

Newsletter

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This newsletter is a collaborative product of the PG CWWN Steering Group: Theresa Jamieson (University of Hull), Nadine Muller (University of Hull), Claire O'Callaghan (University of Leicester), Alex Pryce (University of Oxford) and Amy Rushton (Goldsmiths, University of London)

If you have any questions or comments on this newsletter and its contents, please email us at info@pgcwwn.org



www.pgcwwn.org



Editorial

Hello and welcome to the latest issue of the PG CWWN Newsletter.

You join us at the beginning of a new academic year for PG CWWN; at the time of writing, our most recent conference, *Time & Space in Contemporary Women's Writing*, is just a matter of weeks away. We would like to thank our hosts, the University of Hull, and we look forward to meeting our delegates and discovering more about their research.

The conference also marks the conclusion of two of our members' time with PG CWWN: Nadine Muller and Theresa Jamieson are in the process of submitting their theses, meaning that they are saying goodbye to the Steering Group. We shall greatly miss them both; we cannot thank them enough for all their extremely hard work for PG CWWN and wish them the very best in their future careers.

The future of PG CWWN continues to look bright: we shall soon be welcoming two new members to the Steering Group, as Catherine McGurran (Queen's University Belfast) and Cecily R. Davey (University of St Andrews) shall be officially joining us from October 2011. As you will see from the back page (p. 9), we are currently planning our next series of events and initiatives, including a 'touring' seminar series and a more interactive website. If you are suitably intrigued then make sure that you regularly check the updates on our website, www.pgwwn.org

As ever, the continuing success of the PG CWWN is very much dependent upon the commitment and enthusiasm of you, our readers and members, so please do continue to send us your calls for papers, conference reports, book reviews, as well as short critical and creative pieces.

**Amy Rushton (Goldsmiths, University of London) &
Alex Pryce (University of Oxford)**

CWWA Comment: Forthcoming CWWA events

Our next one-day conference, *Contemporary Women's Gothic*, will take place at the University of Brighton on Saturday 5th November 2011. This event will include the CWWA's first formal Annual General Meeting as an Association. In order to vote at the AGM you will need to be a member of CWWA. For those of you who perhaps haven't joined yet, membership benefits include: print subscription to the Oxford journal *Contemporary Women's Writing*; electronic newsletter; reduced registration fee for CWWA conferences; the opportunity to upload your own membership profile and list your research interests on our website; 20% discount on OUP books and the opportunity to become elected to the executive committee. Subscription prices for students and the unsalaried are currently just £15 per annum or £25 if you would like a print subscription to the Oxford journal, *Contemporary Women's Writing*, included.

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 are very much hoping that it will be possible for us to offer (jointly with PG CWWN) PG bursaries towards attending this event.

For CFPs, deadlines and further information, please see our website: <http://www.the-cwwa.org>

Dr Susan Watkins, Chair of CWWA

Hoping for the Best, Expecting the Worst?

The trials of being an early career researcher

In the final throes of writing my thesis last year, I was working on a chapter on Angela Carter's *Wise Children* and the maxim of Grandma Chance – 'hope for the best, expect the worst!' – started to ring all too true. We all know that the situation for postgraduates finishing an English Literature PhD and hoping to forge a career as an academic is, at best, fairly uncertain at the moment, mainly due to the government's funding cuts. Post-doctoral positions are scarce and the competition for permanent lecturing jobs is daunting. Hourly paid lecturing work is still a possibility, but it is not secure and leaves a minimal amount of time for pursuing the research/publications that are an essential requirement for a lectureship.

I think it is important to acknowledge that post-PhD is a difficult time. We're often told that writing a thesis can be very 'isolating', yet there is little said about what might happen in between completion and (hopefully!) securing a permanent job. There are various areas of support for postgraduate students – departmental seminars, research groups, lower rates at conferences, important networks such as the Postgraduate Contemporary Women's Writing Network [PG CWWN] – but the resources available for early career researchers who haven't got a secure post are very limited. There is no supervisor to read your work and give feedback. There are no seminars to give career advice. Although there can be a sense of community in terms of peers who are also on the part-time teaching circuit, this can be fraught with competitiveness; after all, the number of potential jobs is limited.

