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Université d'Angers

**DOCTORIALES /  
GRADUATE SYMPOSIUM**

## GRADUATE SYMPOSIUM in LITERATURE

*Organizers* : Mathieu DUPLAY (Université Paris Diderot-Paris 7) & Françoise PALLEAU-PAPIN (Université Paris 13)

*Respondents* : Isabelle ALFANDARY (Université Paris Est-Créteil), Mathieu DUPLAY (Université Paris Diderot-Paris 7), Audrey FOGELS (Université Paris 8), Françoise PALLEAU-PAPIN (Université Paris 13), Ada SAVIN (Université de Versailles-Saint-Quentin)

### PROGRAM

**9:15 Welcome and opening comments (Amphi Germaine Tillon, MSH)**

**Literature : (Salle Frieda Kahlo, MSH)**

9:30: **Juliette DOROTTE** (Université Paris 4-Sorbonne, supervisor: Marc Amfreville)

“Introducing the Early American Novel”

10:00: **Pierre-Heli MONOT** (Humboldt Universität zu Berlin, supervisor: Eva Boesenberg)

“Hermeneutics and Authorship in American Literature”

10:30: **Brett BREHM** (Northwestern University, supervisor: Michal Ginsburg)

“Sonorous Worlds: Modernity, City, Technology”

**11:00 Coffee break**

11:30: **Nathalie AGHORO** (Universität Siegen, supervisor: Kerstin Schmidt)

“Sounding the American Novel: Writing Voice at the Turn of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century”

12:00: **Julia KERNINON** (Université de Provence, supervisors: Sophie Vallas and Cécile Cottenet)

“Théorie et pratique de l’entretien: *The Paris Review* (1953-1973)”

***12:30 Lunch break***

14:30: **Caitlin HURST** (New York University, supervisor: Peter Nicholls)

“Late Styles: America’s Decadent Modernisms”

15:00: **Olesya BONDARENKO** (Kyiv National Linguistic University, supervisor: Natalya Vysotska)

“Metamodern Subjectivity and Production of Presence in Rae Armantrout’s Works: Transforming Philosophical Poetry”

***15:30 Coffee break***

16:00: **Alexia SCHEMIEN** (Universität Duisburg-Essen, supervisor: Josef Raab).

“The Politics of Spirituality in Mexican American Literature”

16:30: **Denis KISSANGOU MABIALA** (Université d’Angers, supervisor: Emmanuel Vernadakis).

“The Short Stories of Zora Neale Hurston”

***17:00 Discussion***

18:00 **(Amphi Germaine Tillon, MSH)** Arnaud ROUJOU DE BOUBÉE / Séverine PEYRICHOU (Fulbright / French American Commission): Bourses et soutien à la recherche / Fellowships and support for researchers.

**Juliette DOROTTE, Université Paris Sorbonne-Paris 4, France (supervisor: Marc AMFREVILLE)**

**“Introducing the Early American Novel”**

For most French scholars studying American fiction, the earliest American novelist is Charles Brockden Brown, whose works are more and more studied in university curriculums. Yet Brown was not the first American novelist; many anthologies do mention some other fictional works anterior to his but these are generally dismissed as uninteresting, when their titles are even given.

The purpose of this PhD is precisely to shed light on this forgotten period in a thematic and generic study covering 30 years of narrative prose. The period starts with the first American novel, *The Power of Sympathy* by William Hill Brown (1789) and ends in 1819-1820 with the publication of W. Irving's *Sketch-Book* and the emergence of James Fenimore Cooper's novels.

Our approach will borrow elements from neo-historicist, feminist, post-colonial and psychoanalytical theories in order to capture these novels as fully as possible. This study is not comparative: we will trace echoes of earlier British novels and mention motifs later used in 19<sup>th</sup> century fiction only when obvious.

