Timothy Hampton: Welcome to Berkeley Book Chats. I'm Timothy Hampton, director of the Townsend Center for the Humanities.

Berkeley Book Chats showcase a Berkeley faculty member engaged in a public conversation about a recently completed work. This popular series highlights the richness of Berkeley's academic community.

Today's conversation features Michael Lucey of the Comparative Literature & French Departments discussing his book, *Someone: The Pragmatics of Misfit Sexualities from Colette to Hervé Guibert*.

He is joined by Catherine Flynn of the English Department.

Catherine Flynn: Thanks for inviting me to talk with Michael about his new book, which was really a pleasure to read, and I think it's really going to be a pleasure to talk about with him and you today. I prepared a little intro to the book for those of you who haven't managed to read it yet, so that you get a better sense of the parameters and the goals of this book. So, published with University of Chicago press this year, Michael Lucey's book is called "Someone: The Pragmatics of Misfit Sexualities, from Colette to Hervé Guibert". So, this book argues that sexuality is not just what we do and who we do it with or how we understand and represent that to ourselves and to others, but that it is also to varying degrees, what we cannot understand or represent. Michael's book thus explores manifestations of sexualities that do not conform with normative definitions. Even with more recently adapted and now dominant forms of non-heteronormative sexual identities. The sexualities Michael explores in this book exist outside of socially shared and linguistic denotable positions and practices. They present, he argues, in ways that are pragmatic rather than fanatic, in register, tone, implicit frames of reference and so on.

Catherine Flynn: To locate and discuss these eccentric and you might even say loner sexualities, he assembles a critical practice with concepts from Bourdieu, Foucault, Merleau-Ponty, Erving Goffman, Michael Silverstein, Michael Warner, to name actually not all of them. This book is unusual in the discourse of sophistication it mobilizes to examine the non-discursive with the role of paying compassionate attention to individuals who fail to belong. So, as Michael writes, "someone", inverted commas, the word, stands throughout the present book as a token not only of the misfit, whose utterance has struggled to enact something in language for which there are no readily available words, but also of the hope for an interlocutor who are proved capable of understanding an evanescent message about the experience of sexuality that cannot be stated in so many words, but it is nonetheless being put forth in language in the hopes of founding a community of shared understanding, however small, however awkward, however fleeting. As these lines suggest, with their reference to the shared evanescent and fleeting, the book's exploration of these misfit sexualities does not generalize them as social or sexual revolutionaries or situate them in triumphant progressive narratives. He describes in an even-handed way how some of these figures extend literary and discursive fields in new ways but also how it comes about that others fall into some of the conservative and even homophobic formations of their time.

Catherine Flynn: This is another of the fascinating capacities of the book. As it examines literature as the place where sexualities that are not registered in languages referential propositional functioning find some presence, it examines literature as a place in which indexical or pragmatic functioning of language is activated, it situates literary text within broader sets of mobile and heterogeneous discursive feels and embodied practices. In French culture and society, between 1930 and 1990. Someone is a compelling and even moving work that shows us how literature offers us implicit frameworks with which to organize and reorganize our perceptions of sexuality. It's significance for everyone is signified in these lines from Michael, Michael's book that I'll read now.

Catherine Flynn: He's talking about Simone de Beauvoir's novel, L'Invitée, "they invited" or "she came to stay". L'Invitée might be taken as a novel about the way namable and un-namable forms of sexuality wash through all of us and provide only some with a context in which to manifest our sexuality as a text that others can read. Whereas, others manifest in fragmentary ways, pieces of a variety of sexual forms that may or may not suffice but that don't amount to anything easily cognizable, recognizable or intextualizable for most people around us. So, I'm delighted to talk some more with Michael about this book. So, Michael, could you say a little bit more about how the ideas for the book emerged from your earlier writing? For example, in your previous book, Never Say I, you write in this introduction that, about your discussion of Colette's articulation of social categories that women can have it but only temporarily and then not admittedly or avowedly. So, how is the focus of this book different?

