Michael Field's "Caenis Caeneus": Transmasculine Poetics at the Fin de Siècle

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Introduction: "Surely some-day she will be a man"

On September 21, 1900, the poet Katharine Bradley (one half of "Michael Field") experienced what she described in her diary as "one of the crowned days of my life."[1] After soaking up the autumnal sun with her beloved dog Whym Chow, Bradley went inside to visit her poet-fellow "Henry" (Edith Cooper, the other half of "Michael Field"), who was "floating about his range of upper rooms" at their Richmond home.[2] Henry was excited, having just completed a poem:

> He told me—Caenis is finished. Then he read—from the scaled rocks of her Manhood on to her winged life, to Hades, to her last sob. [. . .] The poem is her Tiresias. I decide for the bliss of womanhood: to her it is shadow-land. Surely some-day she will be a man.[3]

The passage is richly textured with trans possibilities: we find pronouns that ripple from "he" to "she," as Bradley alludes to a classical imaginary of metamorphosing bodies in the figures of Caenis and Tiresias, ending with the striking pronouncement about her partner that "Surely some-day she will be a man." The poem at the center of the passage is "Caenis Caeneus," posthumously published in the Michael Field volume *Dedicated* (1914) thanks to the tireless efforts of Bradley following the death of Cooper in December 1913, shortly before her own death in September 1914.[4] The poem tells the story of the mythological warrior Caeneus, who, according to a range of classical texts including Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, underwent a divine sex change. Caenis spends her early life as a girl and

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Victorian Literature and Culture, Vol. 53, No. 2, pp. 141–171.
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doi:10.1017/S106015032500004X

https://doi.org/10.1017/S106015032500004X Published online by Cambridge University Press

young woman, until she is transformed into a man, Caeneus, at the hands of the sea god Poseidon—an intervention that is, in some versions, a compensation for rape. Eliding the transformation itself and the motivating factors behind it, Cooper's poem dwells on the joy and strength found in Caeneus's subsequent male embodiment, recounting his many adventures, until he is eventually crushed in a battle with centaurs. Evading mortality through yet another transmutation, Caeneus becomes a bird and lives a brief though happy life, harmoniously interconnected with nature. After death, Caeneus becomes a woman again in Hades, and the poem closes as she laments all that she has lost—hence "to Hades, to her last sob" described by Bradley. But resonating beneath that final note of sorrow is the lingering jouissance of male embodiment and animal being.

In this article, we propose to use the poem to explore trans poetics at the fin de siècle, considering Michael Field's use of the past to conceptualize transmasculinity, the role of ecologies in reconfiguring gendered embodiment, and the potential trans affordances of poetic form. This article is the first detailed engagement with Michael Field's work through the lens of transgender studies.[5] As such, it contributes to a growing body of scholarship that seeks to identify transgender phenomena and capacities across nineteenth-century literature and culture.[6] Poets and dramatists who explored a capacious range of genders in their own lives and life-writing, Michael Field's oeuvre, replete with tales of transformation, transition, and gender variance, offers rich ground for exploring transgender possibilities.[7] One of several works by Michael Field that explore gender transition through reimagining classical myth, "Caenis Caeneus" is striking for its prolonged exploration of the "curious joy" of masculine embodiment.[8] In her 1900 diary entry, Bradley notes how Cooper's poem is "her Tiresias," framing "Caenis Caeneus" as the companion piece to Bradley's own poem of divine transition in Michael Field's Sapphic volume *Long Ago* (1889). Poem LII tells the story of the ancient seer Tiresias, "when womanhood was round him thrown," who spends seven years living as a woman before being returned to his original form—but with the added gift of prophecy.[9] As the speaker affirms: "Thou hast been woman, and her deep,/Magnetic mystery dost keep," positioning Tiresias as an enduringly nonbinary figure.[10]

Like poem LII, "Caenis Caeneus" explores a world of multiple transitions as it moves backward and forward between Caenis the maiden and Caeneus the warrior, juxtaposing the "spectral days" (200) of

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femininity with the vigorous, occasionally violent, pleasures of masculinity. In the wake of his transformation, Caeneus revels in a new world of exploration and physical feeling; he feels "no fright, he [knows] no pain" but rather senses "the hunter's lust in every limb" (74, 80). Yet, on the rare occasions when "Caenis Caeneus" has been discussed by critics, it has been read as expressing Bradley and Cooper's frustration with the restrictions of Victorian femininity, rather than as an engagement with the possibilities afforded by masculine identity and embodiment. Lorraine York, for instance, briefly explains how "Michael Field clearly see this classically inspired gender-bending as a harbinger of the liberation of Victorian women."[11] Jill R. Ehnenn likewise reads Caenis's unhappiness and Bradley's pronouncement on womanhood's "shadowland" as "a critique of how women are expected to feel about, and/or orient themselves toward, their embodiment and desires."[12] "Caenis Caeneus," then, has been understood primarily as a poem about womanhood, its limitations, its orientations, its scope—in line with a general critical tendency, identified by Heather Love, to see "gender nonnormativity as a sign or allegory of queerness" rather than as a distinct expression of trans identities or capacities.[13]

Here, we propose to take the poem's engagement with transmasculinity seriously, rather than reading "Caenis Caeneus" as a veiled lamentation about the limitations of femininity. We will use the poem as a test case to consider the possibilities afforded by a transgender reading of Michael Field's work. How might this poem offer a way into "trans-ing" Michael Field?[14] How might we analyze this poem through the lens of transgender studies, including emerging theories of trans poetics? In other words, what can transgender studies offer Michael Field scholars? How can the perspectives offered by trans and nonbinary scholarship enable insight into the complexities of gendered identity articulated in Michael Field's work? Equally, what can engaging with Michael Field's work bring to transgender studies, and how can it help us develop a theory of trans poetics suitable for nineteenth- as well as twenty-first century poetry?

To explore these questions, we begin by considering Michael Field's wider engagement with antiquity in their poetics, before turning to their specific reworking of the Caeneus story. We then shift our focus to new perspectives on transecologies, investigating Caeneus's relationship with the natural world. Situating his movement through the landscape within the genre of "transgender road narrative" described by Nicole Seymour, we suggest that this Victorian transgender road narrative offers new

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insights into imperial masculinities around 1900.[15] We then move to consider how the natural world is represented in the poem as a disruptive force that cannot be mastered through human intervention, despite Caeneus's attempts to conquer it. Conversely, Caeneus's interconnectivity with the environment, a theme that is also found in diary entries when Cooper was writing the poems for *Dedicated,* invokes possibilities of interspecies entanglements and kinship with the natural world. Finally, we conclude with a formalist reading of "Caenis Caeneus," setting the poem in dialogue with recent theories of "trans poetics" articulated by contemporary trans and nonbinary poets. Ultimately, we show that "Caenis Caeneus" opens up possibilities for transgender readings of Michael Field's work, expanding our current understandings of trans poetics in ways that illuminate transgender studies more broadly as well as deepening our grasp of Michael Field's identity in all its complexity.