We focus more particularly on the birth of the American novel. At that time the difference between short story and novel was not as clear and we include all fictional texts published in book form in America, no matter their length. We rely on the most exhaustive list of American novels made so far: Lyle Wright's *A Bibliography of American Fiction, 1774-1850* (1969). We include an English-American writer, Susanna Rowson, and her novel *Charlotte Temple*, first published in Britain, because it was the first American bestseller. We exclude short story collections. The total averages 100 novels.

The great majority of the texts could be found on the Internet; about five could not be found. We chose not to search for alternate copies or for the novels not available online in American libraries for several reasons: the approach is mainly literary and does not study circulation, publication and reception, this choice answers a time imperative, and the purpose of the study is panoramic and does allow for a few omissions. We naturally expect questions and even criticism regarding this personal choice.

This is the second year of research. The first two decades were covered and by the time May comes we presume the whole corpus will have been closely read. So far, it appears that the works are amazingly coherent in terms of themes and genres, with the sentimental novel dominating the literary landscape. Before 1800, the first works are torn between dry didacticism and a tendency to explore death; they are chaotic, gloomy and often hard to read. Brown revolutionizes the novel with first-person narration and develops the darkness that emerged in preceding novels. Yet after 1800, fiction is appeased: the works are longer, controlled, with more 3<sup>rd</sup> person narration. Sentimentalism remains, and dark gothic motifs survive, but all are integrated to a quieter form of novel which gradually evolves towards historic romance—a generic transformation to be yet confirmed by the reading of the last decade. So far, it seems the early American novel is haunted with an heroic quest for fulfillment, a quest to fight one's demons and be happy, and find stability, even in fiction itself.

**Pierre-Heli MONOT, Humboldt Universität zu, Berlin, Germany (supervisor: Prof. Dr. Eva BOESENBERG)**

**“Hermeneutics and Authorship in American Literature”**

My thesis proposes a new reading into one of the most fascinating intellectual dialogues between Germany and the United States in the nineteenth century: the birth of a general theory of interpretation and its effects on the ontology of literary discourse in American literary realism and modernism. Specifically, I show how the extension of German post-romantic biblical criticism to secular forms of intersubjective hermeneutics was

embraced by Ralph Waldo Emerson, Henry James, Gertrude Stein and Jack London to problematize the formation of literary characters and the status of literature as a category of knowledge.

The project is organized into three parts. I begin with a minute reading of historical sources and trace the appearance of Friedrich Schleiermacher's notion of *divination* in New England between 1819 and 1836. I suggest that Emerson's early poetics, although directly indebted to the romantic insistence on progressivity and metaphoricity, paradoxically brings forth the political need for a "generalized other" and a poetics of literality. This hypothesis is substantiated with readings of Emerson's "The Last Supper", "Circles", "Friendship" and "Self-Reliance".

The second part outlines the historical effects of this superposition of *intimacy* and *relative literalisms*, contrasting with the generally accepted critical notions of *experience* and *absolute metaphors* (Hans Blumenberg). I describe the transformations of the idea of benevolence (Puritan: sexual ethics, late Darwinian: sympathy, Kropotkinian: history, Jamesian: the plot), and show that James's recurrent puns on economy, investment, interest and benefit often admit of no paraphrase. Thus, the crack in James's golden bowl is no mere romantic "tragic flaw", but rather is the necessary hermeneutic "leap" that precedes the understanding of any closed system (this covert pun is Schleiermacher's own: leap and crack are homonyms in German, as James well knew). I read James's *The Princess Casamassima*, *The Portrait of a Lady* and *The Golden Bowl*, hoping to show that this is all less technical and counter-intuitive than it seems.

The last part is methodological and ultimately reflects on the causes behind the historical shift from Schleiermacher's already post-metaphysical *Wissenwollen* to a normative *volonté de savoir*. It consists in short readings of Jack London's *Martin Eden* and Gertrude Stein's *Tender Buttons* and "Composition as Explanation". The study hopes to substantiate early findings of a profound, yet often overlooked transatlantic dialogue between German and American institutions at the outset of classical modernity.

