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**CLASS, GENDER, AND
SEXUALITY IN THOMAS
GAINSBOROUGH'S
*BLUE BOY***

VALERIE HEDQUIST



Class, Gender, and Sexuality in Thomas Gainsborough's *Blue Boy*

The reception of Thomas Gainsborough's *Blue Boy* from its origins to its appearances in contemporary visual culture reveals how its popularity was achieved and maintained by diverse audiences and in varied venues. Performative manifestations resulted in contradictory characterizations of the painted youth as an aristocrat or a "regular fellow," as masculine or feminine, or as heterosexual or gay. In private and public spaces where viewers saw the actual painting and where living and rendered replicas circulated, Gainsborough's painting was often the centerpiece where dominant and subordinate classes met, gender identities were enacted, and sexuality was implicitly or overtly expressed.

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Class, Gender, and Sexuality in Thomas Gainsborough's *Blue Boy*

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First published 2020
by Routledge
52 Vanderbilt Avenue, New York, NY 10017

and by Routledge
2 Park Square, Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon, OX14 4RN

Routledge is an imprint of the Taylor & Francis Group, an informa business

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Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

A catalog record for this title has been requested

ISBN: 978-1-138-54342-3 (hbk)

ISBN: 978-1-351-00686-6 (ebk)

Typeset in Sabon
by Deanta Global Publishing Services, Chennai, India

Cover image: Thomas Gainsborough, *The Blue Boy*, c. 1770. Oil on canvas, 179.4 × 123.8 cm. The Huntington Library, Art Collections, and Botanical Garden.

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Acknowledgments

Many people contributed to the publication of this book. First and foremost, I want to thank the members of the School of Art and the staff of the Mansfield Library, especially the ILL team, at The University of Montana (Missoula) for encouragement and assistance during the research and writing. For conversations, my gratitude to Susan Baker, Craig Hanson, Kristen Hatch, Aja Mujinga Sherrard, Matthew Sanderson, and Josh Slotnick. To the staff of the Gainsborough House in Sudbury, the Gerber/Hart Library and Archives in Chicago, and the University of Iowa Art History Library, I extend my deepest gratitude. Thank you to many generous institutions and individuals for supplying high-resolution images and permitting reproduction. Without the editorial efforts of Nathalie Wolfram, Catherine Filardi, and Emily Withnall, I would still be revising. The recommendations of anonymous readers along with the efforts of Art History and Visual Studies editor Isabella Vitti and Katie Armstrong at Routledge/Taylor & Francis brought the present book to completion. Closer to home, my thanks to the O'Brien Creek Road Book Club for listening to me all these years. Last, but not least, the warmest and deepest gratitude to the Hedquists, Callaghans, and especially Edward and our sons Gabriel and Noah.

Introduction

Thomas Gainsborough's (1727–1788) *Blue Boy* (Figure 0.1) began as a performance when the sitter dressed up in an old-fashioned costume, climbed up on a platform, and posed as an aristocrat. Completed around 1770, the picture resembled the portraits painted by Anthony van Dyck during the Stuart age more than 100 years earlier. Although following conventions of fancy-dress portraiture, Gainsborough's sitter was less a depiction of a recognizable person, long identified as the ironmonger Jonathan Buttall (1751/1752–1805), than a successful rendering of fictitious role-playing. This opening act inspired subsequent iterations that along with the original painting established the work's renown and prompted reflections on the construction of class, gender, and sexual desire.

Examining the reception of Gainsborough's *Blue Boy* from its origins in Bath, England, to its manifestations in contemporary visual culture reveal how performance and reproduction led to its growing reputation and familiarity. As if taking a cue from its production, men, women, boys, and girls dressed up in similar costumes and pretended to be Gainsborough's youth at fancy-dress balls and marriage ceremonies, in pantomimes and plays, and in movies and television programs. Two- and three-dimensional copies, especially in prints, comics, and advertisements and as ceramic and fabric figures, also disseminated its appearance. These numerous derivatives expanded the scope of *The Blue Boy* beyond a singular viewing experience and resulted in surprisingly contradictory characterizations of the painted subject.

