



PG CWWN

# **PG CWWN Symposia The Year's Research in Contemporary Women's Writing**

**Liverpool John Moores University  
4th July, 2014**



**LIVERPOOL  
JOHN MOORES  
UNIVERSITY**

## PROGRAMME

10.30-11.00	<b>REGISTRATION</b> and welcome from the organisers
11.00-11.20	<b>Krystina Osborne</b> (Liverpool John Moores University): “Nothing but Zero”? Female Masturbation in Contemporary Women’s Writing
11.20-11.40	<b>Olga Michael</b> (Independent scholar): Undoing Paternal Sexualizing Gazes: A Feminist Take on the Female Nude in Phoebe Gloeckner's <i>A Child's Life and Other Stories</i>
11.40-12.00	<b>Lucy Winrow</b> (Salford University): Exploring Gender through Irony, Humour and Distancing in the Poetry of Selima Hill
12.00-13.00	<b>LUNCH</b>
13.00-13.20	<b>Sophie-Louise Hyde</b> (Loughborough University): <i>The Vertical Interrogation of Strangers</i> : Verbatim Technique in the Politics and Poetics of 'Placing'
13.20-13.40	<b>Hannah Kershaw</b> (University of York): Between the Hysterical and Historical: The Exploration of British Multiculturalism in Zadie Smith’s <i>White Teeth</i>
13.40-14.00	<b>Emma Deeks</b> (Edge Hill University): The Agency of Anonymity: Reading the Feminist Potential of Women's Self-Representative Blogs
14.00-14.20	<b>Stevie Marsden</b> (University of Stirling): Gender and Contemporary Book Award Culture
14.20-14.45	<b>REFRESHMENTS</b>
14.45-15.45	Peer Support Q & A with <b>Dr Nadine Muller</b> (Liverpool John Moores University)
15.45-16.00	Reflections on the day
16.00	<b>CLOSE</b>

## **ABSTRACTS**

**EMMA DEEKS**

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### **The Agency of Anonymity: Reading the Feminist Potential of Women's Self-Representative Blogs**

This paper examines the unique potential of the blogosphere to represent an unrestricted space in which anyone with access to the internet can create a published narrative with a potentially unlimited audience. The analysis specifically focuses on what potential that the medium could therefore hold for women's self-representation. By embracing the concept of blogging as offering a freer form of writing, and the ability to self-represent through disembodied textual construction, the paper suggests that blogging could create a 'new' way for women to be represented. This new representation is not subject to the same gender based assumptions and biases as traditional written forms, and could therefore offer women a higher degree of agency over their own narratives. Given the disembodied nature of online narratives, the interrogation of this new representation will also highlight the potential it holds for anonymous writing and how that may relate to the level of agency being exhibited by the authors. The paper explores these issues in the context of current debates about the accountability for online activity and the contentious issue of anonymity, specifically in the context of online female voices.

**Emma Deeks** is a self-funded PhD student in the English and History department of Edge Hill University. Prior to this, she studied for her BA English Literature degree at the University of Chester, and completed her MA in Women's Narrative at Edge Hill University. Her main research interests are feminist theory and the representation of women in different media, particularly in contemporary fiction and on digital media platforms. Her thesis analyses the textual constructions of gender online, exploring the role of anonymity, and specifically the feminist potential of these elements within women's self representational blogs. Emma is also part of the steering group for the Post-Graduate Contemporary Women's Writing Network.

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**SOPHIE-LOUISE HYDE**

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### **The Vertical Interrogation of Strangers: Verbatim Technique in the Politics and Poetics of 'Placing'**

'As a subject for history, woman always occurs simultaneously in several places.'  
(Helene Cixous, *Utopias*)

Bhanu Kapil Rider's contemporary, experimental poetry 'create[s] a stunning examination of [...] the unresolved process of *placing*: placing oneself in the world, in

relation to the beloved, one's history, one's present, and the irreconcilable nature of all that we, physically, carry'.<sup>1</sup> In a close analysis of Kapil Rider's *The Vertical Interrogation of Strangers* (2001), I consider these key themes of 'placing' (of belonging and identity) and position them in relation to the theories of culturalism and community developing from my own research as an emerging female poet.<sup>2</sup> In particular, I will examine Kapil Rider's use of interview testimony in successfully presenting these notions, before identifying how today's contemporary female, and indeed male, poets can make more use of this verbatim technique to ensure 'an honest and swift text, uncensored by guilt' in their own political and poetic practice.<sup>3</sup>

**Sophie-Louise Hyde** is an emerging poet and Postgraduate Researcher at Loughborough University. Her PhD study explores the techniques of verbatim in poetry in order to create a new body of work that demonstrates practice as research. Drawing upon earlier forms of verbatim theatre and contemporary poetry, her research asks questions surrounding source material, archiving, authorship and ethics of practice. In an investigation of the riots in England during 2011, her work also shares an interest with research in Human Geography and Subaltern studies. Her other interests include experimental poetry and collaboration across art forms. She is also the founder of online creative writing and publishing platform, The Student Wordsmith.

