

ABSTRACTS:
**CONFERENCE "FANTASTIC BODY TRANSFORMATIONS IN ENGLISH
LITERATURE, FILM, AND ART"**

Rita Antoni

(University of Szeged)

"...undead, undead, undead..."

Aging and Bestiality: Representation of Modern Vampirism in *The Hunger*

In this paper my objective is to trace a unique form of modern vampirism represented in the film *The Hunger* (1983), directed by Tony Scott. One of the most striking classical motifs beside the haunting of Bela Lugosi in the song by Bauhaus is the recurring of the beast-like character of the vampires: here in this movie they do not just suck blood, but change from eroticism to bestiality and the contrast of instincts and the beautiful appearance and surroundings of the main figure are abrupt ones.

Although it is a modern representation, set in contemporary New York, we can find some classical motifs haunting the plot, such as the nineteenth-century motive of the mad scientist, who is trying to transgress the boundaries of human existence and trying to find the elixir of life in a scientific institute. But in this vampire story not only the ancient fear of death is represented in a subversive form, but also the fear of aging, and this fear is brought here in an extreme material reality: the horror of being helplessly old, but unable to die. This state is represented as more horrifying than the ancient fear of dying.

In this story vampires are not only represented as gendered but sexed and sexually active as well, as opposed to most of traditional ones; what is more, they are enacting an unconventional form of sexual behaviour (regarding representations of mainstream cinema). The paper analyses the film in comparison with classical Gothic texts, interwoven with the gender dynamics implied in the works.

Silvia Antosa

(University of Pescara)

Fantastic Body Transformations in Jeanette Winterson's Novels

My paper intends to explore how the configuration of the body as a fantastic entity is a central concern in Jeanette Winterson's novels. My thesis is that she follows an itinerary which goes from the assertion of the lesbian body of the female protagonist (see her first novel, *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit*, 1985) to a deconstruction and a fantastic re-mapping of bodily boundaries, which is developed in her subsequent novels, particularly in *The Passion* (1987), *Sexing the Cherry* (1989) and *Art & Lies* (1995). Winterson creates fictional worlds dominated by gigantic women, floating dancers who teach how to transform one's bodies into points of light, men and women who cross-dress to conceal their sexual identity and easily move from one world into another, characters who undertake imaginative journeys with their own body and characters who physically inhabit a timeless dimension. The climax of the Wintersonian search is reached in *The PowerBook* (2000), in which bodies become de-corporealised entities within the world wide web. In the virtual world of the novel, both narrator and reader are allowed to transform at leisure, since their bodily bounds have literally been erased to give space to a new "virtual" body that defies any vivid representation.

The different configurations of the protagonists' fantastic bodies leads Winterson not only to subvert the apparent constructedness of sexual categories and gender differences, but also to remould reality as a multifaceted entity in which corporeality is no longer subsumed by the spiritual power of the mind. Body and soul become one, and thus the Western system of thought is replaced with a fluid conception of its basic tenets: space, time, matter and body are all connected into a single dimension.

Susanne Bach

(University of Mannheim)

Extreme Body Challenges - Travel in Space, Time and War

Travel broadens the mind, but it can also harm the body. In this paper, I would like to look at the descriptions, contextualisations, and consequences of diverse body transformations /mutilations in extreme travel situations in contemporary English and American texts. Mary Doria Russell's *The Sparrow* (1996) and *The Children of God* (1998) focus on the exploration of an alien planet by humans. In the beginning already, space travel takes its toll on the mission members, and on arrival one participant is mutilated by aliens who at the same time do and do not understand his bodily pain. He is raped, and the sinews of his hands are all cut. A pregnant mission member is the target of ridicule, the perception of a changeable body is an 'alien' concept for the aliens. In this context, the comparison of the human to the 'other' body and its vulnerability/mutability (self as other) is central.

In Michael Faber's novella *The Hundred and Ninety-Nine Steps* (2001), Siân, a woman archaeologist, has lost a leg in Bosnia. Unknowingly she has also been carrying a piece of tarmac in her body. She, however, suspects to be suffering from cancer. Only after having been confronted with the eighteenth-century confession of a father who slit the throat of his already dead daughter, is she able to come to terms with her own wounds – those of body and soul. Here, the female body as an object of diverse forms of violence in all times is one of the focal points.

Finally, I would like to look at another form of extreme travel, namely time travel. Audrey Niffenegger's *The Time Traveller's Wife* (2004) oscillates between Clare's and Henry's narrative, showing how the grown-up Henry, who - due to a so far unknown disease - is able to travel back in time, and to meet his (future) wife as a young girl. He pays a high (bodily) price – it will kill him. Time and space converge on his body; proving that violating nature's laws will eventually be punished.

Of course, these summaries can be no more than rough sketches, but all four novels portray the body *in extremis*, and a comparative and at the same time *ex negativo* reading of the body as self and as other will expose the underlying conceptions which mark our own unconscious perception of a 'normal', a 'healthy' and especially unharmed body. Supported by predominantly cultural and psychological theories, my paper will trace the body in three extreme travel situations. By concentrating on these borderline situations, the novels can easily show the mis/conceptions and the re/constructions of a 'normal' body.