Michael Lucey: Yeah. So, in that earlier ... when I started writing that earlier book, Never Say I, I thought it would probably be a book about the whole 20th century, about a problem that I kind of saw in French literature where same sex sexualities became topicalized, they became a thing that could signify that a literary work was serious because it was treating that topic and that to me was in itself an interesting phenomenon, how does a topic like same sex sexuality become a sign that something belongs to serious literature? Why would that happen in France? So, I had this idea that I would deal with that across the whole 20th century because the 20th century starts with a couple of major figures like Colette and Proust who are instrumental in making this happen. But, then, it just goes on and there are more figures like Genet, and Hervé Guibert, and, well, Violette Leduc we can come back to, but Monique Wittig. So, there's a long tradition in french literature where seriousness of literary purpose can be linked to the working on the question of same sex sexuality.

Michael Lucey: But, after I wrote the first book and I started working on what I thought was its sequel, I started working on Simone de Beauvoir and I started learning about Marguerite Duras's relationship with a much younger gay man who became her intimate, I don't even know what else to say, and I was working on Violette Leduc and Violette Leduc, there's always been a question, is it right to call her a lesbian writer or not? I realize that I was now dealing with questions that I had never seen exactly stated in this way of people who didn't fit in. So, the problem was the same that you were topicalizing a same sex sexuality in various ways, but the problem has shifted something. It wasn't the effort to topicalize it, it was the way in which once it had been topicalized, it was a problem for people.

Michael Lucey: So, Simone de Beauvoir of course, the material that I started working on about Simone de Beauvoir was just the greatest instance of that since she wrote this novel which when people read it, when it came out during the occupation in France, everybody who knew her and knew anything about her because people lived their private lives somewhat in public in her circles, understood that it was a book about her relationships with some of the young women who had been her

students. So, they understood that about the book even though if you maybe didn't know that, if you weren't a person in Paris who was current on all the gossip about Simone de Beauvoir and her circle, the novel might not have told you that it was about that. But, then people ... but then Violette Leduc would read the novel much more distantly and she would say, I'm sure Simone de Beauvoir loves women or something like that. So, I would see this novel have a variety of effects on differently positioned readers and I would see also that it would mean differently depending on what else people had read, who they knew, that kind of question. So, a novel that wasn't explicitly about same sex sexuality would be about same sexuality for some people given certain circumstances. So, that problem of meaning, how meaning happens somehow blossomed into this book.

Catherine Flynn: Yeah. So, I'm going to ask you in a minute about how you developed a critical practice with which to analyze in a fine grained and broad way, broad in its end but, how meaning develops and circulates around these texts and in these texts, but I want to start first with maybe more a discussion of the thematics. So, you talk about Simone de Beauvoir as this ... we all know her to be a preeminent figure in French literary circles at the time and who was actually friends with Violette Leduc who is in many ways, at the absolute opposite end of the literary spectrum in certain ways. So, can you talk ... for me, Violette Leduc is one of the most moving and fascinating characters, I mean they're all very fascinating in this book, can you talk about how she embodies the tensions that you're interested in exploring in someone?

Michael Lucey: Violette Leduc you mean?

Catherine Flynn: Yeah.

Michael Lucey: Yeah. Yeah, she's quite an interesting figure, in part because she seems to me an immensely weighty and important figure in 20th century french literature, but not everybody is aware of that or something like that. What's interesting about it is that she of course comes from an extremely impoverished background, so there was no ... it was a challenge for her to occupy a place in the literary landscape. It was something that happened to her relatively late in life and it was one of those things where when she was lucky enough to be by a series of coincidences in a certain way to be recognized by a number of already serious literary people and they would read her writing and they would say, you are a serious writer, you should write more and then they would arrange for her to be published, so right away she was published in very prestigious places, in a series edited by Albert Camus for her first novel. And then the novel was a total flop, got terrible reviews. Only a very small select of really in-the-know kind of people would read her novels and like them and that of course ... she was a very fragile person.

Michael Lucey: So, it was very difficult for her that. But, the other thing was that one of the things that people liked about her writing was that she took up a series of very difficult issues in her writing, so she took up the issue of same sex relationship between school girls and also between school girls and their teachers. So, that was challenging for the public of the time or for the gate keepers you could say of the time and also she took up the question of abortion. So, in one of her early novels it began with scenes in a school and later it portrayed an abortion and [inaudible 00:11:52] refused to publish those scenes. So, Leduc experienced that very personally. So, she thought of herself as a person who was bringing a certain kind of women's female experience to literature that men had already been able to bring. So, she thought of herself as a parallel to Jean Genet in certain ways.