**Brett BREHM, Northwestern University, Evanston, IL, U.S.A. (supervisor: Michal GINSBURG)**  
**"Sonorous Worlds: Modernity, City, Technology"**

In my dissertation I suggest that sound was newly mediated, represented, and spaced in modernity in ways that touched and startled the literary imagination. My readings of canonical and lesser-known French and American authors of the nineteenth-century (both poetry and prose) reveal a constellation of aural problematics at a historical moment often examined through the lens of the visual and the emergent spectacle of urban life. Attention to sound, however, in these texts enables a different kind of reading and a rethinking of self/other relations together with the social, economic, and political forces shaping the dynamics of urban space and everyday life. While engaging with the rich reflections on modern visuality, I maintain that a turn to the acoustic imagination not only provides a new means of reading authors such as Baudelaire, Mallarmé, Whitman, and Poe on the modern city, but also alters our conception of the origins of sound technology (such as the phonograph), origins of early twentieth-century avant-garde aesthetics, and finally broader debates on the relations between the arts.

Drawing from recent scholarship in sound studies, concepts of noise and listening from theorists such as Michel Serres and Jean-Luc Nancy, together with theories of urban life and soundscapes, I uncover in my first chapter distinctive figures of urban listening and sound, the deafening "*vacarme*" of Paris for example, in the poetry of Baudelaire. The poet's lyric voice is both threatened and newly sustained by a range of urban acoustic phenomena. In my second chapter, I then look to three American authors, Whitman, Melville, and Poe, as a means of working comparatively between representations of the acoustic fields of Paris and New York. In so doing, I propose new connections between these authors and Baudelaire while also deepening my argument about the complex literary engagement with these early soundscapes of modernity. Specifically, I focus on how Whitman dramatizes the

phenomenology of rapt listening and poetic 'sounding' within the city's "turbulent chorus." At the same time, horror and turbulence, with Poe and Melville, exist for city dwellers fearing loss of voice and expression amidst cacophony. In the third chapter, my readings of the French poet and inventor Charles Cros, who is often cited for his efforts to develop a phonograph, lead me to develop my argument into the field of sound technologies and media theory. Finally, in my concluding chapter I look to French poet and writer Victor Segalen whose short story, "Dans un monde sonore," and ethnographic essay, "Voix Mortes: Musiques Maoris," each ponder the singularity of sounds and music from other cultures and the fate of their preservation amidst emergent international flows.

For my presentation at the AFEA doctoriales, I would concentrate on my readings of Poe, Melville, and Whitman on the acoustic field of the modern city, with a focus on how the urban uproar inflects the narrative in stories by Poe and Melville, and how it is registered in Whitman's language.

**Nathalie AGHORO, Katholische Universität Eichstätt-Ingolstadt, Eichstätt, Germany**

**(Supervisor: Professor Dr. Kerstin SCHMIDT)**

**"Sounding the American Novel: Writing Voice at the Turn of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century"**

In my dissertation project, I will analyze how the contemporary American novel – a silent medium – addresses the material production of voice. I consider voice from a sound and media studies perspective, rather than a narratological one. Although novelistic voices are mute, they resonate on the page as they assume medial functions such as establishing human connections and negotiating relationships within contemporary fictional worlds. Authors such as Richard Powers or Jonathan S. Foer already hint at the attention paid to acoustic concerns in the titles of their novels as Foer's *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close* or Powers' *The Time of Our Singing* and *The Echo Maker* make clear. My project focuses on these works as well as on Jennifer Egan's *A Visit from the Goon Squad* and Percival Everett's *Glyph*. I propose to analyze how they reflect on the materiality of voice in its sensuous dimensions and its functions as a medium between subject and world. By this means, I seek to establish that contemporary novels foreground voice as an embodied medium in order to explore the boundaries and possibilities of human communication.