Monika Coghén

(University of Cracow)

"Fantastic Transformations of the Female Body in Romantic Literature"

The female body is subject to fearful transformations in Romantic literature. The motif of beautiful women turning into decaying bodies haunts both Romantic fiction and drama: the body of Elizabeth changes into the decaying body of his mother in Frankenstein's dream, and the body of Myrrha changes into the body of his bloody ancestor Semiramis in Saradanapalus's nightmare in Byron's tragedy, and these transformations clearly originate in the Gothic tradition. In Romantic poetry women show an affinity to serpents: In Coleridge's "Christabel" beautiful female eyes turn into the eyes of a snake and Keats's "Lamia" is based on the ancient legend of a snake turning into a woman. The paper closely examines these transformations and their implications.

Mariaconcetta Costantini

(University "G. d'Annunzio" of Chieti-Pescara)

"Magic?– or miracle?": Metamorphosis and Monstrosity in *The Beetle* by Richard Marsh

The focus of my paper is the uncanny body of an Egyptian monster, a metamorphic being that haunts late-Victorian Londoners in Richard Marsh's novel *The Beetle*. This fictional creature, which crosses any kinds of social and ontological borders, has been investigated in few recent critical studies. But there are other aspects of its disturbing corporeality that require investigation. After enjoying great popularity in the late-Victorian age, *The Beetle* (1897) was long neglected by critics and readers, and has raised new interest only in the last two decades. Critics have so far investigated the gender, sexual and racial implications of the Beetle's weird body, which has been connected with the threats posed by colonial hatred, feminist claims and homosexuality at the time of its publication. My intention is to explore two other meanings which the body acquires in the text and which contribute to make it a complex, opaque signifier. Both meanings emerge in the relation that the creature establishes with its victims, by exercising its extraordinary powers of metamorphosis and mesmerism.

First of all, I intend to investigate the disruptive function that the creature fulfils in relation to the British class system. In contrast with its antagonists, who betray a conservative (and prejudiced) attitude in social matters, the Beetle brings to the fore the disparities that created class resentment at the time. The grotesque transformations of its victims run counter to the rigid hierarchy of the British class-structure and unveil the responsibilities of a ruling class that condemned the destitute to starvation and death.

A second aspect to be taken into account is the creature's double identity as an insect and a human being. Its ability to challenge the rules of species differentiation is positively connoted in some excerpts, in which its vital combination of animal and human features counteracts the weakness or the sheer cruelty of the human worshippers of rationality. Particularly interesting, in my view, is the ambiguous relation it establishes with Sydney Atherton, an inventor of mass-destruction weapons whom the Beetle addresses as one of his "kin". Their bond, which has been disregarded by scholars, is the semantic pivot of the novel, since it exposes the author's fears of the inhumane consequences of progress.

Repeatedly associated with murderous aims and actions, Atherton is far more corrupt than his beastly 'double'. The second part of my paper will be devoted to the investigation of their complex role-play, which turns the scientist, the laboratory and various technological products into tokens of moral degeneration. The Beetle's metamorphic nature and mesmeric power (also called "animal magnetism") can be related to the spiritual concept of the *anima*. This concept, which entailed the merging of human and animal life into a harmonious whole, was considered a source of cosmic energy in ancient philosophies and religions.

Despite their fierce connotations, the textual references to archaic rituals and to mesmeric practices configure the Beetle's body as a vehicle of the vital flux and the passionate primitivism of the *anima(l)*, from which a declining Britain might draw new energy. But this possibility of regeneration is denied in the text. Atherton himself, who is initially fascinated by his *alter ego*, resists the temptation of 'going wild'. Like the other humans, he chases the freakish creature and strives to destroy it, thus championing a civilisation that is repeatedly connoted in terms of vanity, arrogance, exploitation and cold cerebralism.

What I mean to demonstrate is that the fantastic body of the Beetle is a plurisemantic, ambiguous signifier, which escapes any simplistic reading. The complex ideological framework of the novel, in which different theories ranging from science to spiritualism are woven together (i.e. post-Darwinian concepts, anthropology, phrenology, mesmerism, metempsychosis, transmigration, etc.), confirms the hermeneutic 'openness' of the monster's

uncanny corporeality. In addition to incarnating the late-Victorians' fears of sexual and racial alterity, the Beetle is a warning against the perversions of scientific progress (epitomised by the *arch-monstrous* Atherton). But it is also a reminder of the existence of 'magic' forces that the 'civilised' Britons fail to decipher and revive.

Ines Detmers

(University of Dresden)

**'Of ragdolls and other monstrous bodies': Dissection and Resurrection as
(Hyper)Textual Strategies in Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* and Its Re-workings by Liz
Lochhead**

At least from the mid-eighteenth century onwards, "the dead body business" (1995: 19), as Tim Marshall puts it, increasingly became of cultural interest in the medical/physiological and/or the judicial discourse of the time. Thus, on the one hand, the corpse represented an "auto-icon" (ibid.), an 'anatomous artefact', illustrating the structures and functions of the human organism. On the other hand, for instance, The Murder Act of 1752 makes the dissection of all murderers compulsory; furthermore, it declares the necessity to add 'some Terror and peculiar mark of Infamy' to the convict's punishment. However, England's surgeons were extremely short of human corpses and as a result the graverobbing market flourished. From there it is but a small step to Mary Shelley's novel *Frankenstein*, first published in 1818. Among other things, Shelley explores aspects of what Anne Mellor famously called "medical Prometheanism" (1988: 105), i.e., an ethical problematisation of components of the combined processes of resurrecting and dissecting a dead body in order to restore life to it by means of galvanisation.