Michael Lucey: So, he had already been able to bring certain experiences to literary representation that hadn't been there before and then she thought she was going to be able to do the same thing and then a censorship was applied to her that hadn't been applied to other people and that really, people say, drove her to a nervous breakdown. She was a very fragile person already. But, there's something about it. There's this ... what's interesting to me about Violette Leduc is, there's this little quote that I like from Pierre Bourdieu that comes at the beginning of the book where he says, "Narratives about the most personal difficulties the apparently most strictly subjective tensions and contradictions frequently articulate the deepest structures of the social world and their contradictions. This is never so obvious as it is for occupants of precarious positions who turn out to be extraordinary, practical analysts situated at points where social structures work and therefore, worked over by the contradictions of these structures.

Michael Lucey: These individuals are constrained in order to live or to survive to practice a kind of self analysis which often gives them access to the objective contradictions which have them in their grasp. So, the objective structures expressed in and by these contradictions." It felt to me like Bourdieu could be describing Violette Leduc when he wrote that, that her writing is mad in certain ways but also lucid, right? There's a lucidity about how the social structures have wreaked havoc on her. So, and then I guess the point that makes her ... all of that makes her interesting for the book, but then what goes on to make her interesting for the book is that she was extremely lucid also about her own sexuality in the way that it made no sense in the categories that the world offered, right?

Michael Lucey: So, she had relationships with men, she had relationships with women, they were overdetermined by all sorts of other variables having to do with class, region, status, all sorts of things. So, she had a sense of the complexity of sexuality that it wasn't a thing in itself, it was this complicated construction and that she understood that she would never fit in. So, she understood a kind of a misfittedness about herself and she made it her effort, her project in a certain way to display that, but then also in displaying it to just have enough critical distance from the display that was going on that you could say that she was working on that problem.

Catherine Flynn: Yeah. I love the way you characterize her as, say her relations to literature and the literary world to authors and to writing are illegitimate, unorthodox, inappropriately sensual, insufficiently intellectual and that when literature is a kind of locus of fervor for her, both as a reader and a writer, it's also weirdly a place where she wants to make a lot of money. So, she brings all of these sort of inappropriate-given the cultural field- desires to writing that cannot be fulfilled and so, she's destined only to have a counter public and the counter public that she creates, well one of them, emerges only to disappear again, embodied in one instance in the three high school boys who she writes with and who come to Paris and she ends up in a hotel room for three days with one of them. It's very strange, very strange and very ... it's both poignant and also inspiring to see her follow these desires, but they are intermittent, ambiguous, shifting. This is very complex.

Michael Lucey: Yeah.

Catherine Flynn: Yeah. So, in the quotation you read from the front piece of your book, you touch on the critical apparatus you put in place. So, I would say that some of the key concepts that you assemble are the notions of cultural fields from Bourdieu of pragmatics and metapragmatics from Pierce and to some extent Bourdieu, but few other figures. Also, the idea of ... there's another one I was going to mention.

Sorry, it's escaped me right now, but do you want to talk about how these fit together, how you kind of assemble a whole? There's also backstage and onstage, but there's something else that's really critical. There are other critical terms too.

Michael Lucey: Yeah. So, it's interesting because there's something about ... there's a set of tools that I needed in order to be able to talk about sexuality, the way that sexuality exists in culture, and in language, but sexuality exists in language in the non-propositional parts of language. So, people, as they are talking, make sexuality happen or actualize sexuality in their talking, but when we are talking, and we aren't just ... we have a bias towards the propositions that are forming our statements, but in fact, so many other things are going on as we talk besides just the propositional level and sexuality happens on all those other channels, you could say often. So, that problem was interesting to me and I needed tools to be able to talk about it. The interesting thing is then that the tools that help you to talk about it are useful in thinking about literature as language in general, not just sexuality. So, there's a way in which the method of the book I think has something to say to the way that we think about literature as a particular use of language, beyond the question of sexuality in general.

