

Bringing the Exotic Back Home: Women Re-Write the Other

Chair: Bénédicte Monicat

The concept of the frontier is both a geo-political boundary, delineating the political entities that go into the formation of empires, and also the point of interface between self and other that helps constitute a sense of identity. Not everyone gets to experience the crossing of geographic boundaries first-hand, however, and this panel focuses on some of the ways the foreign, or exotic, may be experienced by those who remain within the space of the "homeland." Since the ways in which the exotic is brought home are also inflected by gender, the panel looks in particular at three examples of the ways in which the foreign is domesticated by women writers in the course of the nineteenth century, from the Restoration to the Belle Epoque.

1. "Tragic Muse?: Girardin Rewrites Judith and Cleopatra," Cheryl Morgan, Hamilton College

This presentation examines poetic, theatrical, and narrative identities from the Restoration period through that of the Second Empire through the prism of Delphine Gay de Girardin's contributions to theater. Looking at how Girardin represents the exotic figures of Cléopâtre and Judith in tragedy, Morgan examines how the plays lend themselves to questions of interiorising the other.

2. "Aux frontières des genres : Territoires contestés de la géographie racontée aux enfants," Bénédicte Monicat, Pennsylvania State University

Professor Monicat focuses on a different genre, the pedagogical narrative, to see how frontiers are understood in geographical terms. In looking at how women pedagogues communicate the lessons of geography to children, Monicat shows how literary boundaries define a gendered sense of self as they process the outer world. This analysis reveals how the (in)stability of the wider world is mirrored in the representations of women's sense of identity.

3. "Je t'aime... moi non plus: The Correspondence of Renée Vivien and Kérimé Turkhan Pasha," Melanie Hawthorne, Texas A&M University

The final presentation rounds out the century with an example from the Belle Epoque. The poet Renée Vivien enjoyed a correspondence with the wife of a Turkish diplomat that lasted over several years and quickly evolved from admiring fan letters (from her Turkish correspondent) to declarations of love (by Vivien) and expressions of fantasy about harems, perfumed gardens, and oriental charm. Hawthorne argues that this correspondence is more knowing about its mobilization of orientalist topoi than is usually recognized and should be read not as a source of biography about Vivien but rather according to the conventions of epistolary fiction.

Cheryl Morgan
Hamilton College

"Tragic Muse?: Girardin Rewrites Judith and Cleopatra"

Although Delphine Gay de Girardin's weekly column in the July Monarchy daily *La Presse* catapulted the author to the front-page where she wrote as an ambiguous flâneuse, Girardin was not, in her own life, a woman on the move. Her travels took her only to the French

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provinces, Italy, and Jersey. She did, however, cross many borders in her writing, leaving the Restoration salons as the poetic “Muse de la Patrie” for the scrappy world of the press before setting her sights on another off-limits territory, the stage.

After a first satire failed to pass the censors’ muster, Girardin wrote and saw performed at the Comédie-Française two tragedies, *Judith* (1843) and *Cléopâtre* (1847), in which Rachel played the leading female roles. These exceptions in Girardin’s *oeuvre* represent at once curious and bold moves on the part of the woman writer known for her wit. Curious because Girardin’s obvious talents were manifestly comic, bold because she was arguably the first woman of her generation to take on what was considered a “virile” genre, tragedy. Her gambit can be read as foreign both in the choice of genre and in the attempt to rewrite these exotic, yet familiar female bodies for the *juste-milieu* stage.

This paper proposes to examine the ways in Girardin’s two tragedies appropriate the figure of the other woman--foreign, passionate, even murderous--that Girardin leaves out of most of her literary corpus. Finally, when Girardin entered the foreign and hostile territory that French tragedy was for the woman writer, what does her representation of these powerful and foreign female roles reveal about her own conflicted literary identities?

Bénédicte Monicat
Pennsylvania State University

"Aux frontières des genres: Territoires contestés de la géographie racontée aux enfants"

Le savoir géographique tel que les écrivaines l’envisagent dans les écrits qu’elles consacrent à la jeunesse témoigne des tensions qui s’instaurent entre les exigences descriptives de la matière et les contextes de son énonciation et de sa réception. Je me propose dans cette communication d’examiner la manière dont les discours identitaires qui régulent la politique extérieure de ces représentations du monde ont pour ancrage des "poétiques intérieure," qui sont aussi déstabilisatrices. Poétique des genres et politique du genre constituent les frontières dont je suivrai le tracé dans ce corpus.

Melanie Hawthorne
Texas A&M University

"Je t'aime... moi non plus: The Correspondence of Renée Vivien and Kérimé Turkhan Pasha"

The poet Renée Vivien (1877-1909) enjoyed a correspondence with the wife of a Turkish diplomat, Kérimé Turkhan Pasha, that lasted over several years and quickly evolved from admiring fan letters (from her Turkish correspondent) to declarations of love (by Vivien), and expressions of fantasy about harems, perfumed gardens, and oriental charm. One of the notable features of this exchange is how quickly the tone of the letters becomes passionate, even before the women had ever met (as they did, though on only a couple of occasions). While some readers have treated the correspondence as a source of biographical evidence about a real relationship that Vivien had with Pasha, this presentation argues that the correspondence is more knowing about its mobilization of orientalist topoi than is usually credited and thus should be read according to the conventions of epistolary fiction.