Relating those issues sketched above with ideas expressed by Michel Foucault in *Discipline and Punish* and Pierre Bourdieu in *Distinction*, my paper is going to discuss Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*, Liz Lochhead's drama *Blood and Ice* (1982) and a sequence of poems entitled "Dreaming Frankenstein" (1984). Firstly, taking Shelley's novel as a basis I am going to analyse the polyvalent relations between the 'scientist-resurrector-dissector' Victor Frankenstein and his 'monstrous creature'. Thus, it will be argued that the narrative principles of the novel represent and/or mirror the idea of an early example of 'human engineering'. In order to show how these aesthetic principles do not exclusively work on the intradiegetic level of the text but also tackle the metafictional question of the ambivalent role of the artist-writer-relationship (Shelley/Frankenstein), I am then going to look at the two hypertextual examples by Lochhead. By concentrating on the author's usage of body imagery (e.g., the ragdoll) as well as metaphors of (literary) (pro-)creation, it will be argued that the transposition of the 'plot of substituted corpses' as well as the 'inter-textual resurrection' of Mary Shelley herself, based on diaries, letters and a literary biography, mark important aesthetic key-strategies in Lochhead's hypertextual 'anatomical re-workings' of Shelley's novel.

Derek M. De Silva

(University of Salzburg)

Metamorphosis in the Novels of E.M. Forster

From the beginning of his literary career in the congenial climate of the Edwardian phantasy Forster always felt able to draw on the resource of metamorphosis. It remained for him one of the characteristic operations of the poetic principle, transfiguring day-to-day reality and annulling or circumventing its restrictions. In one of his early short stories a young girl changes into a beech tree to escape the advances not of Apollo but of a modern Midas while in *A Passage to India* an elderly English lady mutates into a Hindu goddess and a lowly punkah-wallah reveals himself as an avatar of Godhead. In the proposed essay I hope to

examine the function and significance of Forster's use of what was for him at once literary device and metaphysical possibility and to point out its relation to his particular preoccupations.

Pavlina Ferfeli

(University of Athens)

**‘Foam on the Stretched Muscles of a Mouth’: Mina Loy
and the Resisting Body of Becoming**

With her ‘pugnacious poetics of the body’, Mina Loy, the British modern poet, visual artist and feminist, succeeded posthumously in reviving the international literary community. In this paper, I would like to show how in her poetry and art Loy castigates cultural practices of body modification through irony, symbolism, myth-making and reversal. I will then proceed to an elucidation of Loy’s notion of embodied identity, one of transformable process and endless becoming, grounded on novel perceptions of space, matter, flesh and narrative.

Loy presents familiar stereotypes of corporeality, suggesting that it is the female body which infects man with embodiment, being the only ‘dim inheritor / of this undeniable flesh’. Loy also shows how a body of lived consciousness is turned by societal pressure into a plaything, or, in Foucauldian terms, a docile, subjected body: ‘Her eliminate flesh of fashion..... A tempered tool’. Most importantly though, faced with the risky business of a feminine embodiment of desire, we receive a startling testimony of the treatment that the female desiring body receives in society:

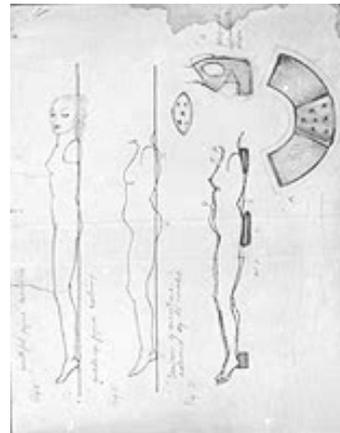
Crucifixion
Of a busy body
Longing...
....
Wracked arms
Index extremities
In vacuum (Love Songs to Joannes, XXXI)

Loy’s response to the western tradition which deforms and shatters the female body is the creation of dynamic bodies of resistance, transformation and constant becoming. Offering fantastic representations of the human resistant body, Loy defies those cultural practices which attempt to control embodiment. Her own body of resistance is described at birth as ‘a clotty bulk of bifurcate fat’, a mythic little goddess of the flesh, a ‘mystero-chemico Nemesis’. Herself giving birth, Loy presents a grotesque female body which is transformable, both transformed and transforming:

Rises from the subconscious
Impression of a cat
With blind kittens
I am that cat
.....
Rises from the sub-conscious
Impression of small animal carcass (Parturition)

A body of resistance is not only limited to grotesque apparitions. Loy also celebrates the hybrid body of the hermaphrodite, the ‘Crab-Angel’ of ‘masquerade sex’, ‘pigmy arms’ and ‘bow legs’, one which remains untouched by social inscriptions, suggesting new, dynamic ways for bodies of fluidity and unfolding to come into being.

I include some of Mina Loy's artistic works to highlight her lingering interest in fantastic body transformation:



Milada Franková
(University of Brno)

Gor and the Giant: Grotesque Bodies in Social Combat

The frequent presence of fantastic bodies in literature and art covers a huge range in terms of themes and purposes aimed at. Throughout the ages fantastic body transformations have represented all kinds of ideas and participated in various debates. The proposed paper will examine two novels by contemporary British writers which are distant in their time settings, but related through their concerns. The titular figure of each of them owns a grotesque body, which is central to the story of the novel and its strong element of social critique. Eventually, both bodies are claimed by medical science with ethical issues inevitably looming over.

