# 2AC Cards

#### Well start your case neg for you: these debates are historically fruitful for shaping non-discrimination policy, trans activism and orientations to disability.

Awkward-Rich 20, prof in WGSS @ UMass-Amherst. (Cameron, February 2020, ““She of the Pants and No Voice” Jack Bee Garland’s Disability Drag,’ TSQ Vol 7, No. 1, Duke University Press, luna)

The author’s unequivocal stance about this mode of exclusion, which framed transness as an impairment but not a protectable disability, was that it harmfully reinforced “the notion that people who dress as the other gender, or who believe themselves to be of the other gender, are sick” (Renaissance News 1989). At the same time, the piece is more ambivalent about the titular question at hand, an ambivalence grounded in the fact that trans people had previously had some, albeit very limited, success bringing discrimination cases under existing federal disability law, a route toward securing employment protections that the ADA effectively shut down.2 Retrospectively, in fact, it is possible to understand Helms and Armstrong’s deeply conservative amendments to the ADA as helping to cement the now seemingly commonsense view among liberals that trans people ought to be protected under Title VII of the Civil Rights Act, but not the ADA. That is, now we largely take for granted that the answer to “whether or not we [trans people] are disabled” is no (Renaissance News 1989). However, in the years surrounding the passage of the ADA, Renaissance News was only one of a handful of trans community publications that devoted space to debate over the costs and benefits of trans exclusion from the ADA in particular and the category of disability in general. The law’s answer to the question of who’s disabled, then, was understood as an event in trans history as it unfolded.

#### 8---False Scarcity DA. Their model presumes there’s not enough room for trans literature. That reproduces the lingua franca of authoritarianism

Brostoff and Goldberg 25, Assistant Professor of English at Kenyon College; PhD candidate in English at Princeton. (Alex; rl, Fall 2025, “Introduction: Whose Trans Literatures?,” John Hopkins University Press, luna)

So trans literature, as we understand it, must not be a methodology (god help us, we’re not transing) but the thematization of trans which is, in the broadest sense, one that understands gender and sex as something redistributable, not immutable; something that can be shared and changed; additive and (re)imaginable. Trans has so often been understood as lack, as a term that can only be formulated in the negative: as the experience of gender dissonance; as nature’s cruel trick, as the mid-century memoirist Hedy Jo Star (1963) wrote; as the mismatch of body and mind; as desperation, loneliness, and artifice. What trans theory has uncovered, instead, however, is an understanding of trans as abundance—not excess. This is the crucial distinction between cis-approved “wrong body” narratives and trans understandings of bodily autonomy, which impose no medical or narrative teleology. The project of trans is one of saying everyone should have full bodily autonomy—of saying, I transition because I want to. As Grace Lavery (2023) has so movingly written about transition, it is efficacious; it works. To be trans is not something to be corrected as has held the dominant sexological narrative since the days of the gender clinic. Rather, it is to recognize that gender is malleable and insistent and iterative; and because it is malleable and iterative, it is portable, it can move. For an individual, movement may look like gender transition; culturally, it intervenes in gender norms, mores, understandings, and horizons of liberation. This is what we mean by redistribution: that gender is something we redistribute for ourselves, and in so doing, collective understandings of what gender is become socially redistributed. In this way, this special issue focuses primarily on the ways that a trans literary criticism must not focus simply on the mere identification of trans characters or themes—in literature produced by trans or non-trans people—but on experiences trans people have of experiencing gender as something redistributable, from within the singular scope of one person’s gender transition, to the kinds of perspective, sociality, and solidarity trans invites.

Our curatorial aim, then, and our argument: trans literature, poetics, and literary criticism are primarily and fundamentally concerned not only with representations of trans life, but also with the project of its reproduction, which occurs through its redistribution of social and material relations.3 By “the reproduction of trans life,” we refer to the intense need for identification that at once inspires and structures practices of trans reading, and, as Cameron Awkward-Rich writes in his essay appearing here: “to learn how to live, to learn that and how it might be possible to live” (651). Living out such possibilities depends on trans bodily autonomy, and in this sense, is part and parcel of reproductive justice. By redistributing social and material relations, we refer to numerous outcomes that arise from the conditions of transness. Gender is famously relational (Goffman 1977; Butler 1990). Whether in the mundane experience of gendered relation; by offering material support for someone transitioning; by questioning, through an encounter with transness, the immutably of gender; or by engaging, oneself, in the redistribution of gender through transition—to change the stakes of relationality is the provocation of transness.

