the same unit in new contexts. An array of thinkers from musicology, performance studies, literary theory, and African American studies informs Edwards’ analysis, which often includes sensational anecdotes. Drawing on a vast archive, Edwards exercises a biographer’s attentiveness in his analysis, which enriches our sense of the social realities that inform seemingly transcendent acts of ingenuity.

As such, anecdote, hearsay, and myth circulate around jazz icons as an inherent part of the discursive universes that Edwards maps. Rather than engage debates about apocryphal or accurate stories, Edwards prefers to ask why certain pseudo-mythical accounts of the jazz greats have endured. For example, in Chapter 1, “Louis Armstrong and the Syntax of Scat,” he entertains the widely contested origin story of scat: Armstrong had dropped his paper with the lyrics during a practice session and, rather than stop the band, proceeded to scat his way to the end of the tune, “The Heebie-Jeebies.” The appeal of this narrative suggests that popular culture appreciates scat’s enactment of a “fall,” a drop of words out of the registers of expression, a dispossession of articulacy. Shifting from linguistic, textual, and musicological modes of analysis, Edwards assesses scat’s literary affordances. Scat entails both a lack and an excess of meaning, enlarging the possibilities for semantic expression while also cracking a window onto nascent meaning-making processes. In scat, and in Armstrong’s wacky performances of it, the body becomes emphasized as an object, the voice as an instrument that can be edged toward expressive absurdity. It’s also a poetics of scatology—an inquiry into bodily regulation and expressive release not unlike a laxative: “sometimes Armstrong thought his genius was his ass”

(43). Edwards ends the chapter by connecting his analysis to the strange punctuation that littered Armstrong's typewritten letters. Truly a wonder, the syntax and flamboyant symbology in Armstrong's correspondence reveals an impulse to lift signification to its most multiple maximum, just like scat: "I—JUST, Love, your, Checks, in, My POCKETS—"OH" They look so pretty" (51). The bottom line that scat performs linguistic alterity strikes one as obvious. Yet the charismatic writerly figure that Edwards so deftly assembles shows a consummate literary jazz artist playing with the limits of expression. Fantasizing about a secret language, Armstrong was "reaching beyond reaching" for the ideal word.

The chapter on the self-styled mystic Sun Ra, who conceived of his musical records as a "cosmic newspaper," emphasizes the role of futurity in the black literary-jazz aesthetic that Edwards means to classify. A jazz composer, pamphleteer, piano player, philosopher, and poet, Sun Ra pursued what might be called a literary-musical aesthetic of black futurity, or a "race for space," as Edwards puts it. Sun Ra viewed poems as scientific equations meant for exploring "the ultradimensions of being," and he even submitted a poem to NASA for Neil Armstrong to read as he stepped on the moon. Infused with numerology, pop culture, koan-like homophones, celestial imagery, and post-race politics, his poetry was never quite assimilated into any one tradition or widely read for that matter. For that reason and others, Sun Ra is perhaps the most controversial political figure in the book. Because he espoused an idealistic "politics of mythocracy rather than a fulfillment of democratic principles," Sun Ra frequently downplayed racial categorization in favor of a more mythic and cosmic collectivity of humankind: "Are you thinking of metaphysics/ alone? Well, don't" (124). In his focus on Sun Ra's contributions to literature, Edwards directs most of his discussion to Sun Ra's obsession with homophones, wherein "good morning" was interrogated as "good mourning" and "hi" was always also "high."

As Edwards explains, for Sun Ra, “tropes that implied operations of language were essential to any approach to the impossible” (126). In analyses like these, with Sun Ra’s desire for devices that stripped words down to their mechanical operations as well as scat’s ability to rescue phonemes from the standard logics of English syntax, the black aesthetic that Edwards describes begins to look a lot like an abstractionism premised on a genre-bending or trans-medial imagination.

While the first six chapters cover jazz literature by Louis Armstrong, Duke Ellington, James Wheldon Johnson, Sun Ra, Mary Lou Williams, and Henry Threadgill, the final two segments analyze how poets Nathaniel Mackey and Ed Roberson—black writers who are not musicians—have learned from jazz’s lessons. An attention to “serialism” frequently marks these two poets, a serial aesthetic bent that spans serial grammar and serial instances of pain. Hayes draws delicate connections between this poetic serialism to the serial quality of black life under the constraints of American racism. The Harlem Fruit Riot in 1964, in which a group of six young black men was framed for vandalizing a fruit cart, stands as his clear example of serial blackness as mediated by the news cycle. The protracted trials, public outcry, and journalistic narrative of the “Harlem Six” exemplifies the serial nature of violence against blacks, but also the attendant reiterations of crime, caricature, and thus the emblematic “characters” in the sagas of narrative realism that Harper critiques. In Mackey and Robertson’s poetry, we can see a tradition that understands the need for attention to seriality as a perceptual mode linked to survival. To have a mind trained for reading serially better equips black subjects for comprehending the operative frameworks of their unfreedom.

