

## NESTA PAIN, THE ENTANGLED MEDIA PRODUCER

### **Kate Terkanian and Hugh Chignell**

*The Entangled Media Histories approach to media historiography has produced new approaches to the practice of media history. The main emphasis in the entangled approach is on transnational and transmedial analysis but there is also an interest in the ‘cultural translator’, an individual who expresses cross-border or cross-boundary entanglement through their professional work. Such a person is the twentieth century BBC producer, Nesta Pain (1905 – 1995) whose career began during the Second World War when she contributed to the ‘Projection of Britain’ for the Overseas Service. Her reputation was made immediately after the end of the war at the time when the Features Department was separated from Drama and the innovative Third Programme was established. Nesta Pain utilised these new opportunities to create highly imaginative cross-genre radio features and especially those dealing with science. She made a major contribution to science education and the popularising of science but at the same time was also a budding radio drama producer. She produced John Mortimer’s Prix Italia winning ‘The Dock Brief’ and her adaptation of Ray Bradbury’s ‘There Will Come Soft Rains’ was ground-breaking. Nesta Pain showed it was possible to ignore the entrenched boundaries of the BBC; gender, departmental and genre as well as the gulf between radio and television and represents an important example of the ‘cultural translator’.*

**KEYWORDS** Nesta Pain; BBC; entangled media histories; cultural translator

Since the first meeting of EMHIS in November 2013 the members of the network have developed a consensus around what it means to do entangled media history. The articulation of this consensus by Marie Cronqvist and Christoph Hilgert in their report, ‘Entangled Media Histories: the value of transnational and transmedial approaches in media historiography’ has greatly assisted network members in writing entangled histories.<sup>1</sup> Following Cronqvist and Hilgert’s statement, Michele Hilmes’ ‘Entangled Media Histories Response’, while accepting the general entangled ‘manifesto’, unsurprisingly, given her pioneering work as a transnational media

historian,<sup>2</sup> contains the suggestion that the search for key individuals is a way of addressing the necessarily difficult methodological issues presented by our approach. She suggests that these people might be ‘cultural translators’ and although they may in fact be quite obscure figures in the story of the media, their careers can help us unlock the way that ‘transmediality functions at ground level’.<sup>3</sup> Inspired by these two statements, this paper examines the career of BBC features producer Nesta Pain and seeks out the entanglement that characterised her time at the BBC. The evidence which we will present suggests that she was a producer who crossed the organisational borders which characterised the post-war BBC at a time when borders of different types – status, class, gender, profession, nation – were such a distinctive feature of British society. This discussion will also reflect how recent developments in digital archives and approaches to interpretation have assisted in rediscovering the depth and breadth of Pain’s work.

When Nesta Pain died in 1995 shortly before her 90<sup>th</sup> birthday, tributes to her recalling her long, diverse career as a BBC producer appeared in *The Times*, *The Guardian*, and *The Independent*.<sup>4</sup> All were glowing accounts of her contributions to the BBC in the areas of science, history and drama. However, Pain’s career involved more than writing and producing feature programmes and dramas for the radio. She was able to translate her experience and expertise gained through radio production into the publishing world by writing books and articles. Her first book published in 1951 was *Science and Slimming*. Other titles on insects, *Lesser Worlds* (1953), on Louis Pasteur (1957), and historical topics, *The King and Becket* (1964) and *Empress Matilda* (1978), would follow. Pain also wrote a series of on-act plays for actors such as Joan Miller and Ellen Pollock. Pain’s foray into stage productions demonstrated a willingness to expand her repertoire.

Many of Pain’s written works derived from topics she had first written as radio features – an unusual programme hybrid that combines elements of factual content, like a radio documentary, with creative techniques including dramatic reconstruction, poetry and music. For example, Pain first wrote about Pasteur in a radio feature in 1945.<sup>5</sup> Following on from the reputation she had built in her radio features, she penned numerous magazine articles in publications ranging from *Everybody’s* to *The Leader*, to *The Atlantic*, covering scientific topics, from slimming to microbes. In the 1990s, she was still contributing scientific profiles and obituaries for *The Guardian* based on her work of the BBC. It is clear from these few examples

that Pain was happy to transfer content across types of media including radio, television and the press. Described by colleagues as both soft-spoken and formidable, Pain proved adept at translating her communicative abilities into a variety of media and subjects.<sup>6</sup> Pain's career path highlights the interconnectedness of various media outlets. She was able to translate her talents as a writer and a producer in experimental ways through the stage, in print, and through both radio and television broadcasting. It is not, however, just her use of various media that highlights the entangled nature of her career, it is her ability to draw other communities, including scientific and literary experts, into the world of broadcasting, that makes her career distinct. Nesta Pain's work as a multi-medial producer suggests an opportunity to apply some of the ideas and approaches associated with an 'entangled media history' and the aim of this paper is to attempt to apply this new methodology to the working life of a particularly innovative woman.