Maureen Duffy's *Gor Saga* (1981) has an artificially produced hero – a hybrid of a gorilla and human. In a dystopic landscape, in addition to social and political upheaval, there is Gor battling with his identity and in mortal danger that his “creator” will want to terminate the experiment and study parts of Gor's body under the microscope.

Hilary Mantel's *The Giant, O'Brien* (1998) of the title entertains eighteenth-century crowds as a freak show. O'Brien's body and eventually his bones are also a matter of fascination to doctor Hunter, the famous anatomist and dissector of corpses from the gallows. In both novels the grotesque bodies of the eponymous heroes play an essential part in the social and moral debate of then and now.

Anna Kérchy

(University of Szeged)

**Grotesque Body Modification, Freaked Femininity and Narrative Self-decomposition in
Angela Carter's *The Passion of New Eve***

The paper proposes to examine fantastic body transformations, grotesque corporealities, freakings of femininity and nervous narrative self-(de)compositions in Angela Carter's *The Passion of New Eve*. The picaresque novel constitutes the transgender and transgenre autobiography of the ineradicably masculine, young Evelyn who is captured by a group of militant feminist Amazons to be surgically transformed in an elaborate sex change operation into a perfect woman, New Eve, designed as bearer of the New Messiah of Anti-Thesis. Eve/lyn, thereafter wandering in dystopian settings of a deserted America, is doomed to witness and identify with grotesque embodiments of femininity. Among them, the most memorable "bodies-in-process" are Mother and Tristessa. Mother, the ingenious scientist and self-made maternal goddess conducting Eve/lyn's surgery, displays two tiers of surgically transplanted nipples grafted on her enormous chest and a beard on her mask-like face, while Tristessa, Eve/lyn's rediscovered boyhood icon is a biologically male transvestite actress who performs in drag the illusory essence of Woman, and finally fecundates Eve/lyn. These grotesque body modifications are theatricalized, spectacular freakings which demythologize the ideologically prescribed gender constructions by tracing a topography of fragmented, fetishized, freaked female anatomy. Moreover, these distorted corporealities infect the narrative by deforming the text through speaking up in a disharmonious, disagreeing autobiographical narrative voice, (con)fusing male impersonator's writing, feminist tract, post-operative transsexual autobiography and body dismorphic discourse in a troubling textual metamorphosis.

David Malcolm

(University of Gdańsk)

Atrocissimum est Monoceros: Metamorphosis in James Lasdun's *The Horned Man*

James Lasdun is a successful and many-sided contemporary poet, short-story writer and novelist. Motifs of borders, transgressions, and transformations occur throughout his work. Such concerns have a biographical dimension. Born into an Anglo-Jewish family, Lasdun writes of that family's experience in the poem "American Mountain" from his collection *Landscape with Chainsaw* (2001). He notes that their upper-class "accents" separated them from the "masses," "while our looks and name / did the same for the upper classes." He later describes his family as "Anglophone Russian-German apostate Jews // mouthing Anglican hymns at church / till we renounced that too." Many transgressions and transformations within Lasdun's writing occur within realist conventions, for example the death of the grandmother in "Property" (*The Silver Age* (1985)) or the corruption of the protagonists of "Dead Labour" (*The Silver Age*) and "Three Evenings" (*Three Evenings, and Other Stories* (1992)). However, these motifs are frequently coupled with grotesque and sinisterly disturbing elements. It is notable that in 1994 Lasdun co-edited with Michael Hofmann a collection of new versions of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, entitled *After Ovid*. One of Lasdun's own contributions to the collection retells the story of Erysichthon, whose greed is punished by an insatiable hunger that drives him to consume his own body and finally be transformed into a "double orificed" "yard / Of concrete pipe."

Lasdun's successful novel from 2002, *The Horned Man*, shows the author developing the grotesque and supernatural aspects of bodily transformation. The novel's protagonist, Lawrence Miller, is a figure under considerable pressure. *Inter alia*, he is an Englishman

teaching at a US university; his American wife has left him; he is a male in an institutional climate of rigorous gender-centred political correctness; his sexual impulses are confused; he carries the baggage of terrible psychological damage done to him in childhood by British class attitudes. The novel itself is metamorphic, for psychological-social fiction, grounded in the conventions of the realist text, changes into the Gothic and the supernatural. Lawrence finds he has a *Doppelgänger*, the raffish and reprobate Eastern European Bogumil Trumilcik. He also develops a horn that grows grotesquely, and very substantially, from his forehead.

Lawrence's fantastic body transformation is multi-functional within *The Horned Man*. It helps to achieve a genre polymorphism that is typical of late twentieth-century British fiction. It is a metaphor of deep sexual disturbance and of the consequences of repressive sexual conformity. In addition, through the novel's references to medieval culture and science, it suggests an ethnic and religious liminality that places Lasdun's work in the context of other Anglo-Jewish writers. The paper concludes by suggesting that fantastic body transformation may be a particularly appropriate motif for presenting racial and ethnic instabilities.