My project aligns itself with the increased interest in the acoustic scope of cultural experience that has made its entrance into American Studies in the recent past. With its 2011 special edition "Sound Clash", *American Quarterly* as a major scholarly periodical acknowledges this academic development. In the introduction, the editor Sarah Banet-Weiser emphasizes that "sound is [...] a cultural form with a material force and the studies here occasion examinations into the sonic and aurality as processes of economic, social, and political negotiations" (v). Studies like Michael Bull's *Sounding Out the City* and Emily Thompson's *The Soundscape of Modernity* prove that a sonic point of view "makes us rethink the meaning, nature and significance of our social experience" (Bull, *The Auditory Culture Reader* 4). Voice plays a fundamental role within this emerging field, but still has not yet attracted much scholarly attention. My dissertation project will address this theoretical gap by sounding the 'muted' voices and their functions with regard to socio-cultural interactions in the contemporary American novel.

In order to do so, my interdisciplinary research draws from studies from the fields of philosophy (Don Ihde, Mladen Dolar), media studies (Doris Kolesch, Sybille Krämer), and sound studies (Michel Chion, Kai Tuuri). In my literary analysis, I combine Don Ihde's "phenomenology of the voice" with Michel Chion's method of "reduced listening," i.e. a listening that attempts to go beyond what is said or who says it.<sup>1</sup> Although voice is closely linked to language, it cannot be narrowed down to its linguistic function and a

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<sup>1</sup> Ihde, D. *Listening and voice: phenomenologies of sound*. New York: State University of New York Press, 2007. Print. and Chion, Michel. *Audio-vision: Sound on screen*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1994. Print.

methodological approach that takes into account the sonic elements of voice helps to discern between different vocal functions. This way, I seek to establish a theoretical connection between non-literary studies on voice and contemporary American literature.

To do justice to the multiple forms voice as a medium adopts, I have arranged my discussion as three clusters: *voice* as speaking, singing, and other paralinguistic phenomena such as laughter and sighs; *listening* in the sense of tuning into an acoustic environment on the one hand and reaching out to others intersubjectively on the other hand; and, lastly, *silence* as an expression of power relations between speaking and listening characters.

**Julia KERNINON, Université de Provence (supervisors: Sophie VALLAS and Cécile COTTENET)**

**“Théorie et pratique de l’entretien: The Paris Review (1953-1973)”**

My PhD research focuses on the discourse surrounding the work of the novelist. I will analyze the discourses of a panel of American novelists themselves in their interviews published by The Paris Review from 1953 (the date of its creation in Paris) to 1973. I chose the Paris Review interviews because far from being mere opportunities for writers to evoke their latest works, they were conceived as literary conversations focusing on "the art of fiction", as the general title of the collection asserts it. I will be studying both the practice of interviewing as exercised by The Paris Review as well as the position of the novelists in their answers. Whether these interviews, which are the result of many exchanges between the interviewers and the novelists, should be considered as paratext to the fiction works of the authors, or rather belong to their works is in itself an fundamental question. How shall we examine these pieces of self-reflective discourse on writing, being an author, earning a living by writing, being a public figure, etc? How are we to distinguish between the two voices of the novelist, that which speaks in his novels, and this one, as full controlled as the first one, which can be heard in the interviews? Is the figure of the author always a case of auto-mythologization, and why, and if it is so, where should we look to know better? I want to consider books as artefacts rather than as miracles obtained thanks to providential inspiration – I want to know more about writers, the craft of writing, and the private as well as public consequences of such a profession. I started my PhD two years ago, and it seems very clear to me that the Romantic figure of the writer is the center around which my whole subject revolves, that is : how do the novelists of the mid-twentieth century place themselves regarding this figure? Do they identify to this myth, or do they distance themselves from it? What are they professing as the correct posture toward Art? Why is the Romantic figure still so vivid? What is, as pragmatically as possible, the reality of the novelist at work? Is it possible for fiction professionals to tell the truth about their everyday life? What was and is the specificity of the interview process invented by the collaborators of The Paris Review? Why is the novelist position surrounded by such a profusion of legends, scandals, myths, which are regularly refuted and yet kept alive at the same time? What does the public expect from the novelist as a figure, and why? How is the novelist's auto-description conditioned by the myth and the pressure of popular fantasy? What does a novelist's workday look like? To answer such questions, in addition to the precious paratexts published by The Paris Review, I am currently reading works about the sociology of art, novels by the authors of my corpus, biographies, etc. This subject seems to me to be connected to many different fields of the humanities, and to hold an interest as to our general position considering writing. I would argue that the mythic quality of the discourse surrounding the novelist/writer/artist figure has something to do with the sacred, which has tended to disappearing from our modern society, and which we try to recover in the figure of the artist. I also believe that the ever deeper interest the public takes in its artists' privacy is only a logical consequence of the evolution of literature as well as of the super-mediatic, gossiping atmosphere of our time. In my work, I intend to analyze those different figures of the novelist presented to us, and grasp a better illustration of the reality of the novelist's craft, which is, in my opinion, crucial to our understanding of novels.

