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Studies in Languages Other Than English: French
Contributions

Françoise Clary, Daniel Royot

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2I Scholarship in Languages Other Than English

i French Contributions: Françoise Clary and Daniel Royot

The academic study of English and American literature is in jeopardy. Government policies of mass education have flooded the universities with students whose unabashed ignorance of the past and enthusiasm for only the latest trends in popular culture make it hazardous for publishers to print books of more than 150 pages and even to take a chance with writers and works before the '60s. A welcome outlet is still found through the yearly syllabus of the highly competitive examinations of CAPES and Agregation, the only way for some portion of 19th-century and early-20th-century literary production to be read, taught, and researched on a nationwide basis.

a. General The theme of the French American Studies Association's annual conference in 1997 was "America Between Science and Fiction." In the proceedings published in *RFEA* 76 Miles Orvell claims that cyberspace and virtual technologies are essentially continuous with the Romantic imagination as it developed initially in the United States in the 1830s ("Virtual Culture and the Logic of American Technology," pp. 12–27). In "Frémont et le daguerréotype: la photographie au service du mythe" (pp. 28–43) François Brunet contextualizes John C. Frémont as one of the few 19th-century explorers to achieve popularity in the United States by promoting innovative scientific methods. Brunet's paper focuses on Frémont's political ambitions and on his contribution to the myth of the West. Two essays revisit the issue of the dysfunctionality of speech in Don DeLillo's novels. Interrogating "Bruits et paradoxes dans *White Noise* de Don DeLillo" (pp. 54–62), Gérard Cordesse projects a nuanced sense of the role of local obscurities (ranging from

oxymoron to paradox) in the global economy of the novel, and Jean Yves Pellegrin in "Le désordre du discours dans *End Zone* de Don DeLillo" (pp. 63–72) scrutinizes the way glossolalia, logocentrism, and the intertwining of semantic fields cause linguistic disorder. Furnishing a different slant on an old topic, Jean-François Chassay in "Pygmalion à l'ère de la virtualité: apprendre avec la machine" (pp. 73–83) investigates the way in which *Galatea 2.2*, Richard Powers's fifth novel, questions the boundaries between scientific culture and the humanities. Other essays explore the connections between technology, artistic creativity, and the American movie industry. In "Le cinéma américain et le parc jurassique: technologie mystique" (pp. 84–92) Pierre Berthomieu contends that technology is used by Michael Crichton and Steven Spielberg to revisit religious melodrama. Berthomieu interestingly presents the dinosaur park as a metaphor for both the power of technology and the power to provoke a mystical revelation. The connected issue of the emergence of new technologies is taken up in "Mort et renaissance du cinéma hollywoodien" (pp. 93–103) by Michel Etcheverry, who positions Hollywood cinema in relation to the new technologies and argues that the impending crisis is not technological but cultural.

After a bibliography by Claire Bruyère (pp. 9–12) that provides useful information about commercial and scholarly publishing and book retailing, five essays in the October issue of *RFEA* (78) deal with that industry in the United States. In "L'édition et la distribution du livre aux Etats-Unis: lignes de force" (pp. 13–36) François Cusset investigates three facets of the book business: a relatively low degree of diversity in titles, a new division of power between major conglomerates and independent publishers, and the rise of bookstore chains and online distributors. In "The Crisis of Midlist Authors in American Book Publishing" (pp. 38–47) Philip Mattera highlights the imbalance of power between authors and publishers, examining problems in the granting of rights, royalties and royalty statements, and manuscript acceptance. Two essays deal with the issue of authors' rights. In "Le droit d'auteur français et le copyright américain: les enjeux" (pp. 48–59) Jules Marc Baudel shows by means of a precise comparative study that not only do French and American conceptions of such rights now tend to converge but also that in both countries a shift toward global freedom of communication is occurring. Richard Fire in "Authorship Cross-examined by Critical Legal Studies" (pp. 60–72) assesses the current upsurge in scholarly interest in American authorship; Fire contends that authors have been active agents in

shaping the marketplace and perpetuating the figure of the author as the transformative original genius. Finally, in “l’Amérique, désert des traductions” (pp. 73–77) François Cusset aptly observes that while the United States has the Western world’s lowest percentage of translated books out of its total production, more French titles are represented in that percentage than those of any other language.

