

**Nomadic Transgender Identity:
Patricia Duncker's *James Miranda Barry*
and Wesley Stace's *Misfortune***

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Abstract:

Neo-Victorian fiction is concerned with retrieving the past of marginalised, ostracised figures. Transgender characters – whether historical or fictional – have been the subjects of two significantly different fictions: Patricia Duncker's *James Miranda Barry* (1999) and Wesley Stace's *Misfortune* (2005). After a short reminder of the artistic treatment of transidentity in the nineteenth century, this article explores the ways in which these two contemporary novels set out to represent characters who do not fall squarely within pre-established sexual and/or gender norms. Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's notion of "nonce taxonomy" (Sedgwick 2005: 23), i.e. maverick classifications of desire, physicality and subjectivity that interfere with hegemonic processes of naming and defining, helps to negotiate the complexity of transgender experiences through fiction writing. Whilst Duncker refuses to pander to the scopoc drive of the voyeurism inherent in the reading experience through a poetics of obfuscation, Stace does not balk at resorting to the sensational breaching of the past's taboos, in an age of sexual overexposure. Ultimately, both novels, notwithstanding their major differences, propound an image of the nomadic identity of transgender.

Keywords: androgyny, deterritorialisation, hermaphroditism, intersex, multiperspectivism, "nonce taxonomy", sartorial semiotics, tomboyishnes, transgender, transidentity.

The reflection on gender and sexuality has been a major source of interest in the neo-Victorian novel, where it has often been addressed through references to coercive or exploitative scientific discourses from the Victorian era (see Heilmann and Llewellyn 2010: 106). It seems germane that this issue should be raised as a contemporary response to Victorianism, a period that is chiefly remembered for having set out clearly defined oppressive gender norms, as in the case of Coventry Patmore's *The Angel of*

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the House (1854) and John Ruskin's chapter 'Lilies: Of Queens' Gardens' in *Sesame and Lilies* (1865). However, it is now widely acknowledged that the Victorian era was not unfamiliar with some gender trouble of its own. Therefore any reduction to binary oppositions between Victorian masculinity and femininity would not do justice to gender alternatives that were already conceived of at that time, as with Edward Carpenter's 'Uranians' in *The Intermediate Sex* (1908) or Algernon Charles Swinburne's treatment of the topic of hermaphroditism in his poetry.¹ The fact that neo-Victorianism emerged in the wake of both poststructuralist philosophy, as formulated by Julia Kristeva, Hélène Cixous, and Michel Foucault, and queer theory, notably conceived by Judith Butler and Judith Halberstam, accounts for the conflation between the sexual and the textual, which is typical of most contemporary fiction engaging with the topic of sexuality. Patricia Duncker's *James Miranda Barry* (1999) and Wesley Stace's *Misfortune* (2005) are two neo-Victorian novels that 'textualise' the question of transgending and transidentity from two radically opposed perspectives, which both confront and sometimes replicate what might be termed 'scientific sexploitation'. Furthermore they arouse some form of concern around bodies which, though they keep their mystery, are nonetheless invested with a power of transgression that both novelists exploit as a trigger to keep the reader fully engrossed.

How do two novels recreating the destinies of two marginalised Victorian figures from the vantage point of the late twentieth or early twenty-first century raise the question of identity, by correlating gender to a fluid, nomadic self, since "becoming is the vehicle for gender itself" (Butler 2004: 65)? Even if they are steeped in the revisionist reconstruction of a typically Victorian context, both novels extend their scope far beyond Britain to include the English colonies and the Orient. Spatial displacement initiates an experience of defamiliarisation through the travels of transgender characters:

the prefix 'trans' as indicative of movement 'across, through, over, to or on the other side of, beyond, outside of, from one place, person, thing or state to another,' highlights the intrinsic *migratory* characteristic of both transsexuals and 'trans' narratives. (Gamble 2009: 132, original emphasis)

As a Victorian surgeon, James Miranda Barry travels to distant colonies, while Rose Loveall, the hero/ine of *Misfortune*, escapes England on a journey to Turkey after s/he has been exposed as an impostor in an inheritance plot. But the journey is probably more meaningful when taken metaphorically rather than spatially: “to go from F to M, or from M to F, is not necessarily to stay within the binary frame of gender, but to engage transformation itself as the meaning of gender” (Butler 2004: 65). Hence the fluidity of identity is conveyed by queering the protagonists’ narratives. Instead of being confined to the condition of abnormal, freakish monsters arousing prurient curiosity for the obscene, which is too offensive to moral decency to be shown or seen, both James and Rose lend themselves to what Emily Jeremiah calls “a queer form of story-telling [...] where ‘queer’ denotes not only so-called ‘same-sex’ identifications, but all kinds of imaginative projections of self onto other” (Jeremiah 2008: 142). It is the purpose of what follows to study how this ‘other’, conceived as both biological and sexual, constitutes a decisive diegetic element and, furthermore, how the perimeters of this ‘other’ take on board the issue of nomadic identity through queer neo-Victorian narration.

1. Two Radically Opposed Perspectives

Even if at first sight Duncker and Stace both choose to bring two transgender characters into the limelight, the differences between their two approaches rapidly stand out. The overly fictitious dimension of Stace’s Rose forms a sharp contrast with the historical data underpinning the semi-biographical recreation of the real-life Victorian doctor. Put differently, Rose is fundamentally a literary invention, self-referentially advertising him/herself as a piece of intertextual fabric, as noted by Emily Jeremiah who argues that:

Texts play a key role in this story. Rose’s father, taking inspiration from *Tristram Shandy* [1767], wishes to compile a ‘Rhodopaedia’, like Shandy’s father’s never-finished *Tristrapaedia* [...], and to capture every detail about his ‘daughter’ in writing. As stated, texts in fact hold the key to Rose’s identity, yielding the truth about his origins. (Jeremiah 2008: 141)