**Caitlin HURST, New York University, New York City, USA (Supervisor: Peter NICHOLLS)**

**“Late Styles: America’s Decadent Modernisms”**

“To be 1890 in 1890 might be considered almost normal,” Carl Van Vechten noted in *Excavations*, adding, “To be 1890 in 1920 might be considered almost queer. There is a difference, however.” In arguing for the persistence and revision of decadent styles in Anglo-American modernisms of the 20th century, this dissertation attends to that difference, as well as to the queer anachronism and experimental style of what I call “decadent modernisms”. Decadent literature is often characterized by 20th century writers as a transitional, failed, and short-lived aesthetic movement of the fin de siècle, its prominent styles and values largely rejected by modernist aesthetics. Developing a “late” sensibility of exhaustion and decline, aestheticizing recondite learning and sociopolitical withdrawal, drawn to notions of the materiality of language and the dissolution of the self, savoring the rare word and the poetics of the catalogue, the repertoire of decadent styles both prepared for and resisted many of the strategies that would energize modernism. Yet the authors I turn to – including Edgar Saltus, Samuel Greenberg, Carl Van Vechten, Richard Bruce Nugent, and Djuna Barnes – continue to allude to and rework the styles and sensibilities of 19th-century decadence. Through readings of these stylists and modernist polemics against them, I theorize categories of “late style” and “bad anachronism,” while exploring the politics and temporal assumptions of aesthetic practices that seem outmoded, disunited, and stylistically excessive. How, I ask, do these styles function as critique of or collusion with modern bourgeois values? What happens to a style often tied to a specific decade and a specifically European cosmopolitanism and class-consciousness, in an American context? How do the attitudes that attend American decadent writing – ranging from life-negating withdrawal to bohemian enthusiasm to more satiric forms of pessimism and self-mockery – shape alternative tendencies, including “dead-ends,” within modernism?

This study spans from the fin de siècle to “late” modernism, tracing out the equivocal legacy and uneven genealogy of decadent aesthetics in modernist American writing. I begin by examining the prose effects and decadent tenets of Edgar Saltus to establish a critical vocabulary for reading decadent styles, while elaborating the relationship between philosophical pessimism and aesthetic perceptions of lateness. My next chapter recovers poet Samuel Greenberg, an early 20th-century “Rimbaud in embryo” with 19th-century influences, whose thickened lyric idiom, archaisms, and sense of approaching death resonate with decadent styles and locate him outside the developmental narrative of a modernist poetics. The ornate, disengaged, cynical style of the so-called “Exquisite” school brings the study into 1920s and to formal questions of excess, tone, and social cynicism. Next, a reading of the problem of “decadence” in the Harlem Renaissance is focused through the work of Richard Bruce Nugent. The following chapter explores satires of and through decadent styles, offering readings of Nathanael West and Carl Van Vechten that argue for the distancing effects of decadent opacity and the critical negativity of a specifically stylistic self-mockery. My final chapter re-evaluates Djuna Barnes’ versions of decadence in relation to her stylized prose and position as a “late” modernist.