### **Entangled Media History**

Cronqvist and Hilgert identified some of the most important historiographical elements of entangled media history -- the transnational, the multimedial -- while allowing space for more distinctive and less formulaic approaches. The spirit of the entangled methodology is a 'search for media historical entanglements' and a recognition that 'borders may not only refer to geography, but indeed also borders or border crossings between different media'.<sup>7</sup> Through the lens of entanglement, histories of broadcasting in Britain can look very restricted and myopic with a powerful tendency to focus not only on one media, but also on a single genre. Although mono-medial, national histories of the media have their place we wish to answer what Sian Nicholas calls the need for an 'integrated history of the mass media'.<sup>8</sup> This search flows across different media products and is accompanied by other attempts developed by EMHIS to broaden the debate about media history. For entangled media historians, access to archives is central as is engaging in the debates around access and interpretation<sup>9</sup>:

The ability to describe in some detail Nesta Pain's career at the BBC is heavily reliant on a variety of archive sources. The first is the collection of files relating to her career and the BBC Features Department at the BBC Written Archives Centre in Caversham; the familiar starting point for many broadcasting historians. The recently developed BBC Genome ([genome.ch.bbc.co.uk](http://genome.ch.bbc.co.uk)) has had a significant

impact on the work of researchers interested in BBC programming. The BBC Genome database contains the information on every BBC programme from the official listing magazine, the *Radio Times*. The many programmes that Nesta Pain worked demonstrate extraordinary diversity of her output. The database is not without its problems as it relies on accurate data input and the original printed version of the *Radio Times* that may not have always named producers like Pain. Nevertheless, the BBC Genome is an extremely useful tool. A small selection of the programmes produced by Nesta Pain are available in the BBC sound archive, accessible via the British Library which at least provides an indication of her work as a creative and imaginative producer.

Nesta Pain was no respecter of strict genre demarcations in the BBC and took every opportunity to work across different media including radio, television and the press. Her ability to be both a fiction scriptwriter and a serious producer of science programmes, to move successfully across borders not only in her creative work but as a woman in a profoundly male-dominated department of the BBC suggests to us a pre-echo of entanglement. Nesta Pain was exactly the sort of cultural translator identified by Michele Hilmes and studying her career through the lens of entangled media histories helps us to challenge the taken-for-granted and orthodox institutional histories which have hitherto ignored Pain and others like her.

### **The BBC and Features Department**

The BBC had a famously good war, it managed to keep government interference through the Ministry of Information at arm's length, it gave women new opportunities as administrators and producers, it pioneered new and creative forms of radio programming and was by 1945 a trusted and very popular source of news and entertainment.<sup>10</sup> In the post-war period, however, much of the success gave way to an unattractive conservatism and caution; economic austerity, the Cold War and a return to pre-war certainties made the BBC a pale imitation of its former self. As Thomas Hajkowski describes, the BBC was an imperialist and royalist broadcaster in a world that had moved on.<sup>11</sup> Little wonder that the advent of commercial television in 1955 proved so popular with British audiences and forced the BBC to reinvent itself at the end of the 1950s.

The male elitism and conservatism of the BBC was demonstrated by some of the most influential men at the top of the organisation. The Head of Drama from the 1920s to the 1960s, Val Gielgud was a man of very fixed ideas as was the notoriously cautious, Tahu Hole, the dead hand on the tiller of radio news. The Director General of the BBC in the 1950s, Lieutenant General Sir Ian Jacob presided over a media organization steeped in the military values of deference, hierarchy and demarcation in which Nesta Pain built her career.<sup>12</sup> If this was the complete story then she would barely have had a production career let alone one of such entangled diversity, but it is not.

Two radical developments enabled Nesta Pain to be a 'cultural translator' and to break down boundaries of gender, genre and media. The first of these was the separation of those two definitive radio genres, dramas and features, by the creation of separate Radio Drama and Radio Features Departments in 1945. While Drama trudged along under Gielgud in unadventurous style between 1945 and 1955, Features Department was led by Laurence Gilliam, a genuine boundary-breaker and rule-bender who made 'daring and well-judged appointments' to his staff including Nesta Pain and a number of other brilliant and imaginative women and men.<sup>13</sup> Features Department ignored the genre conventions of fact and fiction and was the most experimental place to be in the post-war BBC. It is unsurprising that Nesta Pain, someone who wanted to work in such a variety of genres and media, had a place there.

The second major development which enabled her to experiment and break through traditional boundaries was the creation in 1946 of the 'Third Programme', a new artistic and cultural radio network of the BBC which was the most experimental and the most international of the BBC's channels. The Third Programme is sometimes dismissed as intellectually pretentious and significant to only tiny audiences. What is sometimes overlooked, however, is that in a BBC obsessed with tradition, empire and royalty, here was a place where European culture and values could be found and where technological innovation was welcomed. This was the place where, for example, from 1949 the Prix Italia was so highly valued, where the renaissance of French drama had its full impact, and also where experiments in sound recording, including the use of portable tape recorders and then the revolutionary Radiophonic workshop, were introduced. Nesta Pain's entangled career owed a lot to the spirit of internationalism and experimentation which existed in the Third

Programme and the Features Department where to be original and open to European influences was valued. [Do we need some kind of reference here? Do you have something published already Hugh?]