The case is different with Duncker. Even if an aesthetics of performativity, bearing both on text and gender, may be seen operating throughout the narrative (see Gutleben 2007: 218-223), the novelist does not eschew the anatomical enigma forever associated with the riddling personality of her chief protagonist. In other words, whilst Rose may be perceived as a postmodern mosaic of texts, Barry never erases the biological determinism attached to both his/her bodily and historical origins. The fact that the interrogation around his/her anatomical anomaly should return with a vengeance shortly after his/her death brings home to the reader the institutionalised violence exerted on the character by what Michel Foucault designates as biopolitics (see Foucault 2004). Duncker's choice of pastiches lays bare the extent of rumour-mongering around the case, without solving it. Firstly, the fact that Dr Barry is a female is bluntly asserted by the servant who laid him/her out, and then dismissed as irrelevant by the surgeon who prefers not to commit himself on the matter and to stick to the official version:

Further to your inquiry as to the sex of the late Inspector-General Dr James Barry. I had been intimately acquainted with that gentleman for a good many years both in the West Indies and in England and I never had any suspicion that Dr Barry was a female. (Duncker 1999: 364)

These queries, couched as they are in high-handed, official discourse, point to the noxious intrusion of normative discourse into private lives and to the urge to dissect, meant to ultimately establish some form of indubitable truth, as in the letter from one of Barry's closest friends:

Sir,
The stories which have circulated since the death of Dr James Barry are too absurd to require any serious refutation. There could not have been any doubt, among people who knew him, on the subject of his physical constitution which was really that he was a male in whom the development of the *organs* of sex had been arrested from the sixth month of pregnancy. It is sad that no qualified persons took the

opportunity of his death to examine closely the physical condition of the deceased. (Duncker 1999: 365)

Barry affords a typical instance of sexual indeterminacy or intersex condition in an age when, according to Foucault, classification of so-called abnormality or deviance imposed itself in all fields of knowledge: “Between the state and the individual, sex became an issue, and a public issue no less; a whole web of discourses, special knowledge, analyses, and injunctions settled upon it” (Foucault 1978: 26).

2. “*Scientia Sexualis*” and “Nonce Taxonomy”

Foucault demonstrated how sexual practices that differed from procreative heterosexuality were pathologised in nineteenth-century Europe. A whole taxonomy of so-called sexual deviances was constructed in the Victorian age to classify those who did not submit to the accepted norms of sexual conduct (Foucault 1978: 15-50). In *Epistemology of the Closet* (1985), Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick punned on this notion of rigid, heteronormative categories by coining the expression ‘nonce taxonomy’, to designate maverick pseudo-scientific labels that come in handy to negotiate the complexity of human reality where sexuality is concerned. Such off-the-beaten-track designations prove especially useful to make sense of experiences that fall beyond the pale of mainstream, universally endorsed grids of analysis.

Everybody has learned this, I assume, and probably everybody who survives at all has reasonably rich, unsystematic resources of nonce taxonomy for mapping out the possibilities, dangers, and stimulations of their human social landscape. It is probably people with the experience of oppression or subordination who have most *need* to know it. (Sedgwick 2005: 22-23, original emphasis)

‘Nonce taxonomy’ therefore refers to categories that a subject works out tactically in order to navigate the social world. Oppressed subjects have more need of them, as they must navigate a field fraught with more danger: that of systemic violence to enforce conformity and punish difference. Although in a sense enforced rather than freely elected by the ‘at risk’ or

‘othered’ subject, nonce taxonomy also holds out the promise of a liberating continuous self-invention via its “making and unmaking and *remaking* and redissolution of hundreds of old and new categorical imaginings concerning all the kinds [of bodies, sexes, genders], it may take to make up a world” (Sedgwick 2005: 23, original emphasis). Needless to say, these shifting nomadic “imaginings” are particularly necessary to minorities whose specific embodied destinies are either imperfectly translated or plainly denied by the predominant nomenclature. Halberstam thus resorted to the concept of nonce taxonomy to investigate the whole range of nuances pertaining to “female masculinity” (Halberstam 2006: 8-9), and to argue how these various subtle shades of meaning are suppressed by hegemonic heteronormative discourses. Early on in Duncker’s novel, Barry is introduced as a character who cannot be classified according to the grids used to define a person. This impossibility of attributing any definite identity to the child is somewhat naively formulated by Alice Jones, his close childhood friend:

“Well, you’re a sort of a girl, I suppose. But definitely not like me. Perhaps you’re a girl dressed up as a boy? Or a boy that’s got enough girl for it not to matter too much either way. Well, I’ll tell everybody that you’re not Barry’s son after all.” (Duncker 1999: 35)

The novel then proceeds to show that Barry’s whole destiny will be repeatedly determined by the issue of ambiguity, forcing him/her to constantly negotiate ephemeral self-definitions that are not amenable to existing classifications.

Transgendering and intersex defy categorisation, as they can only be extrapolated from the cracks, flaws and silences in the abundant literature on sexual (mis)conduct, pertaining to what Foucault described as “the deployment of sexuality” (Foucault 1978: 75-131), by teasing out convenient categories that do not fall squarely within generic classifications. This, of course, only proves that our perception of reality is dependent on what can first be put into words; hence the act of fictional verbalising gives Barry’s (and Rose’s) gender ambiguity a tangible presence, attesting to its reality. This consubstantiality between the sexual and the textual is amply illustrated in both novels.

There is a distinct genealogy of the intersex and transidentity issue, and the nineteenth century happens to be a landmark to apprehend the question in a diachronic perspective.² In many respects, Foucault's *Herculine Barbin: Being the Recently Discovered Memoirs of a Nineteenth Century French Hermaphrodite* (1980) largely contributed to initiating a decentered approach to historiography, by voicing those who had been (sexually/textually) silenced. Foucault retrieved the sensitive, autobiographical testimony of an intersex person, i.e. one born with an anatomy which could not be easily categorised as either male or female. The French philosopher subsequently got the manuscript published and appended the clinical record of the genital abnormalities of the eponymous Alexine, Alex, Herculine Barbin, as s/he is called in turn, to her/his heart-rending confession. He thus aimed at provoking a discursive shock in the reader who, after becoming emotionally involved with the successive pangs of a socially ostracised person, finds him/herself confronted with the cold, clinical description of the latter's outer sexual organs. Not only is Barbin's text reconstituted from the vantage point of the poststructuralist age, but it raises a number of points that will prove central to this study, notably the question of onomastic fluctuation linked to indeterminate identity likely to entail a traumatic experience.

