FROM
DEAR FILESYSTEM PANIC

BILL LUOMA

GENDER TROUBLE

JULIANA SPAHR
from Dear Filesystem Panic © Bill Luoma 2006
Boog Reader pamphlets design, DAK.
It is set in GillSans Condensed 11, 37, 38, 44, and 60pt; NewsGoth BdCnIt BT 14pt;
NewsGoth Cn BT 55pt; NewsGoth Cnlt BT 10 and 11pt; and NewsGoth XCn BT 10 and 11pt.

Boog Reader pamphlets are published periodically by Boog Literature. Additional copies of this pamphlet are
available for $3 in stores or at events, $4 mail order unsigned, $5 and $6 signed.

Boog Reader 8 is published in an edition of 30—10 of which are numbered and signed by the poet—for his
Segue reading, Oct. 28, 2006, with Juliana Spahr.

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to Clint Eastwood

“I'll see you in hell, little bill”
Take the octopus of wakenhut
who whiffs on the forkball of the hand most powerful
and knuckles the premium leather of covariant return types
spreading activation on the dacron furbie of the uber muff and the diet wings lopped off
by flower girls
in the basket of the sniper yagi
they are making jam from the smallberries of your favorite krylon
it gives odor to the nalgene of the blue kitties of maplepole
it gives the jammies of yoga a spanking with the long lasting chemtool of the prestolog
/** your jammies and my prestolog */
give rise to the flue of sloggin via hotwood
of getting jerked off into the toilet of the kornshell
the prestolog and the weatherbeater
backpropagating the particulate contamination of mercury and the smell of the copy shop
spreading activation through the wrenchouse of fred
growing taller as he sings
the bhopal of die hard.
Dear bebe
yolanda is not at this address
but skipping down the skills of nantucket
in search of the honey pot of recreational equipment incorporated
seeking a counter to the boner of germanic traditions and the great tribes of fantasy
digging through the dung heap of barbasol
hoping for a few pieces of armor in the scrap pile
stealing a swedish implement from the torture show
of gabby electrodes and globbing on regular expressions
of the inodes of alligator clips on the superballs of the cofrog
of the horny toad and the gila monster
the screams of monsters dying are very real
they’re totally baby tender
baby is learning when to play dead
she is learning when to fight back
she is lining the inodes of elocution with the newspapers of habitrail
/* your elocution and my habitrail */
in the kernel space of the pagefiller
in the muffin of the umpires
in the collateral damage of the clearcut
the autopsies reveal people in kitchens
holding colanders.

We talked not reflectively about male poets as MALE poets, but just compulsively about male poets
as if we were not even noticing that we just talked about male poets. We couldn’t help ourselves. The
heroic male literary tradition felt as if it was a warm breeze in the middle of a cold Buffalo winter. A
warmth that maybe came from the ghosts of the living and the dead, the warm breath left behind by
Charles Olson and Al Cook, and Michael Davidson and Jack Clarke and Gregory Corso and John Weiners
and Robert Haas and Charles Altieri and Steven Rodefer and Albert Glover merged in our minds with
the heroic myths the city told about itself, such as that it wasn’t for pussies because it dealt with the
cold and snow more than most other places in the nation.

Every year a fresh new group of students would arrive to attend the English Department. Every year
the admissions committee would have admitted a woman or maybe two who said in their application
that they were interested in studying twentieth century poetry. Every year, by the second semester, this
woman or two would have changed the focus of her or their study.

But in contrast, the study of poetry of the male heroic literary tradition that used fragmentation,
quotation, disruption, disjunction, agrammatical syntax, and so on seemed to be a magnet for men.
Men would enter the program planning to do the muckracking, hard-hitting masculinist American
literature dissertation that Buffalo was so famous for. Leslie Fiedler—a cult academic because of
his arrest for possession of pot in the ’70s and his “Come Back to the Raft Ag’in, Huck Honey” article
that looked at the raft of Huck and Jim as a homosocial space—drew them to the program. But once
they got there they would quickly decide to write a dissertation on the early works of a poet who used
fragmentation, quotation, disruption, disjunction, agrammatical syntax, and so on; the field is wide
open, they would exclaim; there has been no full-length study on the early works of this poet.

Those of us who studied the poetry of fragmentation, quotation, disruption, disjunction, agrammatical syntax, and so on were a group, a herd, and we were well known for building networks of
burrows. We went to parties together. We sat near each other in seminars. We went to the same bars at
night. But despite our collective investment in the male heroic tradition, we divided ourselves uneasily
into buck rabbits, doe rabbits, jack-kit bunnies, and jill-kit bunnies because of the heroic male literary
tradition. It was as if the male heroic literary tradition demanded such a division and we agreed to it
because we couldn’t see our way out of it; we couldn’t hold on to the heroic male literary tradition if
we didn’t give in to these divisions.