"Bodies changed into new forms": Michael Field and the Trans Antique

As a number of Michael Field critics have observed, Bradley and Cooper frequently drew on historical source material in order to reflect on the present moment or to express their thoughts about modernity. For example, Ana Parejo Vadillo suggests that their verse dramas set in Ancient Rome use history as "a screen upon which to discuss the contemporaneous."[16] Scholarship on Michael Field's engagement with classical antiquity has often concentrated on *Long Ago*, their volume of lyric poems expanding and reimagining Sappho's original fragments, with particular attention to their revision of Sappho's work in order to forge their own models of queer and lesbian sexuality. Stefano Evangelista, for instance, claims that Michael Field's engagement with the classical past allows Bradley and Cooper to "overthrow the gendered social and cultural expectations placed on Victorian femininity," while Yopie Prins argues that, through reimagining Sappho, Michael Field develop "new configurations of gender and sexuality."[17] More recently, Ehnenn proposes that in *Long Ago*, Michael Field capitalize on the affordances of the fragment—such as the sense of loss and absence—to forge their own "queer-feminist archive."[18]

While scholarship has focused on Michael Field's use of classical antiquity to reimagine female sexuality, Bradley and Cooper also used the classical past to contemplate and transform *masculinity*. Their Roman plays, for example, contain fascinatingly complex characterizations of masculinity, from the shape-shifting dancer Pylades to the Emperor

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Commodus. In reimagining masculinity through the texts and images of Roman antiquity, Michael Field were certainly not alone: as Laura Eastlake has shown, we can uncover "manifold receptions of ancient Rome in Victorian literature and culture," whose wide range of interpretations suggest that "the precise meaning of Rome" in Victorian culture was "no more fixed and no more stable than the meaning of masculinity itself."[19] While Michael Field's engagement with antiquity has largely been restricted to their reimagining of women's history in existing criticism, their work also raises wider questions about the use of the classical past to, in Eastlake's terms, forge "useable models of masculinity."[20]

Scholarship in the history of sexuality has documented the uses of the past to "create a sense of community or shared identity in the present stretching through time."[21] Recent work in trans studies has likewise stressed how gender is not an isolated project, and how all gender categories are "social and interpersonal," not simply self-determined and individual, as seen in Jana Funke's work on histories of trans-lesbian-modernism as expressed through the life and work of Michael Field's younger contemporary, Christopher St John (1871–1960).[22] We propose to bring these two approaches in the history of gender and sexuality together in our discussion of "Caenis Caeneus" in order to understand the kinship and affinities that transmasculinity in the classical world afforded Michael Field. How did "the past," or more specifically the tale of Caeneus as it reached across antiquity and into the modern period, provide a model of masculinity for Michael Field and, more specifically, for Cooper? What did it mean for Cooper to come across, read, enjoy, reflect on, and rework an antique tale of gender transition?[23]

Frustratingly, Michael Field's collaborative diary *Works and Day* contains no reference to the sources or editions that Cooper consulted to write "Caenis Caeneus." When conceiving the poem during a visit to the New Forest in September 1900, however, Cooper claimed that her mind had "been to its old sources & found them deeper."[24] The claim to return to "old sources" perhaps suggests that Cooper had reread Ovid's *Metamorphoses* to find the story of Caeneus, which Michael Field had earlier used to write their other poem of gender-transition, poem LII of *Long Ago* about Tiresias. As companion poems, the pieces demonstrate Michael Field's long-standing engagement with the tales of "bodies changed into new forms" (corpora mutata) that make up the *Metamorphoses*.[25] While some scholars have argued that Ovid's presentation of Caeneus "undermines" a tale of heroism and manly virtue, recent

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work by Charlotte Northrop has foregrounded the heroic transmasculinity of Caeneus, arguing that Caeneus attains his heroic status "not despite of, but because of" his transmasculinity.[26] Caeneus first appears briefly in Book 8 of the *Metamorphoses*, when he is noted simply as being "no longer a woman."[27] It is not until Book 12 that Caeneus's history is fully laid out. The Greeks have prepared a magnificent feast to celebrate the triumph of Achilles over the invulnerable warrior Cycnus in the Trojan War. King Nestor compares Cycnus with another invulnerable warrior, Caeneus, invoking the precedence of the *Iliad*, in which King Nestor describes Caeneus as the epitome of virtue and heroism, the "mightiest" of all men, whose like the king has "never since seen, or shall see."[28] Ovid's King Nestor, however, adds a new part of Caeneus's life story. In a "gotcha" moment reminiscent of twentieth-century transploitation films, Nestor delivers a shocking twist for his assembled audience: Caeneus, the invulnerable warrior, "had been born a woman."[29] Ovid, in addition to subverting the story of Caeneus in the *Iliad*, also adds tales narrating the story of Caenis the maiden into the mix, notably Hesiod's *Catalogue of Great Women*. Ziogas has argued that Nestor's speech in the *Metamorphoses* "activates a generic and gendered clash" between the tale of Caeneus narrated in the *Iliad* and the tale of Caenis found in Hesiod.[30]

The audience is amazed at Nestor's revelation, and a fascinated Achilles asks Nestor to speak more about Caeneus. Nestor explains that Caenis had once been one of the "most lovely of all the maids of Thessaly."[31] After Poseidon had raped the girl, however, Caenis asked to be made a man, after which he wandered, invulnerable, around the earth. Caeneus reappears at the marriage of Pirithous as a heroic warrior, mocked by the centaurs who taunt him that "woman shall you always be to me, Caenis shall you be."[32] Despite their derision, however, the centaurs are themselves humiliated when they realize that Caeneus is invulnerable, proclaiming that it is an affront to their race to be "defied by one, and he scarcely a man."[33] To overcome Caeneus's invulnerability, the centaurs bury the warrior alive under a mound of trees, following which Caeneus, to the disbelief of his friends, is transformed into a beautiful bird with golden wings.

Michael Field's "Caenis Caeneus" follows the structure of Nestor's speech after Achilles' request for further details. The poem opens *in medias res*, with Caenis's wish described (by a seemingly omniscient narrator) as already accomplished: "Yea, from the sea she won her will/ From Neptune of the restless waves" (1–2). Notably, Cooper withholds

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both the protagonist's name and prayer for gender transition until later in the poem, only emphasizing a longing for change: "to let her life be altered to the core/Dissevering it from what had been before" (7–8).[34] In fact, the opening stanzas of the poem do not really focus on Caenis at all but rather on Neptune, the god of "changeful channels and unfathomed caves" (3), who is described in the second stanza journeying to the surface of the sea in his brine-spouting "car" pulled by dolphins (12). In the third stanza, Caenis's desire for change is compared to that of the sea itself, as the waves churn in equivalent frustration at Neptune's control: "as the ocean round his wheels/Itself will voice impatience" (18–19). However, Michael Field emphasizes that the sea cries "in vain," since Neptune would relinquish "His realm for ever [. . .]/If he could give dejected waves/The new existence that his ocean craves" (31–35). As if in compensation for that impossibility, the narrator implies, Neptune will heed Caenis's petition, granting the request that "She shall be changed [. . .]/And she become a man in form and thought" (39–40).

In comparison to Ovid's tale, the poem is rather ambiguous on the motivations behind Caenis's desire for metamorphosis, implying (but not stating explicitly) that she and Neptune have met before and alluding to her wish for "solace unessayed" (6), her "discontent" (17), and her "lips and eyes" that "Press for a mercy" (30–31). Such allusions to consolation and "mercy" hint at the antique texts that describe Caenis's gender transition as resulting from Neptune's rape, as does the objectifying gaze that he directs at her "urgent face" and the splashes he leaves upon her breast (25, 43). The moment of transformation is described in terms of physical dominance and engulfment: "toward her with magnificence he swayed. // Close in a mist he shut her round" (48–49). This description is strikingly similar to poem LXI of *Long Ago* (also written by Cooper), which tells the tale of Dryope, a maiden who is raped by Apollo, disguised as a serpent. Michael Field's Dryope, like Caenis, is physically engulfed by the god and emerges transformed as a result: "He must dominate, enthrall/By the rapture of his sway,/[. . .] For the spell is round her now/Which has made old prophets bow."[35] Within a comparable cocoon, the speaker of "Caenis Caeneus" tells us, Neptune "rent her soul away," and when the mist "unwound," he bids "adieu/Light-fingered to the youth that stood in view" (52–56). Though the proximity of "rent" and "unwound" subtly encodes the rape-and-reparation plot of ancient sources, Michael Field's poem places greater emphasis on the joys of Caeneus's new beginning as a man than any previous wrongs experienced as Caenis.