Connections between the performance and the reception of Gainsborough's *Blue Boy* show its transgressive role in diverse cultural and commercial situations. In private and public venues where viewers saw the actual painting and in settings where living and rendered replicas circulated, Gainsborough's *Blue Boy* was often the centerpiece where dominant and subordinate classes met, gender identities were enacted, and sexuality was implicitly or overtly expressed. The reception of this singular painting revealed how it described and produced realities tied to both performance and performativity.

Performance and Performativity

The original content of Gainsborough's *Blue Boy* was altered as ironic and parodic reiterations shifted the contextual ground and transformed its meaning through performance and performativity.¹ In his essay on the development of both these theoretical concepts, Hans Rudolf Velten points to the theatrical dimension of performance as a



Figure 0.1 (See Plate 1) Thomas Gainsborough, *The Blue Boy*, c. 1770. Oil on canvas, 179.4 × 123.8 cm. The Huntington Library, Art Collections, and Botanical Gardens.

“tangible, bounded event that involves the presentation of rehearsed artistic actions,” which is evident in the scripted attitude of Gainsborough’s sitter who dresses and poses as a seventeenth-century aristocrat and in the appearance of *Blue Boy* lookalikes who refer directly to the painted figure as the subject of their enactments.² The concept of performativity, on the other hand, began as a linguistic theory by John L. Austin, who distinguishes constative language that describes the world from performative language that does something in the world.³ He recognizes some utterances, especially legal declarations, such as “I now pronounce you husband and wife” or “I sentence you to ten years in prison,” as performative speech because these words do not merely report, but generate new realities. Although he eventually concluded that every utterance contains both constative and performative qualities, Austin’s recognition of reality-producing speech attracted postmodern scholars who valued the processuality of performativity.

Velten summarizes how the theatrical dimensions of performance and the semantic authority of performativity were united in the scholarship of Judith Butler in the 1980s when she expanded Austin’s linguistic theory to include bodily acts and argued that repeated public performances of coded social behavior construct gender and sexual identities without relying on pre-existing essentialist subjects.⁴ In *Bodies that Matter* from 1993, Butler incorporates Jacques Derrida’s understanding of performativity as “the effect of altered meaning through the repetition of signs in shifted contexts of time and space.”⁵ Based on these foundational sources, performativity is an iterative and citational practice that forms the subject just as performative speech produces reality.

By adopting this theoretical framework, this study explores not only what Gainsborough’s *Blue Boy* says, but also what it does. As a feature of its reception over time, understanding the painting and its recurrences as performative shifts the focus from its denotative significance to its contingent effects both situationally, that is in specific spatial and discursive contexts, and relationally, that is in connection to the attitudes and expectations of viewers. Applying this methodological orientation to Gainsborough’s painting focuses on the processual production of meaning and considers the values, conventions, and connotations that are inscribed into the diverse settings in which the painting and its variations are found. The performativity of *The Blue Boy* recognizes its initial and subsequent performances as transformative acts affecting conceptions of class, gender, and sexuality.

Class

Confounding and comparing class or social rank in response to Gainsborough’s *Blue Boy* began with the portrayal of an anonymous youth as an aristocrat and continued as the reception of the painting concentrated on the status of the artist and his relationships, especially his rivalry with Sir Joshua Reynolds (1723–1792); on the mounting cultural and economic value of the work of art; and on the purported class affiliations of the sitter. The wealth and social positions of the owners and the varied professional classes of the viewers were also highlighted in popular and scholarly publications regarding Gainsborough’s painting.

When Gainsborough painted *The Blue Boy*, class was considered a “rank or order of persons” whose placement in a social hierarchy was largely determined by ancestry, deportment, and style of life and leisure.⁶ These overt signs of rank resulted from the economic inequalities of property ownership and income distribution and were part

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of the cultural framework of each gradation of class from the titled nobility to servants and indigents. Political enfranchisement and industrialization in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries transformed this traditional social order and expanded the influence of the middle class, whose growing prosperity encouraged social advancement. To attain higher ranking, many middle- and working-class people augmented their improved economic wealth with what Pierre Bourdieu calls cultural capital.⁷ According to Bourdieu, class status results not only from income or economic wealth tied to station or occupation, but also from the knowledge, skills, and behaviors that signal cultural competence and determine membership in the dominant, middle, or working class.