Epistrophies makes no grand claims. Its findings are a more muted yet perhaps no less potent ascription of black politics to aesthetics than that of Harper (19). The book is suggestive

of qualities that underpin black literary aesthetics as they relate to a musical tradition. Unlike Harper's eye toward a taxonomy, Edwards' approach permits a generous flexibility regarding aesthetic categories and a confidence in the fluid boundaries of invention: song titles, song lyrics, epistles, notebooks, jotted phrases on random scraps of paper. While *Epistrophies* is an impressively researched study, there is one maddening omission: black women. With the exception of a throwaway chapter on Mary Lou Williams, men dominate Edwards' examples by a long shot. Nina Simone, Ella Fitzgerald, Billie Holiday, and scores of others do not come through. Although Edwards should have addressed his book's carving out of a distinctly male African American jazz-literary aesthetic, it is not entirely clear whether that would resolve the problems produced by assigning each chapter to a single protagonist. Black literary aesthetics appear in Edwards as a pantheon, and installing women in that pantheon would be a stopgap measure, an inclusion in the form of an assimilation of gendered others into a male enshrinement of the individual.

In other words, the portraits that Edwards so magnificently creates thrive on the capital of a gendered charisma. In a more critical take on the subject, Erica R. Edwards, in *Charisma and the Fictions of Black Leadership* (2015), designates the site of male charisma as the eminently contested terrain of black aesthetics—in public performance as well as literary fiction—during the long twentieth century. Rather than theorize the elusive essence of charisma, Edwards traces the effects of its development and its foreclosure of a more radical black politics and aesthetics. Tracking charisma's gradual hold on the black political mainstream from Reconstruction to the Obama Era, Edwards reveals how black male magnetism cannot be distinguished from the manipulation of technologies: media narratives, historical revisionism, embodied performance, and a normalization of the charismatic fiction itself. She deploys a cultural studies methodology

informed by deconstruction, psychoanalysis, and close readings to deliver rich interdisciplinary scholarship on textuality, embodiment, historicism, and radical black politics. Since the charismatic male leader is indeed a fiction, fiction itself offers a counterpoint. Edwards claims that twentieth century novels by black women and men alike can be characterized by their deconstruction of this leadership archetype. Ultimately, she argues against charisma's necessity, stopping short of calling it useless.

Much like realism as Harper depicts it, charisma's dominant ideology was not predestined. In post-emancipation America, as newly enfranchised African Americans faced often violent efforts to clamp down on their political power, multiple factors including gender hierarchy, the allure of preachers at the pulpit, Christian scripture, and a new nationalism worked to sediment the "Best Man" tactic as the most feasible politicizing force. Evidenced by Frederick Douglass, the rubric of the charismatic leader begins with a Messiah-like man's imperfection, which he overcomes, often with sacrifice, in order to shepherd his people toward the realization of a political ideal. In light of the Hayes Compromise, the yearning for charismatic figureheads can be seen as a commonsense response to the terror of American modernity. Drawing on Max Weber's notion of charisma as an authoritarian form of emotionalism and Diane Taylor's idea of "scenario" as a master narrative enacted by a "master performative" that can be recycled in many contexts, Edwards lays bare the apparatus of charisma as its spectacular scenarios developed from the 19th to 20th centuries. Charisma emerged as "a phenomenon, a dynamic structure, a figural process of authority and authorizing" that was far from static or inherent in any one body; it was complexly rendered in response to social crises (16). The scenario of romanticized charisma continues to enact specific violences: the silencing of other narratives, an undemocratic model of politics, and a reinforcement of normative gender and sexuality.

In the interwar years of the first half of the 20th century, George Schuyler and W.E.B. Du Bois presented contrasting views on charismatic authority. While Du Bois's novel, *Dark Princess*, put forth an oversimplified image of a successful, erotically charged, Messianic black leader, Schuyler's *Black Empire* caricatures that trope, enlisting techniques of absurdism to stretch the aura of charisma to its breaking point. Zora Neal Hurston's novel, *Moses*, meanwhile deconstructs the Exodus narrative, a major model for charisma-formation, through a Gothic aesthetic. A kind of Frankensteinian Moses who begins as a righteous leader becomes unstoppably murderous. Hurston also foregrounds the disciplinary nature of heroism: in the novel, women who aspire to contribute to the clan are routinely dispensed with. In an argument reminiscent of Harper's abstractionism, caricature and Gothicism suggest an anti-realist aesthetic tradition concerned with defamiliarizing the demagoguery of charisma for its readers.