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Following his transition, Caeneus wanders the earth as he does in Ovid, the gaps in the Ovidian tale fleshed out by stories of Caeneus scaling the cliffs and hunting in the countryside, finally entering towns where he gains his heroic status and wins "Men's praises" (90). Caeneus's invulnerability is introduced with the observation that "never was his piercing might/Struck down nor staggered by the rival's blow" (94–95), despite the fact he "would no chance of quarrel shun" (93). The poem, glossing over the details of how or when this invulnerability was granted, therefore contains elements of both Hesiod's tale, in which Caenis demands invulnerability, and the Ovidian version, in which invulnerability is the decision of Neptune. As a heroic warrior, Caeneus participates in some of the greatest adventures of Greek legend:

> Fame gave him of her noblest sport—
> He hunted the Arcadian boar, [. . .]
> He sailed on Argo from the port
> Of fell Iolchus to the deep
> Sicilian seas, and many wonders met (97–103)

While these lines emphasize the epic extent of Caeneus's adventures, the poem is comparably coy about Caeneus's sexual experiences—although it does describe his encounters with local maidens, whose flirtatious glances provoke confusion:

> And when on shore he passed a maid
> Who tangled flowers about her hair,
> She caught stray smiles, a question in the stare
> That Caeneus fastened on her coil (121–24)

Caeneus's gaze implies a mixture of desire and curiosity, mingled with incomprehension at the reason for his confusion ("a question in the stare"). He loiters, watching "washers at their toil" (126), as if fascinated by this constrained drudgery, in comparison to his life of unbridled physical freedom. Finally, when he does find a lover, his attraction is tinged with fear: "when he wooed the girl whom he would kiss/Oft deemed he shared her shrinking from her bliss" (127–28). Caeneus's hesitation is ambiguous: perhaps the encounter triggers a specter of his sexual trauma or hints at his bewilderment at finding a flicker of himself as Caenis, an uncanny sensation that, as this article will later discuss, he repeatedly experiences but cannot explain. Certainly, in "shar[ing] her shrinking," Caeneus's sexuality, as framed through his uncertain gaze and physical recoil, is presented as fraught and unsettled. Building on Funke's

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work on the significance of asexuality and celibacy in transmasculine culture in this period, Caeneus's "shrinking" might be seen less as a *failure* to inhabit either a legibly cis-male sexuality, or a coherent lesbian gaze, and instead part of the complex, and elusive, stakes of desiring embodiment that Caeneus grapples with throughout the poem.[36]

During the fight at Pirithous's wedding, in which Caeneus leads the charge against the "ravishers," the "cunning Centaurs" forge a scheme to overcome the invulnerable warrior: they "weighed his wound-proof weight" and bury him under tree trunks in a "funeral heap" (138–44). Caeneus's lingering death in stanza 19 is marked by a moment of subtle formal disruption in the poem; this is the only instance where the second and third lines of the stanza do not rhyme ("Immovable, but living long/Without a sigh through the hot summer day," 146–47), though Cooper's manuscript reveals that this line originally read "living lay," so the lack of rhyme may be the result of a transcription error.[37] As in Ovid's version, Caeneus transforms into a bird after being buried alive. The poem stresses the inattention of the enemy to Caeneus's transformation, as "Above their foe a bird, the Caenis, passed" (151). This bird begins a "fresh life" filled with the joy of the natural world (152) and, as in the "avis unica" of the *Metamorphoses,* is presented as a nongendered or nonbinary figure.[38]

However, unlike in the *Metamorphoses,* a "nipping frost" (162) kills the bird, who descends into the Underworld for eternity—as Caenis. For the first time in the poem, Caenis speaks in the first person to bewail her fate: "And I am Caenis: once again/Her life of shadows I resume" (177–78). This transformation in the underworld weaves in a new source for Michael Field's Caeneus. In Virgil's *Aeneid*, Caeneus is transformed back into Caenis in the Underworld, having been "once a youth, now a woman, and again turned back by Fate into her form of old."[39] There, she takes her place in the "Mourning Fields" amongst women who are all victims of love and afflicted by a "cruel wasting."[40] "Caenis Caeneus" likewise describes how "The maiden Caenis in her narrow days/Must ponder on" (175–76). Unlike in Virgil's tale, however, where Caenis is in the company of other women, Michael Field present Caenis as entirely alone, traumatized by both her forced detransition and separation from the natural world, spending her lonely days "weep[ing]" and "sob[bing]" (201, 208). Caenis's inconsolable grief, expressed in the first person, signals a major departure from the classical tradition, demonstrating the poem's repeated attention to the embodied experience of its protagonist. In contrast to her current world of shadows, Caenis mourns a former life filled with sensation, pleasure, and action, in which "Mine was the doing:

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for the rest no heed" (192). In face of this eternity of passivity, Caenis "runs away to the woods" to utter a final cry that closes the poem: "Ah, would I were a bird!" (208).

This section has shown how Michael Field combine different elements of classical mythology in their poem and add some of their own flourishes to Caeneus's narrative. As the final line of the poem suggests, and the next section explores in more depth, Michael Field's reflections on transmasculinity and nonbinary forms of being were inextricably linked to their sense of connectivity with the natural world, reflecting the New Forest setting in which the poem was conceived.

"I am the Forest's & the Forest is mine": Trans Ecologies

When Cooper proclaimed that she had returned to her "old sources & found them deeper" while writing the poems for *Dedicated*, she was alluding not only to a potential return to textual sources but a return to another site of inspiration: to "our primative [*sic*] inspiration, with earth."[41] In May 1900 Michael Field traveled to the New Forest to stay at Holmsely in a "live, not stuffed" keeper's cottage and enjoy the arrival of spring in their accommodation lodged deep in the woods.[42] "How necessary it is to learn one's spring every year," Bradley wrote in *Works and Days*, while Cooper described that she had "never felt more deeply shaken & delighted than in this companionship with the Forest."[43] For Cooper, finding "companionship" with the forest was a life-enhancing experience and a source of revelatory creative rejuvenation. Throughout the stay in the New Forest, Cooper dwells on the "stupendous experience" of the forest, registering in detail the effects of the climate and surroundings on her body and mind in the animacy of the Forest with its trees that "strain & grunt."[44] In July, Michael Field were back again in the New Forest, and once more the forest took center stage. On August 30, 1900, for instance, Cooper disregarded unwelcome news received in a letter, because "today the autumn sun has shone & healed me. I have been received back into the forest."[45] Cooper's attachments to the natural world are described in a quasi-spiritual language, in which the enmeshment with the natural world becomes a site of poetic reinvigoration:

> I am a Poet again; I feel I shall be one while in the memory of this experience. I am going to put together my few Poems & give them to Michael under the title Dedicated. I believe that little volume will grow steadily for a month or two. I am the Forest's & the Forest is mine[.][46]

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Cooper's experience in the New Forest demonstrates a wish for, and belief in, interconnectivity with nature, or what she earlier described as a "companionship" with the natural world. Increasing attention has been paid to Michael Field's ecological imagination and their exploration, as Ehnenn has described, of an "individual subject's inextricable relation with the natural world."[47] Critical work has attended to the queerness of these attachments: Kate Thomas to Michael Field's identifications with plant life, Dennis Denisoff to the surrenders of self in *Sight and Song*, and Ehnenn to "eco-entanglement" in their volume *Underneath the Bough*.[48] The poems gathered together in *Dedicated* demonstrate another instance of Michael Field's entanglement with the natural world, with the whole volume, as Cooper later explained, ultimately bearing "witness" to the "influence" of the New Forest.