Bourdieu recognizes three types of cultural capital contributing to class status. The most readily accrued are the skills, knowledge, and “cultivated dispositions,” that are learned in family groups and through class socialization.⁸ These embodied forms of cultural capital include speech, manners, and taste, such as recognizing the aesthetic value of Gainsborough’s *Blue Boy*. Examples of objectified cultural capital, on the other hand, are material products related to education, occupation, and household that are more easily attained and widely available. Food, clothing, and other consumer goods, such as Gainsborough’s *Blue Boy* and its reproductions, serve as objects of cultural competence that enhance status.

Finally, cultural capital is institutionalized when it is measured or certified by academies or businesses. The process of canon formation that affirmed the high status of *The Blue Boy* for most of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries results from interactions among museums and galleries and the exhibitions, catalogs, and reviews that they generated.⁹ These sources circulated the popular story explaining Gainsborough’s dominant use of blue as a challenge to an academic rule warning against this practice delivered in a lecture by Reynolds at the Royal Academy. Perceived differences in social rank between Gainsborough and Reynolds largely motivated the invention of this origination tale and its widespread institutional dissemination led to the canonization of *The Blue Boy*. Bourdieu recognizes canonical artworks and art knowledge as potent forms of cultural capital that contribute to class status and are most directly available to middle and working classes through educational institutions, publications, and personnel.¹⁰ To these audiences, schools and art venues presented Gainsborough’s painting as a revered work that implied aesthetic knowledge and good taste. As a result, it became broadly familiar and reproductions of the famous painting were ubiquitous.

As an embodied, objectified, and institutionalized form of cultural capital, Gainsborough’s *Blue Boy* exemplified the prevailing taste of the dominant class. Unable to buy the original, members of the middle and working classes dressed as the sitter, purchased reproductions of the painting, and learned the established narratives regarding the painting in order to enhance their cultural capital. These viewers understood the painting as a performance of rank that could be emulated and appropriated as connotative of cultural capital.

For some middle-class imitators, the painting purportedly portraying an ironmonger posing as an aristocrat was an invitation to adopt the upper-class costume to enhance their own status. By the mid-nineteenth century, living facsimiles appeared in social situations such as balls and weddings, where the striking costume signified cultural sophistication with allusions to Van Dyck and Gainsborough. Masquerading as *The Blue Boy* continued into the twentieth century when adults and children appeared in the distinctive dress in parades, elementary-school classrooms, and promotional

events. Professional performances featuring Gainsborough's figure on stage and screen conveyed aspirations and accomplishments that collapsed the gap among the upper, middle, and working classes.

Reproductions of Gainsborough's painting, especially prints and photographs, were also collected and exhibited by the upwardly mobile to signify the canonical knowledge related to cultural capital. Engravings, etchings, and mezzotints were marketed to upper and middle-class collectors in the nineteenth century and color copies of the painting reached a broader audience in the twentieth century. After its sale by Hugh Grosvenor, 2nd Duke of Westminster (1879–1953) to Henry Edwards Huntington (1850–1927) in 1921, magazines in England and America published full-page color versions for subscribers. Subsequently, color reproductions became widely available and when they appeared in real or fictional settings, they conveyed the elevated social position of the owners.

Demonstrating knowledge about Gainsborough's *Blue Boy* also enhanced cultural capital and educational publications and products distributed this information to varied audiences. Many of these facts emphasized the economic values aligned with the actual artwork, with the represented sitter, and with the English and American owners. Commentaries regarding *The Blue Boy* rarely failed to mention its irreplaceability while owned by the Grosvenor family or its record-setting sale price paid by the American businessman Huntington. Narratives regarding the sitter stressed his profession as an ironmonger in order to contrast his occupation with his noble dress. And the extraordinary wealth of both the Grosvenor family and Huntington became an integral part of *The Blue Boy*'s story. Together, measurable monetary values and the less quantifiable cultural capital generated by Gainsborough's painting contributed to its familiarity and renown.