Herculine Barbin lived in the early nineteenth century, and it was precisely at that time that well-known works of fiction tackling the subject of what was subsequently referred to as hermaphroditism were published: Henri de Latouche's *Fragoletta* (1829), Honoré de Balzac's *Sarrasine* (1830) and *Seraphita* (1834), and Julia Ward Howe's *The Hermaphrodite*, an incomplete novel about a hermaphrodite raised as male, assumed to have been written between 1846 and 1847.³ Somewhat later, in 1863, Algernon Charles Swinburne's well-known poem 'Hermaphroditus', inspired by the famous statue at the Louvre museum, was also published.⁴ Meanwhile Latouche's *Fragoletta* avoids any direct treatment of its subject. Unlike her/his depictions in Ancient Greek sculpture, Latouche's hermaphrodite arouses the imagination but is never properly seen; he/she cannot be represented, let alone analysed. Poised between spiritual ideality and anatomical disorder, the romantic, androgynous subject remains veiled in a halo of mystery. S/he is bound to elude any final resolution.

The hermaphrodite, then, provides the perfect illustration of what Roland Barthes describes in *S/Z* as the singular and the equivocal, because

the narrator is reduced to resort to “double entente” (Barthes 1970: 150-151), by alternating between clear-sightedness and blindness in his attempt to capture his enigmatic character. No single, monological utterance succeeds in rendering the essential duality of the hermaphrodite without committing violence to its embodied doubleness. In this sense, categorisation becomes a form of symbolic sexploitation. So *Fragoletta* remains a riddling fiction, constantly deferring an erotic subject, as the prospect of its being fully unveiled is constantly postponed. There is a similar emphasis on the neo-Platonic ideal in Swinburne’s ‘Hermaphroditus’, even if the immediate, tangible source of inspiration for the poem is the eponymous supine sleeping statue, innocently revealing both its female breasts and male genitalia to the viewer. Taking the Ovidean version of the Hermaphroditus and Salmacis legend, the poet first calls up the sheer energy that stems from the union of opposite principles – the masculine and the feminine – to then induce disorienting sexual effects in the reader through a sensuous use of language:

Love stands upon thy left hand and thy right,
 Yet by no sunset and by no moonrise
 Shall make thee man and ease a woman's sighs,
 Or make thee woman for a man's delight. (Swinburne 2000: 65)

Desire is kindled and kept at its highest level of incandescence, but the promise of its accomplishment is syntactically denied by the last two chiasmic lines ushering in a loop of unfulfillment. Ultimately, the poem suggests that the hermaphrodite may well illustrate a form of sexual plenitude, existing beyond or outside the confines of Victorian sexuality, desirable but, also for this reason, unattainable. So, if the topic of hermaphroditism by no means originates in the nineteenth century – the Greek myth of Tiresias springs to mind – there is nonetheless a noticeable tendency to feature cross-gender characters in literature, and notably in poetry, in the late Victorian age, whilst keeping the androgyne in the realm of elusive, ideal unreality.

Significantly, these publications predate the works of sexologists and ideologists such as Richard von Krafft-Ebing, Karl Ulrichs, Magnus Hirschfeld and Edward Carpenter by only a few decades. The latter are known for having discussed gender inversions, or gender variance, by

providing confessions of individuals who felt they had been born in the wrong body. Carpenter used the umbrella term ‘intermediate sex’, without discriminating between intersex, transgender or same-sex love, as his aim was chiefly to empower this so-called intermediate sex in his utopian vision of an egalitarian society. According to Carpenter, Eros was the great social leveller, as same-sex attraction was known to unite representatives from the most estranged ranks of society in the closest affection. Thus ‘Uranians’ (gay men) of high social standing were occasionally drawn to lower, rougher males. Notwithstanding this linguistic confusion, making no distinction between homosexuality and transidentity, Carpenter is interesting in so far as he underscores the bond between sexual or/and gender deviance and political issues in a context in which the production of alternative socio-economic models or utopian communities was thriving, as also promoted by Edward Bellamy, Charles Fourier, Robert Owen and Claude Henri de Saint Simon.

It is no wonder that the neo-Victorian novel, known for its all-inclusiveness and its predilection for blending fiction and historical or cultural knowledge, “questions of identity; of environmental and genetic conditioning; repressed and oppressed modes of sexuality” (Sanders 2006: 129), should take on board this Victorian political context in its treatment of transidentity. Many introspective passages in Duncker’s *James Miranda Barry*, for instance, evoke alternative models of society, and Stace’s *Misfortune* alludes to Charlotte Perkins Gilman’s ‘Feminisia’, depicted in *Herland* (1915), a utopian novel, calling up an isolated society composed entirely of women, who reproduce via parthenogenesis (see Gilman 1998: 249-250).⁵

3. Cross-living Conundrum and Transgender Romp

As will be clear from the above, questions of terminology are delicate when dealing with transgender, and *James Miranda Barry* and *Misfortune*, the two neo-Victorian novels under study, bear witness to this complexity. Duncker’s fiction may be classified as a historical novel in so far as it deals with a real-life character whose life has been documented in other works.⁶ The fact that the eponymous Barry was a medical surgeon who met Florence Nightingale, the Lady of the Lamp, hoists him/her up to the rank of eminent Victorian, even if Duncker’s take on the personage relies less on the mixture of flamboyance and unsavoury details which characterises Lytton Strachey’s

description of the famous nurse, than on the building up of a complex, riddling figure. Stace's *Misfortune*, for its part, overly exploits what Marie-Luise Kohlke labels the 'sexsational', by pandering to the reader's prurient curiosity and allowing for "reading for defilement" (Kohlke 2008: 55, original emphasis).