Edwards then locates Gothic and comic blackness in Civil Rights era and post-Civil Rights fictions. Kelley's *A Different Drummer* works with the trope of a "vanishing spectacle." The narrative follows the exodus of a black community from a Southern, segregated town, as told from the exclusive perspective of white characters. *A Different Drummer's* detailing of whites observing blacks preparing to leave discloses the unglamorous labor of a grand political gesture. By depriving the black characters of interiority and portraying their long, confusing exit as leaderless, Kelley's brilliant conceit shows the tragicomedy of a white town confounded by a "Negro-less world." In contrast to, say, the media's love affair with the Malcolm X and Martin Luther King rivalry, Kelley's novel insists on the possibility of a grassroots movement in the absence of top-down power. Looking to another work that deconstructs the hagiography of Civil Rights, Edwards picks apart the controversy surrounding the 2002 film *Barbershop's* irreverent attitude toward Rosa Parks and Martin Luther King. She juxtaposes this reading with

commentary on the commodification of Civil Rights leader imagery in the 90s. The market of black nationalist consumption repurposes and obscures a history of radical organizing. This market of commodified civil rights iconography also creates a toxic distance between now and then, communicating a sense that the movement had succeeded and is now consigned to the past. In this context, charismatic leadership becomes an alluring or nostalgic impossibility; people in the 90's and 00's waited and wished for a leader of King's proportions. *Barbershop* defamiliarized, as Edwards argues, this ruse, with its folk humor and carnivalesque critiques, all of which occurs in the democratized and honest "hush harbor" of the barbershop.

Edwards concludes that the challenge *not* to reproduce the charismatic rubric is perhaps an even bigger hurdle than first deciding to disagree with it. Edwards' reading of Paul Beatty's *The White Boy Shuffle* shows how, as various groups keep trying to twist out from the specter of charismatic leadership, it continues to find new ways of infiltrating politics. Charisma is stubborn in its sexism and failure of the imagination. As Barack Obama's presidency has shown, charisma continues to subsist on "book recitation, rhetorical flair, sermonic style, the circulation of certain symbols, and quotation" (193). In her reading of Oprah Winfrey's endorsement of Obama, Edwards warns of the dangerous notion of Obama as the final installment in "the narrative arc from Moses to emancipation to civil rights to the black presidency" (190). Even in the Obama scenario, charisma occludes modes of organizing that are more intersectionally inclusive, democratized, and faithful to successful political praxis.

R. Edwards is most convincing when discussing historical events, cultural phenomena, and theoretical perspectives, all of which portray the charismatic aesthetic as a set of assumptions about regimes of narrative performativity. Unlike Harper, and more in line with H. Edwards, R. Edwards does not venture a sweeping definition of black aesthetics; she attends to

one thread within its diversification and suggests paths forward in Gothicism and humor. Her convincing case suggests the need for more attention to charisma's many forms. However, the implicit idea that literary fiction can rise to the challenge of dismantling charisma seems wishful at best. Literature may be better considered as a cultural object that is vital for some stakeholders in a political movement to engage with.

* * *

These three delineations of black aesthetic traditions diverge substantially in their claims and methods. Harper's streamlined polemic makes a case for an all-encompassing aesthetics that overthrows yet requires, as a foil, some fixed rubric of medial categories. H. Edwards historicizes a trans-medial, trans-genre tradition. As such, both Harper and H. Edwards do not carefully scrutinize the masculinisms that creep into their arguments. R. Edwards' genealogy of a master trope of political organizing, interrelated as it is with literary fiction's continual and astute responses, presents a more spacious definition of the aesthetic: it does not end at the physical boundary of a work of art but inflects everyday experiences of gender, media, politics, and relationality. All three writers uphold relatively marginalized texts: Harper's experimental prose poetry, Hayes Edwards' focus on the jottings of people known much better for their music, and R. Edwards' highlighting of relatively fringe novels. So, despite key differences in argumentation and argument, all are drawn to the periphery of the literary in black aesthetic formations.

Moreover, these projects seem less keen to seal the deal on a definitive black aesthetic than to exploit the question as an occasion for gesturing toward futurities. Even H. Edwards, in his more properly historicist analysis, aims to revise how genre is understood in the present. His attention to the cross-fertilizations between a "jazz imagination" and writing—whether prosaic

scribbles or prosy pontifications—redefines what counts as “literary” so as to trouble the conventions that writers such as Harper keep alive. Harper is more didactic yet still persuasive in his prescription of a nascent literary aesthetic that could be further pursued by culture-creators.

R. Edwards outlines the exigency of a more wide-ranging black feminist aesthetics.

At the heart of these gestures toward a black literary futurity that does not rely on charisma, embraces abstraction, and jazzes up the text, there seems to be an instinct to defend literature against the other arts, or at least against a cultural dismissal of the literary. These works may be said to represent a moment of nostalgia regarding the literary. Yet they are also confident re-assessments of the anti-racist potency of the written word and its status as a valuable technology of power that is far from obsolete.

ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY

1500-WORD RATIONALE:

This bibliography gathers sources in preparation for a seminar paper on a specific intersection of early Victorian disability, rhetoric, and sexuality in two characters from two Jane Austen novels.