This special issue performs the redistributive gesture it theorizes. It is an attempt to smuggle trans content into a print journal with a predominantly non-trans readership, as Sedgwick speaks of smuggling queer representation through perverse reading and Cole Rizki speaks of smuggling work from, or about, the Global South in translation.4 It is also to polemically make the following point: the question of what trans literature is, as we’ve contextualized above, is a mystification. In this special issue, we critically examine the who of trans literary criticism. To put a finer point on it: we cannot answer what trans literature is, or what it does, without addressing who it is for. Who reads trans literature? Who teaches it? Who is served by it? Who is excluded from it? For whom and by whom is it being banned? In what follows we begin by exploring who trans literature is for. Subsequently, we offer the literary genealogy we write with and against. To conclude, we consider two asymptotic narratives braided together: the story of trans literature as it’s summarily been told (“a short one indeed” [Benjamin 1969, 1]); and a synthesis of the texts collected in this issue, offering an interlocking albeit alternate genealogy.

THE WHO

In a stroke of synchrony, in the midst of working on this issue, The Routledge Handbook of Trans Literature (2024), edited by Douglas A. Vakoch and Sabine Sharp, appeared on the scene. Sharp’s introduction describes the volume as “presenting a shifting and unfinished map of where trans literature has gone and might go” (2024, 4). The table of contents alone traverses centuries and genres, the tropes and trappings of what one might call “trans literature.” This special issue likewise chimes in with something “shifting and unfinished,” rejecting the notion of a knowable category. By contrast, however, what we offer is not a map, nor can it be contained by the singular “literature.” The work this issue considers is not bound by charting or mapping, methods whose gaze too often bears the trace of imperial eyes. On the contrary, the articles, interviews, and book reviews in this issue unravel and multiply the referents contained within both the pluralized “literatures” and its modifier “trans.”

But even with pluralization at play, a skeptical start would land us in the publishing industry, with an understanding of trans literatures as a consumer category that names a form through which, as Kay Gabriel put it, “large publishers [. . .] capitalize on trans identity to sell to non-trans people, to sell to cis people, to sell to people who do not have a stake in our struggles—who are not participants in but rather tourists of our identities” (2021). Trans sells. As Dan Sinykin shows in Big Fiction: How Conglomeration Changed the Publishing Industry and American Literature (2023), the mainstream publishing industry is no stranger to capitalizing on identity. And what is bought, when trans sells, but an ever-intensifying paradox of visibility that feeds the liberal empathy machine on the one hand, and on the other, enables flashes of recognition and identification within and among trans communities. A work of trans literature in the sense of “inclusion”—a humbling of mainstream publishing to uplift trans voices—ostensibly serves a liberal social purpose that ironically fuels the anti-trans fire.

Who, then, are trans literatures for? It depends who you ask. Trans literary scholars have pointed out the ways early twentieth century autobiography spoke to multiple audiences—clinicians adjudicating who might deserve medical treatment; a curious cis gender audience interested in, what seemed to readers, science fiction; and trans people themselves looking for mutual recognition and a shared name for their discordant feelings. Viviane K. Namaste (2000) has pointed to the ways that feminist and queer theory—another form of literary output concerned with trans—has largely not been for trans people at all, and especially not for the most marginalized among us: trans femme sex workers, incarcerated trans people, and unhoused trans people. For Namaste, the project of trans literature, if it is to have any efficacy, has to serve trans people, and more specifically, the trans femme sex workers, largely women of color, who populate the pages of theory and literature, who appear, spectral, as object lessons, allegorical readings, or silhouetted figurations of the radical potential of “queer world-making” (2000).

