This lecture examines the representational choices made in neo-Victorian life-writing in reconstructing and re-imagining a historical case of transgender: James Barry, senior colonial medical officer of the British army from 1813 to 1859 and a pioneer of medical reform. Known for his pugnacious, iconoclastic personality during his lifetime, he became the object of intense speculation after his death in 1865 when the charwoman who had prepared his body for burial challenged the medical and military establishment about his sex. With only one testimony to lay claim to physical evidence of his female body, and with his birth identity not established until the latter twentieth century, Barry’s ‘real’ sex and sexual condition, gender identity and life circumstances have in the intervening 150 years received sustained attention in biography, biofiction and biodrama.

The central conceptual contention underpinning my lecture is that the uncertainty about Barry’s sex and, consequently, the gender fluidity of cultural representations of Barry offers an exemplary model for the genre fluidity of neo-Victorian life-writing or what I call ‘biographilia’. The best illustration of how neo-Victorian life-writing operates is furnished by drawing on a nineteenth-century figure who features across biography, biofiction and biodrama and who features both as a boundary transgressor and as a boundary marker.


**Presented by**

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*This lecture is free and all are welcome.*

Please visit our website for further information:

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HRC Conference Room, Top Floor, A.D. Hope Building, ANU.

Writing Games with Dr James: James Miranda Barry in Neo-Victorian Life-Writing

Humanities Research Centre Seminar

Tuesday 1 November 2016, 4.15 – 5.30pm