Mr. Collins from Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* and Sir James from her novella written in youth, *Lady Susan*, are anomalous characterizations of masculinity in Austen's oeuvre for two reasons: first, both are portrayed as excessively, unpleasantly long-winded in contrast to the laconic speech styles that predominate in Austen's men as well as her own aesthetic. Second, epithets of cognitive disability—such as “weak,” “feeble,” “silly,” or “disagreeable”—cluster around both Collins and James as a result of their volubility, associating their long-windedness with cognitive and social deficiency. This Annotated Bibliography sketches out the sources for a paper in which I will regard Collins and James as neurodivergent characters with relations to speech that differ critically from their social and aesthetic surroundings' accepted communicative modes. As Joseph N. Straus defines it, neurodiversity represents cognitive differences as part of an “inherently desirable human variability” (467). The paper that these sources support will consider the respective long-windednesses of Mr. Collins and Sir James Martin as neurodiverse rhetorical modes that reveal a more complex relationality than these two characters are generally ascribed by others in the text as well as by critics of Romantic and Victorian disability studies.

While I draw especially from the theoretical ferment around autism, I will resist joining the cottage industry of diagnosing literary characters in Jane Austen novels. Autisms and other cognitive disabilities, much like hysteria or neurasthenia before them, name an increasingly

confused “cluster of behavior, abilities, and attitudes that, under the right cultural conditions, get grouped together and provided with a label” (Straus 465). The cultural contingency of autism since it entered the lexicon in 1943 perhaps means that it is likely to be superseded by other concepts, especially as autism often seeks merely to pathologize a range of neurocultures that don’t have a “cure” insofar as they are, as Straus claims, not diseases at all. Diagnostic impulses are even more unsuitable for late eighteenth and early nineteenth century texts. *Lady Susan* and *Pride and Prejudice* were written prior to the mainstreaming of statistics, and therefore prior to the institutional establishment of “normalization” that enabled “pathologization” (Davis). Diverse neurotypes surely existed, but they were made knowable in radically different idioms. I will argue that Austen uses Collins and James to explore how “weak” and “feeble” masculine speech styles nevertheless cohere as forms of a complex sociality under the constraints of late eighteenth century English social codes.

One secondary goal of this argument is to ask after a methodology for understanding cognitive impairment both through and beyond the lenses provided by disability studies. Since queer theory has a strong tradition of developing progressive historical methods, I have included Valerie Traub’s book on queer historical methodologies in order to see how they might assist my comprehension of disability at the end of the eighteenth century. While much writing on autistic-seeming or otherwise cognitively “impaired” characters in Austen attempts to diagnose these behaviors using modern diagnostic criteria, I want to work toward ways of speaking about “cognitive disability” and ways that it that was novelized prior to today’s medical, social, and cultural models without making any clear diagnoses. Collins and James’s effusive styles of speech, while not identical, cohere as a dynamic feature of their lifeworlds and as the effect of some uncategorized and likely uncategorizable relation to the social that can nonetheless be

fruitfully viewed using the framework of neurodiversity and queer historicisms that respect the alterity of past categories.

In my approach to the bodyminds of Sir James and Mr. Collins, I will work most intimately with Melanie Yergeau's theory of autism as a "profoundly rhetorical phenomenon" (7). Yergeau rejects the scientific myth that autism is primarily a communication disorder, subverting the medicalized "non-rhetoricity" assigned to autism by stating that even asocial ways of being are, in a perverse and unexplored way, relational. I will play with this axiom by analyzing characters who happen to speak generously. Rather than view hyper-talkative men as clueless eccentrics, I consider their controversially prolix speech styles as Austen's configuration of asocial or arelational communicative modes that "work through impossibility" in an expansion of "counter-socialities" (Yergeau 18-19). In this vein, my method will be provisionally diagnostic, mock-diagnostic, even incompetently diagnostic as I steal from then abandon or vex medical discourses in order to map other characters' reactions to and mutual constitutions of Mr. Collins and Sir James's speech. I will write with skepticism toward the contemporary diagnostic medical culture of autism that I cite and with a dissatisfaction toward that criteria's foreclosure of neurodivergent people's innate communications. Thus, I have included in this bibliography a couple of the works that epitomize the literary critics who join the diagnosticians' in their strivings for diagnoses that can then be, in whichever ways, "cured."

Following Yergeau further, I analyze William Collins and James Martin as "neuroqueer" characters in the sense that they insistently "perform the perversity of their neurotypes," speaking so long-windedly that their rhetorical modes aim "toward a future that imagines incommensurabilities of desires and identities and socialities" (19). One aspect of neuroqueerness in Yergeau describes how autistic expressions often challenge, destabilize, or

outright refuse to abide by a gender binary. I plan to read these long-winded men through this queerness of gender as it co-constitutes a neurological queerness against the normative models of masculinity in Austen's time. In specific, I will field neuroqueer gender as a potential model for understanding how Collins and Martin's neurotypes relate to archetypes of masculinity in early Victorian society as well as Austen's oeuvre. Especially significant for this part of a paper on long-winded *men* will be an analysis of how gender privilege and cognitive disability may converge to cover over certain kinds of neurodivergence. Hence, I have included works that contextualize the changing definitions of English masculinity at the turn of the nineteenth century, much of which hinged on competing ideals of masculinized speech, sentimentality, and affect. Collins and Martin both conform to and diverge from these models of masculinized expressivity in key ways that I believe can begin to shed light on our options for historical methods of reading cognitive disability. Namely, that is to read it as always already imbricated with gender and sexuality. As mentioned above, one point of the paper is to explore a method for comprehending cognitive impairment in the late eighteenth century. In this sense, gender and sexuality may provide one path "in" to the comparatively absent, residual, obscured, or merely unexplored discourses around impaired cognition in periods before modern psychiatry.

