

# THE AUSTRALIAN WOMEN'S AND GENDER STUDIES ASSOCIATION

## THE INAUGURAL AWGSA PHD AWARD 2010

The AWGSA PhD Award was established to promote and advance feminist scholarship in Australia by recognising emerging research in the fields of Women's and Gender Studies and related disciplines. This is the first year that the award has been made. The award is given to the most outstanding doctoral thesis completed at an Australian university that clearly and extensively engages with feminist paradigms.

In reviewing the nominations for this award which covered the period 2007-2009, the judging panel was genuinely impressed by the quality and diversity of current feminist research at the doctoral level in this country. The short-listing task was a challenging one; selecting an award winner from the short-list proved even more daunting. In making their determination, the judges paid particular attention to the challenging nature of the questions with which each thesis engaged and how effectively each thesis genuinely advanced debate in the area addressed.

The judging panel has awarded the Inaugural AWGSA PhD Award jointly to Dr Jessica Cadwallader (PhD Macquarie University) and Dr Sally Newman (PhD Monash University).

The judges also wished to Highly Commend a third PhD thesis by Dr Katrina O'Loughlin (PhD University of Melbourne).

*The judges' citations follow:*

### JOINT AWARD WINNER

#### **DR JESSICA CADWALLADER, 'Suffering Difference: The Ethics and Politics of Modifying Bodies'.**

This sophisticated contribution to the debates surrounding body modification impressed the judges with its theoretical flair and clarity of argument. Cadwallader offered in her thesis a focused interrogation of key ethical challenges arising in relation to the experience of suffering. Located at the intersection of phenomenology and bioethics, her research productively extends the ground-breaking work of feminist philosophers such as Rosalyn Diprose in order to craft a series of important and highly original interventions in our understandings of embodiment and difference, of the normal and the pathological. Cadwallader's confident grappling with some of the most challenging current debates joining medicine, ethics and politics demonstrates not only the importance but the power of continuing feminist engagement with the materiality of bodies and with the evolving technologies of body modification. Her thesis is an outstanding example of the quality and originality of doctoral work undertaken in this country and rightly deserves recognition in this regard.

## **JOINT AWARD WINNER**

### **DR SALLY NEWMAN, 'Traces of Desire: Reading the Lesbian Archive'.**

This was seen as a highly original thesis that makes a significant and much-needed contribution to research and methodology in the area of feminist approaches to sexuality. Newman's thesis is centrally concerned with "locating, interpreting and historicizing the textual traces of lesbian desire". This is achieved through an analysis of four central archival encounters – these are with the surviving documentary sources for the Victorian collaborative authors "Michael Field", Vernon Lee, Smith College and Aileen Palmer. She sees her overall project as a "balancing of hermeneutic and historiographical interpretive acts/practices". Newman's particular innovation involves shifting the focus from the "pursuit of identity" to "the more productive questions of desire". Reflecting critically on her training in history and on the work of feminist historiography and its various interrogations, Newman works to separate "theoretical assumptions from [her] own wish to see [her] own desire reflected in history". Most importantly from the judges' point of view, Newman's work generates avenues for further research along the paths she has pioneered: in terms of "the ontological (what is lesbian desire?), the methodological and interpretive (how do we locate it?) to the epistemological and historiographical (what does it mean in his context?)." In the opinion of the judges, Newman's thesis offered a productive example of what might be done in current feminist attempts to write new histories of sexualities.

## **HIGHLY COMMENDED**

### **DR KATRINA O'LOUGHLIN, "The Paper Globe": Subject and Sociality in C18th British Women's Travel Narratives'.**

This thesis offers a wonderfully nuanced account of female-authored travel writings of the eighteenth century and makes a persuasive argument for the centrality of travel to the articulation of British sociality and subjectivity and for the place of women writers in emerging public cultures of curiosity and debate. The judges felt that O'Loughlin demonstrated very effectively the impact new feminist readings can have on our understanding not only of individual literary texts, but also of the social and cultural moments that produce them. Further, her work represents a key contribution to the renewed critical pressure upon core analytical categories such as 'women's writing'. The judges were especially impressed by O'Loughlin's combination of careful and intelligent close readings of writers such as Lady Mary Wortley Montague, Anna Maria Falconbridge and a series of lesser-known authors with a sophisticated account of the historical and biographical context surrounding them. She showed an impressive depth of knowledge of her subject in a thesis that is meticulously researched, beautifully shaped and eminently publishable. In the opinion of the judges, this work revealed the genuinely productive and illuminating interventions feminist approaches can make in the writing of new literary histories.

### **Judging Panel for the 2010 Award:**

Associate Professor Maryanne Dever (Monash University), Associate Professor Catherine Driscoll (University of Sydney), Professor Carole Ferrier (University of Queensland).