Sarolta Marinovich-Resch

(University of Szeged)

"Truthful but fantastic": Virginia Woolf's *Orlando*

"Truthful but fantastic": this paradoxical phrase from Virginia Woolf's *Diary* illuminates *Orlando* as a tale of fantastic body transformation. As we are reading *Orlando* the lord/lady Orlando is a nobleperson first encountered as a young man in the sixteenth century, followed through the courts of Elizabeth I and Charles II to an ambassadorship in Turkey where *he* becomes a *she*, then seen as a literary lady aristocrat in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century England, and last presented as a prize-winning female author in the 'present' moment of airplanes and motorcars. This fantastic life, free-flying over the gravities of history, as Woolf insisted, is truthful to its author's effort to re-imagine history.

The objective of this paper is to show how in this tale of a fantastic body transformation, the metamorphosis of sexuality corresponds to a metamorphosis of history, how the terms of history become Orlando's terms, how history itself becomes Orlando's life story, how the history Woolf had always defined as masculine becomes feminine, how this fantastic tale of sexchange offers an alternative truth, a public history of the private woman.

Joseph Eugene Mullin

(University of Minho, Portugal)

"Philip Roth's *Breast*: A Strange Body Transformation Indeed."

The Breast by Philip Roth (1972) is, in part, a parody of Kafka's "Metamorphosis". It may be discussed in its relation to Kafka and its variations on Kafka's fantastic transformation. It may be discussed in relation to Ovid and the entire literature of metamorphoses. It may be discussed in relation to a period in Roth's own career, running from 1969 through 1973, from *Portnoy's Complaint*, through *Our Gang* to *The Great American Novel*, when Roth was preoccupied with themes and structures of Menippean satire. It may be discussed in the satirical terms that Roth outlines in his discussion of those books and that period, which appear in his *Reading Myself and Others* (1985). And, finally, it may be discussed as one of the three books about the character David Kepesh, finding its relation with *The Professor of Desire* (1977) and *The Dying Animal* (2001).

The chief emphasis will be on the interplay between gothic and parody, since this interplay provides a comic counterpoint to the disturbing and bizarre tale of a man turned into a female breast. The reader of *The Breast* finds himself again and again shaking his head that

Philip Roth ever had the wit to conceive and the brass to compose this parody of Kafka—and then the imagination to push the entire concept even further, for Roth’s poor patient has to rationalize his “adjustment” to his remarkable transformation.

Gergely Nagy

(University of Szeged)

Mythologizing the Body: Mythological Subjects and the Body in Tolkien and Herbert

In fantastic literature, texts which place unusual emphasis on a quasi-religious, theological discourse, incorporating it into the basic representational strategies of their fictions, are often termed ‘mythopoeic’. The works of J.R.R. Tolkien are perhaps the best example; but as the paper shows, Frank Herbert’s *Dune* series could equally well qualify for the title. Both corpora feature characters who enter the human world from a ‘supernatural’, sacred sphere or enter that sphere from the human world. An age-old mythological topos (the transition of the hero to the other world and back), this transition is also marked as a transformation, and in the work of both authors, very special characters are created: subjects who can be termed ‘mythological’ not only because of their prevailing representation as ‘supernatural’, but also because in their figure several representational discourses meet to produce them, thereby truly shifting them from the context of other, more ordinary characters.

The paper investigates one aspect of the representation of such ‘mythological subjects’: the body and its changes. The discussion is centered on Sauron’s figure in Tolkien’s *Lord of the Rings* (and related writings); for some extent also the Nazgul and Gollum; and Leto Atrides II in Herbert’s *God Emperor of Dune*. As will be seen, the transformation of the body in these cases are very specifically marked out from among other markings and changes of the body, and consequently the texts’ ways of representing, narrating this transformed body as a theologically contextualized, ‘othered’ and othering center of discourse effectively lifts these figures above anyone else (anyone else’s speech, narration and meanings) in these stories.

Pascal Nicklas

(University of Leipzig)

Shape-Shifting as Gothic Trope.

Gothic Literature has an exact historical starting point and yet negotiates a fundamentally human set of feelings: fear and horror. The historic contingency of the gothic goes hand in hand with its conventions. One of the most important features besides ancient castles and trap-doors is the transformation of bodies. My paper will attempt a typology of these transformations and offer some explanations in the context of the gothic in literature and compare it with the function and fascination gothic metamorphoses have for cinematic presentations of the master shape-shifter: Dracula. The instability and mutability of the signifier in language/literature finds its counterpart in the ultimately modernist conception of Stoker’s count whose shape-shifting threatens not only Victorian visions of bourgeois sanity but becomes one of the central concerns of cinematic visuality. The technical possibility to make metamorphosis visible in film offers at once a way of capturing the elusive and gives more power to the threat by making it present.

Margaret Rose

(Milan State University)

Mutilated and Fragmented Bodies in Contemporary British Drama

Theatre is the artform par excellence that produces a spectacle where the live body engages the spectator's attention. How, I shall be asking, has late twentieth-century and twenty-first

century drama represented the body. Beckett stands as a pioneer in this respect; in several of his short plays a head or a mouth combine with the other theatre languages to produce a fascinatingly original symbolism. In more recent times images of the body have grown more violent. Plays by Howard Barker, Anthony Nielson, Mark Ravenhill and the late Sarah Kane show mutilated, violated bodies, while works by Martin Crimp contain bodies so ephemeral they seem to get "lost in the script". I shall be exploring these works in the context of present-day drama and society from the point of view of text and performance.