Although I have so far outlined the rationale for certain categories of sources as if treating Collins and Martin as actual people rather than fictionalized figures, I will also continually question the role of Austen's aesthetic in my interpretations of these characters. The ways in which Austen's aesthetic brokers our perceptions of Collins and Martin as neuroqueer cuts right to the core of the verbose counter-rhetorics that they deploy against rhetorics that are not nearly so redundant. Noted for its precision and economy, Austenian style itself contextualizes these long-winded men, foregrounding them as sloppy, out of place, and

disproportionately non-expressive in their hyper-expressivity. Working with central critics of Austen's language, and commentary on her aesthetics especially in relation to embodiment and expressivity, I will ask how this rendering of long-windedness in an immaculate, seemingly "dispassionate" prose voice positions Martin and Collins in contrast to the narrator's capacities as well as the speech capacities of non-verbose men in Austen's works. Pithiness in Austen takes on worldmaking properties, forming the essential lineaments of time, space, and relationality. If concision begets the textual universe as such, how can a disability analysis of aesthetics help to chart the possible modes for understanding neurodivergence in figures whose profuse verbalizations create tension with the taut fabric of the cosmos in which we find them? How does the issue of time—the fact that I am attending to aesthetics in an era prior to our statistics-inflected, medicalized, and socialized discourse around cognitive disability—compound that question? Toward these ends, I have included annotations texts like D.A. Miller's *Jane Austen, or the Secret of Style*.

In short, this bibliography paves the way for a paper that will analyze gendered neurodiversity in Austen in order to further understand how an aesthetic matrix of long-windedness, masculinity, and period-specific relationalities produce an as yet unnameable neurodivergent mode of the social. The majority of the bibliography therefore includes theoretical work on neurodiversity, especially in studies of autism. I will argue ultimately that Austen crafts these men into no less complexly social beings, albeit neuroqueerly social, than the normatively curt men in her novels. Yet I make this case with the intention of blueprinting an intersectionally rich rubric for noticing, comprehending, and analyzing neurodivergence (or "cognitive disability"), in whatever forms it may take, in pasts before that designation was possible.

15 ANNOTATED SOURCES:

Austen, Jane. *Northanger Abbey, Lady Susan, The Watsons and Sanditon*. Oxford University Press, 2008

This primary source contains the novella *Lady Susan*, wherein Sir James Martin, a minor character, pursues the young daughter of the protagonist. Like William Collins in *Pride and Prejudice*, Martin speaks in an unusually repetitive and long-winded manner much to the shock and curiosity of his interlocutors. Victorian-era tropes of feeble-mindedness also cluster around Martin largely as a result of his rhetorical style. Also like Collins, Martin's long-windedness results in extreme social awkwardness precisely because his rhetoric over-uses and hyperbolizes politeness. Although I plan to analyze James Martin on a much smaller scale, especially since he appears in much less of this work than Collins does in *Pride and Prejudice*, I include him in the paper in the spirit of neurodiversity. His characterization bears striking similarities to Collins but it also emerges through textual conditions that are rather different. For one, *Lady Susan* is an epistolary novel and James Martin does not earn the privilege of having any of his letters, which he rarely writes, featured as part of the novelistic structure. Unlike Collins, whom the narrator permits to speak, as mediated by third person narration, Martin is doubly removed from his immediate rhetoricity in that only other characters relay his characterization. Second, Martin appears in a novel considered Austen's "juvenalia." I plan to consider how these facets of his textualization, in contrast to those of Collins, contribute to the diversity of his neuroqueerness.

Austen, Jane. *Pride and Prejudice*. Penguin Books, 2003

This primary source contains the character that my paper will use at length for its exemplification, William Collins. Like James Martin, Collins is initially contextualized through

epistolary means: he writes a letter that the Bennett family scrutinizes, thinking its rhetoric odd, and thus the novel deploys rhetoricity as the main framework for managing Collins's out-of-placeness in his social milieu. When Collins does arrive on the scene, his long-windedness and excessive politeness prompt those in his midst to react by troping him as weak-minded and strange. Scenes in which social etiquette must be more creatively managed around Mr. Collins will help me to locate him within a category of neurodiversity that nonetheless remains difficult to categorize. Other major scenes that I will analyze include Elizabeth Bennett's rejection of Collins's marriage proposal and depictions of his home life with his subsequent marriage partner, Elizabeth's best friend. These scenes deal more clearly with Collins's approach to matters of intimacy, coupling, and sexuality, which will allow me to further comment on intersections between disability and sexual culture. For instance, Collins's marriage is described as passionless. The argument could even be made that it is asexual, yet both partners are surprisingly happy with the arrangement, opening it up to analyses of a dis or crip relationality within (a)sexual partnerships.

