The Nonbinary: The Importance of Gender and Pronouns in *Alice in Wonderland*

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Why Focus on Gender Pronouns?

- Gender identity is central to the production's purpose
  - We are using Carroll's absurdism to make our own meaning in the existing world
- This production is a space for the education and celebration of all identities
  - Gender identities are central to this conversation
- Why a presentation?
  - To educate ourselves about respecting gender identity
  - To give an academic framework for the production's intellectual components

Gender Inclusive Pronouns

- ► What are Gender Inclusive Pronouns?
  - ► Definition: pronouns that are not associated with the with the gender of the individual being discussed
  - ► Gender neutral pronouns can be favored by individuals from any background on the gender identity and the sexual orientation spectrum
- ► The usage of gender inclusive pronouns has a long history both sociologically and linguistically
  - ► They are not a new phenomenon

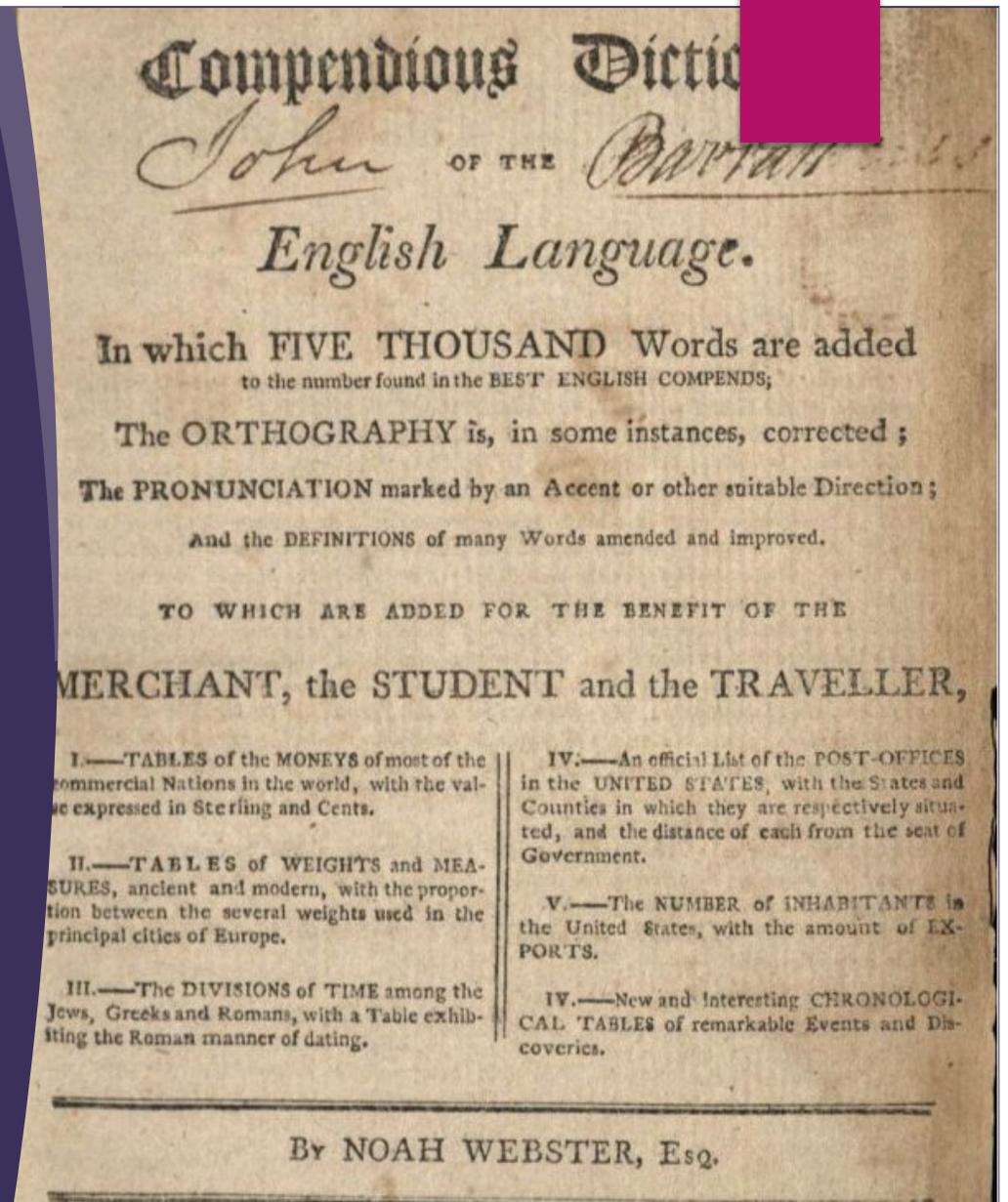|		Subject	Object	Pronoun	Pronunciation
Gender Binary		she	her	hers	as it looks
		he	him	his	as it looks
Gender Neutral		they*	them*	theirs*	as it looks
		ze	hir	hirs	zhee, here, heres
		ze	zir	zirs	zhee, zhere, zheres
		xe	xem	xyrs	zhee, zhem, zheres