Michaela Schwarzbauer

(University Mozarteum, Salzburg)

“...you have but slumbered here, while these visions did appear“

Fantastic Body Transformations in Benjamin Britten's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and Henry Purcell's *The Fairy Queen*

Body transformations are an intrinsic aspect in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* by Benjamin Britten and *The Fairy Queen* by Henry Purcell. Although both works of music are inspired by William Shakespeare's comedy *A Midsummer Night's Dream* there seems to be a fundamental difference in the dramatic significance of transformations.

It will be the aim of my paper to compare the impact of transformations and to evaluate body transformations on the stage as an experience that may, on the one hand, serve as a source of entertainment – fulfilling an audience's delight in the fantastic – and that can, on the other hand, also convey a tragic element – in losing one's identity – or illumination – in discovering new dimensions of one's own personality after a process of “re-transformation”.

Curtiss Short

(Washington University in St. Louis, Missouri, USA)

Withdrawing Bodies: William Burroughs & Corporeal Subversion

I shall be looking at the works of American writer William S. Burroughs (1914-1997) in how they contribute to both an understanding as well as problematizing of the human body in its social, biological, and phenomenological conceptualizations. Burroughs' most lasting contribution to social and cultural thought has been his contention that the twentieth century has made addiction the preeminent condition for existence itself. His works take on issues such as control, the self and identity, linguistics, and the body itself as both delineation of self and, simultaneously, oppressor of this self. For Burroughs, any understanding of society, culture, and technology must begin with a fundamental consideration of the human body as naturally subordinated to material controlling forces. Many of these very forces come from within the suffering agent himself, as during the process of withdrawal, at which time the habituated body begins – in Burroughs' metaphor – to shut down, turn on itself, release pent-up substances that at once define its participation in “normal” social intercourse and simultaneously symbolize this body's inevitable loss of normality. Men are reduced to their fundamental substances without the drug, are transformed into giant insects, devoid of any resemblance to cognizant creatures. Elaborating on Burroughs' proposition that the body-under-duress is a viable ontological category, I shall focus on his conceptualization of the body-in-withdrawal, that is, the addicted body of the drug user who is caught between the “somatic” and the “infiltrated,” between the social norm and the social deviation, and investigate the etiological and morphological categories of disease and virus as they inform his understanding of the mutating or devolving human body. Approaching these issues of control, socialization, viral infection and “the healthy body,” as all being elements in the same discourse of bodily subjection, I hope to show how this most peculiar body-in-withdrawal that

pervades his works represents the modern human's inability to shake off the highly detrimental forces of societal normalization, political/judicial control, and technological supplementation. In conclusion, I shall offer both the possibilities (as they are offered by Burroughs himself) for overcoming the flesh as well as the limitations in Burroughs' cosmology and political and literary praxis in this overcoming.

Christopher Smith

(University of East Anglia)

'The Silly Gentleman and the Beast': David Garnett's *Lady into Fox* (1922)

'Puss, Puss,' is Mr Tebrick's conventional way of addressing his wife, the carefully brought up Silvia. Perhaps he should have been more mindful of a forename constituting a double hint referring to different spheres; he might have done even better to recall that before her marriage she was called 'Miss Fox', For, though a fully grown woman, she is metamorphosed into a vixen. Not surprisingly taken aback, her husband does all he can to minimize the consequences, sartorially as well as socially, trying to find food she will enjoy, moving house for her greater comfort and safety. His efforts are vain against the pull of the wild.

A run-away success on publication as the second of David Garnett's books, preceded only by his anonymous *Dope Darling*, *Lady into Fox* offers a contrast between its fantasy and its cool matter-of-fact manner. Like an eighteenth-century *conte philosophe*, this novella gives free rein to imagination while maintaining perfect control. An ordered and highly respectable society, like the decent husband, harassed but still loving, is juxtaposed with a character turned feral. Related to Esop, reflecting the hunt, tintured with natural history, even ethology, and linked to English schoolboys' fondness for trying to tame wild animals, *Lady into Fox* is a delicately ironic, quietly amusing tale of a tragedy in human relationships, sympathetic yet percipient. Urbanity is tested by the vixen's appetites, and of two different responses to her the traditional countrymen's is shown as the least worthy.

Lady into Fox, which is deliciously illustrated by deceptively simple woodcuts by its author's wife, will yield more when related to the early life and experiences of David Garnett. Another dimension comes from some comparisons with *Man in the Zoo*, which approaches related themes from a rather different angle. More general background information is found in the successive volumes of Garnett's acclaimed, if not entirely reliable autobiography.

Mauro Spicci

(State University of Milan)

The Dialectics of Self-Anatomy: Dissection, Bloodshed and Autoptic Visions in Shakespeare's *Macbeth*

The paper I intend to offer tries to organize the parts of the body scattered throughout Shakespeare's tragedies through the logic of fragmentation, which informs Renaissance anatomical culture as well as Early Modern English drama. In my paper I focus mainly on Shakespeare's *Macbeth*: the play revolves from the opening scene around the horrible dichotomy of inhumanly profaning/profaned human bodies, which either physically enact or suffer the effects of regicide and political dismemberment.