Bottomer, Phyllis Ferguson. *So Odd a Mixture: Along the Autistic Spectrum in 'Pride and Prejudice.'* Jessica Kingsley Publishers, 2007

This secondary source attempts to locate eight characters from *Pride and Prejudice* on the autism spectrum. Phyllis Bottomer is a speech pathologist and psychiatrist, and her book offers an example of a diagnostic impulse in comprehending disability from former eras and cultures, as well as in fictional worlds. The main argument of the book is that it is indeed possible to locate autisms in pre-twentieth century fiction. Bottomer thus advances the idea that autism is a trans-historical—rather than a rhetorically and culturally specific—phenomenon of human bodyminds.

Another assumption involves Bottomer's treatment of literary characters and caricatures as if they were real, diagnosable people. Both of these theoretical bases in this source will serve as foils for my own arguments, which will be decidedly anti-trans-historical and which will consider thoroughly the artifice of literary characterization as it pertains to the construction of neuro-divergent, "feeble-minded," and rhetorically queer representations of human behavior. One of the eight characters that Bottomer discusses at length is William Collins, and while I don't intend to rebut Bottomer's points about Collins point by point, her specific analyses from the viewpoint of a medical model of disability will nevertheless help me trace autistic-adjacent patterns, behaviors, and rhetorics that can be used to assess exactly where I stand on categorizing and analyzing Collins's particular rhetorical context.

Davis, Lennard J. "Introduction: Normality, Power, and Culture." *The Disability Studies Reader* (4th Edition). Edited by Lennard J Davis. New York: Routledge, 2006

This secondary source provides essential history about how the development of the science of statistics led to an evermore pervasive application of "normalization" in Western culture. Davis historicizes this epistemological shift particularly in relation to human bodies and disability. His argument preserves the integral alterity of past expressions of differentiated bodies, as they existed in a time prior to concepts and terms of normalcy, averages, and outliers—or at least prior to the widespread institutionalization of those conceptual apparatuses. He also draws the connections between early statisticians and eugenicists, further cementing the argument that normalization emerged as a function of biopolitical control on populations of disabled bodies. This source will be useful to my paper's theoretical framework, as it helps me to substantiate the tension between twentieth-century and eighteenth century understandings of how bodies

compare and contrast according to behavior, ability, and rhetoric. Although Davis does not so much focus on cultures of disability previous to the era of normalization, his historical account of the way power functions within modern societies based on norms helps to set apart the period that I will be discussing in my paper. Citing Davis's historical evidence for his argument will help me to explain the amorphousness and difficult-to-breach alterity involved in apprehending eighteenth-century bodyminds that were considered weak or feeble.

Dekel, Mikhal. "Austen and Autism: Reading Brain, Emotion and Gender Differences in *Pride and Prejudice*." *Nineteenth-Century Gender Studies*. Vol 10., no. 3, 2014

This secondary source, much like the Bottomer above, represents a diagnostician's approach to comprehending disability in eighteenth-century English culture. Dekel's article differs from Bottomer's book in a number of ways that make it worthwhile to consider in my argument against this methodology. First, Dekel is not a psychiatrist but a literary scholar, so the article is written with a slightly keener eye toward characterization, figuration, and textual conditions. Second, Dekel mainly analyzes Fitzwilliam Darcy from *Pride and Prejudice*. In this analysis of Darcy's autistic behavior, Dekel draws connections between behaviors that may either result from extreme male privilege and/or those of individuals on the autism spectrum. I am particularly interested in this gray area between gendered privilege and autistic rhetorics. I plan to use some of Dekel's insights on this matter in order to explore how autistic rhetorics inflect gendered expressions, whether that means that cognitive difference further cements a "norm" of masculinity or alters eighteenth-century masculinity paradigms.

Johnson, Claudia L. *Equivocal Beings: Politics, Gender, and Sentimentality in the 1790s:*

Wollstonecraft, Radcliffe, Burney, Austen. University of Chicago Press, 2014

The final chapter of this secondary source outlines the various models of masculinity and the shifts that they underwent during Austen's lifetime. Johnson mainly uses Austen's novel *Emma* to claim that dominant ideals of masculinity transitioned from the frilly rhetorics of male sentimentality to a more pragmatic, unsentimental, steward-like austerity, emblemized by cold administrators. As Johnson shows, male sentimentality was more talkative than the austere masculinity that superceded it. Johnson's argument about the shifting contexts of masculinity will be significant to my analysis of how gender intersects with cognitive disability in William Collins and Sir James Martin. I plan to use Johnson's insights to demonstrate how Collins and Martin inhabit hyperbolized forms of an increasingly outmoded masculinity. Their strangeness, as they come across as feeble to others, can be more clearly understood when contextualized by culturally specific modes of masculine comportment.