The needs of early career researchers have to be addressed, and the PG CWWN are leading the way in their organisation of networking events and inclusion of workshops on early career development in their conferences.

The Contemporary Women's Writing Association [CWWA] is also very keen to generate more support for final year PhD students/early career researchers: Rachel Carroll and I are currently pursuing a mentorship scheme via the CWWA, focusing on the ways in which more senior academics can offer advice and encouragement on issues such as job applications/interviews, publications, teaching and funding applications. I encourage any members of the PG CWWN with comments/suggestions about what they would find helpful in this area to contact me (H.C.Davies@leedsmet.ac.uk).

Dr Helen Davies, Leeds Metropolitan University

Demystifying Public Engagement: Gender & Sexuality Studies Beyond the Academy

14th and 15th May 2011, Newcastle University

'Demystifying Public Engagement' was an AHRC funded postgraduate training event that sought to 'demystify' public engagement for doctoral researchers from across the arts and humanities whose work is connected through a shared interest in gender and sexuality studies. As such, the fifty attendees held diverse research interests: from oral history research to government public health initiatives, and of course, to contemporary women's writing. This interdisciplinary mix generated a range of insights and possibilities into the two leading questions posed to all speakers to address as part of a presentation on their current research: who are the non-academic audiences for your research, and in what ways might you best engage them?

In establishing a framework to consider such questions, we were excited by the stimulating line-up of speakers we were fortunate enough to secure for the event including Dr Philip Pothén from the AHRC, who spoke on challenges and opportunities for public engagement in the arts and humanities, and Professor Susan Sellers (University of St. Andrews) and Dr Emma Gersch (Bath Spa University) who provided a case-study analysis of the transition of Sellers academic research on Virginia Woolf, to novel, to play and more recently to the stage. Additional workshops examining specific aspects of public engagement were generously run by Dr Hera Cook (Birmingham University) and Ms Chrissie Tiller (Goldsmiths, University of London).

The event received an overwhelming positive from attendees and contributors and from academics working within gender and sexuality studies all of whom felt that this was an important and much needed initiative. It was encouraging that by the end of the event, discussions around the question of potential audiences had significantly opened up and attendees were discussing options for their research beyond the School class room and further outwards to minority groups, religious communities and diverse age groups. As discussed with Philip Pothén, there remains a concern that as PhD students, engaging the public is not "our" primary concern – completing the thesis is. But at the same time, the event highlighted the potential added value such endeavors hold for academic research, and underlined that postgraduate researchers and indeed academics would welcome support and development in this area so that they feel equipped to undertake public engagement activities when it will add value to their research.

**Claire O'Callaghan (University of Leicester) &
Nadine Muller (University of Hull)**

6th International Caribbean Women's Writing Conference: Comparative Critical Conversations

24th and 25th June 2011, Goldsmiths (University of London)

More than 50 international delegates from countries including Australia, Trinidad, Japan, Egypt, Canada and the USA, attended this two day conference on Caribbean Women's Writing in June 2011. The keynote lecture was given by Professor Maria Helena who reminded us all of the need to become Comparatists, in order to allow the body of work that is Caribbean Women's Literature a "room of its own".

The first two panels on day one explored issues concerning affects and Creole poetics as well as female subjectivity and gender relations. The afternoon panel sessions produced a mixture of spoken word, auto theorising and diasporic remembering. Guest Poet and Author M NourbeSe Philip delivered a lecture based on her recent poetry collection *Zong!* in which she explored the connections, both personal and objective, between law and poetry and how these led her to the "un/writing" and (re) righting of the Zong episode.

Day One came to a close with networking continuing through the evening at the Conference Dinner where even the chef had risen to the challenge and provided delegates with a sumptuous Caribbean meal.

