

Back Talk: Women's Writing, Modernism and Resistance

The Third Modernist Network Cymru Conference

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Keynote speakers: Prof. Kirsti Bohata (CREW, Swansea University), Prof. Diana Wallace (University of South Wales)

The writing of modernist Margiad Evans bespeaks her visceral, deeply creative relationship with the Welsh borderlands of Ross-on-Wye – a landscape which ‘seemed to flow between my breasts, from some deep central love that would make it blood to leave the lovely river....The mute hills, the valleys, the clouds that wave.... My very soul lives here’. (quoted in Asbee, 2018)

In recent years, a ‘High Modernism’ imagined in monolithic, metropolitan terms has been split open to reveal a plurality of different chronologies, styles, and locations. As writers like Evans demonstrate, ‘[s]o much depends...on place, proximity, position’; on ‘*which* modernism, written when and why and from what place – which city, which hillside, which seat on the train, which new nation or new colony, and before, after, or during which war.’ (Doyle and Winkiel, 2005, p.1) So much depends, too, on the position that a writer assumes – and is assigned – in the geography of modernism, a position that is undoubtedly conditioned and informed by gender.

The new perspectives made possible in recent years by developments in transnational and race studies, together with challenges to divisions between ‘elitist’ and middlebrow forms, have facilitated a more nuanced understanding of gender-based approaches in the study of twentieth-century literary culture. However, as Jane Garrity (2013) has argued, the welcome expansion of the field of modernist studies has been accompanied by a persistent marginalization of experimental twentieth-century women’s writing, particularly work by non-canonical writers. Similarly, while new national and place-based frameworks have helped bring recognition to Welsh modernism, more needs to be done to pluralise and fully decentre the map of British modernist activities – just as more needs to be done to illuminate the vital role of women writers in the modernist impulse.

Drawing on bell hooks’s concept of ‘talking back’ (1989, 2014) to male, ethnocentric positions, this conference explores the strategies used by women and/or Welsh modernists to participate in, challenge, and ultimately reconfigure, major modernist forms and cultures. Interrogating how the example of Wales might serve to further expand and unsettle our ideas of ‘High Modernism’, we consider how women use their marginalised, liminal and/or gendered positioning to formulate and engage a process of what Teresa de Lauretis calls ‘thinking within and against’ dominant literary styles, cultures and methodologies (1994, p. 294).

Topics might include, but are not limited to:

- Redefining the role of the ‘woman writer’
- Constructing identity: local, national, and global affiliations

- Location and environment
- Rejecting and/or embracing the metropolitan
- Communities: material, cultural, and affective links connecting modernist women writers to each other, both in Ireland and Britain, and across the world
- Silence and speaking out: connections to the 'Me Too' movement and contemporary feminisms
- Gender and the archive
- Encoding strategies of resistance: writing women's sexuality
- Fashion, clothes and performance
- The role of small publishers in reclaiming literary women's voices
- Boundaries and definitions: challenging and stretching existing understandings of modernism
- Pedagogy and modernism: rethinking and diversifying the syllabus

Proposals for papers (20 minutes) should include a summary of the proposed paper (300 words), the speaker's contact details, and a short bio (100 words). Papers can be delivered in English or Welsh with simultaneous translation; please indicate the language in which you wish to deliver your paper. If you wish to send a proposal in Welsh, please could you also include a copy of your abstract and biography in English.

Proposals should be sent to modernistnetworkcymru@gmail.com by 27 March 2020.

Since 2014, MONC has aimed to showcase the range and diversity of research into modernism happening in Wales today. Through its website, mailing list and conferences, it brings together scholars and professionals working on modernism in Wales and beyond to encourage collaboration and communication. For more information, please visit <https://modnetcymru.wixsite.com/website>