Gender

Gendered characterizations of Gainsborough's *Blue Boy* have centered on the identification of the sex of the sitter and his performative doubles, although the artist and his painting techniques have also been described in language that conveyed categorical attitudes about men and women. Since the mid-nineteenth century, the ostensible masculine gender of Gainsborough's subject has conflicted with the female actors who performed as *The Blue Boy* and with the cultural constructions of what constituted masculinity and femininity in everyday life. These incompatible connotations resulted from a lack of agreement between the indicators of sexual difference in the boy in blue and his counterparts and what Whitney Davis describes as "an extended system of explicit or implicit formal and thematic agreements" related to binary gender distinctions both in and outside of the painting.¹¹ Gendered associations with appearance, dress, and pose that aligned with expectations for masculine and feminine performances were either realized or rejected by the reception of Gainsborough's figure in diverse contexts. Girls and women masquerading as Gainsborough's youth on stage and screen brought about a gradual feminization of *The Blue Boy* that intensified as girlish or womanly inferences overwhelmed the previous descriptions of the sitter as boyish or manly. When well-known actors, such as Marlene Dietrich and Shirley Temple, cross-dressed as *The Blue Boy*, their powerful gendered personas contributed to the confusing blend of feminine and masculine traits attributed to Gainsborough's sitter.

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The superimposition of these differentiated qualities, which accrued over time with the painted sitter and his living lookalikes, was also evident in gendered discussions of the painter and his technique. In general, reservations about Gainsborough's masculinity surfaced in discussions of his love of music, which an early biographer considered "frivolous or childish" and contrasted with his "steady and manly" excellence in art making.¹² Furthermore, when compared with Reynolds, whose disdain for music making contrasted with his devotion to literature, Gainsborough's aesthetic attitude seemed too closely aligned to the sensual appeal of music and to its delicate painterly complement expressed by virtuosic brushwork and soft colors. While painting "to the heart" with truth and simplicity as "his unerring guides," Gainsborough was described as a sensitive man whose style, especially in his rural scenes and portraits of women, implicitly suggested a feminine touch at a time when the proper relationship between feelings and manliness was questioned.¹³ David A. Brenneman points to a review from 1778 that characterized Gainsborough's painting application as lacking "strength of execution" and laid on with a "trembling hand" in contrast to the "manly vigor" of Reynolds's brushwork.¹⁴ According to William Jackson's (1730–1803) posthumous biography of Gainsborough, the artist was capable of both these approaches, failing when the paint was applied too thinly and succeeding when he painted more thickly.¹⁵

Despite these nuanced gendered interpretations of the artist and his painting technique, early narratives regarding *The Blue Boy* recognized the male sitter as a model of masculinity, indicating that the markers of sexual difference in the painting corresponded with the contemporary system of gender agreement regarding maleness. Based in part on his identification as a businessman and his aristocratic deportment, descriptions of Gainsborough's figure emphasized his sensibility, honesty, and shrewdness in connection to gentlemanly pursuits. When men and boys adopted the distinctive blue outfit for balls, staged tableaux, and weddings, the imitators confirmed the normative state of masculinity in both the fictive space of the picture and real realms of their time.

Performance produced the masculine gendered identity of Gainsborough's sitter and also eventually contradicted it. A disruption of the repeated ties between *The Blue Boy* and masculinity first occurred when its costume was adopted for the nursery-rhyme character Little Boy Blue in the 1870s. The resulting infantilized figure dressed as Gainsborough's painted youth appeared in Victorian pantomimes when the "principle boy," usually a woman or a girl, starred in a succession of performances featuring Little Boy Blue.¹⁶ Although retaining many of the qualities associated with masculinity established during its initial reception, Gainsborough's boy in blue was feminized when women and girls adopted his appearance on stage in performances in England and America well into the twentieth century.