With this in mind, we suggest that "Caenis Caeneus" might be read as an example of Victorian trans ecologies. Trans ecology is an emerging field in Victorian studies that highlights, as Gregory Luke Chwala has explained, how "bodies and environments are assemblages, becomings and unbecomings—matter always in transition."[49] Building on Elizabeth Parker's work, we point to the "potential interconnections between 'the environment' and specifically '*trans*-' experiences" to call attention to the interconnectivity and porousness of bodies, species boundaries, and subjectivity explored in "Caenis Caeneus."[50] This follows Denisoff's recent call to resist "reifying an eco-queer identity" and consider instead how Michael Field's ecological imagination persistently "breach[es] the knowledge structure that scaffolds the concept of identity itself."[51] Caeneus's transition is, from the outset, mediated through the natural world. As we have already seen, transition is visualized and embodied in the longings of the ocean to undergo its own change:

> as the ocean round his wheels
> Itself will voice impatience when it feels
> To yearn for alteration, yearn
> For other being than its own (18–21)

Nature, throughout the poem, prompts self-realization and introspection, enfolding Caeneus's subjectivity into an extended communion with the surrounding landscape. Following his transition, the "youth" Caeneus finds himself washed up on the shore, where he is compelled to seek land as he looks toward the cliffs and feels a "curious joy" (61) on beholding them. After scaling the cliffs, he moves joyfully through the landscape, feeling the "tang of fern" and the "grasses, shivering with nods," with

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apparently limitless physical sensation (77, 71). When he sails on the seas, he is impassioned by its forms and rhythms; "he loved the sea he never might forget" (104). Caeneus finds himself in and through the environment: it is both a mirror of, and crucible for, his own strength, vitality, and movement.

This coming-of-age narrative structure might be read as a proto-"transgender road narrative," a genre Nicole Seymour has defined as "tales of transsexual, genderqueer, and/or gender non-conforming persons heading out on the highway and looking for adventure, work, or 'themselves.'"[52] Like the protagonist of a transgender road narrative, Caeneus moves rapturously across land and then sea, ceaselessly crossing environments on his quest of self-discovery. He crosses "the unpeopled plain" (75) to a place "where countryfolk abide" (83), before being endowed with the "noblest sport" from Fame to "hunt the Arcadian boar" (97–98). Drinking and rampaging as he goes, he "loved and sailed and sang,/And fought in battle with his peers" (129–30), presenting a masculinity of unbridled vigor and adventure. As Seymour explains, going "on the road" signifies two kinds of movement: "the geographical movement of characters and their ability to *be* moved: to undergo spiritual or emotional awakenings and to be awed, along with viewers or readers, by striking natural landscapes."[53] As Caeneus moves through the world, nature also moves him and becomes his site of self-realization. The joy he first feels at looking at the cliffs propels him to act, "made him to himself propose/The conquest of that overhanging height/That faces him with challenge of its light" (62–64). As he roams "High on the summit's scarcely-woven clods," his heroic masculinity is woven tighter and tighter, since he "felt no fright, he knew no pain" (72, 74). Caeneus finds an embodied and exuberant masculinity through these encounters with the landscape, growing up from the "boy" (57) on the shore who climbs the cliffs with wonder to the heroic warrior endowed with "manhood's sovereignty" (189) who sails across the seas and to whom "Fame" grants her greatest conquest.

Like Seymour, however, we are uninterested in a straightforward reclamation of the transgender road narrative or in celebrating its early arrival in 1900. Instead, we are interested in how this Victorian proto-transgender road narrative, through its depiction of Caeneus as a heroic hunter, soldier, and frontier-crosser, presents a previously overlooked example of imperial transmasculinity that derives its energy from the classical past. In this way, our work extends scholarship on the formation of imperial masculinities through classical precedence, to argue that

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transmasculinity was equally imbricated in the imperial imaginaries of the fin de siècle. Alex Murray has shown how aesthetic and decadent writers, including Michael Field, were "swept up" in the fervor and jingoism of fin de siècle imperialism.[54] By the end of the nineteenth century, as Bradley Deane has argued, "the untamed frontiersman, the impetuous boy, and the unapologetically violent soldier" had emerged as new aspirational models of masculinity.[55] At the same time, as Laura Eastlake has shown, the decadent effeminacy of men in the cities was being contrasted with the vigorous, hygienic masculinity of men situated on the "imperial periphery."[56] The poem shows Caeneus growing up, from boy to man, a maturity defined through his discovery and use of the landscape. At home only in the wild expanses of land and sea, the heroic Caeneus belongs to the "unpeopled" (75) space of the imperial periphery, crossing the frontiers of the known world and eventually fighting the half-human centaurs. As he moves through the world, his interactions with the environment are persistently defined in terms of "conquest" (63): he "feasted" on the air (65), "started the birds to veer in shoals" (70), "chased the fleeting creatures wide" (82), and feels the blood "lust" of the hunter (80).

The relationship between the journey of the self and the progress of the "Empire" was intimately linked for the Fields. In their customary end-of-year reflections in 1899, a year marked by their intense preoccupation with the events of the Boer War, Cooper made an explicit connection between the two: "Like our Country we shall face the difficulties of Empire-building when circumstances are stubborn. I believe both England & Michael Field will win."[57] As Murray notes, in this diary entry Michael Field align their own work with the project of empire-building, "to manufacture with their vision of the past all the heroism, valor, and pride they wished to see displayed on the battlefields of southern Africa."[58] While criticism has focused overwhelmingly on Michael Field's ecological subjectivity as a relinquishing of identity categories, it is clear that the relationship with nature in "Caenis Caeneus" is also about shoring up a masculine, individualized subjectivity, through which Caeneus, England, and Michael Field "will win." Caeneus knows no borders: he crosses land and sea, sailing on the *Argo* and fighting with his comrades across the world. As both a brave hunter and frontier-crosser, the poem resonates with the New Imperialist trope of the "imperial pioneer and hunter" widely disseminated in popular literature and the periodical press.[59] The "boy" Caeneus first learns through nature, by having "discovered, rifled" (68) the birds in their nests, echoing calls by

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the nature studies movement for boys to engage in direct observation of nature, including the gathering of birds' nests.[60] Once he has taught himself through observation, Caeneus begins to hunt, finding the "lust" (80) of the hunter first through chasing deer and then participating in the most infamous of hunts, the Calydonian Hunt. The hunt, as John Mackenzie and others have demonstrated, was a major part of British imperial experience by 1900, and images of colonial rule were saturated by dead animals and men with rifles, whose conquest of the animal kingdom served as a direct analogy for the subjugation of land and people around them.[61] The poem presents nature as a playground to be explored by the boyish Caeneus and the natural kingdom as a site to be conquered by the explorer and warrior Caeneus, presenting a journey of finding, inhabiting, and loving masculinity within a rubric of imperial masculinity that would have been insistently familiar to readers around 1900.

