

Deluded away: children and bondage in the early modern world

Urvashi Chakravarty

My paper will address the nexus of compulsion and consent as it pertains to children and 'willing' servitude in the early modern British Atlantic world and its representation in visual and cultural texts, paying particular attention to the role that children play (or are prescribed) in the arguments for unfree labour. From the impressment of children into performing companies in the sixteenth century for the purposes of providing fit entertainment to the infamous portrayals of enslaved Black and brown 'companions' in aristocratic portraits in premodern Europe, this essay argues that the labour and bondage of children as it is negotiated, mediated, and emolliated in visual and cultural texts articulates the frameworks of and provides the justifications for unfree labour in the British Atlantic world, even as it reveals the strategies of art and/as compulsion.

***Macbeth* in the theatre of compulsion**

Gerrard Passannante

In this essay, I ask how attention to compulsion (both as a formal structure and an experience) can help us think about the relationship between a literary work and its enabling contexts. While scholars have long understood the genre of God's judgments (narrative illustrations of the punishment of sin) as a source for the plots of early modern drama, my goal is not merely to read Shakespeare's *Macbeth* in light of the content of this ever-proliferating body of examples, but to think about how the compulsive form of the tradition—its endless repetitions—might shed light on the play's phenomenology. I also want to show how the compulsions of the play might help us understand the ambivalence of early modern experiences of providence. Constructing the play not as an adaptation of moralistic *exempla* but as a fever dream of their consumption, Shakespeare invites his audience to reflect on the obsessive desire to secure visible signs of God's "signifying will" and invites us to consider compulsion as a way of conjuring up the interpretive atmospheres of the past.

***Zwang* wars: Marx vs poetry**

Keston Sutherland

The famous description in *Das Kapital* of the 'mute compulsion of economic relations' [der stumme Zwang der ökonomischen Verhältnisse] that takes over the function of direct violence in capitalist societies is one of Marx's innumerable satiric allusions to poetry. Marx pinched the phrase from a dismal poem by the bourgeois jurist Friedrich Lucä, published in 1851. The phrase appears in the hundredth-time-reheated lament of a jealous lover, who asks why the object of his desire is happy to flirt with other men, but shuts up and recoils the instant he open his mouth or gets near: 'Nur meinen Worten folget Schweigen, / Nur meinem Nahen stummer Zwang.' (Friedrich Lucä may have lifted the phrase from a much earlier poem by the baroque poet Sigmund von Birken, published in 1673. Inquiring into the power of beauty, the poet asks, 'Ist sie ein stummer zwang?'). Marx's earlier uses of the word *Zwang* had mostly been

compounds: from the early sketch *Zur Kritik der Politischen Ökonomie* through the published critique in *Das Kapital*, Marx had studied the political economics of *Zwangkurs* (compulsory currency exchange rates set by the state), *Zwangsarbeit* (compulsory labour) and the total *Zwangsverhältnis* (relation of compulsion) that define capitalist production. But now, late on in *Das Kapital*, weary of abstractions, he turned to poetry. Marx's violently aggressive attachment to bad poetry helped create some of his most powerful critical insights into the logic of capital. This paper will look at one particular episode in Marx's long and complex embroilment in the lives of the poets: his altercation with the poet Ferdinand Freiligrath in 1859, over an essay in *Die Gartenlaube*, which decried the toxic, anti-poetical influence of Marx (this miserable virtuoso of hatred) on Freiligrath's formerly beautiful poetry. Freiligrath was lionised after the revolutions of 1848 as the most compelling revolutionary poet of nationalist Germany, the poet who moved the hearts of young men most forcefully and inspired thousands to take up arms. Marx indignantly rejected the claim that he had ever influenced Freiligrath, rubbished Freiligrath's compelling revolutionary poetry in private correspondence, and set about theorising an entirely different experience of compulsion, that would draw on the phraseology of bad German lyric to brutally ironise the prevailing liberal concept of violence.

The drive to change sex

S. Pearl Brilmyer

The first decades of the twentieth century in Germany saw the invention of new medical techniques that made sexual transition possible for the first time. In order to justify such care, doctors and patients tended to emphasize the urgent and inalterable nature of the desire to transition. Indeed, some went so far as to posit the existence of a “drive to change sex” (*Geschlechtsumwandlungstrieb*), an involuntary force that compelled (*zwang*) a person to transform their sex. This paper narrates the emergence of the notion of the “drive to change sex” as distinct from the “contrary sexual feeling” of the invert with which it had long been intertwined. Rather than chart the emergence of “trans identity,” however, I situate the drive to change sex in relation to a broader matrix of turn-of-the-century theories of compulsion, above all that of psychoanalysis. Through close attention to one of the earliest accounts of sexual transition, Karl Baer's 1907 autobiography, *Memoirs of a Man's Maiden Years* (published with an afterword by the sexologist Magnus Hirschfeld), I suggest that the “drive to change sex” indexes a larger shift in the conceptualization of compulsion, that is, from an external force acting upon the subject to an internally generated impulse that demands exterior adjustment.