Less cynical renditions of what constitutes trans literatures flip the target audience, holding that trans literature should be bound not by industry interests but by those it most directly addresses. Trish Salah, for instance, understands trans literature as “by trans people for trans people” (2021, 175), and from a narratological perspective, Cody Mejeur and Chiara Pellegrini likewise describe “narratives made by, with, and for trans peoples” (2024, 128). This method of marrying the terms “trans” and “literature” mobilizes prepositions as grammatical units of relation. But such relational units (“by,” “with,” and “for”) land us in new entanglements, for nested in the question “what are trans literatures?” are two thornier ones: what is trans? And what is literature?

While we’ve discussed the intractable problem of addressing “what is trans?”, an alternate version of this introduction could fall deep down the rabbit hole of “what is literature?” That version might offer a lengthy review of scholarship and criticism that has grappled with what constitutes the literary. It might include, for example, René Wellek and Austin Warren’s Theory of Literature or Terry Eagleton’s “What Is Literature?” (2012) or Raymond Williams’s keyword “Literature,” which could eventually be followed by a survey of poststructuralist interventions (Derrida, Foucault, and Barthes) and so on and so forth. But we veer away from this genealogy because “trans,” as a modifier, changes “literature” as an object. Genealogies of trans literatures emerge from surprising places—ephemera, magazines, sleaze, medical literature, memoir, sensationalizing news articles, comics, low-budget documentary film. By nature of the smuggling that has allowed trans literature to proliferate in, when necessary, subterranean ways, the forms and modes in which trans literatures appear have been indexed less to any theory of the novel than to the most efficacious and possible ways of narrating trans lives. To this end, we understand trans literatures to exceed a certain kind of normativizing cultural legibility, a certain kind of swanky hierarchy of “the literary.”

To venture a conjecture in the interrogative mood, we ask what these two fields, each with their distinct disciplinary approaches, do for each other. What can literary studies learn from trans studies and vice versa? Or, in simpler terms, what does trans do for literature and what does literature do for trans? To what extent and to what ends does trans push the literary to interrogate the relationship between gendered and racialized embodiment, social perception, and desire? How does trans recast literary history through the lens of its approaches to representation and expression? Conversely, how does the literary itself contribute to constructing and contesting what constitutes “trans”? What forms and lexicon does the literary offer for the aesthetic articulation of trans experience? How does the literary participate in the production of trans knowledges? In what ways does the literary elucidate the technologies through which colonial modernity has produced gender, sex, and sexuality as axes of power, privilege, risk, and precarity? How does the literary reproduce and re- or decolonize the trans imaginary? How does the literary translate—or resist translating—trans across local and global sites? Such questions make clear that trans and literature have something, many things, to learn from each other. Our wager in this issue: literary studies has much to learn from trans, just as trans has much to learn from literature.

Still, this issue is caught in a double bind. Too often trans is a closed circuit—trans literature does things for trans people (many of the things Sedgwick enumerates) and trans people only. If a thing called “trans literatures” is contoured by the relational stipulation that they are by, with, and for trans people, potentially separatist proclivities appear—and not without reason. Recent anti-trans animus demands paranoid reading; caution and resistance both in due turns. So we turn to each other: for self-preservation, for mutual aid, for trans care, knowledge, and survival. It’s safer to share with and within trans community. And yet the push for visibility as the marker of inclusivity pulls in the opposite direction. We know visibility is a trap and inclusion is also an enclosure. As Olúfé˙ mi O. Táíwò (2022) has shown, appropriations by liberal discourse are easy even as they narcotically mask the preclusion of broader change. In a symmetrical structure, trans literatures are similarly domesticated by didactic imperatives—the attempt to teach a non-trans public. And this risks (always the risk . . . ) foreclosing social intervention and reconfiguration; it risks, that is to say, the possibility of inclusion in a system that otherwise remains disinterested, if not openly hostile to us, at the exclusion of materially changing and redistributing the resources we have and the ways we see the world. There is more and other work trans literatures do and can do. In the streets. In the classroom. In the bedroom.