Day Two commenced with critical comparisons between postnational and transnational through the works of Paule Marshall, Michelle Cliff and Dionne Brand. Meanwhile, the parallel session explored historical trauma and the literary imagination. Both of the morning panels led nicely into the Plenary lecture delivered by Dr Karavanta from the University of Athens and a question and answer session which elicited so much discussion that it continued well into the afternoon.

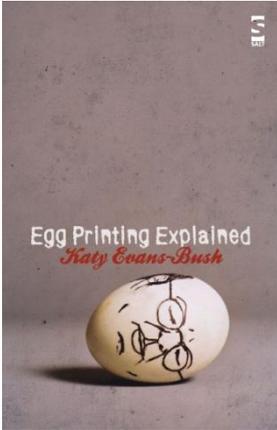
Professor Joan Anim-Addo, founder of this series of international conferences, delivered a stimulating paper on the configurations of African-Caribbean women's histories in current twenty-first century literature. Adopting an archaeological approach, Anim-Addo examined the reconstruction of women's histories in Austin Clarke's *The Polished Hoe* in comparison to Merle Collins's *The Colour of Forgetting*.

The conference ended with poetry readings and a special rendition of a poem written specifically for the conference by Emma Burch, a postgraduate student at Goldsmiths. Abstracts can be found on the conference web site alongside an audio recording of the Conference Poem. See

www.gold.ac.uk/caribbean/comparativecriticalconversations

Marl'ene Edwin (Goldsmiths, University of London)

Egg Printing Explained by Katy Evans-Bush



Egg Printing Explained by Katy Evans-Bush (Cambridge: Salt Publishing 2011) is an eclectic collection of poetry. Evans-Bush's forthright and assured writing style provides a strong backbone to an exploration of life, love, history and myth. The poems are confident and inventive, and the fearless assault of a wealth of different types of poetic form proves to be one of the most interesting features in this collection.

Evans-Bush nestles her poems in a world between the modern and historic, mixing contemporary language with old world themes and even pirate vernacular! Where she really strikes out as a poet of

note, however, is in the more reflective pieces where her careful selection of words is evident. "The Grand Disjuncture" and "The Starvefish" are simply, beautifully written poems showing the raw writing and descriptive talent Evans-Bush has. "Overland Homesick Blues" is another highlight. An intelligent and sassy piece, the Bob Dylan-influenced poem is witty, current and provides relief from some of the denser topics explored in the collection.

Where Evans-Bush runs into difficulty however, is her obvious desire to explore as much as she can in her writing. The poems are bursting at the seams. Trying to grasp a thematic flow is a confusing task as there are so many different writing styles, poetic form and issues present. This unfortunately serves to create a cold distance between the poems and reader. "Richard Price" and "Meditations on a Freudian's Lip", for example, run close to sounding pretentious and interrupt the pace of the collection as a whole.



Ultimately, *Egg Printing Explained* is a worthwhile read. Evans-Bush is clearly well-educated and has very interesting perspectives which translate well into poetry. She is a fearless writer who is not afraid to mix styles and concepts. This adventurousness is both the positive and negative aspect of the volume of poetry but gives Evans-Bush her own unique and distinct place within contemporary literature.

Maeve O'Brien, University of Ulster

Sarah Daniels, *Plays 1*

In 1988, Sarah Daniels was “the only radical lesbian feminist to have made it into the mainstream”, according to the *Bloomsbury Theatre Guide*. *Plays 1* (London: Methuen Drama, 1991) charts the first arc of Daniels’s notoriety, collating five plays first performed between 1981 and 1986. Under the Thatcherite press, each provoked the kind of anti-feminist vitriol that wouldn’t be seen again until Sarah Kane’s debut, *Blasted*.

Critics called Daniels embittered, strident, blasphemous and melodramatic; today’s readers may well be disconcerted by the unabashed anger

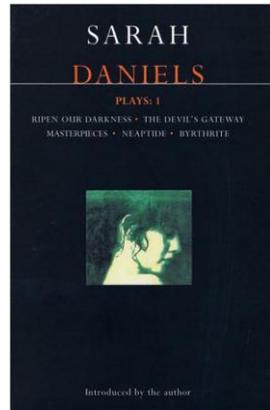
and emotion of her early work. Deeply preoccupied with the savagery of the nuclear family, the plays expose the damage wreaked by men and male institutions, and women’s ability to resist by reaching out for each other.

