

## Points of Exit: Gothic Escapes?

On Thursday, March 19, and Friday, March 20, 2009, the Centre for Gender and Diversity, Maastricht University, the Netherlands, will mark its ten-year anniversary with a conference entitled *Points of Exit: (Un)conventional Representations of Age, Parenting, and Sexuality*. The conference aims to examine the potential deconstruction of conventional scripts of age, parenting, and sexuality.

For one of the panels, entitled *Gothic Escapes?*, we invite papers that deal with the following theme:

Gothic fictions have been said to challenge dominant discourses ever since the late eighteenth century. Gothic has been labeled as unconventional or plainly deviant, as dangerous or as utopian, as transformative or transgressive. Whether gothic transgressions are perceived as threatening or as empowering, is likely to depend on your political position.

However, Chris Baldick & Robert Mighall (2000), among others, have argued that the gothic is conservative rather than progressive. Especially on the issue of female gothic, opinions have been strongly divided. While some feminists declared female gothic a progressive form, others have maintained that gothic plots are even reactionary for women. Can gothic fictions – famous for their featuring of confining spaces such as prisons, dungeons, coffins and labyrinths – provide a point of exit of narrative confinement? Do gothic fictions offer a possible escape from conventional representations of, for example, gender, sexuality, family relations or age?

This panel seeks to revisit the question if and how gothic fictions offer a way out from restricting narrative conventions. Can we evaluate this cultural strategy that we call Gothic politically, or does escape mean escapism? Does unconventionality immediately lead to monstrosity, or are there other options? Is it true that psycho-analytical perspectives favour the gothic as transgressive, while more historical/materialist analyses see gothic as more conservative? After the many discussions on female gothic, is there still a productive way of connecting gothic to feminism, and how should we evaluate the ways feminism has appropriated the gothic?

Papers are welcomed on topics from different periods, and different narrative art forms. They may either offer a close reading of a particular work, or a more theoretical contribution on the issue of the political evaluation of the gothic mode and the narrative possibilities of this persistent cultural strategy.

Send in a 500-word abstract and a short bio to [info-gender@cgd.unimaas.nl](mailto:info-gender@cgd.unimaas.nl) (subject heading: “Gothic Escapes?”) before November 1, 2008.

We aim at publishing a selection of conference papers in a special issue of a peer-reviewed journal.

For further information on the *Points of Exit* conference, see: [www.genderdiversiteit.nl/pointsofexit/](http://www.genderdiversiteit.nl/pointsofexit/).