Loftis, Sonya Freeman. *Imagining Autism: Fiction and Stereotypes on the Spectrum.* Indiana

University Press, 2015

This secondary source is the major monograph on representations of autism in works of fiction. Loftis analyzes a wide range of twentieth and twenty-first century works in order to accomplish two tasks: first, she charts how stereotypes of autism are perpetuated through fictional narratives. Second, she demonstrates the wide flexibility that fictional representations afford especially in terms of diversifying understandings of what an autistic imagination is like. There are two chapters whose theoretical projects will be useful to my paper. In Chapter 6, Loftis examines methods of diagnosing and "undiagnosing" fictional characters. My paper will trace attempts to

diagnose characters in Austen with autism and then examine how those applications of contemporary criteria fall short of describing a neurodivergent eighteenth century bodymind. Loftis is one of the major voices in the field who works on a similar method. In another chapter, Loftis describes how in both fictional characters and in reality autistic people are prone to appropriating dominantly gendered behaviors and refunctioning them to their own ends. This insight will be useful to my argument about how Collins and Martin do not quite reinforce the male sentimental modes as much as they hyperbolize and refunction it.

Macpherson, Sandra. "Rent to Own; or, What's Entailed in *Pride and Prejudice*."

Representations, vol. 82, no. 1, 2003, pp. 1–23.

This secondary source explains the intricacies of land ownership and estate inheritance in late eighteenth century England. It will serve a very specific explanatory function for one of the awkward situations that Collins creates. His entire premise for visiting the Bennetts after a long separation is to apologize for being next in line to inherit their estate, as though he had any agency in the matter. The Bennetts are confused by this sentiment, but their confusion can only be clearly understood alongside the details of estate laws around "entails" during the period. Although she never mentions disability, Macpherson's article contextualizes Collins's blunder by framing the misunderstanding as a lack of awareness around how estates were inherited. Collins, for example, was entailed to the Bennett's estate because the Bennetts did not have a son, and this arrangement was contracted multiple generations before the Mr. Bennett and Mr. Collins were even born.

Manning, Erin. "Histories of Violence: Neurodiversity and the Policing of the Norm." *Los Angeles Review of Books*, 2 January 2018, online

In this interview, Erin Manning clearly explains her writing on autistic perception. This secondary source represents recent theoretical efforts to think cognitive disability through affect studies. Manning's approach also works within the framework of neurodiversity, and she attempts to theorize how autistic imaginations provide insight into the ways that all imaginations do and/or can operate. Manning is particularly focused on how autistic perception entails an extremely heightened attention to the "coming into being" of experience before sensory perceptions are "chunked" into discrete categories of meaning. In descriptions of both Collins and Martin, this same imaginative process can be discerned. While I don't intend to use Manning's insight in order to prove that Collins and Martin fit contemporary criteria for an autism diagnosis, Manning's belief that autistic imaginations are actually heightened facets of imaginative capacities that all people possess can be used to argue for Collins as cognitively different, or neurodivergent, in ways that are both similar yet distinct from those of autism in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries.

Baron-Cohen, Simon. "The extreme male brain theory of autism." *Trends in Cognitive Sciences*, vol. 6, no. 6., 2002, pp. 248-254

This secondary source is written by one of the leading theorists of autism's relation to male gender, and it represents a very medicalized way of understanding gender's relationship to autism. Baron-Cohen construes the "male brain" as inherently selfish, anti-social, and systems-focused. He then applies this pseudo-scientific definition of masculinity to autistic behaviors, arguing that autism represents an extreme version of male neurotypes. Surprisingly, Baron-

Cohen's thinking on gender and autism, despite its sloppy conflation of cultural causes for behavior with scientific ones, has been incredibly influential in his field. Yet writers who are actually autistic, like Melanie Yergeau (see below), have challenged his flawed thinking. Baron-Cohen is an essential reference for this paper because I will be arguing strictly against his concepts of gender, autism, cognitive disability, and the cultural constructedness of the way those three domains interrelate.

Miller, D.A. *Jane Austen, or, The Secret of Style*. Princeton University Press, 2003

In this secondary source, D.A. Miller confronts the meticulousness of Austen's prose style by writing about his personal attachment to it. Miller describes Austen's compact and well-polished craftsmanship, tracing how his attraction to Austen's style as well as various characters' efforts to cultivate their own stylistic perfectionism creates gender confusion, especially as men are placed into positions of aestheticized femininity. Although Miller does not touch on the characters that my essay will cover, I find his commentary on Austenian style particularly useful for its contrasts with the speech styles of Collins and Martin. I plan to use Miller's insights in my analysis of how these rhetorically divergent characters are positioned in the text as out of place, as divergent from the very discourse of the world that surrounds them and creates them. In my treatment of this source I will work towards considering these two characters' configurations as literary characters whose existence depends on its contrast to the economic prose that Austen cultivates.