**Olesya BONDARENKO, Kyiv National Linguistics University, Ukraine, (supervisor: Natalia VYSOTSKA)**

**“Metamodern Subjectivity and Production of Presence in Rae Armantrout’s Works: Transforming Philosophical Poetry.”**

Philosophical poetry, or poetry of ideas, a curious hybrid of lyrical and philosophical discourse, has occupied an important place in the American literary tradition, with poets like Wallace Stevens and William Carlos Williams as its leading exponents in the 20th century. Taking into consideration the most recent sociocultural transformations, we must ask the following question: have the functions and forms of philosophical verse changed within the



last several decades? What does it mean to write poetry in the ‘age of theory’? The thesis focuses on texts by the contemporary American author Rae Armantrout (2010 Pulitzer Prize winner) whose ‘Cheshire poetics’ of disbelief and doubt demonstrates an interesting shift in philosophical verse writing. One of the aspects under study is the alignment of her poetry with critical theory which leads to the emergence of new modes of lyrical subjectivity. Armantrout’s verse is puzzling in the way it simultaneously expresses most intimate feelings and puts them under close theoretical scrutiny, leading the critic Stephen Burt to label it as ‘poetry of suspicion’. Some literary scholars have gone as far as to postulate the disappearance of the lyric ‘I’ from her works. However, this study seeks to disprove any attempts to interpret Armantrout’s poetry in the light of the ‘death of the subject’ category. Instead, drawing on the recent concept of metamodernism elaborated by Timotheus Vermeulen and Robin van den Ekker, it aspires to demonstrate that the author’s texts are informed by epistemological lessons of postmodernism while not altogether discarding the ‘modern’ poetic ontology of the subject. According to Vermeulen and van den Ekker, such a phenomenon is characteristic of recent cultural products which equally distance themselves from “modernist ideological naivety and the cynical insincerity of its antonymous bastard child”. The author herself also points out to this deliberately paradoxical nature of her writing: “I think my poetry involves an equal counterweight of assertion and doubt. It’s a Cheshire poetics, one that points two ways then vanishes in the blur of what is seen and what is seeing...”

Another important aspect the thesis seeks to address is the way Armantrout constructs images of the material world in her poems. Her writing has more than once been called minimalistic on account of its laconic and exact depiction of urban space and material environment. At the same time, this ‘minimalism’ arouses suspicion given Armantrout’s preoccupation with language and the reality effects it often serves to produce. The study tries to interpret this in the light of Hans-Ulrich Gumbrecht’s ‘production of presence’ theory, which posits that literary texts oscillate between presence effects and meaning effects. In the case of Armantrout, this oscillation is often conscious as she creates tension between, to quote her fellow poet Charles Bernstein, “words without a referent and words with a direct referent”. Thus, the metamodern paradigm manifests itself in her poetry once again in the form of opposite but reconcilable poles of materiality and textuality.

**Alexia SCHEMIEN Universität Duisburg-Essen, Essen, Germany (supervisor:  
Prof. Dr. Josef RAAB)**

**“The Politics of Spirituality in Mexican American Literature”**

At the core of this dissertation lies the analysis of contemporary literary works by Mexican American authors, concentrating on their use of religious stereotypes, spiritual individualism, and the religious interconnectedness with other discourses, such as politics, ethnicity, gender, and history. These discourses have influenced the way people have been looking at the Mexican culture and its devotedness and piety. Several Mexican (American) authors play with these perceptions of religion in their own culture and rewrite their own (hi)stories and memories by including their very distinct and personal versions of this religiousness. The aim of this dissertation is to take a close look at these rewritings and revisions in order to better understand these works in a postmodern context.

This dissertation understands the Americas as two intertwined hemispheres in dialogue and uses an Inter-American approach to analyze global trends that shape identities and unite communities as well as states and nations. It aims to contribute to the de-centering of ideas that scholars have had on “America” and “nationality,” by transcending not only geopolitical, but also cultural, individual and ethnic borders. In the words of José Saldívar, it strives for a “theoretical scenario of Americanness to explain how we might move away from a nationalist American studies to an outernational comparative critical U.S. studies” (Trans-Americanness xxvi). Therefore, it is useful to understand religions as transamerican products of cultural contact and add to the idea of Mary Louis Pratt’s term of the borderlands as a “contact zone.”