These enactments destabilized the masculine gender initially prompted by both Gainsborough's rendered figure and the painting's title and revealed the fluid nature of gender formation. These performances confirm Butler's argument that "gender is in no way a stable identity" but "an identity tenuously constituted in time—an identity instituted through a *stylized repetition of acts*."¹⁷ When women and girls appropriated *The Blue Boy* costume, they shaped perceptions of the painting as performative acts, creating novel gender identities in peculiar contexts and cultural situations and highlighting the gender variances associated with adolescent boys and with contemporary aesthetes and gender and sexually transgressive figures.

In contradiction to the feminized version of Gainsborough's sitter that began in Europe, his masculine traits were reaffirmed when the painting was transferred to

America. In a Depression-era play by Jay Tobias, a character named Frank Blue is resurrected as Gainsborough's sitter. He is described as "handsome," with an "inexhaustible supply of vitality," and with "a low, beautiful voice" and assumes a fatherly role dispensing advice to a troubled family.¹⁸ The masculinity of the boy in blue is also exaggerated in *Kitty*, first published as a historical romance by Rosamond Marshall in 1943 and subsequently released as a Hollywood movie in 1945. In this complicated tale of love and class, the boy in blue becomes the father of Kitty's son whose character is formed by staring at the painting itself.¹⁹

These emphatic re-assertions of clear-cut masculine identity for *The Blue Boy* in America in the middle of the twentieth century were short-lived. Instead, the persistent feminine gendering of the figure combined with the showy dress contradicted any lingering associations with manliness. Wearing Van Dyckian attire continued to connote aristocratic affluence and sophistication, but the excessive fussiness was also linked to delicacy and frailty, conditions culturally tied to women. After World War II, the thoroughly feminized boy of Gainsborough's painting no longer corresponded with normative masculinity, but instead aligned with the contemporary sissy, an effeminate male who sexually desired other men.

Sexuality

Gainsborough's *Blue Boy* has both affirmed and transgressed sexual norms depending on the sociocultural contexts of its reception. For most of its history, Gainsborough's boy in blue implicitly expressed heterosexuality since he conformed to actual or idealized expectations of masculine appearance and conduct, and this gender agreement corresponded to culturally determined procreative sexuality. Evidence of this understanding appeared in descriptions that underscored his manhood, good looks, and professional advantages and in fictional narratives that paired him with a woman. Heterosexual virility was unambiguously affirmed when as an adult, he became a fictional father in the novel and movie called *Kitty*.

The gradual shift from *The Blue Boy*'s extended period of normative heterosexuality through a transitional stage as a symbol of gay liberation to its explicit rendering as a participant in same-sex sexual acts in the twenty-first century can be traced by examining the historical framework for the construction and interpretation of sexuality. This approach to reproductive and erotic history derives from Michel Foucault's influential *History of Sexuality* in which sexuality is presented as a historical construct that connects sexual pleasure to knowledge and power.²⁰ According to Foucault, the rise of sexuality as an identity, rather than a biological term tied to reproduction, began in the late-nineteenth century when religious and moralizing attitudes regarding sexuality were gradually replaced by a scientific impulse to detect and classify non-procreative sexual acts that defied societal norms. Among the reformers, the psychiatrist and forensic scientist, Richard von Krafft-Ebing collected criminal case studies that linked specific sexual desires and behaviors with individuals. The results of this project personified sexuality, including "gender inversion," as an identity, a notion that was broadly circulated in Krafft-Ebing's *Psychopathia Sexualis*, which went through thirty-five British and American editions between 1892 and 1899.²¹ His classification system also situated sexual attraction into the dichotomous orientations of heterosexuality and homosexuality that transformed what was historically determined and individually experienced into an identity based on the gender of one's sexual partner.²²

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The history of homosexuality as a sexual identity in opposition to the heterosexual norm began in this context and set the stage for the association between effeminacy and homosexuality that affected the characterization and understanding of Gainsborough's *Blue Boy*. The conflation of gender and sexuality led to the prevalent and long-lived idea that sexual inversion explained homosexuality. The overt signs of gender inversion rather than the biological sex of the partner established effeminacy in men and mannish styles in women as defining indicators of homosexuality for the dominant culture from its inception in the late nineteenth century through most of the twentieth century. At the same time, this characterization of homosexuality was most clearly manifested by the unconventional aesthete, Oscar Wilde (1854–1900), whose legal troubles in 1895 made him a celebrity.