*used as singular

Linguistic History of Gender-Neutral Pronouns

- Gender inclusive pronouns have existed in the English language since its inception
  - There are recorded uses since the medieval ages
    - These pronouns are derived from old and middle English
  - Examples: The dialectical epicene pronoun "ou"
    - "ou" encompassed "he", "she", or "it"
  - The "ou" pronouns evolved over time into the middle English pronouns "he" and "heo"
    - By the 12th and 13th centuries the "he" and "heo" pronouns merged into a neutral term and casted ambiguity on the pronoun system
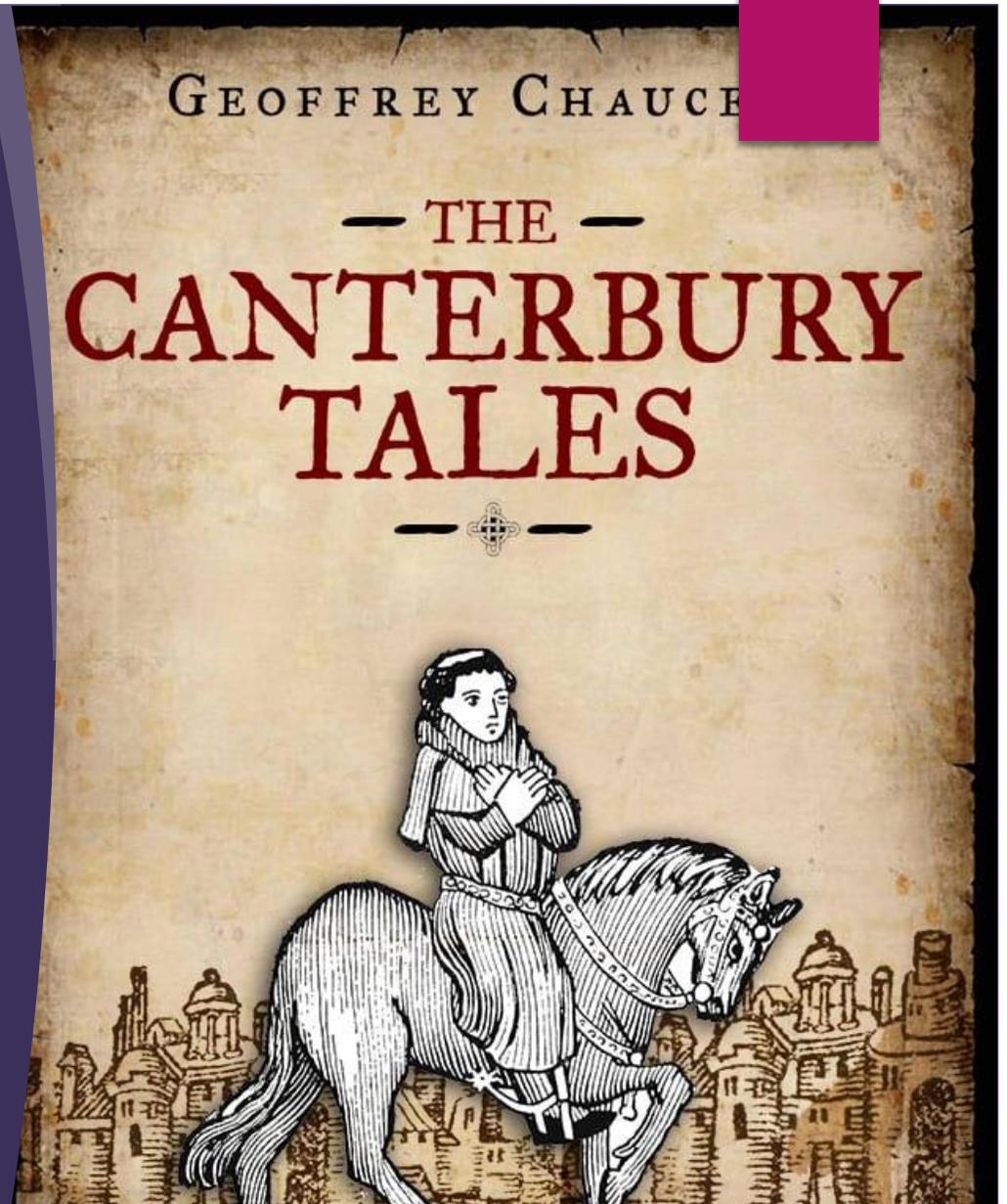
Linguistic History of Gender-Neutral Pronouns cont.