Yet, at the same time as the environment is presented as the site for shoring up Caeneus's imperial transmasculinity, nature is simultaneously shown to be an unruly force. In the midst of his heroic adventures, the sea shatters Caeneus's unthinking conquest, bringing him back involuntarily to a bodily memory he cannot quite place: "he felt,/As he beheld it fall and climb,/Misgivings, intimation of a time/Before he lived a man as now" (105–8). Echoing the earlier connection between the sea and transition in the poem, the sea evokes a strange feeling of longing that Caeneus tries to repress, "He put the strange, unguarded thought to rest" (112), but it insistently returns, "when it came to him it charmed,/It harrowed him and made him reel/With sense of things too far away to feel" (113–15). Despite his lusty singing with sailors, when he "ample-throated sang their song" (118), his gaze is irresistibly drawn back to the sea: "But with his eyes still on the fluent bars/Of sunny foam or grey beneath the stars" (119–20). Caeneus's encounters with the natural world engender an unsettling affect, which moves him somewhere between "reel[ing]" and "feel[ing]." In the wide expanse of the sea, sensation is literally "too far away to feel." Nature, the poem suggests, is the force that grants transition: just as the maiden Caenis "won her will" from the sea, Caenis in the underworld wonders if she could yet "breast the sea/and lure from it the gift of change!" (1, 185–86).

Caeneus's interconnectivity with the natural world even surpasses species boundaries—not only in its affects and affinities between Caeneus and the ocean but in its forms of embodiment—when Caeneus transitions into the Caenis bird. This porosity between species undoes the firm edges

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of the human body: Caeneus, in the end, is simply matter in transition. Embodiment is not finite, and transition is not one-directional; it is all considerably messier, with potential implications for the reader's own expectations and experiences, as the heroic model of soldier and explorer is ultimately overturned and unmade. As Denisoff has noted, Michael Field's work repeatedly confronts "the question of how one's affective or desiring immersion within an organic environment can be realised for others."[62] In this sense, "Caenis Caeneus" both fits within and subverts narratives of imperial masculinity, and the environment is the site in which these tensions play out. While the transgender road narrative bolsters an image of heroic imperial transmasculinity, it also presents nature as a disruptive force in Caeneus's life, and one that he ultimately cannot conquer.

As much as Caeneus has loved his life as a soldier, the Caenis bird is shown to be blissfully interconnected with nature. Just as Caeneus scaled the rocks, so the bird "love[s] to climb/the topmost bough" (165–66).[63] While the warrior Caeneus was invulnerable, all it takes is a "nipping frost" (162) to kill the bird, who loved to sing a "sweet" song for hours on end (168), like Caeneus joining in with the song of the sailors. At the same time as the poem emboldens an image of heroic transmasculinity, therefore, it also frays at its edges through worrying at the boundaries of the human and nonhuman, between individuated subjectivity and interconnected kinship. The transecological imagination of "Caenis Caeneus" is a fraught place, and one that the dead Caenis in the underworld cries out to Neptune to regain, for "I loved my life/Should leaven earth" (194). If the environment and the body are both matters constantly in transition, Caenis in the underworld is finally robbed of that transformational possibility. The poem closes with a final lament, "Ah, would I were a bird!" (208). Sealing the wish for transspecies transition, Michael Field's transecological imaginary presents nature as an endless, if cruel, site of embodied change.

"In form and thought": Trans Poetics

In his reflections on Michael Field's transecological imagination, Dennis Denisoff notes: "I am particularly interested in ways in which the authors use style and formal techniques to render their experiences of transspecies intimacies beyond physical engagements."[64] Recent studies in contemporary poetry have also suggested that trans is not just a matter of theme but also of form. Bearing this in mind, we now ask: do Caeneus's

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transitions take place on the level of form, as well as narrative content, in Michael Field's poem? The concept of "trans poetics" is a subject of recent and growing discussion among poets and theorists, most notably in the collection *Troubling the Line: Trans and Genderqueer Poetry and Poetics* (2013), edited by T. C. Tolbert and Trace Peterson. As Tolbert explains in the introduction to this pioneering volume, commissioned poets were asked to provide short essays to accompany their poems, in which they reflected on the "intersections (and/or disconnections) between one's experience of the body (as a trans and/or genderqueer person) and the way one uses language."[65] Contributors were also asked to consider: "Is there such a thing as a trans and genderqueer poetics? A trans and genderqueer genre? A trans and genderqueer form?"[66] The resulting responses offer diverse insights into how contemporary trans and genderqueer poets understand the relationship between bodies and lived identities (both their own and those of others) as well as the language, imagery, and poetic forms in which they work. As several contributors make clear, trans poetics cannot be reduced to theme or subject-matter; for example, as Joy Ladin puts it: "Trans poetics aren't a matter of poetic content. Poems that describe or refer to trans experience may not utilise trans poetics—and poems that are not about the trans experience may."[67] Instead, trans poetics are defined by Ladin and other contributors in terms of revisionary approaches to poetic form and style, as "techniques that enable poetic language to embody or enact some aspect of trans experience."[68]

Several poets within the anthology articulate the view that new poetic forms are needed in order to express trans and genderqueer identities. For example, j/j hastain explains: "As a genderqueer writer/maker of things my body speaks of/as a constant state of generative genesis. It asks this question: 'What is it for an identity to be in a continuity of beginnings? Always extant. Always reaching. And what forms must be invented in order to make space for that identity?'"[69] According to hastain, established poetic forms are incapable of articulating this fluid experience of identity as an unbounded and constant state of becoming, due to these forms' rigidity and entanglement with long-standing hegemonic structures:

> The current dominant structures cannot enable (regarding such body-speak) because the pressure/need to speak is itself a result of what happens when a body does not/cannot adhere to the dominant culture's dogma or imposed paradigms. It is from just such pressure/need to speak that we generate new forms. Forms to hold this different type of telling. Forms to hold not only what is told but the way that we must tell it.[70]

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For hastain and other poets in *Troubling the Line*, established poetic forms are implicitly (and sometimes explicitly) associated with the rigidity of the gender binary and with other systems of oppression. This desire for radically new forms is reflected in the poems included in the anthology, the majority of which are experimental in style, eschewing conventional structures, established meters, and recognizable rhyme schemes in favor of free-verse forms, typographical innovations, and experiments with generic hybridity (for example, the volume features several prose poems and instances of the combining of poetic and visual material).

In light of these reflections from contemporary poets, what might a late Victorian "trans poetics" look like? Is such a thing even possible? Given that existing conceptualizations of trans poetics have been primarily articulated by contemporary poets focused on the breaking of form, does this mean that nineteenth-century poems, which tend to adhere (at least at first glance) to established formal conventions, are irrelevant to the concept of trans poetics? "Caenis Caeneus" offers an intriguing case study for conceptualizing a potential fin de siècle trans poetics because, although it largely follows what appears to be a conventional, or at least recognizable, pattern on the surface, closer attention reveals that the poem is subtly subversive on the level of form as well as content.