THE HOW; THE WHY

If there were strokes of synchrony, there were also strokes of jarring dissonance as we assembled this special issue. The second Trump administration has worked to rapidly change the landscape of social intelligibility—the who. In the first days of this administration, trans gender ostensibly no longer existed, by way of executive order. As of 2025, the United States recognizes but two genders: male and female. “‘Female’ means a person belonging, at conception, to the sex that produces the large reproductive cell,” and “‘Male’ means a person belonging, at conception, to the sex that produces the small reproductive cell” (The White House 2025). Never mind that sex differentiation does not occur until about six weeks after conception. Under these new circumstances—these new definitions which aim to choke old taxonomies—asking “who” trans literature is for becomes nonsensical. Trans literature is for no one; there is no trans; there is no trans literature.

Underlying the widespread cultural panic that trans evokes, the reason for this attempted surgical excision of trans from public life, is another question of “who?” Judith Butler’s Who’s Afraid of Gender? (2024) points to the who seeking far more than merely banning trans literatures.5 Those who are “afraid of gender” (namely, Evangelism, the far right, and trans exclusionary radical feminism, among authoritarian others) position it as a phantasm, a reservoir for wide-ranging fears that constellate around the loss of power. Whether in discussions of sports, education, equal access, unionization, healthcare, or carceral policies, trans has become a proxy and is, again and again, positioned at the center of the discourse. In this battle over language and cultural ascendency, literature gets caught in the crosshairs. This is nothing new. As Jodi Melamed has shown in Represent and Destroy (2011), post-war liberalism’s re-making of race—in particular, the installment of “formal anti-racism” (Melamed 2011, 4) through the race novel—served as a liberal method of schooling its citizenry in the subject of difference. Post-war literary studies have served as a particular historical site of, and a cultural technology for, educating the American public about liberal racial orders. Under the guise of progress and equality are pedagogies of normalizing, surveilling, and policing racial orders. Melamed periodizes three successive phases within this project of “official or state-recognized US antiracisms: racial liberalism (1940s to 1960s), liberal multiculturalism (1980s to 1990s), and neoliberal multiculturalism (2000s)” (1), the trajectory that Melamed traces is a nested story about trans/of color incorporation into liberal capitalism, beginning with popular reporting on gender transition in the 1950s that stressed, above all else, the role of tolerance in liberal capitalist modernity, on into the ascendency of some trans novels as New York Times Bestsellers in the 2010s.

But what comes after (neo)liberal multiculturalism for trans literature? This returns us to the immediate present: to book banning, prohibitions on teaching certain topics or texts, and the attempt to scrub transness from the official governmental tongue (apparently, Stonewall was a riot for LGB people only) (Tsvetkova 2025). Surely prohibition is the lingua franca of authoritarianism. But there is more at stake: the sense that the texts themselves contain a wrenching power. In Melamed’s terms, “It is important to note that racial-liberal discourse never theorized what it was to read but rather assumed the transformative power it attributed to race novels resided within the texts themselves” (2011, 23). This argument echoes as we witness the hapless sorcerers of anti-trans animus that offer no alternative theory of reading, and indeed, dispense with the whole game entirely in book banning. The aim is not to “influence subject formation by creating conditions for people to self-identify” (Melamed 2011, 23) through the dissemination of literature, but the exact opposite: to decommission literature and literary criticism from any role in US governmentality and sociocultural life, and thereby forcibly preclude trans subject formation. In the coming weeks and months, no doubt, conditions for trans and queer people will remain tenuous and dire in ways we can’t fully predict. Against this, we turn to the literary, not as a site of policing national culture, but its antithesis: insisting and expanding on the possible lives that authoritarianism seeks to inter. This issue’s cover image visualizes such a turn to the literary. Interdisciplinary artist Chris Vargas’s Reading is Transcendental is an original wallpaper designed for the show “Scientia Sexualis,” and now hangs permanently in the public restrooms of the Institute for Contemporary Art in Los Angeles. The wallpaper, in Vargas’s words, “acts as a syllabus for and homage to the sprawling, unwieldy cannon of transgender studies” (quoted in Museum of Trans Hirstory & Art 2024). In this way, the public restroom, a contested site of trans life, becomes a site of trans reading.