

Transnational Circulation of Women's Writing (1780-2014)

Archives, Libraries, Translation

Friday, 26 June, 2-6pm

Venue: Room 243, Senate House, University of London, Malet Street, London WC1E 7HU

Organised by the Centre for the Study of Contemporary Women's Writing at the IMLR, and Travelling Texts, 1790-1914: The Transnational Reception of Women's Writing at the Fringes of Europe (Finland, the Netherlands, Norway, Slovenia, Spain) (<http://travellingtexts.huygens.knaw.nl/>)

Sponsored by HERA (Humanities in the European Research Area)

Programme

14:00-14:05 Welcome (**Gill Rye**, CCWW)

14:05- 15:25 Session 1: Historical Perspectives

Gillian Dow (Chawton House Library): The Biographical Impulse, Writing Women's Literary History and Chawton House Library

Henriette Partzsch (Hispanic Studies, Glasgow): Mapping the Transnational Reception of 19th-Century Women's Writing

15:25-15.55 Tea Break

15:55-17:15 Session 2: Living Archives [Chair: Gillian Dow]

Marina Cano López (English, St Andrews): Recycling the Archive: Jane Austen in the 21st Century

Donna Moore (Glasgow Women's Library): The March of Women: Glasgow Women's Library's Living and Breathing Archive out on the Streets

17:15 Wine Reception

ABSTRACTS

1. Historical Perspectives

Dr Gillian Dow, Chawton House Library: The Biographical Impulse, Writing Women's Literary History and Chawton House Library

In the study of women's writing, all kinds of 'life-writing' have come under increasing scrutiny in recent years: diaries, letters and travelogues, commonplace books and scrapbooks all considered worthy of examination, and their authors treated as 'writers'. Here, I will be concerned specifically with writing lives across borders. For in the pan-European study of 18th and 19th-century women writers – which until very recently, has been largely at the margins of a discussion of women's writing in individual Western nations – the biographical impulse seems never to have gone away. Indeed, the biographical continues to dominate discussions, to the detriment of other theoretical approaches: at Chawton House Library, public lectures are most successful when the focus on the detail of the lives of 'forgotten' women, and the section of the website devoted to author biographies gets more attention than the section devoted to forgotten novels.

This talk will make a claim for the importance of looking transnationally when writing the history of women's writing. It will, however, be concerned with how to move on from bio-bibliographical compilations when in some European countries there is simply no strong tradition of writing women's literary history. How should the scholar keen to 'recover' the voices of women of the past address concerns that such work lacks theoretical drive? I will refer to a range of 18th and early 19th-century bio-bibliographical compilations, translator's prefaces and articles in the periodical press to try and tease out the enduring biographical impulse for many of those who have written and still write pan-European women's (literary) history. At the heart of the discussion will be an exploration of Mary Hays's *Female Biography* (1805) and Stéphanie-Félicité de Genlis's *De l'Influence des Femmes sur la littérature française* (1811) – a work which, contrary to the suggestion in its title, focuses on the Western European writing woman.

Dr Henriette Partzsch, University of Glasgow: Travelling Texts 1790-1914: Mapping the Transnational Circulation of Nineteenth-century Women's Writing

The visibility of women in the history of literature remains a contested area, despite the fact that decades of questioning and criticising male-dominated canons have produced some changes in perspective and attitudes. As Mario Valdés has put it, '[a] plethora of works that deal historically with the repressed material does not produce a massive corrective of the tradition since these counterhistories will be mere add-ons for the interested user of literary history and will not be central for the tradition' ['Rethinking the History of Literary History', 2002: 65]. However, the growing emphasis on studying dynamic connections rather than static objects, as sketched out for instance in Stephen Greenblatt's *Cultural Mobility: A Manifesto* [2010], points towards ways of sidestepping the dilemma of counter-histories in order to productively reframe the debate about recovering voices of the past.

The HERA-funded research project *Travelling Texts, 1790-1914: The Transnational Reception of Women's Writings at the Fringes of Europe (Finland, the Netherlands, Norway, Slovenia, Spain)* inscribes itself in this broader context. Based on the systematic scrutiny of nineteenth-century sources, such as the press, library and booksellers' catalogues, it sets out to study and compare the connections created through the circulation of women's writing from a de-centred perspective, with the overall aim of contributing to the development of relational approaches to the history of literary culture. This talk will provide a brief presentation of the project and illustrate its approach using as example and starting point the library of Spanish woman writer Emilia Pardo Bazán (1851-1921).

2. Living Archives

Dr Marina Cano López, University of St Andrews: Recycling the Archive: Jane Austen in the 21st Century

'I watched *Bridget Jones' Diary* and fell in love with Colin Firth. Then I read the book and learned the movie was an adaptation of *P&P*.' This is one of the answers to the Jane Austen survey I conducted in March this year— here my respondent explains how she first came to Jane Austen. In this talk, I will examine modern uses of the Austen archive through the 300 answers my survey elicited worldwide. It is undeniable that, with the advent of the internet, adaptations, continuations and recreations of Austen's work have reached unprecedented dimensions. Yet these developments are frequently frowned upon by cultural purists, who complain that people no longer read Austen's novels, but prefer YouTube videos or online mashups full of vampires and spelling mistakes in equal proportions. My research, however, suggests otherwise: modern Austen fans are among the most avid and demanding readers; they want well-written stories that have the therapeutic, social and psychological applications they associate with Austen's work. Following a fan-based approach, in this talk, I will explore modern attitudes to Austen and Austen cultural artefacts to suggest that, far from being at death's door, Austen has never been in better health. Fanfiction repeatedly recycles and enlarges the Austen archive, which suggests that fanfiction *is* the future of Jane Austen, and perhaps of the whole archive of women's fiction.

Donna Moore, Glasgow Women's Library: The March of Women: Glasgow Women's Library's living and breathing archive out on the streets

Glasgow Women's Library's 'The March of Women' was a participatory, public art project which utilised the Library's archive to bring together women from all backgrounds through a dramatic celebration of local history and social space, recognising and celebrating outstanding women in Scotland. It involved over a 100 women performing a re-enactment of Cicely Hamilton's Play *A Pageant of Great Women* and being joined by other women to process to Glasgow Green. Our collections are a unique resource, which provide vital evidence of women's achievements, culture and lives. During a two-year project in partnership with the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland, and working with women throughout Glasgow and across the whole of Scotland, Glasgow Women's Library used the archive to give a voice to forgotten heroines of the past, culminating in a performance event and a procession.

The project demonstrates GWL's feminist social praxis view that the archive is not just a passive depository of historical artefacts but is a living, breathing resource that can be used and enjoyed by everyone. Working with the archive is a conversation between history, present and future. Throughout history, women and their stories have been marginalised and sidelined and GWL aims to support women – including those women who have, traditionally, been removed from arts and culture - to creatively rework the past and improve the future by bringing those stories to life. 'The March of Women' project was a thrilling and accessible means of bringing the archive to life in many different ways – from suffragette play readings, through delving into the archive to discover the hidden histories of women, to revisiting the lost art form of the Suffragette pageant.