Michael Field's poem is composed of twenty-five eight-line stanzas (or octaves), rhymed *abbcacdd*. This pattern bears a close relationship to *ottava rima*, an Italian stanza form comprised of octaves rhymed *abababcc*. *Ottava rima* is associated with the heroic verse of the Italian Renaissance (early examples of its usage include Boccaccio, for instance) and later with mock epic, particularly as it is employed in Byron's *Don Juan* (1819–24)—a poem that shares certain other intriguing similarities with "Caenis Caeneus," such as the linking of sea voyages, imperialism, and gender subversion.[71] However, in line with the subtle formal innovations that LeeAnne M. Richardson argues characterize Michael Field's oeuvre as whole, in "Caenis Caeneus," Bradley and Cooper offer their own twist on this established poetic form.[72] First, they begin each stanza with what, at first, appears to be envelope rhyme (*abba*) rather than the anticipated alternate rhymes of *ottava rima*. However, even this expectation is swiftly further unsettled by the appearance of the *c* rhyme in the fourth line. In the final quatrain of each octave, the *a* and *c* rhymes recur, but the latter does not reappear where we might expect to encounter it. Michael Field carefully withhold the satisfaction of another rhyming couplet until the final *d*-rhymed couplet, imbuing the end of each stanza with the finality

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(and in the case of Byron's poem, the comic banality) found in traditional *ottava rima*.

Each stanza's lack of formal balance is also reflected in the poem's metrical shifts. "Caenis Caeneus" employs a mixture of iambic tetrameter and pentameter, rather than the consistent iambic pentameter conventionally used in *ottava rima*. The third, seventh, and eighth lines of each stanza are iambic pentameter, while the rest are tetrameter, with the result that the second *b* rhyme is longer than the first, generating a sense of mismatched elongation even within apparently matching couplets; for example, in the first stanza:

> From **Nep**|tune **of**| the **rest**|less **waves**,
> The **change**|ful **chann**|els **and** |un**fath**|omed **caves** (43)

When summarizing the form of "Caenis Caeneus," however, it is important to acknowledge the poem's general uniformity. Within the bounds of its slightly out-of-kilter stanzaic and metrical patterns, there is little variation across the poem's twenty-five stanzas—with the exception of a few reversed (trochaic) feet, the occasional lengthier line, and a significant variation in the nineteenth stanza, describing Caeneus's death at the hands of the centaurs, in which the second and third lines do not rhyme (which, as we noted previously, is probably the result of a transcription error). Even taking account of its stylistic quirks, it would therefore be misrepresentative to say that "Caenis Caeneus" is, formally, a radical poem. Nonetheless, Michael Field's poem suggests the capacity for fixed forms to capture, in hastain's words, the sense of identity as "a continuity of beginnings [. . .] Always extant. Always reaching"—although it achieves this in a rather different manner than contemporary experimental poetry.[73] Indeed, in defining trans poetics, Ladin raises the possibility that traditional forms may also contain their own potential trans poetic affordances: "Trans poetics may be unheard of, outlandish, shocking—or they may be familiar poetic means deployed for trans poetic ends. Think of rhyme: the use of sound to call attention to likeness in unlikeness, the revelation that different semantic bodies harbour the same sensuous soul."[74]

Developing a theory of trans poetics for the fin de siècle through the lens of Michael Field's work, "Caenis Caeneus" helps us perceive the trans poetic affordances inherent in established poetic forms. For example, as we have seen, the poem does not reject rhyme entirely; instead, the poem "transes" rhyme by playing with *ottava rima*, resituating the anticipated

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correspondences and elongating the meter within couplets, generating the sense of "likeness in unlikeness" (and *un*likeness in likeness) that Ladin describes. In a narrative recounting a series of abrupt transformations, the poem's formal shifts and stanzaic asymmetry make total sense, as expected rhymes are disrupted by unexpected returns, and established patterns are subverted within the bounds of an apparently fixed form—just as the poem combines various iterations of classical myth to develop its own version of Caeneus's story.

"Caenis Caeneus" can thus be said to engage in trans poetics on several different levels. Thematically, it is concerned with a series of transformations: metamorphoses that undo divisions between human and animal and between dead and alive as well as the disruption of gender categories. As we have seen, the poem transes classical myth by combining different versions of Caeneus's narrative from diverse sources (Ovid, Homer, and others) to forge a new story. In a similar manner, the poem transes poetic form, not by rejecting formal conventions, but by playing on and with readers' formal expectations. By bringing recent discussions of trans poetics in contemporary poetry into dialogue with our formal analysis of Michael Field's poem, we can therefore enrich and complicate our understanding of what trans poetics are, and could be. As Tolbert puts it, "To use language is to believe one has the power to make a world of our own choosing exist. The form of the work is, for me, the poem's gender. [. . .] The poem is my body. My bodies. They better be something I can live inside."[75] In forming and transforming Caeneus's story, as part of their wider ongoing project of constantly revising their personal and poetic identities, Michael Field too sought to make a poetry they could live inside.

Conclusion: Future Transformations

As articulated in our introduction, this article was prompted by two interconnected questions: What insights can transgender studies offer to Michael Field scholars, and what might engaging with Michael Field's work bring to transgender studies? We have focused our response to these potentially unwieldy questions through the close reading of a single poem, but the implications of our study resonate far beyond a single text. Reading "Caenis Caeneus" across the axes of classical reception, ecology, and poetics reveals the trans possibilities rife in Victorian literature and life-writing. Late Victorian writers, for instance, used classical sources to imagine transgender lives, in addition to voicing the queer desires and

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feminine identities discussed in previous criticism. However, as we have seen, these seemingly subversive visions of masculinity were formed via imperialistic discourses that were intimately bound up with the conservative and racist ideologies which characterized late nineteenth-century colonialism and empire-building. An exploration of transmasculinity can, as we have suggested, shore up the white Victorian status quo as much as disrupt it. Yet we have also seen how Michael Field's transecological imagination simultaneously pushes against their imperialistic transmasculine fantasies, undermining their own narrative of nature's domination, as unruly ecological forces influence and transform Caeneus throughout the course of the poem. Our reading thus offers a significant instance of how the rich potential offered by ecological criticism both augments and complicates the otherwise apparently fixed boundaries of nationality, race, and transmasculinity depicted in Michael Field's poem.

Second, examining Michael Field's poetics has revealed the trans capacities nestled within established poetic forms. While existing definitions of trans poetics tend to focus on contemporary poets breaking form, the example of "Caenis Caeneus" suggests that a poem does not necessarily need to be written in free verse or to radically reject conventional forms in order to articulate a trans poetics. Michael Field's work reveals the transgender affordances already inherent in recognizable devices such as rhyme and metrical patterns. This opens up further possibilities to recognize trans poetics in nineteenth-century verse. Poets beyond Michael Field are ripe for such consideration: for example, Swinburne's near-obsessive use of rhyme, rhythm, and alliteration can be read in terms of trans poetics. Natalie Prizel has, for example, described Swinburne's use of "liminal forms" in "Hermaphroditus" as "an intersex aesthetic [. . .] brought to life through the transgenre mediation of the ekphrastic gesture that turns stone into print."[76] The notion of "transgenre" that Prizel draws on here, described by Trish Salah as "cross genre writing and writing that interferes with or intervenes in the classification of gender," is also a useful concept for approaching Michael Field's wider work.[77] Beyond "Caenis Caeneus" and the lyric revisionism recently analyzed by Ehnenn and Richardson, Michael Field also experimented more widely with generic hybridity across their oeuvre, writing numerous poetic dramas and prose *croquis*, for instance—not to mention the startling textual variety offered by their extensive diaries, as recently discussed by Carolyn Dever.[78]

As *Works and Days* (1888–1914) attests, Bradley, Cooper, and Michael Field's gender identities are complicated, mercurial, and relational,

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intersecting with several other categories of identity and desire (lesbian, queer, cross-generational, incestual) in ways that are fascinating but also deeply troubling and problematic, entangled as they are with issues of exploitation, power differentials, manipulation, and abuse. Rather than regarding this as undermining Michael Field's position and potential within trans and queer history, though, we propose that a deeper exploration into these enmeshed aspects will prove illuminating, rather than undermining, for future scholarship into the history of Victorian gender and sexuality.

