

Postgraduate Contemporary Women's Writing Network

# Newsletter

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This newsletter is a collaborative product of the PG CWWN Steering Group: Cat McGurran (Queen's University Belfast), Claire O'Callaghan (University of Leicester), Alex Pryce (University of Oxford), Amy Rushton (Goldsmiths, University of London) and Emma Young (University of Leicester).

If you have any questions or comments on this newsletter and its contents, please email us at [newsletter@pgcwwn.org](mailto:newsletter@pgcwwn.org)



## Editorial

Welcome to the fourth issue of the PG CWWN newsletter, that comes at an exciting time in the evolution on the PG CWWN. We are about to embark on a nationwide series of symposia with the theme 'Women on Women'. We look forward to hosting a series of stimulating conversations on queer identity, the monstrous feminine, contemporary female poetry, and global relationships in women's writing. These symposia will be lively research events, and each event will host a noted academic or writer to guide the debate. You can find information on individual events on our website.

2011 was an exciting year for women's literature, with the publication of Annie Proulx's *Bird Cloud: A Memoir*, Tea Obreht's *The Tiger's Wife*, and Aminatta Forna's *The Memory of Love* amongst the notable novels of the year. We also have much to look forward to in 2012, with Jeanette Winterson and Helen Dunmore venturing into the horror genre, Naomi Wolf promising sensationalism with *Vagina: A New Biography*, and Zadie Smith publishing the long awaited *NW*.

In this newsletter you will find conference reports on our biennial conference, Time and Space in Contemporary Women's Writing, which took place in Hull in September, as well as a review of the CWVA's Contemporary Women's Gothic conference. There is a review of Margaret Atwood's recent book of essays on Science Fiction, *In Other Worlds: SF and the Human Imagination*, which highlights the use of the supernatural in contemporary literature.

We are pleased to welcome our new Steering Group members, and we would like to thank Nadine Muller and Theresa Jamieson for all their work and dedication with the PG CWWN over the last few years, and warmly wish them success for the future. The sustained success of the PG CWWN is very much dependent upon the commitment and enthusiasm of you, our readers and members, so for future issues, please do send us your calls for papers, conference reports, book reviews, as well as short critical and creative pieces. We look forward to your continued contributions to our research community.

**Cat McGurran (Queen's University Belfast) and Emma Young (University of Leicester)**

## CWWA Comment – Moving Forward

It was wonderful to see so many CWWA and PGCWWN members at our recent one-day conference on 'Contemporary Women's Gothic', at the University of Brighton in November. There were some fascinating papers and many availed themselves of the opportunity to see the famous Lewes fireworks afterwards. The CWWA AGM took place as part of the conference and included the election of CWWA Exec members. For details of the CWWA Executive please see our website. PG CWWN is represented on the CWWA Exec by two members of the PG CWWN steering group.

Our next biennial conference, on 'Contemporary Women's Writing: (Wo)Man and the Body', will take place on 11-13 July 2012 at the National Chiao Tung University, Taiwan. We have received a big response to the bursary competition, offering two bursaries of £500 each, one for PhD students and one for early-career scholars, to contribute towards the costs of attending the conference. We hope to be able to announce the outcome as soon as possible.

Being able to offer these bursaries (jointly with PGCWWN) is a source of great satisfaction to me. We can offer this sort of support as a result of becoming an Association, which has provided us with a regular income from subscriptions. In March it will be a year since the formal launch of CWWA: something to celebrate!

For CFPs and further information, and to join CWWA, please see our website:

<http://www.the-cwwa.org>

**Susan Watkins, Chair of CWWA**

## CWWA Conference Report – Contemporary Women's Gothic

The annual CWWA conference took place at the University of Brighton on Bonfire Night of this year, with its chosen theme of the 'Gothic' successfully managing to bring together senior, early career and postgraduate delegates from all over the world.