### **Nesta Pain – The Entangled Producer**

Born in 1905 to a prominent Liverpool family, Nesta Pain initially seemed destined to follow the familiar path of wife and mother, despite her interest in academics. She married in early in 1926 during her first year at Liverpool University, and gave birth during her second year.<sup>14</sup> However, Pain seemed less committed to a domestic life than an intellectual one, when she decided to pursue a doctorate at Somerville College, Oxford in linguistics.<sup>15</sup> With a failing marriage and uncertain employment prospects, Pain turned to the BBC in late 1941. The husband of an old school friend helped Pain secure a job as a writer/researcher on the strength of a previously produced play, “The Jews of York”, and a script on Henry of Anjou.<sup>16</sup> Like other women that joined the BBC in the 1940s, Pain benefited from the opportunity to enter into broadcasting that the Second World War provided and managed to have a long career with the organisation.

Nesta Pain the joined the Corporation in January 1942 at a tense time, both within the Corporation and for the war effort. Despite the fact that the Soviet Union and the US had come into the war, the allies experienced military setbacks in both North Africa and on the Eastern Front before the tide turned at the end of the year. Within the BBC tensions were also mounting as a streamlining reorganisation loomed after a year of hectic expansion and her first assignment reflected the BBC’s concern about the war effort. Pain began working for the Overseas Service of the BBC primarily concerned with broadcasting to the empire. This formative year in which she trained as a radio writer and producer would be influenced by the Corporation’s role in what they termed the ‘Projection of Britain’, which was designed to reflect a positive image of Britain to people outside of the British Isles. These positive qualities were to reflect not only institutional and social structures, but also more intangible concepts of national character.<sup>17</sup> Her output during the war years, and immediately in the post-war era seemed to reflect BBC’s policy in transmitting this specific image of Britain, and the outlines of this

policy are demonstrated in programmes she wrote and produced across several types of genres.

On her first assignment, Pain was assigned to work as a researcher and writer for Cecil McGivern on a series for the Overseas Service called 'For Gallantry'.<sup>18</sup> The objective of the programmes conformed to some of the directives outlined in the 'Projection of Britain', particularly with regard to projecting the virtues of the British character are stressed. Consisting of fifteen minutes programmes that dramatized the feats of everyday heroism, the pieces dovetailed with the stated aims of the Assistant Controller of the Overseas service that the BBC follow the example of Russian media and stress the home-front heroes.<sup>19</sup> Pain herself commented that her "... first job with the B.B.C. was to write about heroes. The war was going far from well at the time and the B.B.C. evidently thought it would be a good idea to convince the colonies and all potential allies that although we couldn't be called victorious, at least we were brave."<sup>20</sup> Pain's statement was a condensed version of the BBC's policy regarding the Projection of Britain. Pain's adherence to this policy directive was borne out further in her programming that followed, particularly her initial scientific programmes on tropical diseases.

Often seen as specialising in medical issues, Pain's focus on scientific topics covered a broad range, including investigation into atomic energy, psychology and the natural sciences.<sup>21</sup> Although lacking a degree in a science-related field, Pain clearly knew how to research a topic and write a coherent script that appealed to a broad spectrum of listeners. During her first year at the BBC, the Head of Features, Laurence Gilliam valued her ability as a researcher, but doubted that she would ever be a scriptwriter.<sup>22</sup> However by 1944, despite narrowly avoiding dismissal, Pain had carved out a niche for herself writing and producing scientific programming, and earning the respect of Laurence Gilliam in the process.<sup>23</sup> An early script on sleeping sickness also appeared to have followed the Projection of Britain policy as they emphasized the accomplishment and dedication of British scientists, and were part of the Overseas Services' series 'Experiment in Freedom'.<sup>24</sup> The script focussed on the tireless dedication of Australian-born Scottish scientist David Bruce to finding the cause of the disease. The story emphasised not only British scientific contributions, but also British commitment to improving living conditions in the Empire.