Michael Lucey: So, the tools come in part from Bourdieu and in part from linguistic anthropology and Bourdieu has this really nice, it's like the first sentence of his book called Pascalian Meditations and he says something like, it's because we are implicated in the world that there is implicit stuff in what we act, how we act and in what we say. I don't necessarily like to go into that genealogical thing... that etymological thing, but implicit, if you know french, then you know that it has the word "pli" in it, right? So, it's a folding inward. Implicated also has that folding inward sense. So when Bourdieu says we are implicated in the world, what he means is that the world has been folded into us in a certain way, we've absorbed the world and so, when we talk and when we act, the way that we've absorbed the world is present implicitly in the way that we talk and act. And so, then the question is, how do you get at implicitness? So, implicitness is important for understanding how sexuality operates.

Michael Lucey: But, implicitness is also just a thing that happens in language all the time. So, my interest in that regard was both when is literature itself interested in implicitness and how does it engage with that interest of implicitness? But, also, if we are thinking ... if we are people who are interested in objects that are made out of language, how do we make sure that we are as attentive to the implicitness of the object as to just what it says?

Catherine Flynn: Yep. Literature emerges as really crucial in this aspect, particularly in regard to the idea that you take from Merleau-Ponty that the manifestation of the individual exceeds any intellectual representative or theoretical capacities of the first person, so that we're not capable consciously, conceptually of encapsulating ourselves of giving expression to ourselves. So, we have recourse to existing frames of reference, ways of speaking, but those ways of speaking are not just conceptual, they're also gestural, they're also indexical to use another term you used for a kind of deprived semantic content or a sort of content that is less semantic than other, than non-propositional. So, literature becomes a really rich place. The richness of literature is really activated by this question of what is implied, rather than said. But, what's very interesting about your book is that it investigates these literary moments within larger contexts of critical reception, of behind-the-stage exchanges between writers, about what they're doing in order to understand what kinds of discourses are mobilized or what kinds of attitudes are infusing these works.

Catherine Flynn: So, it was very interesting to read de Beauvoir's exchanges with Sartre about the use of the third person and that they took from Dos Passos. So, they felt in a kind of different way to Merleau-Ponty that the first person cannot encapsulate themselves, that they are in some ways victim to certain stories about themselves, but that once you cast yourself in the third person, your moments of bad faith, your intellectual laziness, your moral or political hypocrisy becomes exposed. And so, the "you" as the third person, in order to recast what seemed like straightforward, understandable events and statements, as in some ways requiring further reflection and some kind of enhancement of political and ethical honesty, but what you argue then is when de Beauvoir uses that in her fiction, it actually, the third person becomes a space in which what she cannot articulate about herself and her sexuality is rehearsed in some ways.

Catherine Flynn: It echos or it's present in this depersonalized space that she's creating in her fiction. These are sexual encounters with younger women that she will disavow later in the second sex where she writes about the lesbian. It was really very interesting to bring these into contrast where there's a kind of taxonomy of the lesbian or description kind of quasi-anthropological, but it's very othering and that she just doesn't identify with, but that as a woman who has sex with other women, but not exclusively, she has a very problematic relationship too, a kind of confusion about how to situate herself with regard to.

Michael Lucey: Yeah. So, that whole episode where Sartre and Beauvoir are talking a lot about the novels that they're writing and they're trying to use a kind of a free and direct discourse and they're imagining ... for them, free and direct discourse is a kind of a harsh version of a self-critique, an ideology critique they do free and direct discourse as a form of critique, that's the way they would like it to operate, but the problem is that when you use the third person in that way, nonetheless more is expressed than you know. So, it doesn't actually solve the problem, it just postpones the problem a little further and that seems especially true about Beauvoir's relationship to her own sexuality that ... I mean, it would be conceivable ... it would've been conceivable. The novel seems to have a very clear understanding that there are bars in Montmartre that you go to if you're a lesbian and then there are places in Montparnasse that you go to if you're a woman who sleeps with women. She doesn't actually say it per se, but the novel structures her ... you can see her understanding is structured that way. So, that understanding is present in the way that the novel is structured, but there's no sense that the free and direct discourse of the novel, the third personalization of the novel has given any critical access to that structure, that is-

Catherine Flynn: That's an example of the implied practical knowledge that pertains to these misfit sexualities that you're examining in this book. Can you talk a little bit about temporality in this book? So, in the first chapter, you talk about Colette and her ... the importance the Ladies of Llangollen play especially vis-a-vis contemporary, contemporary to her female sexuality, female same sex sexuality that she is put off by. So, can you talk a little bit more about time and how it might ... your approach to temporality in this book or your observation of the kind of temporal functioning of these texts is perhaps different to other kinds of temporalities associated with [inaudible 00:25:12].