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## **HANNAH KERSHAW**

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### **Between the Hysterical and Historical: The Exploration of British Multiculturalism in Zadie Smith's *White Teeth***

*White Teeth* by Zadie Smith (2000) is an ambitious attempt to portray multicultural society in North West London through the eyes of characters from many different cultural backgrounds. Smith's somewhat extravagant style, which is reminiscent of Salman Rushdie's, means that she pairs serious issues of social cohesion and colonial history with the comedy that comes with everyday life in London. James Wood describes *White Teeth* as a 'hysterical realist' novel, suggesting that the overindulgence in stylistic and poetic devices prevents the social issues addressed in the novel from being taken seriously. Indeed, Smith's style has received plenty of criticism as well as praise.

However, the style of the novel should not necessarily overshadow its substance. At frequent intervals the text, one of Smith's characters who comes from a Muslim background, Samad Iqbal, tirelessly tries to convince his white British friends that his great-grandfather, Mangal Pande, was a hero of the 1857 Indian Rebellion. The

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<sup>1</sup> Jane Sprague, 'Jane Sprague reviews *The Vertical Interrogation of Strangers* by Bhanu Kapil Rider, *Jacket Magazine* (2003) <<http://jacketmagazine.com/21/spra-rider.html>> [accessed Tuesday 17<sup>th</sup> December 2013].

<sup>2</sup> Bhanu Kapil Rider, *The Vertical Interrogation of Strangers* (Berkeley, CA: Kelsey St. Press, 2001).

<sup>3</sup> Bhanu Kapil Rider, 'Introduction', in *The Vertical Interrogation of Strangers* (Berkeley, CA: Kelsey St. Press, 2001).

history books and dominant opinion, however, write Pande off as a drunk and a coward. Utilizing ideas of historiographic metafiction (Hutcheon, 1988) and collective memory (Halbwachs, 1992; Kakar, 1996), this paper offers an original contribution on this much-discussed novel by exploring the reasons why Smith repeatedly refers to a relatively unknown figure of the Indian Mutiny in her narrative on contemporary multiculturalism. I argue that rather than skimming over the issues with a 'glib' or 'rose-tinted' view of multiculturalism, as some of her critics have suggested, Smith powerfully deploys notions of historical discourse and collective memory in an witty critique of multiculturalism that certainly 'has teeth'.

**Hannah Kershaw** is currently studying for her PhD at The University of York, where she is jointly supervised by the Department of English and Related Literature, and the Department of Politics. The primary focus of her thesis is the ways in which contemporary British writing approaches Muslim experiences of multiculturalism in Britain. Hannah is funded by the ESRC and is part of a network entitled 'Reshaping Multiculturalism through Cultural Practices', which is supported by leading academics at the Universities of York, Leeds, and Sheffield.

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**STEVIE MARSDEN**  
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### **Gender and Contemporary Book Award Culture**

My doctoral thesis is an accumulation and assessment of the Saltire Society's book awards and their influence on Scotland's literary and publishing culture. The Society is a Scottish registered charity established in 1936 dedicated to 'improve[ing] the quality of life in Scotland and restor[ing] the country to its proper place as a creative force in Europe' and 'encourag[ing] new developments which can strengthen and enrich the country's cultural life'.

In recent years the debates surrounding the representation of women within book award culture have raged, particularly in relation to the percentage of female winners compared to their male counterparts. This paper will illustrate one particular aspect of my research relating to a statistical analysis of the Saltire Society book award winners and consider whether the ratio of female to male winners is comparative to the output of contemporary Scottish women's writing in recent years.

**Stevie Marsden** is a PhD candidate based at the Stirling Centre for International Publishing and Communication at the University of Stirling. Her thesis 'A History of the Saltire Society's Literary Awards: 1982-2012', is an AHRC funded Collaborative Doctoral Award which allows her to gain first-hand experience within the Saltire Society's administrative offices in Edinburgh.