Indeed, *Misfortune*, a highly metafictional novel, constantly beckoning to the reader in a way reminiscent of Laurence Sterne's *Tristram Shandy*, explicitly alludes to a sick appetite for unpalatable details. A telling preterition is symptomatic of this approach. Referring to the medical check-up to decide whether the main character leans more towards the male or female biological sex, Stace's narrator informs the reader: "I am not going to go into detail about it: there are plenty of soi-disant medical (pornographic) novels that will titillate the keen student with the specifics of such interviews" (Stace 2006: 275). In actual fact, *Misfortune* does not balk at providing the anatomical particulars of a case of hermaphroditism at birth, "when the penis has shrunk into a chink and (excuse me) the testes have yet to fall into the scrotum" (Stace 2006: 271). This way of insisting on teratology (the study of human abnormalities), in a page-turner, partakes of the sexsational and, arguably, of the sexexploitative. Similarly, Stace's narrator calls up scenes which are, to put it mildly, risqué, as when the main protagonist, dressed up as the heiress of the estate, arouses her suitor, by suddenly revealing her male anatomy (see Stace 2006: 254-255). In such an instance, the neo-Victorian sexsational is clearly influenced by the salacious eighteenth-century realist novel through a sort of historical loop backward and forward. It is no coincidence that the narrator flaunts a predilection for literary onomastics: Squire Allworthy, Fanny Price and Hargrave Pollexfens, all names associated with the eighteenth-century novel, are mentioned in passing (see Stace 2006: 79).

James Miranda Barry, by contrast, spurns the allurements of exhibitionism and voyeurism even if it broaches a topic likely to elicit curiosity. Indeed, a halo of mystery surrounds the Victorian military surgeon's existence, which the fiction does not quite dispel. As a historical figure, Barry is chiefly remembered as a well-travelled successful doctor, who rose to the rank of Inspector General in charge of military hospitals. Previously, he had served in many parts of the British Empire and pioneered new treatments relying on spotless, mandatory cleanliness. It was long after his death that it was revealed that he had been assigned the female sex at

birth under the name of Margaret Ann Belkeley. Actually, Barry's life affords an unprecedented case of social schism between private and public selves which Duncker subtly documents. As Jana Funke aptly argues in an article on the protagonist's "gender resistance" (see Funke 2012: 215-226), which the novelist herself endorsed on her website, Duncker is less concerned with arriving at any foundational truth than she is with conjuring up a sense of indecision, frustrating the reader's desire to read the past in terms of gender binaries and stable sexual identities. Therefore to establish, once and for all, whether Barry should be seen as a cross-dressing woman or an intersex individual (with all the attendant biological implications) is clearly outside her remit. Apart from one scene in which Barry manually stimulates a youthful female admirer to orgasm (see Duncker 1999: 234-235), the novel self-consciously resists engaging in writerly sexploitation to appease readers' desires for titillation. Rather, for Duncker, the challenge consists in 'losing' Barry to the past, a past that is bound to remain elusive and irretrievable at the end of this three-hundred-and-fifty-page long novel, rather than in bringing her/his story closer to the present, by providing the type of answer relevant to this day and age.

Stace, also known as a folk/pop singer, opts for just the opposite tack. He updates and queers the typically Victorian inheritance plot, by putting a character, known in turn as Rose Loveall and the Lord Rose Loveall, at the centre of the novel. In doing so, he gives free expression to contemporary questions on the trauma of transgenering, entailed by the necessity of leading a two-tiered existence, in limbo, somewhere betwixt and between. The difficulty of putting on alien items of clothing or the hardships resulting from reassignment and, more generally, questions linked to gender identity crisis are treated at length, and their significance goes far beyond the plot's interest. This concern may be paralleled with John Colapinto's famous case study of Bruce Reimer as reported in *As Nature Made Him: The Boy Who Was Raised as a Girl* (2000).⁷

Misfortune discriminates clearly between sex and gender. Indeed, Rose Loveall is a man by birth, who has been reared as a girl, but when the time comes to qualify as male heir, s/he has to rehearse the most obvious gestures of everyday life, such as walking or sitting, to adopt a comportment bringing his gender identity in close correspondence with his biological sex. In Ann Heilmann and Mark Llewellyn's words, Stace

creat[es] a male protagonist whose cross-gender attire constitutes no act of transvestism, manifesting as it does his childhood conditioning, but who finds himself forced to ‘cross-dress’ in the conventional costume of his sex. (Heilmann and Llewellyn 2010: 39)

Rose Loveall/Lord Rose enacts a paradoxical queering of more ‘standard’ gender bending practices, in which Stace’s protagonist engages. Notwithstanding their differences, *James Miranda Barry* and *Misfortune* share similarities both as novelistic representations of transgendering and as neo-Victorian fictions engaging with such a complex issue – including that issue’s potential exploitation in fiction.

4. Multiperspective, Intertextual Narratives

Multiperspectivism implies perceptual relativism and scepticism towards knowledge and reality. *Misfortune*’s opening chapter takes the form of an omniscient narrative, focalised on Pharaoh, an autistic boy who is shown scavenging the rubbish heap to dump the baby that is soon after retrieved by Lord Geoffrey Lovehall. The latter is desperate for an heir. Thereafter the narrative is written as a private memoir dictated by Rose himself/herself, the foundling baby, in old age. Rose indulges in self-referential jokes on the use of the omniscient stance in fiction-writing: “I opted for the old-fashioned narrator, the All-Seeing One – or let’s call him God. No one knows how God knows everything He knows – after all, it’s bound to be a man (and He blithely assumes that you are male)” (Stace 2006: 77). Rose’s memoir is then momentarily interrupted, when s/he collapses in Turkey, by an excerpt from the journal of an archaeologist’s daughter, who nurses him/her back to health. So Stace’s fiction relies on the diversity of sources to afford shifting perspectives. Consequently, Sarah Gamble notes, readers are “never allowed to forget that they are listening to a story, since their attention is always being drawn to the decision underpinning its construction” (Gamble 2009: 137). Besides, the text is filled with mostly unacknowledged intertextual references. In the opening chapter, Pharaoh’s forays into the dust heaps evoke Dickens’s *Our Mutual Friend* (1865), and the ballad man, whom the helpless child encounters, recalls Silas Wegg (see Dickens 1997: 11). Moreover Love Hall, with its “appearance of a museum that had shut down” (Stace 2006: 75), cannot fail to call to mind Satis House in *Great*

Expectations (1861), a novel in which the by now iconic Miss Havisham could be seen as a symbolic victim of (albeit non-physical) sexploitation. Ironically, she then becomes a victimiser, condemning Estella to a life of sexploitation with her abusive husband, Bentley Drummle.