Michael Lucey: I think there are lots of ... right, so, somewhere in the introduction, I think I cite this passage from Jose Munoz that I like a lot, where he says, so, the queer ... introduction I talk about why I use the word misfit sexualities instead of queer. So, what Jose says is that the queer present, it's something like this, is a moment where you see fragments of the past that you can assemble in order to put together some future utopia imagining that would be a space that would harbor a kind of queerness that is difficult to assemble like in your present moment. So,

the past is a resource, the present is difficult, the future is utopian, something like that.

Michael Lucey: So, I like that model a lot. I just noticed that it doesn't play out that way for everybody in the book, right? So that Colette, when she's reading about the Ladies of Llangollen who are these Irish women who fled Ireland to Wales where they set up a household for themselves in the mid-18th century and became iconic figures across Europe for having done this and were visited by many people. So, for Colette, what she sees in her present is an emerging culture of lesbianism in which she feels out of place. So, the past is the place that she would go back to and the future is almost a one of dread, right? So, that would maybe be one way of explaining why you would say call her maybe a ... that there's something that she's interested in her misfittedness rather than a queerness the way that it often gets evoked in work that's aspired by Jose Munoz's work for instance. I'm trying to think of what another example is. I guess what I thought for many of the figures in the book, for a variety of reasons, the future was foreclosed, so there was no sense that they were borrowing from the past in order to make a more livable present that might emerge as a queer future. The future seems foreclosed for-

Catherine Flynn: Violette Leduc, when she rips on Proust, and says, the past has no nourishment for me.

Michael Lucey: That's another great example.

Catherine Flynn: I'm going to open it up to questions. I just want to ask you first, what you want people to really take from this book. What kind of effect would you like this book to have in the discursive fields in which it's going to move?

Michael Lucey: Yeah. I guess I would say just in terms of ... not in terms of say sexuality studies, but in terms of critical practice, there's a moment in the book for instance where I'm thinking about how we today would understand what a novel like L'Inviteé would mean, right? Or to take an example from the Marguerite Duras chapter, the texts, the melody of death which has been understood in so many ways by so many different people and often times people don't notice about it that it's an explicitly homophobic text. I think that Marguerite Duras understood it to be an explicitly homophobic text. It was written as an explicitly homophobic text. But, that was apparent to some people, lost on some people, some people didn't care, that kind of thing. So, I'm thinking, in critical practices, when you think about how meaning happens, how meaning comes and goes around literary works, I would like for us to talk about that more and to have better tools for talking about that. I think that that's also really importantly true in sexuality studies.

Michael Lucey: Since I think that often times people talk about how modern sexuality emerged. Foucault's date was 1869, 1870, 1871, I can't quite remember what the date was, but there was that sense that there was a bunch of categorical, there was a period of flux and then the categories reorganize themselves and somehow between 1870s and 1940, a paradigm shift happened in and out and then now things are the way they are. I don't believe that actually. I think that period of flux, if it ended, it's started again. So, I think that there is no sense of a set of categories through which we understand sexuality. There's a lot of implicitness that's operative right now about sexuality. So, I would like I think for in sexuality studies too for us to have better tools for talking about the way that paradigms shift all the time, that they're always shifting.

Catherine Flynn: Great. Okay. So, questions from you. Marie.

Marie: I just have one question related to something you said. You said your work is helping you understand what a special type of language literature is. So, can you say more about that? What is special about literature as language or as communication maybe?

Michael Lucey: I don't know if I exactly said that. What did I say that was that? So, one of the things that I talk about in the book is ... so, if in the prequel to this book I was talking about the importance of same sex sexuality being topicalized as a serious ... something that gave you bonafides as a serious literary author, what I was noticing in this book was how you could see as people across the 20th century worked on sexuality, they began to work on the problem of implicitness or the problem of pragmatics, they began to understand that just by say repeated writings of scenes having to do with people trying to interact in a way in which sexuality was involved, they began to understand, perhaps not on some conscious level, but on some level of literary practice that an investigation of the non-denotational parts of language had to be part of these literary projects.