If the scientific programmes began as propaganda vehicles for the Overseas Service, they appeared to have become much more personal for Pain. Over the

course of her long career at the BBC, she moved from these celebrations of British achievement in science to presenting the brutality of the insect world with a flair steeped in black humour. A series of profiles that Pain wrote in the 1990s for *The Guardian* on pathologist Keith Simpson and Dr John Snow indicated that the scientific characters she had discovered and often interviewed during her career had resonated with her. The character sketches of these individuals also demonstrated a penchant for translating a historical or scientific event into a compelling story.<sup>25</sup>

Often approaching her topics from a personal angle, Pain's science programmes featured the dramatic element of the scientist and the moment of discovery.<sup>26</sup> Perhaps it was her unassuming persona which allowed her to succeed in developing profitable relationships with members of the scientific community. In reviewing her work, Gilliam praised her ability to win the confidence of notoriously prickly scientists.<sup>27</sup> A series of letters between Pain and a specialist in tropical medicine, F.H.K. Green, demonstrated this tendency. Through consultation, and requests for expert opinion and feedback on scripts, Pain established a rapport with Green. In return, he lent her books, assisted with access to the Royal Society of Medicine library, and introduced her to other scientists. She directly consulted Green for stories on sleeping sickness, malaria and yellow fever. He referred her to experts in microbiology and anaesthesia, and often reviewed her scripts.<sup>28</sup>

For her part, Pain was not adverse to forging other contacts on her own. By the time Green reported that his recommended expert in microbes had huffily declared he had no time to assist, Pain had already decided that it would be best to contact Alexander Fleming directly as she planned to dramatize the discovery of penicillin. Pain reported back that despite Green's fears that Fleming might refuse, Fleming had proved to be "really charming."<sup>29</sup> Pain also persuaded the BBC to pay for her membership of the Royal Academy of Medicine to alleviate the problems of access that she had previously outlined to Dr Green.<sup>30</sup> In creating a piece that would inform and entertain the public, Pain forged a link between the scientific community and the BBC. The detailed knowledge required to produce programming for the Features Department allowed Pain to develop an approach that intertwined her own work with the scientific community. Pain sought prior approval of scripts and solicited scientist for their private opinion on BBC science broadcasting.<sup>31</sup> Allan Jones has described how the scientific community sought to control and influence broadcasting on the BBC from the late 1940s through to the early 1960s.<sup>32</sup> However,



Pain's early consultative relationships demonstrated that this interconnectedness with the scientific community had already been functioning during the war.

The BBC Genome reveals Pain's contribution to the BBC's domestic services and in particular the Home Service. During the war years as well as her role in 'projecting Britain' she made a variety of features and documentaries including programmes with the titles 'Poetry of the British Empire' (11 October 1943) 'A Radio Portrait of a District Officer' (12 August 1943), 'The Haymarket Theatre' (17 February 1944).<sup>33</sup> Her main contribution to domestic radio, however, was in the production of science programmes and she wrote and produced programmes on sleeping sickness, yellow fever, X-rays, microbes, one titled 'A layman looks at science' (27 April 1945) and one on Louis Pasteur. It is clear from this war-time output that she had developed some expertise in the area of the public communication of science on radio. One of her programmes from the end of the war still exists as a recording, 'The Atom Explodes' was broadcast on 5 September 1945, just weeks after the use of atomic bombs on the Japanese cities of Hiroshima on 6 August and Nagasaki on 9 August. Originally the programme had been scheduled to air on 15 August 1945. The timing of the programme, and its delayed broadcast, led some in the press to speculate that the BBC had prior knowledge of the bombing.<sup>34</sup> Pain explicated stated that she had no information about the nuclear bomb programme, but that the possibility had been the subject of speculation in the news. Her scientific consultant, Professor Norman Feather, had been a consultant on the development of the bomb and had tried to steer her away from the topic.<sup>35</sup>

The recording of "The Atom Explodes" reveals Nesta Pain's highly creative and experimental approach to her work. Her concern was not with the political context of the broadcast but instead she focused on explaining quite complicated science to the listener using dramatic reconstruction. The programme begins with a domestic drama in which three people are talking rather flippantly about the fact that one of them, Charles, has taken a radioactive pill as part of an experiment. The tone is jovial and one of the characters, John, tries to explain the principles of radioactivity which he does with the benefit of dramatic reconstructions of the discovery of X-rays, Marie Curie discovering radium and Ernest Rutherford's experiments splitting the atom. 'The Atom Explodes' defies generic classification and certainly adds to the idea that Nesta Pain was no respecter of genre boundaries, an enormously important

historical event is obliquely acknowledged in a highly inventive series of dramatic scenes with quite demanding factual content.