However, Stace arguably instrumentalises his intertextual references to reify, as it were, a paradigmatic fake Victorian novel, allowing for a journey in his fiction turned literary theme park of sexual non-conformity. In a sense, *Misfortune* qualifies as what Michael Fox described as “Post-Authentic Victorian Fiction” in his preface to his bestseller *The Meaning of Night: A Confession* (Fox 2006: 3). Thus, the question of the spurious does not seem to be relevant anymore, as it implies the possibility of establishing an origin which can only be illusory. Authenticity would be the corollary for naturalness, but the point of *Misfortune* is precisely to leave the reader poised at the crossroads of possibilities, both ontologically and epistemologically, by refusing to fix any definite certainties. As Gamble comments, “Rose is [...] a consummate role-player, having been brought up in a world that is entirely dedicated to performance, masquerade, and transformations of all kinds” (Gamble 2009: 137). In one sense, Rose exploits her sexuality as much as being exploited by/for it.

Admittedly, the novel’s title lends itself to easy puns, such as *Miss Fortune*, in which ‘miss’ refers both to failing to grasp and to the title before the name of an unmarried woman. More importantly though, the privative prefix ‘mis-’, as in ‘misfit’, points to the sheer inadequacy of any pre-existing categories. So, *Misfortune* is both Post-Authentic Victorian, in so far as it is not amenable to any hierarchic system of classification establishing the precedence of the already known and identified, and also maladjusted because it is always at one remove from all the accepted norms and conventions through its eponymous misfit character. The artificial typifies both the character’s and the novel’s destiny, as the definition of the natural is too limited to include them. This does not mean that ultimately the fiction fails to deliver an existential testimony holding some measure of truth, but rather that it stays beyond the pale of the already recognised. To this extent, it is post-authentic *and* unnatural, which is by no means dismissive but rather calls for a re-appraisal of what is commonly taken for granted and the need to devise new, iconoclastic categories – i.e. nonce categories – to short-circuit inadequate, predetermined frames of reference. Halberstam describes this heuristic posture as “perverse presentism”,

“propos[ing] a perverse presentism as not only a denaturalization of the present but also an application of what we do not know in the present to what we cannot know about the past” (Halberstam 2005: 53).

Through a process of exhibited embedding, the estate house, where most of the action unfolds, is endowed with its own replica, the “dollhouse, a scale model of Love Hall” (Stace 2006: 27). This turns the novel into a fetishised object of cultural consumption in which the characters are mere marionettes as in the foreword to William Makepeace Thackeray’s *Vanity Fair* (1848), before the curtain rises. This device permits cynical comments on the reader’s greed to be privy to all that goes on in the privacy of the home – and its bedrooms. This voyeuristic impulse, laid bare by Charles Dickens’s narrator in *Dombey and Son* (1848) – “Oh for a good spirit who would take the house tops off” (Dickens 1985: 738) – is made accessible to the reader of *Misfortune* through the dollhouse: “The moon shone through the tiny windows of the Hemmen dollhouse in the Doll’s House. The front was *opened like a body on a surgeon’s table, its organs on display*” (Stace 2006: 47, added emphasis). Through this dissection metaphor, the novel, built as a “house within a house within a house” (Stace 2006: 50), vicariously fulfills a fantasy of both transparency and titillation. The reader is egged on to crack the nut, i.e. “the hieroglyphics, enigmas, conundra” of Miss Fortune’s identity (Stace 2006: 51), while being offered a whole array of cultural references touching upon the topic of transgenering, in one way or another. These range from the omnipresent mythological episode of Salmacis and Hermaphroditus to the Chevalier d’Éon (see Stace 2006: 131-133, 238), to say nothing of the sundry allusions to female warrior ballads from the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries (see Heilmann and Llewellyn 2010: 39).

James Miranda Barry too is a multiperspectival fiction, alternating third person narratives, fictitious autobiographical fragments from the medical surgeon, private correspondence, extracts from literary works and newspapers, notably by de Sade and epitaphs carved on tombstones. In a manner reminiscent of Foucault’s edition of Herculine Barbin’s memoir, Duncker’s novel rests on a succession of pastiches of legal and medical documents raising the question of Barry’s biological sex, without providing a definite or definitive answer. Overall, the narrative does not proceed by following a seamless chronological progression, complete with transition from one life stage to the next. Instead, it propounds a succession of

temporal blocks, separated from one another by ellipses. This specific take on time, deliberately shunning the linear chronology of mainstream heterosexual life projects, has been seen by Halberstam as an instance of queering, in which

[q]ueer subcultures produce alternative temporalities by allowing their participants to believe that their futures can be imagined according to logics that lie outside of those paradigmatic markers of life experience – namely, birth, marriage, reproduction, and death. (Halberstam 2005: 2)

The novel's first section is centered on a phenomenological approach, in which the young Barry, still known as Mrs Bulkeley's daughter, reminisces about her childhood holidays in Shropshire by conjuring up sensory details. Then the plot, through a series of jump cuts from one scene to another, calls up in turn Edinburgh, an unspecified island,⁸ and eventually London. Thus, the diegesis does not progress along a straight arrow line from one point to another and, ultimately, the story fails to cohere into a fully controlled personal and historical record. To take up Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari's terminology, such a structure is not arborescent, because it does not posit a focal centre from which everything would proceed but, instead, seems to open up lines of becoming.