Also in the field of transcultural evaluation, grounding her detailed study in Mark Twain scholarship, Claire Maniez in “Les traductions françaises de *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*: production et réception” (*Annales du Monde Anglophone* 7: 71–82) offers a perceptive vision of the problems of translation at the root of the misunderstanding between the French public and the American writer. As products of specific cultural environments, Maniez explains, these translations betray Twain’s work. Even subsequent translations, she concludes, have failed to convey adequately the originality and the subversive potential of a work “considered as the very foundation of American literature.”

b. 19th-Century Literature In the collection “Voix Américaines,” ed. Marc Chénétier, Michel Granger, a well-known Thoreau scholar who specializes in psychoanalytical studies, has prepared a monograph on Henry David Thoreau (Paris: Belin) intended to introduce the New England writer to students and the general public. The volume deals successively with Thoreau’s cultural heritage, his apprenticeship, his “economy of life,” and readings of *Walden*, resistance, and literary ecology, with a final chapter titled “From the Major Author to the Culture Hero of America.” *Cycnos*, a review published by the University of Nice, devotes a special issue (15, 1) to “Espaces et paysages des Etats-Unis.” Paul Carmignani contends that it took almost two centuries for a new pattern of perception and representation to slough off European conventions and enable the “visual myth” of America to take shape. In 19th-century icons of nature, the industrial landscape could include pastoral elements, while the wilderness was often fraught with the sublime. The Luminists and Emerson thus elevated the American scene to spiritual levels (“‘L’Esprit des Lieux’ et sa représentation dans la littérature et la peinture américaines du XIXe siècle,” *Cycnos* 15, 1: 5–16). Anne-Marie Bonifas in “Sectionalisme et représentation du paysage: Le Sud d’avant la Guerre Civile” (*Cycnos* 15, 1: 37–58) enlists antebellum writers such as William Gilmore Simms, George Tucker, and John Pendleton Kennedy to evaluate the involvement of Southern intellectuals and literati in rescuing

their land from aesthetic criticism leveled by Northerners. While asserting the singularity of the natural environment as exemplified in the swamp, the South glorified the plantation system as a harmonious model of civilization, helping toward the definition of a cultural identity. Meanwhile, the Southern landscape also conveyed doubts about the possibility of survival. Also dealing with the problem of metaphorical representation, François Brunet explores the full symbolical significance of the sequoia metaphor and its iconic value in the context of the myth of the frontier in "The Sequoia Files: l'arbre merveilleux" (*Cahiers de Charles V* 25: 77–96).

Edited by Claudine Verley, *The Portrait of a Lady, Henry James, Jane Campion* (Paris: Ellipses) offers analyses of the novel under three headings: "(Se) représenter," "Idéal et Identité," "Instabilité des Possibles." In "Les Figures de l'épuisement" (pp. 31–40) Nelly Valtat-Comet argues that while the ultimate disasters perceived by Isabel Archer suggest antique ruins, they also reveal the perennial value of a "texte-image" forever "universally intelligent and unprecedentedly virtuous." In "Portrait d'une lectrice: la représentation du romanesque" (pp. 41–52) Julie Wolkenstein focuses on Isabel Archer's experience of suffering and evolving analytical capacities, the Old Continent representing the territory of fiction in a sustained critique of conventional romance. For Françoise Dupeyron-Lafay, Italy evokes the image of the garden as a refuge for "American parasites" in Europe. Like the butterfly emerging from the caterpillar, Isabel undergoes a metamorphosis enabling her to express her creative imagination and perceive the specter of Gardencourt ("L'Italie dans *Portrait of a Lady*," pp. 53–67). In "Natures, contre-Nature et surnatures" (pp. 68–77) Catherine Delyfer sees *The Portrait of a Lady* as both an allegory of the confrontation of good and evil and a realistic novel demonstrating the necessity of a pragmatic vision of life, rigorously keeping romantic imagination under control. In a Lacanian interpretation of James's novel, Jean-Louis Lampel emphasizes the aspects of seduction, narcissistic passion, and cruel perversion in Osmond's relationship to Isabel, who is seen as a mirror reflecting his desire ("Dans le labyrinthe des images: regard et désir dans le roman," pp. 78–84). In the light of Jean Baudrillard's "système des objets," Line Koïs seeks the final meaning of the novel in "the capture of the portrait as object," while Isabel as subject remains unattainable to boundless desire ("Le Sujet impossible ou la personne de l'objet," pp. 85–94). In "*The Portrait of a Lady* en son temps: littérature et débat d'idées" (pp. 95–104) Claude