### **Adaptations, History Programming, and Contemporary Writers**

Nesta Pain developed her interest in popular science and transferred her expertise from radio to books and magazine articles on scientific topics, especially during the 1950s. Although her research and writing on scientific topics had led to what amounted to a parallel career in publishing, Pain turned to other forms of dramatic expression during this period. Seemingly drawn to dark humour and the macabre, she scripted plays for actors Thorley Walters and Ellen Pollock. “A Bride for the Bath” opened in Brighton and briefly toured, with Walters as the protagonist, George Joseph Smith, Junior. The one-act play depicted a descendant of notorious serial killer George Joseph Smith, the perpetrator of the Bride in the Bath Murders in the 1910s, who had been following in the family business of murder on his most recent wedding night. Instead of winding up a widower as he intended, Smith Junior ended up the victim.<sup>36</sup> Also produced in 1954 were two pieces for Ellen Pollack for the Irving Theatre’s Grand Guignol season. “Birthday Greetings” was a monologue of an ageing and neglected wife driven mad with jealousy by her unfaithful husband, which was favourably reviewed in *The Times*, and “Golden Voice” another exploration of jealousy, this time in a surgical setting.<sup>37</sup> Pain’s interest in the macabre and forensic medicine as a radio producer dated from an 1946 programme on psychology and delinquency through to criminal and legal case studies in the early 1950s.<sup>38</sup>

In 1957, Pain began a training programme in television scriptwriting, as well as continuing to develop her publishing and playwriting activities.<sup>39</sup> At the same time that her outside interests were shifting, the Features Department’s priorities also started to shift. Colleague Rayner Heppenstal noted that in the late 1950s Laurence Gilliam had tasked the Features’ producers to recruit young writing talent.<sup>40</sup> Perhaps Pain as a loyal and proud member of the Features Department whole-heartedly embraced Feature’s new priorities. This turn away from factual and scientific features may also have been prompted by an increased interest in broadcasting from the scientific community. Allan Jones has detailed how the scientific community was trying to have greater influence on BBC science broadcasting, and how other BBC departments were prominent in this development in the 1950s.<sup>41</sup> Another possible influence was a stylistic move away from the dramatizations favoured by Features.

Whatever the reason from the mid-1950s, Pain began writing and producing more frequently in genres other than science on both radio and television.

The first adaptation of a book that the Pain produced for Features was *The Goshawk* by T.H. White in 1952. This work of non-fiction was on falconry, and other similar adaptations followed. However it would be Pain's adaptations of contemporary fiction, and her encouragement of modern novelists to write for a radio audience that would provide with some of her more successful material at this phase of her career. Pain had been nominated in 1951 for the Prix Italia for her programme "Spiders", but it was her production of John Mortimer's "The Dock Brief" that would win her the prize in 1957.<sup>42</sup> Importantly, and perhaps unsurprisingly, Nesta Pain then produced "The Dock Brief" for BBC television. The play was reviewed in *The Times* and the critic's views are revealing:

Miss Nesta Pain's production forcibly drew attention towards two of the most neglected and most powerful assets of television – its ability to portray character with microscopic exactitude and to attain drama by using language of the utmost gentleness.<sup>43</sup>

These words show that she was not simply someone who dabbled in different media but was able to identify the particular qualities of her medium and exploit them. Soon after *The Dock Brief* she produced another television 'documentary play'<sup>44</sup> 'a Shaft of Light'<sup>45</sup> which was a dramatic but factually-based introduction to dreams and their meaning. "Shaft of Light was a reworked version of her radio programme "Dreams" which was first broadcast on 24 March 1947 for the Third Programme.<sup>46</sup>

Mortimer worked with Pain on other occasions, "I Spy" in 1957, "A Voyage Around my Father" in 1963, and "Education of an Englishman" in 1964, and would praise Pain for encouraging him to write for the radio in his own autobiography.<sup>47</sup> Another popular adaptation was "The Loneliness of the Long Distance Runner" by Alan Sillitoe, which was particularly noted for its use of music in dramatizing emotion.<sup>48</sup> She also produced several radio dramas with Simon Raven and Christine Brook-Rose. As with her work with the scientific community, Pain gathered around her a group of writers from the world of publishing, and successfully made programming that appealed to a wide range of BBC listeners. Although Mortimer's "A Dock Brief" debuted on the more high-brow Third Programme, it later aired both

on the Home Service and on BBC television, demonstrating that something first considered to have only minority appeal proved widely popular.<sup>49</sup> In the case of “The Loneliness of the Long Distance Runner”, the BBC sold the production to radio stations in Denmark, Sweden and Germany.<sup>50</sup>

In 1962, she produced one of her finest programmes, the unclassifiable ‘There Will Come Soft Rains’<sup>51</sup> an adaptation of Ray Bradbury’s short story of the same name. The story is inspired by a poem by the American lyric poet, Sara Teasdale which suggests the world after all human life has gone. Ray Bradbury’s short story describes a house staffed by speaking robots after nuclear war. The robots continue to speak but all that is left of the family are their silhouettes on the blackened side of the house. In Pain’s highly creative adaptation she worked with the composer, Antony Hopkins using radiophonic techniques. The robots voices are sung, rather eerily and the adaptation itself is subtle and light-touch – so for example she shifts the writing from the past to the present tense to give the story greater immediacy.