Bewitching forms: Marianne Moore and the glamour of verse

Saskia Barnard

This article tests the possibility of glamour as a literary concept and aesthetic category. It begins by providing a brief history of glamour, detailing its origins in forms of occult practice and associated states of mind in which self-possession is compromised, such as bewitchment and

delusion. It also offers an evaluation of how scholars across various disciplines (art history, fashion history, literary studies, and philosophy) have conceptualised or historicised glamour. With these contexts in view, the article proposes an alternative approach to literary glamour from that offered by Judith Brown (2009); its case study is Marianne Moore's poem 'Those Various Scalpels' (1917; rev. 1935; rev. 1956). Moore's poem has often been read as a portrait of her glamorous contemporary Mina Loy; it has also been interpreted as a critique of the feminised aesthetic of glamour per se. Here, the versions of 'Those Various Scalpels' are taken as experiments in what a glamorous poem might be. This possibility is not simply contained in the poem's referents—not, that is, in its depiction of glamorous persons and objects—but in the state of cognition which its versification ostensibly strives to engender: that of being spellbound.

Critical homographomania

David Kurnick

This paper will identify and give a socio-theoretical account of a mini-tradition in literary criticism: book-length essays that aspire to total, line-by-line analyses of fictional texts. That this tradition exists at all is evidence of an undertheorized compulsive thread in modern criticism; that it is a queer (specifically gay male) tradition demands some account of the sociological coordinates of critical writing.

The best-known example founds the tradition: Roland Barthes's *S/Z: An Essay* (1974) conducts a famously slow interpretation of Balzac's short story "Sarrasine." Four years later, Samuel R. Delany's *The American Shore* performed a book-length exegesis of the science fiction story "Angouleme" by his friend Thomas Disch that constitutes an explication of SF's representational logic startlingly reminiscent of Barthes' unfolding of realism's underpinnings. Finally, the German ethnographer and novelist Hubert Fichte, in an unfinished essay published posthumously in 1988, began a similar line-by-line tour of Henry James's *Washington Square*.

All the critics (and almost all the fiction-writers) I've listed are gay men. They are also all theoreticians of gay cultures of promiscuity. The coincidence underlines the formal resemblance of these books of literary criticism to another gay male genre: the scrupulous accounting of sexual partners that occurs in the "stud file" or sex diary. Modular in form, obsessively detailed, affectively minimal, written in a style where description and interpretation asymptotically converge, this genre prompts reflection on the overlap between the compulsion to map the socio-sexual world and the ambition to critically exhaust a text. My paper's aims are threefold: to analyze what looks like sexual compulsion as also a will to conceptual totalization; to unfold the perverse energies underlying a major thread of criticism; and to suggest that sexual subcultures find their way into criticism in ways hard to capture via the language of contemporary queerness (this is queerness not as beneficent world-building but as maniacally fixated world-mapping).

Animal fascinations: from *The Peregrine* to *Wild London*

Lewis Wynn

This paper adopts the psychoanalytic category of fascination as a means of exploring the particular hold which falcons—and especially peregrine falcons—have had on the modern imagination. Taking J.A. Baker’s *The Peregrine* (1967) as its leading example, it considers the incompatible regimes of understanding which separate representations have issued, from Colin Simms’ *Gyr Falcon Poems* (2007) to the BBC’s 2026 documentary *Wild London*. Rather than supporting naïve conceptions of ‘becoming animal’ (or, indeed, ‘becoming-animal’) as a means of bridging the gap between species, however, the fascination which peregrines exert over these authors is instead read as attesting to the very insurmountability of a fundamental divide between man and animal: a divide shaped by the burdens of self-consciousness, and the ambivalent consolations of art.

Noisy compulsion: Wynter, Lacan, Marx

Seb Franklin

Why did Sylvia Wynter turn to the computational language of cognitive psychology and neuroscience in order to theorise the radical potential of aesthetic forms? In essays including “1492: A New World View” (1991), “Rethinking Aesthetics” (1992) and “No Humans Involved” (1994), Wynter began to use concepts of “code” and “programming” to posit representations as inputs through which a specific kind of biological-symbolic entity—the human—is compelled to reproduce a certain image of itself. It is only when the functions of this biological-symbolic mechanism become humanly knowable, Wynter argued, that they can be “consciously, and consensually” altered. In this talk, I will connect this apparent turn in Wynter’s work to the novel synthesis of Marx’s theory of value and Jacques Lacan’s cybernetic psychoanalysis in her earlier, unpublished study of racial slavery in the Caribbean, *Black Metamorphosis*. In so doing, I will argue that that Wynter’s writing on ostensibly self-regulating systems (economic; psychic; cognitive) represents a theory of compulsion and counter-compulsion in the expansive network of racial-capitalist modernity.