Daniels recalled hearing of (straight) audiences relationships wrecked by arguments over the bleak conclusion to *Masterpieces*, her horrifying play about violent pornography. Nevertheless, these five plays remain both grimly and wildly funny: *Ripen Our Darkness* depicts the slow suffocation of a middle-class vicar’s wife with the acidity of a lesbian Alan Bennett; *Neaptide* balances a fable of lesbian parenting and sexual secrecy with classroom farce.

Daniels’s introduction to the first edition of this volume in 1990 worried that the plays had already dated. *Byrthrite*, with its Civil War allegory on male control of female reproductive processes, is probably most susceptible to this charge, with its insistence that now commonplace IVF processes contribute to a master narrative of male medical supremacy. In 2011, a song likening the space race to rape, claiming “man has ejaculated over the moon” (*Byrthrite*) is probably unstageable; even in reading, it provokes mirth.

Nevertheless, much of *Plays 1* remains resonant beyond the moment of 1980s feminism. Jalna Hanmer’s 1987 introduction to *Byrthrite* anticipates the modern growth of ecofemism, equating women’s bodies with the agricultural and industrial spaces exploited for “new biotechnological advances”. Similarly, lesbian marriage and parenting, explored throughout the plays are increasingly visible and emotive issues. Above all, Daniels’s work spans the full humour and horror of the female experience, whether as mothers or soldiers, witches or wives.

Sophie Duncan, University of Oxford



Calls for Papers & Forthcoming Conferences

Calls for Papers

20th-22nd April 2012. *Sexual Cultures: Theory, Practice, Research*, Brunel University. **Deadline for abstracts** 31st October 2011. Full details at www.onscenity.org/conf1/

16th-18th July 2012, 'What Happens Now: 21st Century Writing in English', University of Lincoln. **Deadline for abstracts** 9th January 2012. Full details at www.lincoln.ac.uk/home/conferences/index.htm

Forthcoming Conferences

28–29th October 2011. *Love, Sex, Desire & the (Post)Colonial*, Senate House, University of London. Full details available at: <http://ies.sas.ac.uk/events>

5th November 2011. *Contemporary Women's Gothic*, Contemporary Women's Writing Association Conference and Annual General Meeting, University of Brighton. Full details available at: www.the-cwwa.org

8–9th November 2011. *Translation and Gender: a gap between theory and practice?*, University of Calabria (Italy). Full details available at www.linguistica.unical.it/translating/

26th November 2011. *Shorelines and Shadows: Literary Representations of Queer and Postcolonial Mythical Beings*, a postgraduate conference hosted by the Joint Faculty of Arts, Humanities and Social Science, University of Reading. For more details, contact pocomyth@yahoo.co.uk

11–13th July 2012. *Contemporary Women's Writing: (Wo)Man and the Body*, CWWA Fourth Biennial International Conference. National Chiao Tung University, Taiwan. Full details available at www.the-cwwa.org



Researching Contemporary Women's Writing?

If you want to keep on top of developments in contemporary women's writing academia, have the opportunity to develop skills critical to success in the academic job market and keep in touch with peers with similar research interests, you can't afford not to keep in touch with the Postgraduate Contemporary Women's Writing Network.

In addition, we need your help to organize a touring seminar series leading to a national conference. We want you to help us build a dynamic web space and develop a mentoring scheme to help post-doctoral students make the transition to tenure. We'd also love your input for this newsletter, particularly if you would like to review a book, report from a conference, or submit your thoughts on any aspect of postgraduate life.

Involvement in PG CWWN via our mailing list, Facebook group and regularly updated website will keep you abreast of the many opportunities available. Visit www.pgcwwn.org to sign up for the mailing list: don't rely on any other mailing list to receive our updates.

We'd hate for you to miss out!