According to Deleuze and Guattari, becoming is opposed to memory, which freezes past events into a fully achieved discourse, singularly devoid of gaps and blanks. In other words, it reterritorialises what is scattered. Conversely, becoming is the movement by which the line frees itself from the point, and renders points indiscernible. To illustrate their theory Deleuze and Guattari quote, amongst other sources, Virginia Woolf's *Orlando* (1928), a perfectly apposite reference in the context of this study. Woolf's work indeed shuns any teleological design: "*Orlando* already does not operate by memories, but by blocks, blocks of age, blocks of epochs, blocks of the kingdoms of nature, blocks of sexes, forming so many becomings between things, or so many lines of deterritorialization" (Deleuze & Guattari 1987: 294). Duncker proceeds along similar lines. Barry's haphazard existence does not freeze into a fully coherent destiny; her childhood as a prim and lively girl in ringlets and flounces does not prewrite his/her or rather 'hir' – pronounced 'here' –

the transgender pronoun (Love 2011: 157) – future. Indeed, Deleuze and Guattari's becoming is fully applicable to the transgender issue, as it calls into question the very idea of a fully integrated, temporally and causally built-up sense of identity. The self does not so much recapitulate previous experiences, with the present consciousness exerting its ascendancy over the past, as it is made up of multiple layers or blocks of plural selves, stretched out in time and crossed by erratic events. As Barry reflects in his most introspective moments towards the end of his life:

What is your real identity? [...] And what is genuine? The genuine inner soul you say you want to discover? [...] You aren't the same person with everyone you know. You act out different roles. [...] And you make up the lines and the plot as you go on. [...] There's no rehearsal and no second night in which to do better. (Duncker 1999: 358)

Duncker fleshes out a character whose nomadic condition is profoundly modern – “Barry had no constant markers in his life. He moved onwards from land to land” – and whose decentered identity may only be negotiated from the margins, when, as the protagonist puts it, “I stepped away [...] across the margins of my sex” (Duncker 1999: 238, 296). Barry escapes the exploitative plight of his women contemporaries, such as his good friend Alice Jones, who in spite of her constant desire for self-emancipation, finds herself at the mercy of “lecherous old rogues whose skin hung flabby round their necks like turkey roosters” (Duncker 1999: 332). Later as an old woman, who has been kept in luxury by a now dead artist painter, Jones symbolically fails to see the meaning of the tapestries hanging on the walls which, though overly inspired by ancient Greek and Roman mythology “all represent women being raped or abandoned [...] being violently sodomised by a group of satyrs” (Duncker 1999: 333). Duncker also shows how Mary Ann Bulkeley, Barry's mother, could not bear the prospect of leaving her child dependent upon men's wills and desires. Raising his as a boy by pulling off a redemptive act of gender bending was Bulkeley's way of sheltering him from the exploitation she herself had endured, which appears to have included incestuous abuse by her brother.

5. Skewed/Queered *Bildungsroman*e

Evidently, then, there are a significant number of points in common between *James Miranda Barry* and *Misfortune* in their respective literary treatments of transgending, even though there is no tangible reason to think that Duncker's novel influenced Stace's text. Both propound a skewed or queered version of the *Bildungsroman*, or of the coming of age novel, which exploits the protagonists' ambiguous sexualities while nonetheless resisting or disavowing the texts' own implications in sexploitation. For a start, in both cases the dice have been loaded to tamper with the laws of natural design. There is a halo of uncertainty surrounding Barry's filiation, and it is attributed to a symbolical paternal trinity, metonymically designated as "the triumvirate of cigars" (Duncker 1999: 59), which includes Barry's uncle, the celebrated Irish painter, James Barry, his mother's lover, General Francisco de Miranda, and another wealthy patron, David Erskine. It is to this "triumvirate" that the child's upbringing and education are entrusted: "they decided to share you [...] Barry too, as they shared Mary Ann [Barry's mother] and to invest in you together" (Duncker 1999: 349). So the mother insists that the child is to be passed off as a boy to spare his the hardships befalling the fair sex: "*She was the source of the plot, soldier. It was her idea. What was she asking for? To give you the chance to live something other than a woman's life*" (Duncker 1999: 297, original italics). Conversely, in *Misfortune*, the baby boy is raised as a girl, both to replace the beloved sister whom her foster father, Lord Geoffrey Loveall, has lost and to gratify her adoptive mother's ideal of androgyny as the most elevated condition of mankind. In the pattern of development inherent in the feminine appropriation of the *Bildungsroman*, tomboyishness may be seen as a temporary step, as happens with Maggie Tulliver in George Eliot's *The Mill on the Floss* (1860) for instance. Yet whilst as Halberstam argues, tomboyishness is condoned in girls as a transitory stage "prior to remodel[ing] into compliant forms of femininity" (Halberstam 2006: 6), in the two novels under study it is diverted from its accepted course. In *James Miranda Barry*, it is presented as a much hoped-for, permanent condition because it provides a convenient ploy to escape exclusive and oppressive gender identification: "You'll just go on being a tomboy" (Duncker 1999: 60). *Misfortune* goes even further in depicting tomboyishness as foundational in identity formation, not just in identity's psychological but also physiological aspects. As Rose speculates, "perhaps my tomboy

yearnings had adapted my body into its more boyish shape” (Stace 2006: 187).

Logically enough, in these revisionist versions of the *Bildungsroman*, growing – both physically and intellectually – is superseded by metamorphosing, through repeated allusions to the Ovidian hypotext and images that are consonant with Deleuze’s lines of becoming. The human is no longer treated as irreducible, a superior, gifted species, existing beyond nature and impervious to its organic influences. There is a blurred line of indeterminacy or uncertainty, some indiscernible propinquity, which entails the impossibility of drawing a neat and clear dividing line between the human, the animal and nature. Indeed, the transmorphing process, which is seen at work in the main protagonists – “I underwent this metamorphosis from my old self to my new self, from butterfly into grub” (Stace 2006: 228) – is by no means confined to the human realm but opens itself up to expandable deterritorialisation: “Outside the earth was in the grip of metamorphosis” (Duncker 1999: 59). This harmonious circulation between the human and the non-human transposes on the cosmic plane the absence of neat corporeal definition, which seals the mystery of the transgender body. This unaccountability of the transgender body is precisely what Butler wishes to retain about the above-mentioned Bruce Reimer’s case. If Reimer most unwillingly found himself at the heart of a heated debate between, on the one hand, the constructionists, who spoke for the malleability of gender regardless of biological determinism, and, on the other, the naturalists who pleaded for genetic destiny in the name of nature, Butler, for her part, cautions her readers against the absolutism of distinction itself. Implicitly, she reads such absolutism as a form of sexploitation – a violation of the individual on account of her/his indeterminate sex that seeks to eradicate the subject’s unique constitutive ‘morphability’. Founding her argument on Reimer’s own declaration, Butler makes the point that his humanness lies exactly in “the ways in which he is not fully recognizable, fully disposable, fully categorizable” (Butler 2004: 73). Hence, it is interesting to see how both *James Miranda Barry* and *Misfortune* come to a similar conclusion through the aesthetic techniques which they deploy.