My paper is the final outcome of a critical anatomical operation. Bodily fragmentation is both the main method and the ultimate outcome of anatomy, which, by the end of the sixteenth century, seems to satisfy more than any traditional medical method the growing need to *see* and to *touch* the body (in the sixteenth century, anatomy was indeed a branch of *anthropology*, and strongly contributed to the creation of brand new discourses around man and body; see Van Delft, 2004, p. 35). Renaissance anatomy transforms the human body into a fleshy object to dissect, but it also shows the inviolable region of the interior space of the

body. As a consequence, Renaissance anatomy offers a privileged perspective whence it is possible to unravel the complex network of interrelated discourses around the body (in the anatomical theatres the body was at the same time an object of scrutiny, encoding and *dramatic* experimentation). What prompted me to anatomise *Macbeth* was, first of all, the massive recurrence of the term “blood”, which testifies that the play arises from the so-called “culture of dissection”. In the play, blood turns out to be the colour of the primordial matter that fills both the individual and the cosmic body, into which Macbeth plunges his own blade. Furthermore, circularity, which is the hallmark of supernatural creatures, acts on human beings by virtue of the circular “cyclicality” with which blood irrorates human bodies. The spatial dialectics between *inside* and *outside* transform bloodshed into a spectacle that both ensnares and pushes away the observers. So the eye-like king Duncan, petrified but dangerously attracted by the blood springing from the Captain’s wounds, takes on the features of a leech-like king, whose life can be sustained only by perpetual bloodshed.

Like a schizoid doctor or an anatomist-butcher, Macbeth performs an anatomy on a multi-layered body: not only does he violate the king’s body; he also profanes the flesh of the State and of the Universe as well, slashes the veins of a macroscopic circulatory system, corrupts the blood of the world and plugs the knife into the tender tissues of the cosmos. Flesh and blood – with which Shakespeare literally filled the empty case of the ancient organological metaphor – turns out to be Macbeth’s sole destiny of damnation. In the petrifying unnaturality of an autoptic vision (which was what *actually* happened in every anatomical theatre), Macbeth discovers that the dialectics that shape the tragic flow through the flesh of his own body.

In order to let the audience feel the pregnancy of the anatomical discourses in Early Modern English Drama, I intend to accompany my paper with the projection of a series of sixteenth-century anatomical pictures (taken from Renaissance anatomical treatises and pamphlets), emblems and icons.

György E. Szönyi

(University of Szeged)

The Reincarnations of the Magus: John Dee as Fantastic Theme in Modern and Postmodern Historical Metafiction

John Dee was a real historical character: mathematician, scholar, traveler and ideologue during the reign of Queen Elizabeth I. At about 50 he got disappointed in science and engaged in a fantastic activity of angel magic in order to learn the language of Adam in paradise. Testimony to this are his detailed personal and spiritual diaries, a valuable document of early modern European cultural history. It should not surprise anybody that this curious Renaissance man has become a favourite character of modern and postmodern writers. Some of the novels in which he features as main character or important episodist: Gustav Meyrink's *The Angel of the West Window*; Umberto Eco, *Foucault's Pendulum*; John Crowley's *Aegypt* tetralogy; Patrick Harpur, *Mercurius*; Peter Ackroyd, *The House of Doctor Dee*. In my paper I am going to examine the technologies through which the theme of Renaissance magic transforms into postmodern 'uncanny'.

Gulshan Taneja

(University of Delhi)

Bodies, Cyber-bodies and the Body Snatchers: Keats and the New Technologies

The philosophical debate over the dichotomous issue of body and mind is now often projected as having been overtaken by the context provided by the new technologies and the new literary theory. It is argued that an artificial body—perennially renewable on demand—and a mind that can be downloaded onto a chip would mean, as Kurzweil [*The Age of Spiritual*

Machines] remarks, “our identity will be based on our evolving mind-file. We will be software, not hardware. Our immortality will be a matter of being sufficiently careful to make frequent backups.”

The new technologies and the possibilities offered by the digital reemployment of human experience ignore the apparently less exciting view which posits that human consciousness, mind, and experience are not independent of the organic body. The body is not merely a temporary carrier, a container or a vehicle for human identity, consciousness, mind, and experience. The body is not a form as different from its content. The body as form in this context is an active, contributing factor in the total human experience. The body as form affects the content, modifies it, reorganizes it, and is conversely and similarly affected, modified, and reorganized by it.

Keats in his “Odes,” as also elsewhere, and Joyce’s fiction [“Penelope,” in *Ulysses*, for instance] provide support for this argument. Keats’ search for means of perpetuating body in its selective moments of growth ends in a recognition that the decline and decay of the bodily vehicle can be viewed as movement of growth and fruition in the life of mind. He gains a new perspective on the supposed disadvantages that beset the organic human frame and refuses to acknowledge the primacy of mind over body, but conversely, reaffirms the unitary significance of the body-mind combine.

Zsófia Anna Tóth

(University of Szeged)

The Fantastic Body’s Representation in *S1m0ne* (2002)

In my paper, I examine the fantastic body representation of *S1m0ne*. *S1m0ne* is a computer created actress, an animation, who is considered to be a real person and actress by everybody in the film entitled *S1m0ne* (2002). *S1m0ne*'s body consists of 1s and 0s, since she is a computer program, so she is a fantastic body transformation, and she has got a perfect body which is made up of the (pictures of the) best actresses and this body is constantly recreated, modified, made even more perfect and for one role or other, new and new actresses’ characteristic features are built into her "repertoire". The film is centered on the omni-presence of the actually non-existent body of *S1m0ne*. Everybody admires her, everybody wants her, and it is impossible to prove that she is non-existent because the people (in the film) are not willing to believe it.

