



Australian
National
University

Writing Games with Dr James: James Miranda Barry in Neo-Victorian Life-Writing

Humanities Research Centre Seminar

Tuesday 1 November 2016, 4.15 – 5.30pm

Speaker

Professor Ann Heilmann, Cardiff University (UK)

HRC Conference Room, Top Floor, A.D. Hope Building, ANU.

This lecture examines the representational choices made in neo-Victorian life-writing in reconstructing and re-imagining a historical case of transgender: James Barry, senior colonial medical officer of the British army from 1813 to 1859 and a pioneer of medical reform. Known for his pugnacious, iconoclastic personality during his lifetime, he became the object of intense speculation after his death in 1865 when the charwoman who had prepared his body for burial challenged the medical and military establishment about his sex. With only one testimony to lay claim to physical evidence of his female body, and with his birth identity not established until the latter twentieth century, Barry's 'real' sex and sexual condition, gender identity and life circumstances have in the intervening 150 years received sustained attention in biography, biofiction and biodrama.



The central conceptual contention underpinning my lecture is that the uncertainty about Barry's sex and, consequently, the *gender* fluidity of cultural representations of Barry offers an exemplary model for the *genre* fluidity of neo-Victorian life-writing or what I call 'biographilia'. The best illustration of how neo-Victorian life-writing operates is furnished by drawing on a nineteenth-century figure who features across biography, biofiction and biodrama and who features both as a boundary transgressor *and* as a boundary marker.

Ann Heilmann is Professor of English Literature and Director of Research, School of English, Communication and Philosophy, at Cardiff University (UK). The author of New Woman Fiction: Women Writing First-Wave Feminism (2000), New Woman Strategies: Sarah Grand, Olive Schreiner and Mona Caird (2004) and Neo-Victorianism: The Victorians in the 21st Century (with Mark Llewellyn, 2010), she has co-edited a critical edition and essay collection on the Anglo-Irish turn-of-the-century writer George Moore, most recently George Moore: Influence and Collaboration (with Llewellyn, 2014). Her current project is a monograph on Neo-Victorian Biographilia and James Miranda Barry: Transgender and Transgenre.

Presented by

School of Literature,
Languages and Linguistics
ANU College of
Arts & Social
Sciences

Enquiries

hrc@anu.edu.au

This lecture is free and all are welcome.

Please visit our website for further information:
slll.anu.edu.au/

CRICOS# 00120C

PUBLIC SEMINAR