In the case of Duncker’s novel, this indeterminacy is further reinforced by a specific take on space. Spatially, the absence of the crystal clear, defining contours for masculinity and femininity is rendered by the rejection of the chronotope of the road which, in many respects, singularises

the *Bildungsroman*. If the road tropes a sense of purpose conducive to a process of identity formation within the framework of patriarchal society, it is replaced in both novels by the maze (see Duncker 1999: 59, 121, 349, 351; Stace 2006: 3-18). From the baroque, mannerist gardens of the country house to the rhizomatic labyrinth, both novels deploy the whole gamut of the maze paradigm. This, in itself, is symptomatic of an ontological experience, ranging from the playful game of getting lost as both entertainment and cognitive training – “The maze was on the east side of the house. We often played hide and seek there in the afternoons” (Duncker 1999: 59) – to an oblique, metaphysical comment on the plight of transgender individuals, who, as it happens, are not included in Nature’s scheme, a fact also suggested by Duncker’s epigraph, taken from William Shakespeare’s *The Tempest*:

This is as strange a maze as e’er men trod,
And there is in this business more than nature
Was ever conduct of.
(Shakespeare 1990: Act V, scene 1, ll. 243-245)

As evidenced by the above quotation, the labyrinth becomes first and foremost a mental image, a symbolical figure no longer referring to any specific architectural edifice. In a way it is a metaphor deprived of referential anchorage. What stands out is the figurative dimension which fascinatingly connotes the mystery of signification. Through this cryptic aspect, the maze may be construed as a fit pattern for the hermaphrodite’s destiny, in lieu of the road which invariably gestures towards some form of resolution. And the detour through the world of the theatre and representation is, of course, by no means coincidental, but seminal to both novels.

6. The Metaleptic Leap, Sartorial Semiotic and Performance

Indeed, both *James Miranda Barry* and *Misfortune* are characterised by the recurrence of the metaleptic leap, i.e. the shift from one ontological level of representation to another. In particular, both novels underscore the crossing of the demarcating line between the characters in the fiction and their pictorial likenesses, called up through ekphrastic passages. Barry’s mother and Alice Jones, the only girl Barry was ever to love, both model for James

Barry, the neoclassical Irish painter. Confronted by both the real life models and their pictorial representations in the artist's studio, the cross-living gentleman feels the very substance of his own self vacillating: "And now I feel like two people. One of them is true and one is a charade. I don't know which one is real. And mostly I feel that neither one really exists" (Duncker 1999: 94). Stace, for his part, takes the metaleptic trope literally when Rose Loveall dreams that s/he lets her/himself fall into the crystal pool of the Salmacis and Hermaphroditus painting (Stace 2006: 199). The confrontation with art thus further destabilises the loose contours of personalities engaged in permanently re-imagining themselves.

The fluidity of unstable selves is, of course, reinforced by the many theatrical allusions and the recurrence of the *theatrum mundi* trope in both fictions. The Butlerian category of performance is omnipresent in both novels, and it is perhaps in their treatment of what Halberstam designates as "sartorial semiotics" (Halberstam 2006: 99) that both novels carry conviction: "Costume was much more acceptable than disguise" (Duncker 1999: 55), exclaims Barry when s/he relinquishes his female garments to don the 13th Light District Dragoons uniform. Dressing up in manly attire highlights the gender identity the character feels duty-bound to adopt at this stage, even if his body remains irreducible to either manly or womanly items of clothing as it cannot be codified. Instead, it is bound to remain as an unrepresented signified in the highly dichotomous range of clothes that prevailed in the mid-nineteenth century. The dictum "Cucullus non facit monachum, the cowl doth not make the monk" (Duncker 1999: 149-150) is graphically illustrated when, in a melodrama attended by Barry, the expected cleric turns out to be an aristocrat in lace and jewels. Indeed, crude disguises may be read as gross oversimplification in these two novels which call for nonce taxonomies, subtle nuances that go beyond the mere opposition between essence and appearances. Clothes, instead of merely exposing or concealing identities, may testify to a whole array of intermediary attitudes, either elected or imposed. More than merely a matter of dissembling, male costume in both novels is dictated by the need for upward mobility, to render the protagonist eligible as medical surgeon or heir to a property. But, for Rose Loveall, who is a boy raised as a daughter, dressing up as a man is an alienating experience, which shows how gender training prevails over biological sex.

In *James Miranda Barry*, Duncker suggests that the Victorian doctor, despite his successful masculine impersonation, never overcomes gender dysphoria, and in the novel's last pages presents a typical case of relapse, as it were, when the aging protagonist suddenly rues the past and wishes s/he could return to the anonymity of a plain Irish woman (see Duncker 1999: 359). In self-introspective moments Barry feels his own identity as an imposture, which he cannot put at any distance, however, because it is intimately bound up with his mother's dearest wish. So, the attempt to escape from the constraints of one's sex does not necessarily entail a release from sexploitation. Yet, in other instances, transvesting may be a pleasurable experience: "the male drag has become more than a costume", since the wearer inside it "has an erotic relation to her clothes and uses masculine clothing to complete her gender presentation" (Halberstam 2006: 206). This is precisely what Alice Jones, who used to play the breech parts in Shakespeare's comedies on the Victorian stage, is keen to point out to the aging Barry: "But you loved dressing up. Don't you remember your first uniform? And how you danced for me in a swirl of red. [...] You loved the power, James" (Duncker 1999: 359). All those subtle inflections of meaning crudely expose the crass simple-mindedness of "the cowl doth not make the monk" where transvestism is concerned. Through sartorial semiotics both novels imply that dressed bodies may be construed as sites of resistance to sexploitation by seemingly complying with vestimentary gender codes whilst subtly displacing them. The lack of fit between the wearer and his/her attire both point to the artificiality of clothing conventions and the impossibility of reifying identity by reducing it to gender binaries.