Religion or spirituality as a main aspect of analysis in literary texts of the U.S.-Mexican borderlands turns out to be a promising field for future investigation. As Gastón Espinosa has remarked, “[d]espite the fact that the vast majority of U.S. Latinos claim to be religious or spiritual, little has been written on Mexican American/Chicano religions” (*Mexican American Religions* 1). To underline this “emergence of a border culture” also in religious terms, the expression *hybrid spiritualities*, which signifies the blending of Spanish Christianity and indigenous beliefs, will be applied. As the theologian Kees Waaijman points out, “[s]pirituality occupies an important place, not only within the churches, but also between the churches, and in interreligious dialogue” (Waaijman, *Spirituality* 1). Therefore, the term *spirituality* has been found useful as a defining element in Mexican (American) culture and literature because the focus here lies on individual everyday practices rather than on an institutionalized church or religion.

The connection between spirituality and politics in Chicano literature will be highlighted because many authors employ religious practices and spiritual beliefs, such as *curanderismo* as well as the belief in the Virgin of Guadalupe or the legend of La Llorona. These Latin American specificities as well as elements of the Mexican heritage are often used to address and criticize political circumstances, such as restrictive immigration laws, the hierarchy of gender in the Mexican society, as well as unequal labor conditions.

**Denis KISSANGOU MABIALA, Université d’Angers, France (supervisor: Emmanuel VERNADAKIS)**  
**“The Short Stories of Zora Neale Hurston”**

La communication proposée porte sur l’œuvre de l’auteure afro-américaine du Sud, Zora Neale Hurston (1891-1960), abordée par la thématique : Couleur et Genre. Nous entendons mener cette étude à travers l’exploration de ses nouvelles. Trois points constituent l’ossature de notre présentation :

- 1-Point sur l’auteure ;
- 2-Point sur le corpus choisi ;
- 3-la méthodologie.

#### 1- Point sur l’auteure

Paule Lévy<sup>2</sup> aborde la littérature juive américaine en introduisant une problématique d’écriture identitaire : « comment, sur qui et sur quoi écrire » lorsqu’on est Juif-Américain? La littérature afro-américaine, ne peut-elle pas être, elle aussi, abordée par ce prisme ? Il semblerait que oui. Au cours de la période dite « la Renaissance d’Harlem », alors que la grande majorité des noirs est encore analphabète en dépit des 13<sup>e</sup> et 14<sup>e</sup> amendements, (cf. « The stigma of degradation »<sup>3</sup>), pour dénoncer le fait colonial et réaffirmer les valeurs noires, les élites de la communauté afro-américaine regardent la création littéraire au sein de leur communauté comme une urgence. Ce qui est un indice d’une préoccupation identitaire semblable à celle qui émane des questions de Paule Lévy.

Zora Neale Hurston, qui commence sa carrière en 1921 avec la parution de plusieurs nouvelles dans des revues littéraires locales, est assez sensible à cette situation. Dans son autobiographie, plusieurs propos esquissent des réponses à la problématique identitaire posée par les questions de Paule Lévy, comme par exemple: « Ce qui m’intéresse, c’est ce qui pousse un homme ou une femme à poser tel ou tel acte, quelle que soit la couleur de sa

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<sup>2</sup>-Emmanuel Vernadakis, Recension du livre de Paule Lévy, *Figures de l’artiste, Identité et écriture dans la littérature juive américaine de la deuxième moitié du XXe siècle*. Pessac, Presses universitaires de Bordeaux, 2006. <http://transatlantica.revues.org/4720>

<sup>3</sup>- Pauline E. Hopkins, *Contending Forces*, (Boston: Colored co-operative Co, 1900); Reprinted Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1978, P.13.

peau »<sup>4</sup>. Toutefois, centrée sur l'identité de figures féminines noires, l'œuvre de Hurston présente des particularités propres. Elle s'érige, certes, contre les stéréotypes du féminin véhiculés par la littérature main-stream ; néanmoins elle se dresse aussi contre les poncifs d'une culture patriarcale transmise par la littérature noire américaine émergente. Si bien que, chez Hurston, la question raciale devient subalterne à la question de genre.