- Binary "he" and "she" were only accepted into the English lexicon by the 16th and 17th centuries

- There was a discourse during the 17th and 18th over the usage of "they" as a neutral pronoun

  - Is it formal or informal usage?

  - Regardless, "they" continued to be used neutrally for 600 years

Literary History of Gender-Neutral Pronouns

► The usage of gender usage pronouns in English is evident in many classical literary works

  ► Example: Geoffrey Chaucer's *The Canterbury Tales,* Shakespeare's *Hamlet,* and Jane Austin's *Pride and Prejudice*

► The usage of the singular "they" was used to specify an action and not to express gender neutrality

► Claiming "they" is a recent trend sociologically

  ► The oldest academic research to the topic dates to 2017

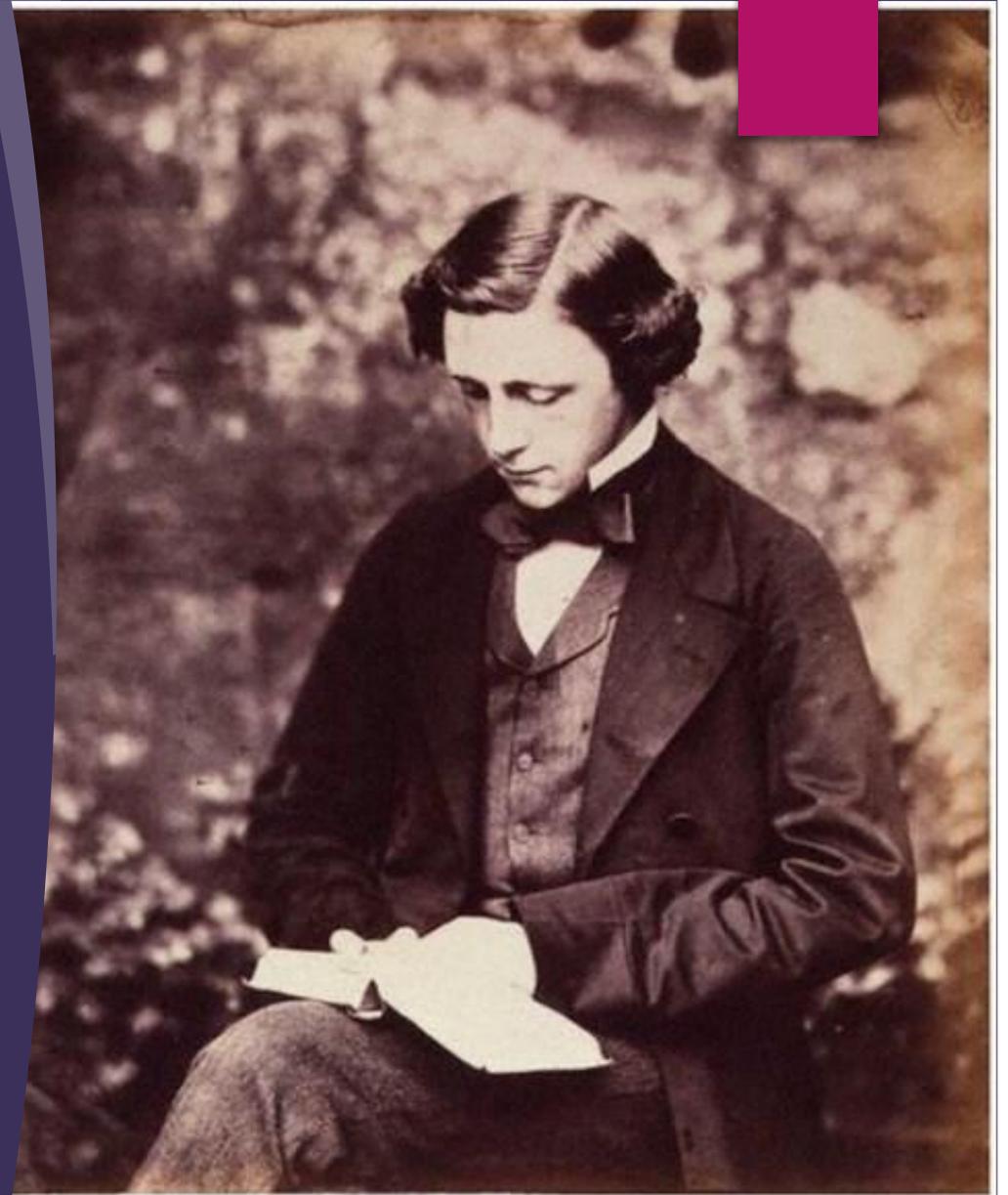 ► The usage of "they" for gender neutral/Non-binary people became widespread 20-30 years ago

Understanding Non-Binary identities

- Non-Binary Defined
  - Non-Binary people are individual who do not use male or female to describe their gender identity
  - Non-Binary is the most common term. Other terms include genderqueer, agender, or bigender
  - Non-Binary identities can be expressed in different blends of masculine and feminine elements or the absence of gender entirely.