The organizers' attention to detail, right down to the provision of waterproof navigational aides (which some kind person must have got up early to distribute around the campus), ensured the success of this efficiently managed and thought-provoking one-day event. An event that managed to pack an incredible amount into a relatively short space of time through the inclusion of three, vibrant, parallel plenary sessions in between two, engaging, keynote addresses from both Dr Paulina Palmer

and Professor Andy Smith. The day was brought to an apt close with some brave delegates making the journey to nearby Lewes to see the world-famous firework display being held there on that windswept, dark, drizzly and very 'Gothic' night.

From my perspective as a postgraduate student, one of the highlights of the day involved the chance to hear from, and to afterwards talk to, fellow researchers working in similar fields to my own. The quality of the research presented was both fascinating and daunting in terms of its impressive theoretical scope. The conference also proved to be a fantastic opportunity to meet, greet and realise that writers of many of the scholarly texts I have spent years reading, and being awed by, are, aside from being very clever, also extremely friendly and supportive people who drink tea and coffee just like me.

Throughout the day the unifying theme of the 'Gothic' facilitated a diversity of interpretative readings of various cultural forms and fictions. Researchers considered, for example, how the stereotypical 'Gothic' narratives surrounding many of the female characters in the 'Silent Hill' PSP video game series steer players towards certain traditionalist



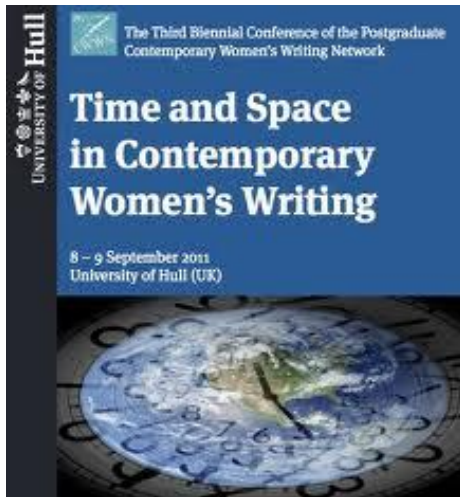
representative conclusions. This desire to queer, and thus to complicate, frequently overlooked, popular forms also emerged as an implicit theme within papers about the work of Phyllis Nagy, Jackie Kay, Leontia Flynn and Ali Smith, to name but a few. These attentions to how ghostly capitalist constructs arguably orchestrate

consumer desire was perhaps one of the key themes of this conference, in that many of the papers implicitly urged all of us to think more carefully about exactly what kind of stereotypical narratives we are digesting every time we consume a 'Gothic' thrill from within our multiplicitous, but strangely still so conventional, popular cultural reference points.

In short, this year's conference continued to display the CWWA's commitment to creating a space for experienced and new researchers to speak of hitherto critically under-researched aspects of contemporary women's writing.

**Rebecca Crowley (Leeds Metropolitan University)**

## PG CWWN Conference Report – Time and Space in Contemporary Women’s Writing



The third biennial PGCWWN conference set out to explore the ways in which contemporary women writers engage with and conceptualise notions of time and space in their work. Attended by over fifty delegates from all over the world including Canada, Italy, Austria and the United States the conference provided a diverse range of voices and perspectives on contemporary women writers’ engagement with the temporal and spatial. The panels of papers were varied and dynamic with sessions on gendering ecological space, violent and traumatic spaces

and domestic landscapes to name but a few that focused on the spatial thematics of writer’s work. The discussions of time were just as lively with considerations of queer time, historical narratives and children’s time travel fiction all proving enlightening topics for reflection. It became clear that the focus of the conference had acknowledged a key concern in contemporary women’s writing and one that is alive with a rich variety of postgraduate research today.