During the last years of the Features Department, Pain would also continue to write and produce science-related programming, but in a more focussed way. Almost all of her own scripting during this period was on insects. This included new productions of her material from a decade earlier, and new programmes on other insect groups. One of the highlights of these productions on insects was her collaboration with composer Antony Hopkins in producing music that conveyed as much as the narration.<sup>52</sup> She also was involved with productions on historical topics, chiefly although not exclusively on monarchs. In 1961 she finally produced a programme on Henry of Anjou, a topic she had researched back in 1941 when first applying to the BBC. Although both Features and the Third Programme, which had both provided Pain with the opportunity for creative expression, had ceased to exist by 1964, Pain continued her career with the BBC until the 1970s. In her later years, much of her work for the BBC was as a producer, but she also continued to write occasional pieces in the press and left an unpublished manuscript *The Price of Freedom* with her personal papers.<sup>53</sup>

## **Conclusions**

Although Nesta Pain was primarily a writer and producer of radio programmes, her career also included writing and production in other media, including the stage, book publishing, the press and television. Two of her more

successful radio programmes, “So this is Man” and her series on Louis Pasteur, were also adapted as television programmes. The work on Pasteur also spawned several magazine articles and a book.<sup>54</sup> Each of these forms of media required Pain to adapt her subject matter to its particular demands of presentation. That she was able to create productions that were successful across media platforms, demonstrated her ability to see the limitations each form of expression entailed. A report on her progress in the BBC’s television scriptwriting training school indicated that she was not afraid to take chances and tackle difficult material despite the risk of failure.<sup>55</sup>

One of the more entangled aspects of her career was her ability to draw on professionals outside of broadcasting to create radio content. She was able to forge connections with scientists, and translate their work into informative and entertaining programmes for both high-brow audiences in the Third Programme, and a science series “Searchlight” on the Light Programme. She recruited daring young novelists to produce their work for a radio audience – not only bringing the work of John Mortimer, Simon Raven and Christine Brook-Rose to the listening public, but introducing the possibilities of the broadcast medium to the literary world. Following Michele Hilmes formulation of the ‘cultural translator’ as a way of identifying and researching entangled media history, the case of Nesta Pain demonstrates the way one producer in a boundary-conscious BBC occupied that role. Nesta Pain spent an entire career crossing boundaries, including gender divisions, genre demarcations and across media. What remains to be done is an examination of transnational influences in her work, both European or American influence on her as a creative producer but also the export of her writing and productions abroad.

Nesta Pain’s career was not unique, many producers worked in different media in the post-war period, but her ability and willingness to work across so many media, forces the entangled media historian to follow her journey in radio, television, the stage, publishing and the press. It is legitimate to ask what the consequences of this trans-medial career were. Rather than diluting her competence as a producer or creating amateurish work in too many different contexts, she appears to have been a highly successful author, playwright, radio and television producer. Her rejection of the conventional boundaries of genre and different media made her more sensitive to the particular qualities which they offered. Her award winning radio production of John Mortimer’s “The Dock Brief” is evidence of the highest quality radio drama production but it was then transferred to television where she was praised for her

particular awareness of that medium's strengths and qualities. Nesta Pain's willingness to be a 'cultural translator' made her one of the most creative and experimental women of her time.

### **Acknowledgements**

Our thanks go to the staff at the BBC Written Archives Centre without whose help Nesta Pain's carer would have remained hidden. Particular thanks go to the STINT funded Entangled Media Histories network and especially to Patrik Lundell and Marie Cronqvist for creating and then leading the EMHIS network.

