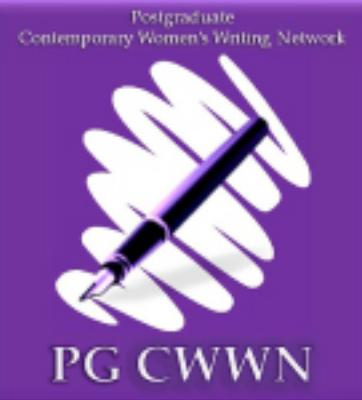


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PROGRAMME



The Postgraduate Contemporary Women's Writing Network

Biomedical Sciences and the Maternal Body

21st February, 2015 | University of Southampton

CONTACT

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- 10.00-10.15** **Registration**
- 10.15-11.15** **Panel 1: Reproductive Technologies**
Fran Bigman: The Authority's Anti-Breeding Campaign: State-imposed Infertility in Recent British Dystopias
- 11.15-11.30** **Coffee Break**
- 11.30-12.50** **Panel 2: Autonomy**
Elselijn Kingma: How Many in a Pregnancy? The Metaphysics of Human Reproduction
Charlotte Stroud: Endoscopic Explorations in A.S. Byatt's 'Quartet'
Laura-Jane Devanny: The Interrogation of 'woman-as-foetal incubator' in Jane Rogers' 'The Testament of Jessie Lamb'
- 12.50-1.30** **Lunch**
- 1.30 – 3.00** **Keynote by Professor Clare Hanson and Closing Discussion/Workshop**

NOTES:

The Authority's Anti-Breeding Campaign: State-imposed Infertility in Recent British Dystopias

In *Manufacturing Babies and Public Consent: Debating the New Reproductive Technologies* (1995), media theorist José van Dyck argued that 1980s radical feminist opposition to IVF had largely disappeared, neutered by a medical and journalistic campaign to naturalise new reproductive technologies. However, I would argue these radical feminist discourses can still be found in recent dystopian fiction in Britain, the home of IVF and the first country to regulate the practice. In this talk, I would examine two novels in which the oppression of the state is symbolised by the denial—by male-controlled technology—of women's right to mother. In Sarah Hall's *The Carhullan Army* (2007), IUDs are mandatory; to have a baby, you must win a lottery. Joanna Kavenna's *The Birth of Love* (2010) rewrites *Brave New World* (1932) from the perspectives of the women Huxley marginalises—women whose broody dissatisfaction is easily quenched by a 'Pregnancy Substitute.' In both dystopias, women's resistance is catalysed by the state's iron grip on their ovaries, and they escape to utopian regimes that allow women to reconnect to nature, symbolised by natural childbirth. After examining the problematic ways these novels naturalise maternal desire, I will suggest that these novels revise FINRRAGE discourse by re-opening the question of whether technology is inherently patriarchal; they ask whether the oppression lies in the technology, or in the male-designed systems around the technology.

How Many in a Pregnancy? – The Metaphysics of Human Reproduction

I take these two statements to be uncontroversial:

- (1) before an organism becomes pregnant, it is only one organism.
- (2) after the organism's pregnancy, there are (usually) two organisms.

Together, these two statements raise a question: when does one organism become two?

There are at least two possible answers to this question. One is that fetuses are part of a pregnant organism, much like a brain, a kidney or a cardiovascular system. The other is that fetuses are merely inside that organism – like a tub of yogurt is in the fridge. The second view seems implicitly accepted in much philosophical literature, and enjoys widespread social and cultural support. But I contend that it is false: fetuses are not merely inside, but a proper part of pregnant organisms. Thus one organism becomes two only at birth.

This position has important consequences: if we take fetuses to be human beings and/or persons, then human beings and/or persons can be part of other human beings and/or persons. That constraint has important implications for the meaning of our concepts 'person' and/or 'human being', their application, our ideas about individual distinctness and personal identity, and legal and moral questions surrounding reproduction.

Endoscopic Explorations in A.S.Byatt's 'Quartet'

A.S. Byatt believes that 'accuracy of description is possible'. She believes that 'words denote things.' Unlike many writers, theorists and philosophers who have become increasingly sceptical in the last twenty years about the capacity language has to relate what is 'real', Byatt firmly believes in the power it possesses to get closer to the truth. Her novels can be identified by the way in which they so vividly portray the multiplicity of life, which she achieves through the invention of such vast arrays of interconnected characters and also by maintaining plurality of perspective. Byatt often writes from a medical or scientific perspective and, as a result, we are taken *inside* the bodies of her characters, exploring them at a cellular level. At times, it is as though Byatt is steering an endoscopic camera through the cavernous tubes and pockets of her character's bodies. With focus on the 'Quartet' series, this paper will consider how entering the bodies of her characters enables Byatt to convey the reality of not only pregnancy but the moment of conception and the experience of giving birth. It will discuss whether, in giving women readers the power to enter another woman's body, they are consequently empowered with autonomy over their own.

The Interrogation of 'woman-as-foetal incubator' in Jane Rogers' *The Testament of Jessie Lamb*

Using Susan Bordo's identification of the unique embodiment that pregnancy poses of 'having an other within oneself' as a starting point, this paper discusses the challenge posed to concepts of autonomy and subjectivity through the maternal body. Traditional theories of personal identity become problematised through the physical state of being both infant and adult, leading to concerns of the potential superseding of a woman's subjectivity by that of her unborn child's. A disturbing exploration of such concerns can be seen in Jane Rogers' *The Testament Of Jessie Lamb*, where the 'Sleeping Beauties' programme becomes a literal realisation of Bordo's concept of 'woman-as-foetal-incubator'. Arguments concerning the morality of such a programme are given from many perspectives throughout the duration of the novel, all of which centre around the issue of choice. This paper will explore Jessie's own journey into motherhood as a Sleeping Beauty, during which issues of power, autonomy and subjectivity emerge as central to her decision-making processes. By presenting the reader with multiple options for interpretation, Rogers deliberately denies us a simplistic answer to the debates around motherhood and autonomy; it would appear that, rather than relying on the binary arguments around subjectivity, the only way forward is through the value of individual freedom and choice.

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