The two keynote addresses both succeeded in supplying stimulating material with Professor Ann Heilmann (University of Hull) opening the conference whilst the poet Gwyneth Lewis followed with an equally engaging talk on day two. By bringing together female voices from the world of academia and poetry, these two keynotes added to the breadth and vitality of the conference. Proceedings concluded with a Career Development Workshop led by Professor Mark Llewellyn (University of Strathclyde). The workshop was a fascinating and incredibly useful session for first year PhD students like myself through to early-career researchers. The workshop covered a range of topics that included building your professional profile, the dissemination and impact of your work and the importance of public engagement. The comprehensive scope of the workshop combined with the realistic and honest opinions of Professor Llewellyn was reassuring, informative and it meant everybody left the

conference with even more to reflect upon aside from the provocative questions raised by the individual papers delivered.

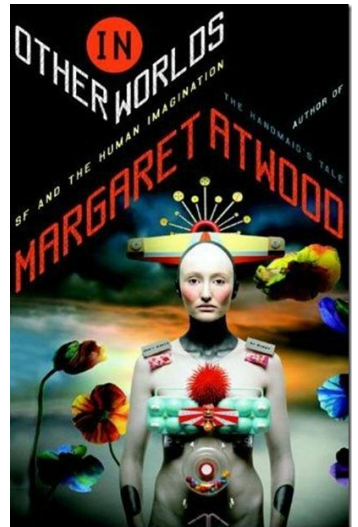
Overall, *Time and Space* was a highly successful conference. The structure of the two days provided numerous opportunities for delegates to network and build new relationships. Likewise, the well-thought out organisation ensured smooth running and easy accessibility to the accommodation and University for all participants. The quality of all the papers ensured that discussions and ideas were continually flowing and the atmosphere of the event was one of positivity, warmth and of a blossoming community.

(Emma Young, University of Leicester)

## Margaret Atwood – *In Other Worlds: SF and the Human Imagination*

Margaret Atwood’s prolific body of work – which consists of more than 40 publications and covers a variety of genres and mediums – has a new addition: *In Other Worlds: SF and the Human Imagination*. In her most recent publication, the Canadian author reveals a lifelong relationship with science fiction as a reader and writer. Pairing an autobiographical approach with historical and literary criticism to productive ends, Atwood offers a thorough exploration of the various forms and motifs in SF (Science Fiction).

In the introduction, Atwood identifies the source of her book as the three lectures she delivered at Emory University for the Richard Ellmann Lectures in Modern Literature. Atwood develops her ideas from these lectures into the first section of *In Other Worlds* which is organized into three parts. In the first part, “Flying Rabbits”, Atwood describes her early interactions with SF as a child, which included reading the comics of Captain Marvel and constructing her own



world of superhero bunnies. Here, Atwood muses over the prevailing motifs of alien worlds, superhero outfits (what about the capes and tight clothing?), and flight.

Second, in “Burning Bushes”, Atwood discusses her engagement with ancient mythology during her undergraduate career and demonstrates commonalities between mythology and SF. Particularly, she identifies the unknown of SF enquiry as first located in Heaven and Hell and then relocated on “Planet X” – exploring consequences of new technologies or interrogating social organizations in the “plausible” context of off-world (65).

In “Dire Cartographies”, Atwood explores literary utopias and dystopias which she encountered during her post-Harvard years as an SF reader, reviewer and writer. She coins the term “ustopia”, combining utopia and dystopia “because, in my view, each contains a latent version of the other” (66). Atwood maps out literary trends in relation to historical events as well as technological, scientific and medical changes which have altered the topography of the twentieth-century imagination. She then locates her own SF contributions – *The Handmaid’s Tale* (1986), *Oryx and Crake* (2003) and *The Year of the Flood* (2009) – on this map.

In the remainder of the book, Atwood compiles previously published reviews (in “Other Deliberations”), fiction (in “5 Tributes”), and a letter (in the Appendix), cataloguing her consistent engagement with SF.

If you, the reader, are coming to this text looking for definitive statements or searching for polemic quotes about SF, you will be disappointed. If you are instead looking for a tour guide through a museum of SF literature, you will be delighted with Atwood’s recent publication.