### **Disclosure statement**

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

- 
- <sup>1</sup> Marie Cronqvist and Christoph Hilgert, "Entangled Media Histories".
- <sup>2</sup> Michele Hilmes, *Network Nations*.
- <sup>3</sup> "Entangled Media Histories: A Response," *Media History* 23, no. 1 (2017).
- <sup>4</sup> Peter Cotes, "When the Third Came First: Obituary of Nesta Pain," *The Guardian*, 27 July 1995; Charles Hodgson, "Obituary: Nesta Pain," *The Independent*, 26 July 1995; "Nesta Pain; Obituary," *The Times*, 25 July 1995.
- <sup>5</sup> She also directed a four part series for television in 1958 called "The Invisible Armies"; BBC, "Genome, Radio Times 1923-2009,"
- <sup>6</sup> Frederick Bradnum, "Obituary Letter: Nesta Pain," *The Guardian*, 4 August 1995; Peter Cotes, "When the Third Came First: Obituary of Nesta Pain," *ibid.*, 27 July.
- <sup>7</sup> Cronqvist and Hilgert.
- <sup>8</sup> Siân Nicholas, "Media History or Media Histories?, 380.
- <sup>9</sup> Marie Cronqvist and Christoph Hilgert, "Entangled Media Histories".
- <sup>10</sup> Siân Nicholas, *the Echo of War*.
- <sup>11</sup> Thomas Hajkowski, *The BBC and National Identity*.
- <sup>12</sup> Cites for Gielgud, Hole and Jacob. [Maybe Alban Webb for Jacob.]
- <sup>13</sup> Jeanette Thomas, "A History of the BBC Features Department".
- <sup>14</sup> Nesta Pain, "I, a Mother, Went Back to College," *The Evening News*, 15 June 1939.
- <sup>15</sup> Richard Hewlett, "Pain [Née Taylor], (Florence) Nesta Kathleen (1905-1995), Broadcaster and Author," (Oxford University Press, 2004).
- <sup>16</sup> The husband was then Regional Head of Scotland Andrew Stewart. Letter from Andrew Stewart to Laurence Gilliam, 24 November 1941, "Left Staff, Pain, Florence Nesta Kathleen," (BBC WAC L1/2121/1-2, 1942).
- <sup>17</sup> Memo, 11 February 1942, from European Talks Editor to Director of European Broadcasting, "Policy, Projection of Britain," (BBC WAC R34/622, 1941-1946).
- <sup>18</sup> Nesta Pain, "War Scripts, for Gallantry and Others," (BBC WAC S300/17/1, 1942-45).
- <sup>19</sup> Memo, 29 March 1942, AC(OS) to C(OS), "Policy, Projection of Britain."
- <sup>20</sup> "An Itch to Find Out," (BBC WAC S300/30/1, Undated).
- <sup>21</sup> "Nesta Pain; Obituary," 1995.
- <sup>22</sup> Annual Review, 14 January 1943, Letter from Gilliam to AEO, 2 April 1943, "Left Staff, Pain, Florence Nesta Kathleen."
- <sup>23</sup> Memo from Gilliam to AEOP, 9 June 1943, *ibid.*
- <sup>24</sup> Undated CV, "Personal Papers, Obituary and Souvenirs" (BBC WAC S300/4/1).
- <sup>25</sup> "Some People: When a Body Meets a Body - Keith Simpson," *The Guardian*, 26 August 1992; "Some People - Dr John Snow - Malt Liquor's Gift to Cholera Science," *The Guardian*, 18 June 1991.
- <sup>26</sup> Listener Research Report on "Yellow Fever" (2 February 1944), Listener Research Report on "War Against Disease" (8 March 1944), Listener Research Report on "X-Rays" (18 April 1944), "Left Staff, Pain, Florence Nesta Kathleen."
- <sup>27</sup> Memo from Gilliam (23 March 1945), Memo from Gilliam to Controller (Entertainment) (4 January 1950) *ibid.*
- <sup>28</sup> "Broadcasting on Medial Research and Everyday Life: Correspondence with Mrs Nesta Pain, BBC," (NA Kew, FD 1/1379, 1944).
- <sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*

- 
- <sup>30</sup> Memo from Nesta Pain to Gilliam (29 January 1945), "Left Staff, Pain, Florence Nesta Kathleen."
- <sup>31</sup> "Broadcasting on Medical Research and Everyday Life: Correspondence with Mrs Nesta Pain, BBC."
- <sup>32</sup> Allan Jones, "Elite Science and the BBC"; "Clogging the Machiner".
- <sup>33</sup> Many of these programmes had first aired on the Overseas Service. For example, 'District Officer' was first broadcast on 2 April 1944 on the Overseas Service to the Pacific and Africa. 'Poetry of the British Empire' was a programme that resulted from items originally planned for the Empire Day broadcast in 1942, and aired on that service in 1942. Pain, "An Itch to Find Out."
- <sup>34</sup> Ibid.; Jonah Barrington, "The 'Miracle' Woman of the Mike," *The Sunday Chronicle*, 9 September 1945 1945; Newspaper clippings, Nesta Pain, "Son Et Lumiere and Historical Note," (BBC WAC S300/33/2).
- <sup>35</sup> "An Itch to Find Out," 70-72.
- <sup>36</sup> "A Bath for the Bride", "Playwright, Plays," (BBC WAC S300/26/1); Memo, 21 May and 25 May 1954, "Left Staff, Pain, Florence Nesta Kathleen."
- <sup>37</sup> "Irving Theatre - Grand Guignol," *The Times*, 11 March 1954 1954.
- <sup>38</sup> BBC. 'Second Hearing – The Young Delinquent' (6 June 1946) and 'The Trial of Daniel M'Naughton (9 October 1949).
- <sup>39</sup> Letter, 21 December 1956, from AEO TV to Pain, "Left Staff, Pain, Florence Nesta Kathleen."
- <sup>40</sup> Rayner Heppenstall, *Portrait of the Artist*. [page number needed]
- <sup>41</sup> Jones, "Elite Science and the BBC."
- <sup>42</sup> "Left Staff, Pain, Florence Nesta Kathleen."
- <sup>43</sup> *The Times*, 17 September 1957.
- <sup>44</sup> *The Times*, 10 October 1958.
- <sup>45</sup> *A Shaft of Light*, BBC Television, 9 October 1958.
- <sup>46</sup> BBC. 'Dreams' was rebroadcasted on two other occasions on The Third Programme and subsequently two other times on the Home Service.
- <sup>47</sup> Ibid.; Cotes; "Nesta Pain; Obituary."
- <sup>48</sup> Listener review "Borstal Boy's Hatred of Normal People," *The Times* (1961).
- <sup>49</sup> BBC.
- <sup>50</sup> "Left Staff, Pain, Florence Nesta Kathleen."
- <sup>51</sup> *There Will Come Soft Rains*, BBC Third Programme, 12 September 1962.
- <sup>52</sup> C. L. Ridgeway, *Framed by Gender*.
- <sup>53</sup> Hewlett.
- <sup>54</sup> Memo from Ian Atkins (11 June 1957), "Left Staff, Pain, Florence Nesta Kathleen."
- <sup>55</sup> Ibid.