Cette démarcation lui a certes valu incompréhension et mauvaise interprétation, faisant d'elle une victime du sexisme des intellectuels de son temps, noirs comme blancs, mais sa démarche atypique est ressassée depuis la publication, par Alice Walker, en 1975 de l'article: "In search of Zora Neale Huston"<sup>5</sup>.

Une des questions qui s'impose d'emblée concerne le choix de la nouvelle comme genre pour porter le message que Hurston porte dans son combat. On peut, à ce propos, examiner la théorie développée par Frank O'Connor dans « The Lonely Voice », selon laquelle la nouvelle constitue le mode d'expression privilégié des groupes minoritaires ou marginalisés : « The short story has never had a hero. What it has instead is a submerged population group...always dreaming to escape.»<sup>6</sup> Cependant, ce choix peut procéder de plus d'une cause. Le domaine du "story-telling" parmi les afro-américains est, en effet, un domaine réservé aux hommes qui seuls avaient droit à la parole en public. Tel un commentaire métafictionnel justifiant ses choix, cette tradition apparaît clairement dans le chef-d'œuvre de Zora Neale Hurston, *Their Eyes Were Watching God*<sup>7</sup>, à travers la métaphore de la véranda, seul endroit où les contes et histoires de tout genre sont racontés et que seuls les hommes ont le droit d'occuper. Il se peut donc que, ironiquement, Zora Neale Hurston commence sa carrière par la publication des nouvelles pour revendiquer le droit de la femme au pouvoir du récit. En passant de la métafiction à la création identitaire de l'auteure, la nouvelle serait ainsi une marque identitaire dont Hurston s'empare pour attribuer à son persona un pouvoir jusqu'alors réservé aux hommes. Cet usage idéologique de l'écriture met au centre de l'œuvre d'Hurston la figure de l'auteur/e qui questionne l'identité et l'altérité au travers les notions du genre et de la couleur.

## 2-Point sur le corpus choisi

Dans la vingtaine des nouvelles qu'elle publie de son vivant, Hurston aborde en priorité les thèmes suivants :

- La définition de soi;
- la langue et le récit comme moyens d'expression des valeurs culturelles;
- les rapports inter genres et inter races dans la société américaine;
- La justice divine et humaine.

Ces thèmes seront examinés à travers les spécificités génériques de la nouvelle.

## 3-Méthodologie

Les nouvelles de Hurston seront d'abord étudiées à travers leur structure et par le prisme des théories existantes. Si la nouvelle est un genre qui s'offre particulièrement à la critique sociale et peut même devenir l'instrument d'une contre-culture, l'étude des enjeux de la couleur, du genre et leurs interrelations pourrait se montrer fructueuse dans la définition identitaire des personnages. Judith Butler et les *Gender studies* seront convoquées pour étudier le concept d'identité, mais aussi Cixous et Foucault. Il s'agit d'examiner, à la lumière de la théorie de la performativité, la construction et le fonctionnement du discours

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<sup>4</sup>- Zora Neale Hurston, *Des pas dans la poussière, Autobiographie d'une petite fille d'esclave*, Editions de l'aube, 1999, P.207.

<sup>5</sup>-Alice Walker, In Search of Zora Neale Hurston, publié dans Zora Neale Hurston The Complete Stories, Harperperrenail ed., 2008.

<sup>6</sup>-The lonely voice : A study of short story, Frank O'Connor, [http ://www.massey.ac.nz](http://www.massey.ac.nz)

<sup>7</sup> Zora Neale Hurston, *Their Eyes Were Watching God* (1937) New York: Harper and Row, 1990.

genre chez Zora Neale Hurston, et les manifestations de l'identité sexuée dans son écriture.