The divisions were larger than all of us. They were structural. Among ourselves, talking to each
other in the bar, it was hard for us to tell who was a jack-kit bunny and who was a jill-kit bunny beneath all the thrift store sweaters. We kept our sex organs inside our clothing and to identify which of us was which, someone had to hold us upside down so as to hypnotize us and then use their forefinger and middle finger to press down the vent area just in front of our anus so as to make our sex organs protrude. If we were a jill-kit bunny, we would then display a slit and a central line running up and down each side of our slit would be banded in pink. If we were a jack-kit bunny, there would be a blunt white tube without a central line that looked like a bullet. Because we were bunnies, and not rabbits, someone had to look very closely to see the difference.

But it was easier to tell who was a buck rabbit and who a doe rabbit. Only the buck rabbits—there were five of them—had endowed chairs with budget lines for travel and to bring people to the university to read and dole out to graduate student projects as they saw fit. The one doe rabbit affiliated with the Poetics Program did not have such a line. This was all the more noticeable because the doe rabbit was actually better known and more established than some of the buck rabbits. And this was called a “shame” and “an accident of hiring” by the buck rabbits and was blamed on the English Department’s hiring practices, not the heroic male literary tradition that haunted it.

This division, this gender trouble, was profound and mundane but it shaped all of us into a pattern that we could not control. While most of us would say we were feminist, the heroic male literary tradition had set up a complicated apparatus that supported the blunt white tube over the slit banded in pink that none of us could escape. For instance, there were two sorts of funding lines for graduate students. One, the one most jack-kit bunnies and jill-kit bunnies got, involved teaching two courses a year. Then there was another that involved nothing more than doing errands, like picking up poets at the airport for a buck rabbit and this line paid more than the teaching lines. Probably because the buck rabbits felt the most comfortable with jack-kit bunnies as their assistants, they gave their lines exclusively to jack-kit bunnies. When the jill-kit bunnies complained because they couldn’t even apply to be rejected from the lines, one of the buck rabbits said that because the jill-kit bunnies were so devoted to teaching and the jack-kit bunnies did such a bad job of it, that it made more sense for the jack-kit bunnies to run the errands and be paid more.

This is just one example of the complicated financing system that the heroic male literary tradition left behind. I don’t know how to describe it without insane amounts of detail and minutia. In retrospect, I am also struck by the small amounts of money we are talking about and how pathologically...
Two observers are considered the same if the sadness of the onesie is the goodie of the other if the slope of the paver is the gradient of the plane if the screed of the state is the underground loader of the state if the octopus of wakenhut is the control thread in a monitor that waits on the switch of the overhead light in the living room and furthers the cause of the trivet resting on the new marcellio amid the midpap of the smell of baby and the item state change hanging on the edge of the dingus of bool
I feel the milk treading of blue shoes on the downs of beaverton
the kneading of lami by the maersk of splaylist of mol the comedy explosion at the paramount the black comedy explosion of the military in the retail lofts of ann taylor in the sears building of tawny peacock the race condition is never a tie.

we analyzed the distribution spread. The buck rabbits gave out lines that paid $10,000 a year. The department gave out lines that paid $8,000 a year. And the rare books collection gave out jobs by the hour at a little over minimum wage. You might be able to imagine the gender spread in those jobs. But you might find it incomprehensible to imagine how seriously we took the small differences in such small amounts of pay. I imagine that these differences were incomprehensible to the rabbits at the time also, that only bunnies could chart them.

Basically, we were all stuck together in this burrow none of us dug. It was not that the doe rabbit and the jill-kit bunnies were innocent. We were stuck together in this burrow with narrow mud walls that had been dug out before we got there. It was hard for us to figure out where to dig to expand the burrow or how to make new openings into it because we had not created it. As doe rabbits and jill-kit bunnies, we were experienced with closing down openings to the burrow in order to protect the young, not with building new openings. We too were caught. We stupidly used essentialism as an epithet and tossed it at each other. We had trouble building things together. When one of us complained about gender stuff, another of us shot her observations down. We couldn’t see our way into the things that get talked about in Gender Trouble, a book which we could have read as a how to guide on escaping or reclaiming the heroic male literary tradition. While the jack-kit bunnies circulated petitions to the admissions committee saying that they should admit various jack-kit bunnies to the English Department, the jill-kit bunnies, including myself, signed them and we did not bother to circulate petitions of our own, choosing instead to mumble when the jack-kit bunny showed up about their being too many jack-kit bunnies. When the doe rabbit was given a budget by the buck rabbits, she didn’t bring in any doe rabbit or jill-kit bunnies to read, she used the money to show all of the films of Chris Marker. And I distinctly remember a buck rabbit telling me that Kevin Killian was complaining to him that there were not any queers invited to the New Coast conference and replying that I didn’t know the sexuality of most of the people invited and the buck rabbit saying, pointedly and justly, that is probably his point.