Michael Lucey: So, when I get to the end of the book in the last chapter it goes a little bit out of chronological order and I write about the novels of [inaudible 00:32:11] I think was the master of that since his whole ... when he would describe his own project in literature, it would be that he was interested in tone, right? He was interested in people who talked and the tone they had when they talked and he would say that when he was waiting to write a new book, he would have to wait to hear the voice and then once he would hear the voice, then the subject of the book would emerge out of the sound of the voice and it just so happens that every voice he heard was queer in some way or another or that he ended up writing about an imaginary part of the world that represented the region in France where he spent a lot of time, in which all sorts of misfit sexualities were present and people knew about them in some way or other and housed them in their language, but it was in all of these implicit futures of language that they housed this knowledge about sexuality.

Michael Lucey: So, I am interested in particular in places in literature. I'm interested in novels in particular where this concern for the other channels of language you could say emerges. So, in fact, the book that I'm hoping to finish some time soon is really about Proust and how he is keenly focused on the use of language to make culture move in certain ways and when culture moves because of the way people use language, it's because of all these other parts of language not just because of the propositional content of language.

Catherine Flynn: Okay. Right down the back. Let's see if the wire stretches that far.

Speaker 4: Hello. I was wondering the Bourdieu quote that you read first, the one from the beginning of the book about the precarious position and the kind of practical knowledge that comes with being in a precarious position in a social field, I was wondering in some ways, I guess that sounds like the queer or the idea that queer sexuality somehow gives you this position within the field and this kind of inherent knowledge or this view of the way things are and of normativities. So, I was wondering if you did see it that way or if you saw it as distinct somehow from the queer and the way that misfit is also distinct from the queer?

Michael Lucey: I mean, I don't think that when Bourdieu was writing that passage he was thinking about sexuality per se, I think that he was thinking about other forms of domination. So, I think that he was thinking about class forms of domination and ethnic forms of domination and domination of capital over people who don't possess capital. That's kind of what he was thinking about there. So, I don't know if you would find it useful or not to take all forms of precarity and say

precariousness is queer. That seems to me kind of unhelpful, really. And then maybe the other thing that I would say which is why I moved a little bit away from queer towards misfit is that not all people who think of themselves as queer are really precariously situated. I mean, they may be situated on the edges of categories, right? But, not all places at which people find themselves situated which makes them queer would make them precarious. Some people, yes, some people no. So, the precarity, precariousness involves an array of variables coming to bear on somebody at the same time. So, that's a way of saying I would probably not, those are a series of reasons why I wouldn't use queer in relationship to that passage. Yeah.

Speaker 5: I'm excited to read this book. It's just come in the mail, but I haven't read it yet, so if it's addressed in this ... I guess I have a question on the subject of the making yourself into the ... not the ideal interlocutor, but if this book is coming from a somebody and from that misfit position, the thing that came to mind was two quotes, one of them a scholar who's writing on Looking for Langston and talks about maybe some day, someone will dream our moment into life and another from Walt Whitman who says, my ideal biographer has not yet arrived. So, I was thinking in terms of that and like when you were talking at Colette, you talked about the relationship she has to the past that maybe my biographer has come and gone or something, but just about I guess two things, one, the sort of terms that you had to move around to see how best to make these misfit sexualities legible and two, the way that they do sort of still cohere within queer studies with the emphasis on the gesture of [inaudible 00:37:51] the sort of turns that seem to energize your project just in terms of how this project took energy within a moment where ... this book seems really right for the moment that we're in. So, I'm curious about the ideal reader then and the way you moved among those terms alongside the ideal reader now, if that makes sense.