The question dealt with in the film is not only the manipulation of the bodies and the body images but also the great old question of creation, Mary Shelley’s story in a modern era. *S1m0ne* presents us the struggle of creator and creation, it clearly shows us the human inability of handling the consequences of creation. *S1m0ne* is the “real” people are striving for while they do not realize this is the one thing they surely will never get. Thus, this body evades existence through representation. As Viktor Taransky says: “It’s easier to make a hundred thousand believe than just one.” because they think seeing is believing, though, seeing *S1m0ne* does not guarantee that she is really there.

Maristella Trulli

(University of Bari)

The Use of the Grotesque Body in Swift’s Satire

In my paper I would like to deal with the use of the grotesque body in Swift’s satire and with the “ideological” or anti-ideological reasons of this use. My analysis concentrates above all on the first two books of *Gulliver’s Travels*, where the obsessive presence of the enormous body, oppressed by its continuous biological needs, ironically inverts any assumed idea of order and hierarchy. While focusing on the animal, “beast-like” nature of the human being,

the incumbent and uncanny bulk of the body serves as a vehicle for Swift's criticism of the eighteenth-century dominating rationalism, which had definitively divided man into two halves, lower and higher, mind and body, splitting his integrity. I will draw examples both from *Gulliver's Travels* and from other works, such as *The Mechanical Operation of the Spirit* (a pre-Freudian explanation of sublimation) and the *Memoirs of Martinus Scriblerus*, which deals with another form of physical metamorphosis. In the latter work, in fact, the hero's girl-friend has one body and two heads, this means two minds and two wills. This fact arouses discussion about where to locate individual identity - whether in the "superior" half (which here is split into two parts, each one struggling against the other!) or the inferior half. The conclusion is, as I will show, an ironical inversion of norm and normality. The same can be said for *A Modest Proposal*, where human flesh is proposed as food for the poor Irish people.

More examples could be given, but what I want to suggest is that Swift often uses devices taken from beast fables, utopian fantasies, imaginary journeys, biblical parallels and romance, but his aim is to criticize some fundamental assumptions of western culture such as rationalism, anthropocentrism, individual identity. In order to do so, Swifts makes use of the polymorphic and fantastic transformations of the grotesque body, whose meanings need to be carefully analysed one by one. I am particularly interested in the formal devices of Swift's satire – a unique mix of irony, parody, paradox, intelligence and fantasy which makes his language so immediate and stimulating.

Ingrid von Rosenberg
(University of Dresden)

**From Devilish Fantasies to Cool Routine:
the Boom of Plastic Surgery and its Reflection in Popular Culture**

When Fay Weldon in her famous novel (1983) let her "*The Life and Love of a She Devil*", as part of the revenge on her unfaithful husband, undergo innumerable operations to transform her body into an exact replica of her rival's, readers responded with a mixture of disbelief and pleasurable horror: too gruesome to be true. Meanwhile surgical body manipulation to comply with the dictatorial demands of the beauty ideal has become routine, not only for the rich elderly, but for ever younger girls in many parts of the world, and ever new types of operation and new substances are applied. No wonder that popular entertainment, above all television, has discovered the topic. After looking at the growth of the industry and discussing possible explanations (does it have to do with the changing concepts of identity?), the paper will investigate the treatment of plastic surgery in some representations in literature and popular culture, e.g. apart from Fay Weldon's novel as a starting point, the English novel *Nip 'n' Tuck* (2001) by Kathy Lette and the TV series *Nip/Tuck* (2003). *Nip/Tuck* has been produced in America, but shown in Britain and Germany with sensational success, mirroring the international dimension of the phenomenon. Therefore an analysis within a British Cultural Studies conference seems justified. What I would like to explore are the changing attitudes to plastic surgery as represented in the texts and programmes, i.e. the range of operations, the purposes pursued by patients, the ethical position and commercial interest of doctors, often at conflict, and the view taken by authors, script writers and directors as transferred by literary and filmic strategies.

Wladyslaw Witalisz

(Jagiellonian University, Krakow)

**Body Transformation and Medieval Gender Politics:
Chaucer's "Wife of Bath's Tale" and Gower's "Tale of Florent"**

Both Chaucer and Gower use in their tales the archetypal episode of an old and ugly hag changing into a beautiful bride in reward for the knight's *gentillesse*. But however analogous the narrative structures of the two tales appear the body transformation incident carries markedly different implications in each of them. Both tales are ripe with gender discourse rooted in the medieval paradox between the code of courtly love and frequent expressions of misogyny. While the moral Gower rewards his Florent with the beautiful body of his bride to reassure the reader of the value and propriety of traditional gender roles, the discursive Chaucer reverses medieval gender politics and shows the transformation to be a metaphor of female triumph. In the "Prologue" to her tale, the Wife of Bath adds more spice to this unorthodox vision of male-female relationship and puts the theme of the body at the centre of the tale's interest.

John Woolford

(University of Manchester)

The Victorian Grotesque Body

This paper examines Victorian theorisations of the grotesque (by Hugo, Ruskin and Bagehot) in relation to Romantic theories of the sublime, showing that the issues at stake come to centre in the body as a centre for processes of sensory inclusiveness, performance, transformation, overload and disintegration. Key texts will include Browning's *Sordello* and Dickens's *Bleak House*, in both of which a bizarre episode of corporeal disintegration presents a critique of dominant social narratives, including capitalism, the legal system and historical/social (d)evolution.