Savarese, Ralph James; Zunshine, Lisa. "The Critic as Neurocosmopolite; Or, What Cognitive Approaches to Literature Can Learn from Disability Studies: Lisa Zunshine in Conversation with Raph James Savarese." *Narrative*, vol 22., no. 1, 2014, pp. 17-44

This interview covers a range of recent progressive thinking on autistic cultures and imaginations. Zunshine and Savarese discuss "neurocosmopolitanism" as a critical mode of working towards neurodiversity. Neurocosmopolitanism borrows some of its frameworks from postcolonial theory, considering the marginalization of different neurotypes as a kind of colonization of bodyminds that functions by recruiting neurodivergences into neurotypicality. Neurocosmopolitanism aims to effectively dismantle the view in which neurotypicality sits atop a hierarchy. Savarese and Zunshine also discuss "mindblindness" at length, a term which describes the idea that autistic people are unable to create a "theory of mind" about how other people think. As a popular concept, mindblindness has contributed to the stereotype that autistic people are anti-social, or incapable of sociality. Yet Savarese and Zunshine claim that autistics do have a theory of mind on their own terms. They argue that it is neurotypical people who are often mindblind to autistic imaginations. The theoretical work in this piece will be essential to the development of many of my analyses in this paper, especially concerning the ways that Martin and Collins represent quasi-autistic bodyminds that are extremely social, so hyperbolically "social" on their own long-winded terms that they productively challenge the sociality of their culture.

Straus, Joseph N. "Autism as Culture." *The Disability Studies Reader (4th Edition)*. Edited by Lennard J Davis. New York: Routledge, 2006

In this secondary source, Joseph Straus elucidates the cultural conditions of autism's emergence in comparison to other categories of disability from earlier eras. Autisms and other cognitive

disabilities, much like hysteria or neurasthenia before them, name an increasingly confused collection of behaviors and abilities that have been assimilated into the same category as a matter of classificatory convenience and ignored opacity rather than medical accuracy. As Straus argues, the extreme cultural contingency of autism since it entered the lexicon in 1943 means that it may eventually become an irrelevant term, especially as it often seeks merely to pathologize a range of neurocultures that don't have a "cure" insofar as they are, as Straus claims, not diseases at all. Straus's insights here will add to my theoretical position on my inherent inability to label the apparently neurodivergent bodyminds of Collins and Martin, as Straus helps to advance a more queer-theoretical historicism that respects the alterity of the past.

Traub, Valerie. *Thinking Sex with the Early Moderns*. University of Pennsylvania Press, 2015

This secondary source represents a more altericist approach to historical methods of comprehending marginalized subjects in the past. For Traub, sex acts and sexualities are inherently elusive objects of inquiry. She argues that the obscurantist condition of sex in the past should center, rather than foreclose, any analysis. Traub advocates resisting the urge to extrapolate, fill in gaps in the archive with contemporary knowledge, and uncritically use modern terminologies when describing past subjectivities. Opacities, obscurities, and inarticulacies in historical archives, when considered as such, offer valuable resources for comprehending the conditions of knowledge that triangulate us with the past and its future. While Traub may be the outlier in this bibliography because she does not explicitly discuss disability, I plan to experiment with Traub's methodology in this paper, letting the "caesuras, false starts, and moments of inarticulacy" guide my attempt to ask how we can even begin to approach the mechanisms, social functions, and conceptualizations of disability—or bodily

differences—in the eighteenth century. In this sense, I plan to see how queer historical methods can fruitfully inflect disability studies.

Yergeau, Melanie. *Authoring Autism: on rhetoric and neurological queerness*. Duke University Press, 2018

Yergeau's recent monograph will form the backbone of the theoretical apparatus of my paper.

Authoring Autism revises neurodivergence so that it no longer merely describes intellects but defines an identity category akin to queerness. She calls this category "neuroqueerness."

Drawing connections between queer people's self-narrations and various oppressions that queer people faced with those of people with cognitive disabilities, Yergeau demonstrates how autistics have been repeatedly denied the right to narrate and define their own rhetorical capacities. Her book works against that denial of agency by self-narrating her own experiences while theorizing the linkages between queerness and neurodivergence. Yergeau describes a host of ways that autistic rhetoricity operates. She also describes the ways that autistic rhetorics like stimming or ticcings are seemingly anti-relational or anti-rhetorical. Nevertheless, they can often work to queer our understandings of rhetoric as always already a conscious, articulate, intentional flow of communication. Yergeau's theory of neuroqueerness will be essential to my attempt to uncover the queer and elusive modes of being and speaking represented by Collins and Martin. Although Yergeau does not discuss long-windedness (in fact she mainly analyzes how autistics are generally thought to be curt or silent), I will adopt many of her arguments in order to analyze the rhetoricity of potentially neurodivergent Austen characters.