7. Conclusion: Transgender as (Counter)Image of Sexploitation

The transidentity issue is closely linked to hypermodernity, as is the neo-Victorian trend predicated upon recent approaches in the fields of historiography, epistemology, literary reception and ethics, among others. Following Gamble, transidentity may also be seen as a fit illustration of what is fundamentally at stake in neo-Victorian writing as a whole, especially the kind that mixes ethical concerns for sexual rights with sexsational and potentially sexploitative tropes. Indeed, by exposing "the provisional nature of all enactments of gender, past and present", both Stace and Duncker arguably "reveal the performative nature of the neo-Victorian

literary mode itself” (Gamble 2009: 128-129). However it has been the purpose of this study to focus more on transidentity as representing deterritorialised subjects with multiple affiliations that enable them to evade or subversively re-negotiate oppressive social structures and gender conventions. On the individual psychological level, the transgender condition reflects a far larger trend that is applicable on the scale of the whole global village. In the nomadic age, with transcontinental migrations and the necessity of acculturation for an increasing number of people, the question of identity formation from the margins is becoming paramount. Yet too often this same question is also accompanied by traditionalist or fundamentalist backlashes and subjects’ increasing precarity, often rendering them targets of gendered and sexual violence. Thus the transgender question, which of course warrants attention in its own right, may reach out beyond the scope of the private realm. In Jeffrey Eugenides’s *Middlesex* (2002), the presence of an intersex, second generation Greek American appeared to some critics as a symbol of a divided heritage. Aristi Trendel aptly remarks that “[g]ender trouble in *Middlesex* could hardly veil the immigrant and ethnic experience in America”, before adding that “[t]he novel is about reinventing your identity on different levels, be that Greek to American, female to male” (Trendel 2011: n.p.). Given the double orientation of the Janus-like neo-Victorian novel, “[g]oing forward, looking backward” (Heilmann and Llewellyn 2010: 32), the transgender question may prove relevant to a double-barreled approach to history and a nomadic take on space, relying extensively on textual hybridity and enacting a “hybrid performance, thus transforming two plays into one” (Duncker 1999: 107). A further ambivalence stems from the fact that transgender challenges sexploitation by complicating the relation to desire, whilst relying upon sexploitation’s trademark of voyeurism.

Notes

1. See ‘Anactoria’ (1866), ‘Hermaphroditus’ (1866) and ‘Fragoletta’ (1866).
2. A reminder of the semantic content and possible overlaps between the terms used may be appropriate. Historically, hermaphroditism, etymologically derived from Hermes and Aphrodite, the Greek God and Goddess, is the first to consider. The hermaphrodite has both philosophical and poetic

ramifications, as it goes back to Plato's *Symposium* whilst it also symbolises the higher union of the souls in poetry, from John Donne and Edmund Spenser to Swinburne. The word hermaphrodite may also be employed in its biological sense to speak of humans having both male and female reproductive organs. In this latter case, the term intersex is considered less derogatory and stigmatising. So strangely, when applied to the arts and philosophy, 'hermaphrodite', held as a synonym for 'androgynous', is valued, whereas it is not thought proper in scientific or medical parlance. Transgender may be defined as the fact of performing a gender at odds with one's own sexed body; it is the opposite of cisgender. Transidentity is a more accommodating term positing an intersectional self in which gender fluid identifications may be correlated with social or ethnic affiliations.

3. The novel was published in 2009 in the Legacies of Nineteenth Century American Women Writers series by the University of Nebraska Press.
4. The 'Sleeping Hermaphrodite', also known as the 'Borghèse Hermaphroditus', is a statue exhibited at the Louvre museum in Paris. It has been described as an early Imperial copy of a bronze original by an Hellenistic sculptor. Swinburne's poem 'Hermaphroditus' bears the subscription "*Au Musée du Louvre, Mars 1863*", pointing the reader towards the ostensible subject for his poem. See <http://www.louvre.fr/en/oeuvre-notices/sleeping-hermaphroditos>.
5. *Herland* depicts a gyna-ecocentric society from which three explorers, the wealthy macho womaniser Terry O. Nicholson, the romantic botanist and physician Jeff Margrave, and the rational sociologist and physician Vandyck Jennings, never return. Each of these men projects his own model of ideal gender interaction unto the unnamed women of this alternative, utopian world. Gilman first reveals men's exploitative interaction with women, evidenced through their dehumanising and objectifying manner of address, and then exposes the shallowness of these adventurers' humanity, as the veneer of their civilization cracks to lay bare their sexist bias against the female community and their manipulative and violent acts.
6. See, for example, Isobel Rae's biography *The Strange Story of Dr James Barry* (1958), a novel by Jessica Grove and Olga Racster, *Dr James Barry: Her Secret Story* (1932), June Rose's biography *The Perfect Gentleman* (1977), and Rachel Holmes's *Secret Life of Dr James Barry: Victorian England's Most Eminent Surgeon* (2007).
7. Bruce Reimer was a boy who was mutilated at the age of eight as a result of a botched surgical operation to rectify phimosis (a narrowing of the penis foreskin). On learning of the possibility of sex reassignment, his parents

decided to have him operated on to become a woman, so that he might have a clear sexual identity, rather than stay in a gender 'limbo' due to his severed sex. He was then raised as a girl but showed repeated signs of his original nature, notably by insisting on peeing standing, in spite of the taunts and mockery of his girl pals. At the age of fourteen, he reverted to his former male identity by choosing the name David and receiving male hormone shots. So, in the final resort, Bruce Reimer was born a man, accidentally castrated by the medical profession, feminised by the psychiatric world, and finally proved unable to return to who he was. Indeed, he took his life at the age of thirty-eight in 2004. The Bruce/David Reimer's case polarised tensions between the naturalists and the constructionists.

8. This unspecified island conflates Barry's successive postings overseas to South Africa, Corfu, Malta and finally Jamaica during the slave rebellion which erupted on 27 December, 1831.

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