Before the publicity of the court cases, Wilde was a successful writer and editor, whose appropriation of old-fashioned aristocratic dress and colorful public persona appealed to his mostly female audience.²³ After he lost two cases brought by the government against him for “committing acts of gross indecency with certain male persons,” Wilde served two years in prison. The publicity of the trials publicized the new scientific conceptions of homosexuality, especially as aberrant sexual behavior directly tied to gender inversion.²⁴ Audiences in England and America were already familiar with Wilde's aesthete style from his popular lectures and plays and from the portraits taken by the celebrity photographer Napoleon Sarony. Ten years after the trial, however, these same photographs appeared as textbook illustrations of sexual perversion with captions that identified specific feminine physical characteristics, especially evident in Wilde's facial expression and pose. These markers of “delicacy of taste, artistic talent, and general refinement” became signs of “desire for the same sex” and influenced the subsequent reception of Gainsborough's *Blue Boy* with which Wilde's image shared many effeminate physical characteristics in pose and dress²⁵ (see Figure 0.2).



Figure 0.2 Napoleon Sarony, *Oscar Wilde*, 1882. Albumen silver print, 14.7 × 10.4 cm. Courtesy of the George Eastman Museum.

The “legibility of inversion” persisted despite further developments in the construction of homosexuality that shifted its medical classification toward the object of desire.²⁶ In the same year that Wilde was presented as an embodiment of homosexuality, Sigmund Freud made a distinction between the preferred mode of sexual behavior, which is often gendered as passive/feminine or active/masculine and corresponds to sexual inversion, and the sexual object of desire, such as persons of the same sex. Discriminating between gender role inversion and homosexual object choice was later affirmed in 1948 by Alfred C. Kinsey who maintained, “Inversion and homosexuality are two distinct and not always correlated types of behavior.”²⁷ Although not conclusively attached to homosexual sex, gender inversion stigmatized boys and men who did not conform to male gender stereotypes and instead engaged in conventionally feminine activities and effeminate behavior especially in pose and dress. In post-war America, in particular, passive, feminized boys and men were often stereotyped and humiliated by bullies, but they could also gain the upper hand by exaggerating their deviations from normative gender roles in camp performances in which the overt meaning of what was performed was subverted or inverted by drawing attention to the fact that it was a performance.²⁸ Like Wilde, Gainsborough’s *Blue Boy* appeared in both roles. As a figure reproduced in visual culture, Gainsborough’s sitter was a target for accusations of effeminacy and homosexuality, but he also served as a model for subversive performative acts of homosexual identity.

In the 1950s and 1960s, Gainsborough’s *Blue Boy* underwent several striking transformations as the canonical work of popular art and paradigm of manliness turned into a sign of old-fashioned conservative taste featuring an effeminate figure. Consequently, by deviating from contemporary conventions of masculine deportment and dress, the boy in blue failed to perform heterosexuality in accordance with normative gender and sexual identity. Instead, the appearance of Gainsborough’s sitter corresponded to the descriptions of cerebral sissies who threatened American democracy and were demonized as “Harvard lace-cuff liberals” and “lace-panty diplomats.”²⁹ Like these caricatures of intellectualism and aestheticism, Gainsborough’s figure looked like a “swish,” a degrading term for a homosexual male whose feminine mannerisms were visible markers of his perceived aberrant sexuality.³⁰ With associations of weakness and degeneracy, the clichéd swish first appeared as *The Blue Boy* in the satirical *Mad Magazine* in 1970 and in *Dennis the Menace* in 1975. The unmasking of Gainsborough’s boy as gay paralleled the contemporary cultural climate in which the sexual attitudes, orientations, and behaviors of individuals were becoming more public. Like Wilde, whose presumed “secret” homosexuality was revealed by the trials of 1895, Gainsborough’s *Blue Boy* was outed in satirical and parodic images in the 1970s.

