

## **PREFACE: MAKING TIME FOR CREATIVITY IN CRITICISM**

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Which goddess is the muse of literary criticism? I'm certain she's related to Clio, the Muse of History, but there is an inverse relationship between her presence and that of the traditional Greek pantheon. The absence of good criticism is likely to invite the presence of Melpomene, whose face is the mask of Tragedy. Knowing how to read texts—linguistic or visual—is a compulsory requirement for any writer. The academic and so-called 'creative' enterprises are often erroneously contrasted with each other, but what poet ever wrote who hadn't learned first how to think clearly and critically? In his essay on Wagner, Baudelaire wrote about the important moment of transition when what comes easily to a young poet no longer serves his or her purpose:

All great poets naturally and fatally become critics. I pity those poets who are guided by instinct alone: I regard them as incomplete. But in the spiritual life of the former a crisis inevitably occurs when they feel the need to reason about their art, to discover the obscure laws in virtue of which they have created, and to extract from this study a set of precepts whose divine aim is infallibility in poetic creation. It would be unthinkable for a critic to become a poet; and it is impossible for a poet not to contain within him a critic. (124)

Scholars are the best friends of the writer, especially those at the beginning of those critics' intellectual careers. The writers covered in the articles included here, diverse as they are, should regard themselves among friends. Academics retire mentally when they lose touch with their graduate students' work. I'm delighted to know about and support the Postgraduate Contemporary Women's Writing Network (PGCWWN) and this publication because it allows me to participate in and witness a key forum of intellectual enquiry for me as a writer. Good thinking is never achieved alone and a key skill in striving for excellence is recognizing and keeping the best company. I was invited to give the keynote at the conference from which this publication comes, and just as these papers represent good thinking and keeping good company, I was pleased to share my own resulting thoughts in a recent article in *PN*

*Review* (Lewis). I pride myself on knowing an important community when I see one, and the PGCWWN, affording space for enterprising young scholars in the field of contemporary women's writing, is one of mine.

### WORKS CITED

- Baudelaire, Charles. 'Richard Wagner et Tannhäuser à Paris'. *The Painter of Modern Life and Other Essays*. Trans. Jonathan Mayne. 2nd edn. London: Phaidon, 1995.
- Lewis, Gwyneth. 'Time and Space in Contemporary Women's Writing'. *PN Review* 211 (2013): 35–44.