Michael Lucey: Yeah. Thanks for bringing up Looking For Langston. I think that that would be obviously couldn't exactly go into corpus for this book but it would be a really nice text or film to think about with these terms in mind. There's a place in the introduction where I address some of the previous work on queer historiography, like Chris Nealon's work on Foundlings. So, that or Heather Love's Backward looking negative effects work, and I say ... so, all of that work seems really kind of helpful to me in understanding the way that people try to turn themselves at certain moments of time into the appropriate interlocutor for some past text. So, maybe in a certain way, like if you were taking ... the question of these Ladies of Llangollen, I'm going to go there and visit their ... I'm going to do some Ladies of Llangollen tours at some point in the near future. But, because the house is a tourist site, right? It became a tourist site already while they were living in it and it has remained such ever since, because people really wanted to say I understand the Ladies of Llangollen. There's lots of different understandings of them. They did have sex together, they didn't have sex together. There's any number of axis on which people try to imagine, yes, when I read their writing, I am the appropriate addressee for it and I understand it.

Michael Lucey: So, I guess I'm interested when people do that, right? And then I'm interested also in the moments in the book that I'm talking about where people are imagining I hope someday there will be or I hope somewhere out there in the world there is someone who when they read this will get what I'm talking about or even moments in Genet where he kind of says, most of you aren't going to get this, but some of you might, right? So, the sense that the address of the book is itself multivalent. So, to me, I think what's interesting when you ... if you're going to be critical in some ways, then you want to be able to have those responses and say, yeah, I am the right person to read the Genet novel which I'm not going to read the Genet novel, but maybe somebody will feel, oh yeah, I'm the right

person to read Colette's, The Pure and The Impure, right? I get it, right? Something like that.

Michael Lucey: I like it that people have those moments and then I think they should have a second moment which would be interesting that I just had that moment and how do I think about my ability to have had that moment? Who am I? How am I implicated in my world now and how does the way I'm implicated in my world now interface with what was implicit in that text that I think I'm able to make legible? So, I like that two phase process. I feel like that's politically important in some ways for people now trying to figure things out. Does that answer?

Speaker 5: Yeah, that's so helpful, thanks.

Catherine Flynn: Other questions? Yep, Carl.

Carl: So, Michael, one of the parts of the book that I really was fascinated with is the section where you write about people attending and writing about and talking about what were called the [inaudible 00:42:04] in Paris and I just wanted to invite you to talk, if you'd like to, about how the kind of work that you're doing in the book having to do with kind of misfit categories of sexuality was illuminated by that and other sections in the book where you address histories of race and colonialism with many of the writers that you are working on in the book.

Michael Lucey: Yeah, that's kind of ... there's that moment in the ... so, just to fill people in a little bit, when I said that in the implicit social geography of the world that Simone de Beauvoir portrays in her novel L'Inviteé which is translated into English as "She Came to Stay," there is the sense that there is some bar that you can go to in Montparnasse- I mean in Montmartre, in the north of Paris, where you will meet lesbians and gay men or whatever the words ... [inaudible 00:43:12] is actually the word, [inaudible 00:43:14] is the word that they use. So, that sense of a queer bar in Montmartre and there are people who study the queer culture in Montmartre and in some ways that's the world that Genet lived in, but then, the other space that the novel brings up is a space in Montparnasse. So, in south, what's it called? The left bank. Which is where ... I'm having a hard time recalling the characters names now, Francois and-

Catherine Flynn: And Xavier.

Michael Lucey: And Xavier. Yeah. Go. The place that they actually go is a bar that actually existed called the Bal Nègre. So, it's a complicated space on the Rue Blomet, which went out of business for a while, but came back into business not so long ago, but of course, what's interesting is that I think that you were the one who sent me to read this stuff, when they decided to reopen the bar, they wanted to maybe reference its storied past. So, they thought they would just call it the Bal Nègre again. And then, they had to be educated out of that. So, now they call it the Rue Blomet I think are the-

Speaker 7: Bal Blomet.

Michael Lucey: The Bal Blomet, is that what it's called? Yep. So, in sort of my tourism regarding my own book, I have to go to Wales but I actually went and heard [inaudible 00:44:31] play at the Bal Blomet a few times ago in Paris and it was interesting just to be in that space and think, wow, so this is a space that was opened as a meeting place for Caribbean people living in Paris to have a cultural ... a space for their own culture. And then of course there were some artist types living in

the neighborhood and they thought it was a cool space. So, then they started coming and then they invited their friends and then before you knew it, there was a tourist industry about going to this bar. You know all this because I learned a lot of this thanks to references you sent me to. So, then, that means that it's not just that François and Xavier, the characters in the book, have this other space on the left bank where they can go to and not be identity-based in their same sex eroticism. It's tied up with watching the culture of the Caribbean transplanted into Paris being enacted and the kinds of ways that they eroticize that for themselves.