Pioneering work on Michael Field's diaries and correspondence by Sharon Bickle, Dever, and Ehnenn has already begun to unfold the complexity of this lifelong record of entangled queer lives.[79] Once digitized, the online version of *Works and Days* will build on this scholarship, offering an accessible and indispensable resource for research in gender and sexuality studies; enabling researchers to track, for example, the shifting pronouns and names used by Bradley, Cooper, and their associates. This digitization project also provides an opportunity for scholars to think through how to represent transgender identities accurately through encoding and notation, combining insights from transgender studies and digital humanities.[80] The online diary also has potential to engage students, alongside Michael Field's published work, as a valuable teaching resource. However, as those who have experienced it know well, introducing Michael Field's work to students can be a complicated endeavor. As recent critics have observed, at first glance, Michael Field appear to resonate with twenty-first-century understandings of gender fluidity that are familiar to many of our students. As Richardson notes:

> Our contemporary acceptance of "they" as a singular pronoun suggestively corresponds to Michael Field's own insistence that they are singular. [. . .] Bradley and Cooper's modes of self-creation speak forcefully to our current cultural moment since they formed what might now be termed gender-fluid identities.[81]

When teaching Michael Field, we have often found that students are fascinated and repelled in equal measure. As trans scholars have long warned, any wish to find recuperable "ancestors" is likely to be a frustrating exercise, especially when confronted by a writer like Michael Field.[82] While students frequently find discovering traces of queer, gender-fluid, nonbinary, and transgender identities in the past exciting and inspiring, they are just as frequently disturbed by the host of other issues that Bradley and Cooper's lives and work bring to the surface: incest, potential

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grooming and abuse, racism and imperialism, misogyny and class snobbery among them. As this article has shown, Michael Field's complex identity cannot, and should not, be disentangled from the problematic crucible in which this identity was forged. Michael Field are queer in ways that are ethically and ideologically unsavory, to say the least, but they are also truly queer in the sense that they are radically different from us as well as (in some respects) the same as us. Acknowledging Bradley and Cooper's queerness in all its complexity is essential to a truly comprehensive engagement with the trans capacities of Michael Field's work.

In tune with Bradley and Cooper's own revisionist response to history, Ehnenn concludes her recent book by proposing that we read Michael Field's writing strategically out of time. Reflecting on the diaries, she writes: "I am interested a bit less in what the diaries mean for Michael Field's life, and a bit more in what they might mean and do for us, now," before asking: "What are we looking for, what are our aims as readers of the archive? Maybe these questions about ourselves are just as important as those we pose about our 'subjects.'"[83] In raising these questions, Ehnenn follows Heather Love's provocative call to stop asking "were there gay people in the past" and instead ask: "Why do we care so much if there were gay people in the past?"[84] In contemplating similar questions while exploring Michael Field and transgender studies, we asked ourselves: What do Michael Field do for us now? What might they do? This article is one response to those lines of enquiry. Our close examination of "Caenis Caeneus" has analyzed and expanded Michael Field's work not only for those already interested in Bradley and Cooper's work, and in Victorian poetry, but also for scholars of trans literature and history. But we have also kept in mind our own students who may be inspired by perceiving transgender, genderqueer, and nonbinary possibilities in the poem, and in Michael Field as a gender-nonconforming figure. In this sense, we hope to have enhanced Michael Field studies through our engagement with the insights offered by transgender scholarship, but also to have shown how Michael Field's rich and complex poem speaks to and illuminates our present moment.

Notes

1. Michael Field (Katharine Bradley [henceforth KB]), *Works and Days* (September 21, 1900), British Library, London [BL] Add MS 46789, fol. 130r.

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2. Ibid., fol. 130r.
3. Ibid., fol. 130v.
4. The original manuscript of the poem is held in the Bodleian in a notebook "Dedicated to Master" (Bradley) in Cooper's hand, dated September 22, 1900. The published version follows the manuscript faithfully on the whole. The most significant changes are found in the final stanza, originally in past tense in the MS, but altered to present tense in the published version (e.g., "she bemoaned herself and wept" in the MS version is revised to "she bemoans herself and weeps" in the published version). See Bod.MS.Eng.poet.f.20.
5. For an accessible introduction, see Frankie Dytor, "Transgender and Non-Binary Identities."
6. As Paisley Currah and Susan Stryker have explained, the study of transgender phenomena means attending "to anything that calls attention to the contingency and variability of sex/gender statuses through difference from expected forms" ("Introduction," 8). For recent explorations of transgender phenomena in Victorian studies, see Ardel Haefele-Thomas, "Introduction," 31–36, and the ensuing cluster of seven *Victorian Review* articles; Mary Mussman and Margaret Speer, "Introduction"; Mary Mussman, "Trans Sapphism," 9–33; Jolene Zigarovich, "Victorian Literature as Trans Literature," 504–13.
7. As recent critics of Michael Field have observed (among them Carolyn Dever, Jill R. Ehnenn, Alex Murray, and Sarah Parker), Bradley and Cooper constantly play with nicknames and fluid gender identities in their diaries and correspondence as well as in their published work. For Bradley and Cooper's various nicknames, including the boyish identity "Heinrich" or "Henry" for Cooper, see Sharon Bickle, *The Fowl and the Pussycat*. For a discussion of Michael Field's "promiscuous" and playful use of pronouns in the diary, see LeeAnne M. Richardson, *The Forms of Michael Field* 32.
8. Michael Field, "Caenis Caeneus," in *Dedicated*, 45 (line 51). Line numbers for quotations from this 208-line poem will henceforward be provided in text.
9. Michael Field, "LII, " in *Long Ago*, 89.
10. Michael Field, "LII, " 91. Mary Mussman also discusses the "trans subtext" and "gender mutability" of Michael Field's *Long Ago* ("Trans Sapphism," 25).
11. Lorraine York, *Rethinking Women's Collaborative Writing*, 82.
12. Jill R. Ehnenn, "From 'We Other Victorians' to 'Pussy Grabs Back,'" 45. It is worth pointing out that Bradley describes womanhood as