Amy Suzanne Crawford  
(Anglia Ruskin University)

## Relevant Conferences and Calls for Papers

### **Calls for Papers:**

**18<sup>th</sup>-19<sup>th</sup> May 2012.** 'Negotiating Gendered Spaces' 10<sup>th</sup> International Conference on Women's Studies (Facultad de Filología, Universidad Complutense de Madrid, Spain). For full details visit: <http://ies.sas.ac.uk>.

**22-23rd June,** 'Women in Magazines: Research, Representation, Production and Consumption'. (Kingston University, London). For full details visit: <http://womeninmagazines.tumblr.com/>

**21-22 September, 2012.** Kentucky Women Writers conference, University of Kentucky, USA. For full details visit: <http://www.uky.edu/WWK/>

**28 September, 2012.** Feminism in Academia: An Age of Austerity? Current Issues and Future Challenges, University of Nottingham, UK. For full details visit: [http://feminismandausterity.wordpress.com./](http://feminismandausterity.wordpress.com/)

**25-27<sup>th</sup> September 2012.** 'Gender and Love' 2<sup>nd</sup> Global Conference (Oxford University.) For full details visit: <http://www.inter-disciplinary.net/critical-issues/gender-and-sexuality/gender-and-love/call-for-papers/>

### **Forthcoming conferences:**

**9<sup>th</sup>-10<sup>th</sup> March 2012** 'Women and Media: Representations Past and Present. (Queen's University Belfast) For details visit: <http://womenanadmedia2012.wordpress.com>

**12<sup>th</sup> April 2012.** 'The Popular and the Middlebrow: Women's Writing 1880-1940 (University of Newcastle) For details visit: <http://www.pop-middlebrow.com/>

**14-15 September, 2012.** Baggy Monsters: The Late Work of Iris Murdoch, , Kingston University, London, UK. For details visit: <http://fass.kingston.ac.uk/activities/item.php?updatenum-1869>

**10-13 October, 2012.** Society for the Study of American Women Writers (SSAWW) Triennial conference: Citizenship and Belonging, Dever, Colorado, USA. For details visit <http://ssaww2012.wordpress.com/>



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## WOMEN ON WOMEN NATIONWIDE SYMPOSIUM SERIES 2012

Contemporary women's writing continues to lend itself well to an exploration of feminist politics. Women writers express breadth and depth, through a variety of modes and literary forms, whether they situate women in historical settings, explore diverse geographical landscapes and a variety of cultural contexts, or depict unusual or non-normative female behaviours and relationships and exploring such images through a variety of modes and forms, women authors express breadth and depth to the category 'woman'. These symposiums seek to examine how and in what ways contemporary female authors write women in post-1970 literature.

We invite papers from postgraduate researchers to participate in one of four events listed below:

**Queens University Belfast, 29 February 2012**

*Queer Sisterhood in Contemporary Women's Writing*

**Keynote Speaker: Dr Tina O'Toole**

(CFP Deadline: 10 February 2012)

**University of Oxford and Oxford Brookes University, 9 March 2012**

*Sisters in Verse: Contemporary Women's Poetry*

**Keynote Speakers: Kate Clanchy, Sophie Mayer and Jane Yeh**

(CFP Deadline: 17 February 2012)

**Goldsmiths, University of London, 26 April 2012**

*Sister Earth: Global Relationships in Contemporary Women's Writing*

**Keynote Speaker: Bernardine Evaristo**

(CFP Deadline: 13 April 2012)

**University of Leicester, 20 June 2012**

*Mythical, Magical and Monstrous Women in Contemporary Women's Writing*

**Keynote Speaker: Dr Becky Munford**

(CFP Deadline: 30 March 2012)

Please submit abstracts of 250 words for 20 minute papers via email to [women@pgcwwn.org](mailto:women@pgcwwn.org).

**Please include the name of the host institution in the title of your email.**

If you have any further questions about the network or the symposium series, please email or visit our website, [www.pgcwwn.org](http://www.pgcwwn.org)

