

On Whose Terms?

Critical Negotiations in Black British Literature and the Arts

13 – 14 March 2008

Goldsmiths, University of London, New Cross, London SE14 6NW
<http://onwhoseterms.org> onwhoseterms@gold.ac.uk

This conference focuses upon local, international and transnational engagements with Black British literature and the arts – in relation to its production, reception and cultural position. Through the multiple disciplines of the arts, it creates a meeting point for prominent and emerging scholars, writers and practitioners in order to explore the impact of this field, both at home and abroad. The context is one of critical investigation and celebration; a journey along diasporic and aesthetic routes.



UNIVERSITY OF
Münster

Goldsmiths
UNIVERSITY OF LONDON

Birkbeck, UNIVERSITY OF LONDON

EVENTS

Andrea Levy interviewed by
Blake Morrison

Kwame Kwei-Armah in conversation
with Britain's key Black directors

Malorie Blackman leading a forum on
young people's writing and writing for
young people with **Deptford Secondary**

School pupils

Malika Booker performing her acclaimed
one-woman show **Unplanned**

KEYNOTE ADDRESSES AND INVITED

SPECIALIST PANELLISTS

Hilary Carty • Joan Anim-Addo • Simon Gikandi
Kadija Sesay • Bénédicte Ledent • Neil Astley
R. Victoria Arana • Gabriele Griffin • Les Back
Nii Parkes • Parminder Bhachu • David Dabydeen
Courtia Newland • Su Andi OBE • Mark McWatt
Michael Buffong • Sukhdev Sandhu • Lyn Innes
James Hogan • Bonnie Greer • Susheila Nasta
Diane Abbott MP • Indhu Rubasingham
Valerie Mason-John • Margaret Busby

EXHIBITIONS

A History of Black Theatre in Britain

Victoria and Albert Museum

Man-Royal, Whickers and Zamis:

New Work by Ajamu

CONTACT onwhoseterms@gold.ac.uk

Deirdre Osborne Goldsmiths,

University of London

Mark Steyn University of Muenster, Germany

Godfrey Brandt Birkbeck, University of London

We invite papers across a broad spectrum of interests: drama, poetry, prose, performance, film, visual arts, curating, arts management and history. Areas of discussion might connect with the following ideas:

(i) At home and abroad – sights and sites of reception Critical engagements with Black British literature and the arts differ according to political and geographical contexts. Many artists and writers themselves embrace diasporic and transnational identities and aesthetics. What are the consequences of this multiple reception and affiliation? How is an indigenous notion of Black British culture affected? Which critical vocabularies are employed, which critical agendas enacted when discussing Black British cultural production? On whose terms is Black British cultural production created, distributed and evaluated?

(ii) Securing credentials Chris Ofili has been accused of “playing to the audience” (and to the judges) thereby securing his credentials as a “black artist”. In contrast, some writers and practitioners steer clear of the term and face the charge of effacing their black heritage as they encounter mainstream and commercial success. What is the relationship between mainstream acceptance and opportunities for producing radical black-centred work?

(iii) Historicising the field Black writers have been published in Britain over the past three centuries – although there is no extant evidence of this in drama before the twentieth century. What are the lines of descent and tradition that connect writers and performers across time and place? What were the formative conditions of production and reception for early black writers and artists in Britain? What part do contemporary historical novels, poetry, visual arts, or drama play in retrieving and reviving past times, to recirculate and celebrate marginalised voices?

(iv) Publishing Black presses have played a vital role in getting black writers into print. Small presses such as New Beacon Books, Karnak House, Bogle L'Overture, Peepal Tree, Mango and X-Press (to name a few) have devoted themselves to fostering black people's writing. Wasafiri, Calabash, SABLElitmag and Third Text have also played a crucial part in providing a platform for writers, securing audiences and engaging with new work. Other non-specialist presses too, such as Sheba Feminist Press, Virago, Oberon, Methuen and Nick Hern Books have been instrumental in publishing poetry, novels and plays by black writers. How is sustainability a factor today and what interventions are being made in the light of Danuta Keane's Arts Council-funded reports into publishing in Full Colour and Free Verse?

(v) Celebrate or segregate – the problematics of a Black British canon?

When Marsha Hunt instituted the SAGA Prize for Black British-born writers in 1995, this registered both indigenous black people's literary output and the fact that it was not yet a customary inclusion in the national cultural landscape. If the canon is key to artistic longevity and revival of work, what part does canonisation play for Black British literature and the arts?

(vi) Arts bodies, cultural policy and education Challenges to publicly-funded educational and arts bodies raise questions about the criteria for and beneficiaries of subsidy. Can policy initiatives and educational programmes reshape the cultural industries? What kinds of pedagogical approaches have been developed in disseminating and teaching Black British literature and the arts – both inside and beyond the UK? How do they impact upon experiences of multiculturalism and Black artistic production, here and elsewhere, and how do they shape understandings of Black British culture?

(vii) Textual/Sexual Practices Articulations of gay, lesbian and trans-gender experiences have regularly side-lined the perspectives of black people. Black sexual-gender politics have also contended with feminism's inadequacies. How are socio-sexual categories negotiated and represented across forms, disciplines and sites of writing and performance? Who are the boundary breakers? Which aesthetic principles are at work?

(viii) Carnival and Spectacle The Notting Hill Carnival has developed from a small, community-based event, (celebrating still-retained links to Caribbean culture), into a key feature on the London calendar, showcasing the presence of the Caribbean diaspora. Over recent decades, establishment anxieties regarding public control, media representations and political agendas of inclusion and multiculturalism have exacted an increasingly distorting process upon the Carnival's future and integrity. Where is Carnival placed within contemporary British culture? Papers and visual materials are welcomed which cover any aspect of Carnival anywhere in the UK and its history up to now.

Final Call for Papers. Please send your abstract (250 words) and a short bio to: onwhoseterms@gold.ac.uk. DEADLINE: 15th December 2007