

French Culture and Its Others on the Stage

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Les dernières aventures du jeune d'Oblan ou les balbutiements du drame romantique en France

La pièce du baron Louis Ramon de Carbonnières (1755-1827) a été publiée en 1777, donc trois ans à peine après *Les Souffrances du jeune Werther* de Goethe. Elle a su éveiller l'intérêt de Charles Nodier qui l'a rééditée en 1827 et dotée d'une préface sur le suicide et l'esthétique romantique. Nodier considère *Les Dernières aventures du jeune d'Oblan* comme le premier drame romantique français. La pièce est divisée en trois journées, l'unité de lieu n'y est guère respectée pas plus que la bienséance : un des personnages blasphème, un autre jure comme un charretier. Ramond de Carbonnières met en scène des brigands (avant Schiller qui le fait en 1781) et un ecclésiastique rongé par la passion et le remords (avant *Le Moine* de Matthew Gregory Lewis, 1795). Il pratique avant Victor Hugo le mélange du comique et du tragique. La pièce de Ramond de Carbonnières a été aussitôt traduite en allemand par Lenz (*Letzen Tage des jungen Olban*). Lenz (1751-1837) s'est suicidé comme Werther et comme d'Oblan. Et on doit à Georg Büchner une petite biographie (restée inachevée) de Lenz. La pièce est une curiosité littéraire qui a le mérite de bouleverser la chronologie officielle du romantisme français et de contribuer à l'histoire des relations littéraires franco-allemandes.

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Love No Other: Staging Race and Desire in French Restoration Drama

Les Deux Colons, Un Nègre comme il y en a peu, Le Mulâtre et l'Africaine, Oréno, ou le bon Nègre, Pyracmond, ou les Créoles, Le More de Venise, the four stage versions of *Ourika*, as well as Balzac's unperformed *Le Nègre* form a corpus of plays articulating cross-racial desire under the French Restoration. Through a variety of modes including farce, melodrama, or tragedy, each of these works imagined the consequences of love in a world in which the institutions of a colonial empire raised the stakes in encounters with the Other and in which alterity had become a means for defining exclusive national identities. Studying theatrical productions representing contact between the French and the non-French during the Bourbon restoration, as well as the reception of these works, offers insight into how the Parisian art and entertainment industries attempted to negotiate questions of race and integration. This talk focuses, in particular, on *Pyracmond* and the four versions of *Ourika* and studies how these plays staged the impossibility of cross-racial desire in an attempt to exorcize the specters of integration and assimilation that threatened the hierarchies of power and privilege. It analyzes how the settings of these plays contribute to the condemnation of cross-racial desire and assimilation. Indeed, by choosing to place the action in a specifically colonial context or in Paris, the playwrights removed the stories from the neutral space of the 'exotic' and deliberately located them in the contested zone of 'reality'.

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Susan McCready
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Empire, Identity, Exoticism: Teaching Romantic Themes through French Drama

While the centrality of the theater in nineteenth-century French literary and cultural life cannot be denied, the drama is often sadly neglected in our courses on nineteenth-century literature. The plays are avoided as too long or too complicated for undergraduates or judged to lie outside the mainstream of the more important literary developments of the period in the novel and poetry. And anyway, they are rather corny. In this presentation I will argue, however, that the basic structures of western drama and their particular expression in French romantic drama expose the major themes of romanticism announced in the title of this year's colloquium. Empire, identity and exoticism are present both as theme and as structure in the romantic theater and I will attempt to show how teaching the drama can enrich the study of nineteenth-century literature both for our students and ourselves.