Gainsborough’s *Blue Boy* not only appeared in images in which he was passively forced out of the “closet,” he also took an active role in live performative displays of gay self-identification, most notably when a photograph of a wrestler performing as *The Blue Boy* was reproduced on the cover of the premier issue of the bimonthly gay lifestyle magazine called *Blueboy* in 1975. Camp performances of gay men dressed in *Blue Boy*’s showy blue costume, such as the *Blueboy* cover, brought theatrical social visibility to a sexual identity that had been only furtively recognized by the dominant heteronormative culture. As a form of gay activism, the irony of adult men performing as Gainsborough’s youth allowed them to “make sense of, respond to, and undermine the social categories of gender and sexuality that served to marginalize them.”³¹ Yet,

these public confessions of sexuality denied the option of self-protective non-disclosure, “passing,” and implied that gay men, in particular, required an audience in order to reveal their true essential identity, which was their sexuality.

Acting as *The Blue Boy* seemed to provide a path of agency for gay liberation, however, the performance was scripted by the “closet.” As an oppressive social construction created by the prevailing normative culture, the “closet” provided a strategy for managing non-normative sexuality through secrecy. In her publication, *The Epistemology of the Closet*, Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick eloquently demonstrates how complicated this understanding of concealment or “passing” was because the “open” secret of homosexuality was already known by the heterosexist culture at large, but could not be revealed. David Halperin further illuminates the quandary of the “closet”:

to come out is precisely to expose oneself to a different set of dangers and constraints, to make oneself into a convenient screen onto which straight people can project all the fantasies they routinely entertain about gay people, and to suffer one’s every gesture, statement, expression, and opinion to be totally and irrevocably marked by the overwhelming social significance of one’s openly acknowledged homosexual identity.³²

Controlling the message beyond an individual’s wish for disclosure or secrecy, the “closet” also denies the malleability of sexual or gender dispositions.³³ As a result, *The Blue Boy* became a fixed signifier of gay sexuality until the emergence of a more nuanced queer identity became a possibility.

At the same time that gay men were coming out as *The Blue Boy*, the Pop artist Andy Warhol (1928–1987) was performing in self-revelatory acts that refused to hide or disclose and instead embraced the queer tactic of “opacity” as an alternative to the confessional metaphor of “coming out of the closet.”³⁴ Instead of performing as a concealed identity, Warhol performed as an absent one with queer tactics that included responding to his audience through stand-ins and with monosyllabic answers.³⁵ The impenetrability of his art-centered performances challenged the definitive categories of sex and gender in acts which celebrated mutability and the instability of identities. Refusing to submit or escape entirely from dominant societal gender and sexual norms, Warhol subverted them.

Following these early destabilizing strategies, *The Blue Boy* materialized in the queer ceramic art of Léopold Foulem as a tool of disidentification, a process that reworks contradictory components of gender and sexual identities. In his scholarly work, José Esteban Muñoz considers this concept in relationship to race, however, it applies equally well to Foulem’s odd sculptural presentations featuring Gainsborough’s figure. Whether standing alone or with Santa Claus, KFC’s Colonel Sanders, or a Roman Catholic priest in pairs or trios, Gainsborough’s youth engages in overt sexual acts in Foulem’s art (Figure 0.3). The perplexing juxtapositions of these easily identifiable characters follow the strategies of disidentification as described by Muñoz:

Disidentification is about recycling and rethinking encoded meaning. The process of disidentification scrambles and reconstructs the encoded message of a cultural text in a fashion that both exposes the encoded message’s universalizing and exclusionary machinations and recircuits its workings to account for, include, and empower minority identities and identifications. Thus, disidentification is a step



Figure 0.3 (See Plate 2) Léopold L. Foulem, *Trio in a Flower Patch*, 2012. Ceramic and found objects, 51.2 × 38.9 × 21.4 cm. Photo: Richard Milette.