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"shadowland" to Cooper, rather than these being Cooper's own words.
13. Heather Love, "Queer," 174.
14. Jen Manion has stressed the need to consider trans as a verb to reroute attention toward trans as a "practice or process" (*Female Husbands*, 11).
15. Nicole Seymour, "Trans Ecology."
16. Ana Parejo Vadillo, "Outmoded Dramas," 237.
17. Stefano Evangelista, "Greek Textual Archaeology."; Prins, "Greek Maenads, Victorian Spinsters," 47.
18. Jill R. Ehnenn, *Michael Field's Revisionary Poetics*, 85.
19. Laura Eastlake, *Ancient Rome*, 11.
20. Eastlake, *Ancient Rome*, 11.
21. Kate Fisher and Rebecca Langlands, "General Introduction," 5.
22. Kadji Amin, "We Are All Non-Binary Now," 115; Jana Funke, "Lesbian-Trans-Feminist-Modernism," 56–77.
23. Interestingly, while working on this article, Caeneus's narrative has resurfaced in popular culture. Caeneus appears as a character in the Netflix series *Kaos* (2024), in which he is represented as a trans man (played by actor Misia Butler).
24. Michael Field (Edith Cooper [henceforth EC]), *Works and Days* (September 12, 1900), BL Add MS 46789, fol. 126r.
25. Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, 1:3.
26. Ioannis Ziogas, *Ovid and Hesiod*, 180; Charlotte Northrop, "Caeneus and Heroic (Trans)Masculinity," 25.
27. Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, 427.
28. Homer, *Iliad*, 33.
29. Ovid, *Metamorphoses,* 193.
30. Ziogas, *Ovid and Hesiod,* 217.
31. Ovid, *Metamorphoses,* 195.
32. Ovid, *Metamorphoses,* 215.
33. Ovid, *Metamorphoses,* 217.
34. The protagonist is first named as Caeneus in line 89 of the 208-line poem. The name "Caenis" does not appear until line 152, after Caeneus's death and transformation into "a bird, the Caenis," and later in the underworld. The name "Caenis" is therefore never used for the living protagonist and is in this sense quite literally a dead name.
35. Michael Field, *Long Ago,* xcv. As Margaret Stetz has noted, in Michael Field's version: "Dryope seems less a victim of rape in any

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conventional sense … than the object of a godlike male figure's scrutiny and mastery, which has the potential to bless rather than destroy ("'As She Feels a God Within,'" 53). Michael Field's treatment of the "Caenis Caeneus" myth similarly translates rape into an act of transformation and empowerment.

36. Funke, "Lesbian-Trans-Feminist-Modernism," 57–62; see also the discussion of the "dissociative" trans gaze and "trans maladjustment" in Cameron Awkward-Rich, *The Terrible We*, especially "Some Dissociative Trans Masc Poetics" (89–116), which grapples with the "hard-to-discuss centrality of forms of feminized harm—especially sexual violence—to the narration of transmasculinity" (93).
37. See MS.Eng.poet.f.20, fol. 22.
38. On the avis unica, "a bird alone of its kind," see Debra Freas, "*Da femina ne sim*," 79.
39. Virgil, *Aeneid*, 563, 565. On Virgil's version, see Glenda McLeod, *Virtue and Venom*.
40. Virgil, *Aeneid*, 563.
41. Michael Field [EC], *Works and Days* (December 31, 1900), fol. 181r.
42. Michael Field [KB], *Works and Days* (May 9, 1900), BL Add MS 46789, fol. 64r.
43. Ibid.; Michael Field [KB], *Works and Days* (May 12, 1900), BL Add MS 46789, fol. 66r.
44. Michael Field [EC], *Works and Days* (May 15, 1900), BL Add MS 46789, fol. 70v; Michael Field [EC], *Works and Days* (May 13, 1900), BL Add MS 46789, fol. 67v.
45. Michael Field [EC], *Works and Days* (August 30, 1900), BL Add MS 46789, fol. 113v.
46. Michael Field [EC], *Works and Days* (September 12, 1900), BL Add MS 46789, fol. 126r.
47. Ehnenn, *Michael Field's Revisionary Poetics*, 135.
48. Kate Thomas, "Vegetable Love," 25–46; Dennis Denisoff, *Decadent Ecology*, 61–95; Ehnenn, *Michael Field's Revisionary Poetics*, 137.
49. Gregory Luke Chwala, "Emerging Transgothic Ecologies," 71.
50. Elizabeth Parker, "'The bog is in me,'" 18.
51. Denisoff, "Ecology." This resistance to "identity politics" as an adequate model for attending to subjectivity and experience beyond its late twentieth-century context has long been made in trans studies: see the overview in Regina Kunzel, "The Flourishing of Transgender Studies," 289.
52. Seymour, "Trans Ecology."

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53. Seymour, "Trans Ecology."
54. Alex Murray, *Decadent Conservatism*, 213. It should be noted, however, that Bradley and Cooper's political attitudes shifted throughout their lives. As their early biographer Mary Sturgeon observes, during the 1880s they were interested in socialism and suffrage. Bradley in particular was "a prime mover of the Anti-Vivisection Society" and member of John Ruskin's Guild of St. George (*Michael Field*, 21).
55. Bradley Deane, *Masculinity and the New Imperialism*, 1.
56. Laura Eastlake, "Metropolitan Manliness," 473.
57. Michael Field [EC], *Works and Days* (December 31, 1899), BL Add MS 46788, fol. 144v.
58. Murray, *Decadent Conservatism*, 226.
59. John MacKenzie, "The Imperial Pioneer," 179–98.
60. See discussion in Karen Sayer, "'Let Nature Be Your Teacher,'" 589–605.
61. MacKenzie, *The Empire of Nature*; Joseph Sramek, "'Face Him Like a Briton,'" 659–80.
62. Denisoff, "Ecologies."
63. This is a subtle allusion to one of Sappho's fragments, also used in Michael Field's Poem XLVII in *Long Ago* to describe a bride's virginal state: "A blushing apple on the topmost bough,/Heaven kept thy bride" (lxvii).
64. Denisoff, "Ecologies."
65. TC Tolbert, "Open," 9.
66. Tolbert, "Open," 11.
67. Joy Ladin, "Trans Poetics Manifesto," 206.
68. Ladin, "Trans Poetics Manifesto," 306.
69. j/j hastain, "Poetics Statement," 253–54.
70. hastain, "Poetics Statement," 253–54.
71. See, for example, Caroline Franklin's discussion of the harem episode in "Juan's Sea Changes," 56–89.
72. Richardson argues that Michael Field reinvented established poetic forms across their oeuvre, with each of their volumes representing "evolving experiments in adapting traditional forms to contemporary concerns" (*Forms,* 20).
73. hastain, "Poetics Statement," 253–54.
74. Ladin, "Trans Poetics Manifesto," 306.
75. Tolbert, "The gifts of the body," 465–66.
76. Natalie Prizel, "Intersex Aestheticism," 490. Zigarovich also mentions "Hermaphroditus," alongside Michael Field's Tiresias, as poems that

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offer "genderqueer characterizations" ("Victorian Literature," 506). See also Mussman, "Trans Sapphism."

77. Trish Salah, "Transgender and Transgenre Writing," 182. Nicole Anae also discusses "trans genre" writing in "Trans Poetics and Trans Literature," 257–66.
78. For the prose *croquis*, see Michael Field, *For That Moment Only*. Carolyn Dever describes *Works and Days* as stretching the boundaries of the Victorian novel through "great narrative experiment" (*Chains of Love and Beauty*, 23).
79. See Sharon Bickle, "Rethinking Michael Field," 39–47, plus *The Fowl and the Pussycat*; Dever, *Chains of Love and Beauty*; Ehnenn, *Michael Field's Revisionary Poetics*, 232–47.
80. For an expanded discussion of this, see Marion Thain, "Perspective," 226–41.
81. Richardson, *Forms*, 2–3.
82. Likewise, scholars such as Laura Doan have cautioned against the impulse to tie up queer history with progressive causes (*Disturbing Practices*). See also Jennifer Evans's discussion of the numbing effect of recuperation in *The Queer Art of History*, 9–11.
83. Ehnenn, *Michael Field's Revisionary Poetics*, 234, 244.
84. Love, *Feeling Backward*, 31.

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