- Non-Binary people have been present since the dawn of human civilization
- How to show respect/support to the non-binary community
  - Use a person's preferred pronouns
  - Do not make assumption about a person's gender identity: **Just ask!**

Importance to the Production

- ► The world of the play is Non-Binary
    - ► This means the characters exist outside the realm of gender rigidity and hierarchy
    - ► Carroll's works were not based on the idea of non-binary, but he encouraged the audience to create their own meaning of Wonderland
        - ► Non-Binary is our meaning
- ► Why Non-Binary?
    - ► It is a mechanism for self-celebration and self-acceptance
        - ► These ideas are highlighted by the pandemic
    - ► To serve and celebrate our students!

Works Cited

- Slides 3-5:
  - "Gender Pronouns." *University of Wisconsin Milwaukee,* https://uwm.edu/lgbtrc/support/gender-pronouns/. Accessed 12 December 2021.
- Slide 6:
  - "A brief history of gender-neutral pronouns." *BBC,* https://www.bbc.com/news/newsbeat-49754930. Accessed 12 December 2021.
- Slide 7:
  - "Understanding Non-Binary People: How to Be Respectful and Supportive." *National Center for Transgender Equality,* https://transequality.org/issues/resources/understanding-non-binary-people-how-to-be-respectful-and-supportive. Accessed 12 December 2021.