Michael Lucey: So, that ties in with the sense of how do you understand sexuality in relationship to this cloud of other variables that surrounds it and impacts it. The thing about the Beauvoir novel is that it doesn't understand it, it just mentions sexy black women dancing together and then it mentions Baudelaire and it mentions the Bal Nègre. So, it just puts it out there that it's there in the culture and it doesn't really know what to do with it. So, that's a point where the novel is not able to be analytical about the material that it's presenting. So, to me, that's a kind of unfinished business for me to talk about that more. So, I have this other book that I'm hoping to write next called thinking about sexuality with novels where I want to be able to talk about the way that categories circulate, right? So, that you would be able to think about the text like L' Invitée as just a node in a circulatory pattern for certain kinds of information that's moving around the globe. So, what would it mean to start to think of what I ... maybe you could call it the extended indexicality of novels where novels index things almost in spite of their intentions. So, they contribute to the history of sexuality un-accidentally almost. So, that's work that I'm hoping to do more of now. Yeah.

Catherine Flynn: Tim?

Tim: Can I ask a question? So, I'm just trying to find a way in which the words-

Catherine Flynn: Posterity wants to hear you.

Tim: You.

New Speaker: You're having a conversation about the role of literature. And the word novel seems to be literature. I've been struck by the kind of models of reading that Michael was just describing in the question before seemed to me to be very generically based. Novels are about aims of identification where we say, yes, I am a reader for that problem, right? Or possibly. The question is, to what extent is this discourse about literature and about novels? I think in the text that I work on, [inaudible 00:48:11] for example, says that poetry nails him, it pierces him and nails him. And then he quotes a line in a Latin book from Virgil, which he couldn't possibly identify with because it's talking about kingdom. So, there are lots of different models of reading, but this model of reading seems to be one model of reading and I'm wondering ... and it seems to be connected to the novel. So, could you help us? Because I find the thing you're saying about the kind of methodological models that you're working out a way which you're trying to think about it, the implicit can be incredibly compelling, but they seem to be limited in a certain kind of way to a particular genre or am I just not hearing you?

Michael Lucey: No, that's totally fair. So, when I said that I want to write this book that's called thinking about sexuality with novels, that's like ... that's because that's my expertise in a certain way and even though I'm not ... it's not just about novels [inaudible 00:49:07] because there's many genres of texts that crop up in here, but

they tend to be prose-based or life writing of some kind. The book that I'm working on on Proust is really about a stream of novel writing where it's very clear that novelists are influenced by each other and they learn lessons from each other and they learn ... novelists say like Proust learns from George Elliot and from Balzac about what you are doing when you portray scenes of conversation in which what's important is the non-denotational aspect of conversation. Right? So, Proust learns that from other novelists.

Michael Lucey: So, it's something that exists within a novel tradition. So, there is something novel-specific that I'm working on. On the other hand, I also want to write a little short book called "Literature and/as Language and Use." Of course, most of my examples will be novels, but when you take the method and you say, okay, I want to understand ... so, if you take the example Simone de Beauvoir publishes this novel L' Invitée in 1939 I think it is, and just if you are obsessive enough and you read enough stuff from 1939, 1940, 1941, 1942, you're going to find a bunch of different people reacting to the novel and you will see, oh, this novel's reception varied from person to person and you can find real distinctive differences between people in different social locations reading the novel.

Michael Lucey: So, then their testimonies become part of the array, the semiotic array that you are constructing to understand what is in the novel. So, for me, what's interesting, the way I'm describing it nowadays is that it's not actually in the novel, there's a capacity that the novel has to allow certain kinds of interactions to happen and they happen differently with different people, right, and this is where a notion like habitus would come in. There's a set of implied habitus in the text and then there are habitus out there in different readers that somehow create an interactive space in which the text emerges in different ways. That problem is not specific to a genre. That problem is specific to textual artifacts. So, there are problems that are specific to textual artifacts and then there is a novelistic tradition that interests me in particular.

Timothy Hampton: We hope you enjoyed this Berkeley Book Chat, and we encourage you to join us in person or via podcast for future programs in the series.