At moments we managed to form smallish groups of jill-kit bunnies and get things. Although I can’t prove it with a memory of conversation, I’m sure one of the reasons two of us included only doe rabbits and jill-kit bunnies in the first issue of a journal we started was that we felt we could get guilt money from the buck rabbits. And once when the doe rabbit was going on leave, we jill-kit bunnies had a meeting and wrote a letter to the chair saying that we didn’t want the doe rabbit replaced
with another buck rabbit who used fragmentation, quotation, disruption, disjunction, agrammatical syntax, and so on in his writing; we felt it was crucial to hire a doe rabbit. The chair complied and a doe rabbit came and this was a good thing but our success felt somewhat lessened because most of the jack-kit bunnies refused to take her classes; the classes she offered were not interesting to them, they explained.

The anger that this remark provoked in at least one of us was almost pathological. It was the anger of suddenly realizing gender trouble. The anger of an anxiety that all those jill-kit bunnies who said in their applications that they were interested in studying twentieth century poetry who then changed their focus of study were right. The anger that arose when the buck rabbit who ran the rare book collection called the jill-kit bunnies secretaries; bring your secretary he would say to the jack-kit bunnies when they set up meetings. I don’t know how to describe this anger. But I think I attempted when writing “Thrashing Seems Crazy,” a poem that felt overwrought when I wrote it and I never understood why I wrote it. And it feels even more overwrought now. But I did not connect this overwrought-ness to various events until I started writing this piece. I have for years instead only noticed how it was from Oprah and how it seemed a certain weird and yet literal example of some of the ideas in Gender Trouble.

In 1992 the anti-abortion group Operation Rescue came to Buffalo with their “Spring of Life” action and, again, many jill-kit bunnies spent their mornings doing clinic defense (which I have to confess started at some ungodly hour in the morning and so I wasn’t as diligent as some of my fellow jill-kit bunnies). And at the same time there was at SUNY Buffalo a graduate student unionization drive and many of the jill-kit bunnies who did clinic defense began to work on the unionization drive. Because the buck rabbits preferred to fund the jack-kit bunnies, many jill-kit bunnies found refuge and funded positions in the union, the organizing ranks of which were almost exclusively female. Most of the jack-kit bunnies didn’t find the union as interesting as the early works of a buck rabbit who used fragmentation, quotation, disruption, disjunction, agrammatical syntax, and so on. I am remembering that it was hard to get a number of them to join the union.

Eventually this union drive culminated in the graduate students being affiliated with Communications...
Workers of America (CWA), the country’s largest communications and media union, and out of this came a contract with health benefits. I learned a lot from this work that I couldn’t have learned in graduate school. A huge amount of economic changes happened in the name of free trade in the nineties. The fact that CWA was mucking around organizing a labor force that made $8,000 a year is a sign of how complicated the time was for unions. For several years many of my weekends were spent walking picket lines for other CWA affiliates like health care workers and bus drivers. I learned from the discussion on these picket lines some details about the larger world of international economics that were not at all evident in my seminars, which tended to concentrate on the revolutionary politics of fractured language practices. I began to notice the IMF and the World Bank and structural realignment and outsourcing and those other things that would be grouped under the term “globalization” and would contribute to the 1999 Seattle World Trade Organization protests. Basically, the world beyond the burrows of the male heroic literary tradition entered into my vision.

In 1995 I left Buffalo and moved to New York City. The poetry world there was not divided into buck rabbits and doe rabbits and jack-kit bunnies and jill-kit bunnies. It had some other formation with badgers and swans and coyotes and wrens and whales and grasshoppers. I remember 1995 and 1996 as one of the most productive times I’ve ever had poetically. I wrote no literary criticism, walked no picket lines, and worked as a bartender and then as a secretary. In 1997 I moved to Hawai’i for a job at the University of Hawai’i at Manoa and became an octopus instead of a jill-kit bunny.
One of the most talked-about scholarly works of the past fifty years, Judith Butler's *Gender Trouble* is as celebrated as it is controversial. Arguing that traditional feminism is wrong to look to a natural, 'essential' notion of the female, or indeed of sex or gender, Butler starts by questioning the category 'woman' and continues in this vein with examinations of 'the masculine' and 'the feminine'. In her book *Gender Trouble,* Butler observes: "There is no gender identity behind the expressions of gender; identity is performatively constituted by the very 'expressions' that are said to be its results." Of course, the stability of gender as a concept was in doubt well before anyone used words like "performatively." Psychoanalysts have been aware of its arbitrariness since the *Gender Trouble* book. Read 599 reviews from the world's largest community for readers. Since its publication in 1990, *Gender Trouble* has become one of the key works of contemporary feminist theory, and an essential work for anyone interested in the study of gender, queer theory, or the politics of sexuality in culture.