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further than cracking open the code of the majority; it proceeds to use this code as raw material for representing a disempowered politics or positionality that has been rendered unthinkable by the dominant culture.³⁶

In order to configure a subversive queer identity, Foulem's ceramic sculptures simultaneously refer to the art historical, legendary, commercial, and religious connotations of his recognizable figures within the dominant heteronormative culture and expose their queer status as representatives of outsiders negotiating hybrid identities through their preposterous character combinations. In Foulem's configurations, Gainsborough's *Blue Boy* performs as an agent of class, gender, and sexuality in a queering strategy that creates a place for minority subjects.

Notes

- 1 Moya Lloyd, "Performativity and Performance," in *The Oxford Handbook of Feminist Theory*, eds Lisa Disch and Mary Hawkesworth (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2016), 577.
- 2 Hans Rudolf Velten, "Performativity and Performance," in *Travelling Concepts for the Study of Culture*, eds Birgit Neumann and Ansgar Nünning (Berlin, Germany: De Gruyter, 2012), 250–251.
- 3 John L. Austin, *How to Do Things with Words* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1962), 7–12.
- 4 Velten, 253 and Judith Butler, "Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory," *Theatre Journal* 40, no. 4 (1988): 519–531.
- 5 Velten, 253 citing Judith Butler, *Bodies that Matter: On the Discursive Limits of "Sex"* (New York: Routledge, 1993) and Jacques Derrida, "Signature Event Context," in *Limited Inc.*, ed. Gerald Graff (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1977), 1–23.
- 6 David Cannadine, *Class in Britain* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1998), 22 and 31.
- 7 Pierre Bourdieu, "The Forms of Capital," in *Education: Culture, Economy, Society*, eds A.H. Halsey, H. Lauder, P. Brown, and A.S. Wells (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 1997), 46–58.
- 8 David Swartz, *Culture and Power: The Sociology of Pierre Bourdieu* (Chicago, IL: Chicago University Press, 1997), 76–77.
- 9 Barbara Herrnstein Smith, *Contingencies of Value: Alternative Perspectives for Critical Theory* (Cambridge, UK: Harvard University Press, 1988), 43–44 and Gordon Fyfe, "Reproductions, Cultural Capital and Museums: Aspects of the Culture of Copies," *Museum and Society* 2, no. 1 (March 2004): 49.
- 10 Pierre Bourdieu, *The Field of Cultural Production: Essays on Art and Literature*, ed. Randal Johnson (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993), 36–37 and Omar Lizardo and Sara Skiles, "Cultural Consumption in the Fine and Popular Arts Realms," *Sociology Compass* 2, no. 2 (March 2008): 485–502.
- 11 Whitney Davis, "Gender," in *Critical Terms for Art History*, eds Robert Nelson and Richard Shiff (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 336.
- 12 David A. Brenneman, "Intended by Nature for a Musician: Thomas Gainsborough, Musicians, and the Musical Analogy for Painting in England in the 1770s and 80s," in *Seeing and Beyond: Essays on Eighteenth- to Twenty-First-Century Art in Honor of Kermit S. Champa*, eds Deborah J. Johnson and David Ogawa (New York: Peter Lang, 2006), 33.
- 13 Henry Bate-Dudley, *Morning Herald*, April 16, 1788, 3 as cited in Brenneman, "Intended by Nature," 27 and 33.
- 14 David A. Brenneman, "Thomas Gainsborough and the 'Thin Brilliant Style of Pencilling of Vandyke,'" *The Huntington Library Quarterly* 66, no. 1/2 (2003): 93–94.
- 15 William Jackson, *The Four Ages; Together with Essays on Various Subjects* (London: Cadell and Davies, 1798), 155.
- 16 Millie Taylor, *British Pantomime Performance* (Bristol, UK: Intellect Books, 2007), 116–120.