## Bibliography

- Barrington, Jonah. "The 'Miracle' Woman of the Mike." *The Sunday Chronicle*, 9 September 1945 1945.
- BBC. "Genome, Radio Times 1923-2009."  
<http://genome.ch.bbc.co.uk/search/300/20?order=asc&q=nesta+pain+#search>.
- "Borstal Boy's Hatred of Normal People." *The Times* (1961/04/27/



- 
- // 1961): 18.
- Bradnum, Frederick. "Obituary Letter: Nesta Pain." *The Guardian*, 4 August 1995, 11.
- "Broadcasting on Medial Research and Everyday Life: Correspondence with Mrs Nesta Pain, BBC." NA Kew, FD 1/1379, 1944.
- Cotes, Peter. "When the Third Came First: Obituary of Nesta Pain." *The Guardian*, 27 July 1995, 14.
- Cronqvist, Marie, and Christoph Hilgert. "Entangled Media Histories - the Value of Transnational and Transmedial Approaches in Media Historiography." *Media History* 21, no. 1 (2017): 130-41.
- Hajkowski, Thomas. *The BBC and National Identity in Britain, 1922-53*. Studies in Popular Culture. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2010.
- Bibliographies
- Heppenstall, Rayner. *Portrait of the Artist as a Professional Man*. London: Owen, 1969.
- Hewlett, Richard "Pain [Née Taylor], (Florence) Nesta Kathleen (1905-1995), Broadcaster and Author." Oxford University Press, 2004.
- Hilmes, Michele. "Entangled Media Histories: A Response." *Media History* 23, no. 1 (2017): 142-44.
- . *Network Nations: A Transnational History of British and American Broadcasting*. New York and Abingdon: Routledge, 2012.
- Hodgson, Charles. "Obituary: Nesta Pain." *The Independent*, 26 July 1995, 14.
- "Irving Theatre - Grand Guignol." *The Times*, 11 March 1954 1954.
- Jones, Allan. "Clogging the Machinery: The Bbc's Experiment in Science Coordination, 1949-1953." *Media History* 19, no. 4 (2013): 436-49.
- . "Elite Science and the BBC: A 1950s Contest of Ownership." *British Journal for the History of Science* 47, no. 4 (2014): 701-23.
- "Left Staff, Pain, Florence Nesta Kathleen." BBC WAC L1/2121/1-2, 1942.
- "Nesta Pain; Obituary." *The Times*, 25 July 1995, 17.
- "Nesta Pain; Obituary." 1995.
- Nicholas, Siân. *The Echo of War : Home Front Propaganda and the Wartime BBC, 1939-45*. Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 1996.
- . "Media History or Media Histories? Re-Addressing the History of the Mass Media in Inter-War Britain." *Media History* 18, no. 3-4 (2012): 379-94.
- Pain, Nesta. "I, a Mother, Went Back to College." *The Evening News*, 15 June 1939.
- . "An Itch to Find Out." BBC WAC S300/30/1, Undated.
- . "Personal Papers, Obituary and Souvenirs ": BBC WAC S300/4/1.
- . "Playwright, Plays." BBC WAC S300/26/1.
- . "Some People - Dr John Snow - Malt Liquor's Gift to Cholera Science." *The Guardian*, 18 June 1991, 35.
- . "Some People: When a Body Meets a Body - Keith Simpson." *The Guardian*, 26 August 1992, 33.
- . "Son Et Lumiere and Historical Note." BBC WAC S300/33/2.
- . "War Scripts, for Gallantry and Others." BBC WAC S300/17/1, 1942-45.
- "Policy, Projection of Britain." BBC WAC R34/622, 1941-1946.

- 
- Ridgeway, C. L. *Framed by Gender: How Gender Inequality Persists in the Modern World*. Framed by Gender: How Gender Inequality Persists in the Modern World. 2011. Book. doi:10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199755776.001.0001.
- Thomas, Jeanette. "A History of the BBC Features Department, 1924-1964." Oxford University, 1993.
- Thomas, J. (1993) *A History of the BBC Features Department, 1924-1964*. Unpublished D.Phil, Oxford University.