**OLGA MICHAEL**

*Independent scholar*

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### **Undoing Paternal Sexualizing Gazes: A Feminist Take on the Female Nude in Phoebe Gloeckner's *A Child's Life and Other Stories***

This paper will discuss Phoebe Gloeckner's graphic memoir *A Child's Life and Other Stories* and the negotiation of female "to-be-looked-at-ness" and sexualization therein. Gloeckner's life narrative introduces the girl protagonist as a sexual object under the voyeuristic gaze of father figures and her sexualization and sexual violation within the family domain. The paper will point to the ways in which the visual/verbal medium of comics allows the depiction of girls' sexualization as a broader cultural phenomenon as well a private, domestic one. It will underline Gloeckner's feminist critical stance towards this phenomenon, and it will explain the way in which she undoes male voyeuristic pleasure through a nude visual depiction of her autobiographical alter-ego by focusing on her self-portrait with *pemphigus vulgaris*.

**Olga Michael** has recently finished her PhD Studies in English and American Studies at the University of Manchester. Her thesis examines the representation of different forms of insidious trauma and the use of pastiche as reparation in contemporary American women's graphic memoirs. It also demonstrates how the graphic memoir can become a site where feminist reconfigurations of femininity and of elements from dominant male artistic and psychoanalytical canons can be performed. Her research interests include women's autobiographical performances, feminist reconfigurations of trauma, trauma in relation to the visual and contemporary uses of intertextuality.

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**KRYSTINA OSBORNE**

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### **"Nothing but Zero"? Female Masturbation in Contemporary Women's Writing**

Female masturbation is a notable omission from the vast majority of female-authored contemporary erotic texts, despite its links to female sexual autonomy. The act is rarely addressed in contemporary culture (particularly in comparison to representations of male masturbation) and is still regarded as being somehow taboo. This paper will argue that the embarrassment and humour often provoked by the mere mention of female masturbation belies its importance as a feminist issue deserving of more scholarly attention than it has received thus far. Furthermore, this paper will explore the representation of female masturbation in texts including *Wetlands* by Charlotte Roche and *Brass* by Helen Walsh in order to argue that, on the rare occasions that female masturbation is addressed in either erotic or in general fiction, it is clear that there are enduring patriarchal associations between the act and notions of female deviance and mental instability.

**Krystina Osborne** is a first year PhD student and research assistant at Liverpool John Moores University's Research Centre for Literature and Cultural History. Her thesis focuses on engagements with female masturbation in contemporary women's writing from 1973 to the present day. Her research interests in women's erotic writing and theories of gender and sexuality are reflected in her MRes thesis, which was entitled "In the Service of Women"? Developments in Feminism and Female-Authored Erotic Fiction Since the Publication of Angela Carter's *The Sadeian Woman*'. She is currently a member of the PG CWWN steering group.

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**LUCY WINROW**

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**Exploring Gender through Irony, Humour and Distancing in the Poetry of Selima Hill**

This paper examines how British poet Selima Hill uses irony and humour to explore notions of masculinity and femininity. Throughout her writing, Hill returns – in a form of subversive repetition – to considering intimate relationships between siblings, lovers, and parents and children, demonstrating how they are crucially involved in producing and perpetuating restrictive gender roles. Domestic settings are defamiliarised by Hill's dark humour and violent depictions of caricatured gender positions, predominantly comprised of sadistic males and masochistic females. In terms of Denise Riley's argument, irony can "[make] mention of something by displaying it, holding it aloft to view in a pair of tongs. It makes a curio out of the bad word, a proper object for dispassionate investigation." Similarly, Hill utilises the distancing effect of humour and irony in order to confront these disturbing scenes and foreground the suffering and violence that goes into creating the appearance of naturalised gender performances.

I recently completed a PhD on the poetry of Selima Hill at Salford University. My thesis focussed on Hill as a prolific yet overlooked British poet, alongside theories on embarrassment, shame and guilt, and how these emotions relate specifically to the formation of gendered identities. During this time I corresponded with Hill and was fortunate enough to meet her for a face-to-face interview. My research interests also include theories on violence and desire, as well as the work of American poet Sharon Olds and British innovative poet Geraldine Monk. I teach part-time on the English Literature programme at Salford University.

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**DR NADINE MULLER**

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You can follow Nadine on Twitter (@Nadine\_Muller) and visit her website ([www.nadinemuller.org.uk](http://www.nadinemuller.org.uk)).

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