Julien links James's vision of the "spreading human scene" to the "field of consciousness" as defined by his brother William with the body at the center of vision, action, and interest. Marie-Claude Perrin-Chenour views Newland Archer as an expression of both idealism and materialism within a process of growth corresponding to the movement of American history ("Le Regard de côté: Isabel (re)vue par Newland Archer ou 'Portrait of a Lady as a gentleman'" (pp. 105–10). Claudine Verley's concluding essay bears on the narrow margin separating excess from want, and the fragility of happiness in a paradise later considered as irrecoverable ("La Tasse du vieil homme ou le premier paragraphe," pp. 122–30).

"'The reality of absent things': la portée du négatif dans *The Portrait of a Lady*" (EA 51: 423–34) is a study devoted by Evelyne Labbé to the grammar of negativity that generates James's text in the light of psychoanalytical theories of negation. As Labbé asserts, the first paragraph of *The Portrait of a Lady* introduces the reader to a linguistic world in which even the most restrictive contention is apt to conjure up a reference to some negated or negative potentiality. More specifically, the network of negations, denials, and contradictions that underlies the divided portrait of Isabel Archer is explored in connection with the hypothesis of a "mortal" or "negative" narcissism intent on preserving the self from the vicissitudes of alterity. QWERTY 88 also dwells on James's fiction. In "Metonymy and Mimesis in *Portrait of a Lady*, or How Osmond Secures Isabel" (pp. 153–57) Gert Buelens focuses on the moment when Isabel accepts the hand of Osmond in marriage. Buelens's argument is that the psychological mechanism that James indicates has a distinct affinity to René Girard's notion of mimetic or triangular desire. Contrasting several versions of the novel, Tony Dunn focuses on the free, indirect narrative voice used extensively by James with the purpose of showing that Isabel is not so much a character as a center of consciousness ("The Three Isabels: *The Portrait of a Lady* 1881, 1908, 1996," pp. 159–67). With the same attempt to confront several texts at once, James's novel and the 1996 movie, Donatella Izzo opts for an analytic approach in "Setting a Free Woman Free: *The Portrait of a Lady*," pp. 169–79). Joelle Harel in "Liberty and Women in *The Portrait of a Lady*" (Alizés 16: 37–51) remarks that most characters choose to remember endlessly the failure of their projects or the frustrations that result from a misconceived plan. The only hopeful one is Henrietta who, averse to obsolete moral values, meets with hardships while remaining true to her deeper self.

c. 20th-Century Fiction to World War II In “Inadvertent Echoes or ‘An Instance of Apparent Plagiarism’? Cather’s *My Ántonia*, *A Lost Lady*, and Fitzgerald’s *The Great Gatsby*” (*EA* 51: 325–37) Gautam Kundu sees Willa Cather’s influence of Fitzgerald in the evolution of his concept of the novel as a form of imaginative art. Besides similarities in form and technique, in tone and rhythm, and in turns of phrase, both writers display common themes. They are fascinated with the concomitants of moral regeneration and bright expectation of the American dream and its eventual dissolution, a romantic version of pastoral ideals undercut by the dark passions of modernity. For Kundu, Fitzgerald was indebted to Cather’s novels in terms of his *Weltanschauung*, point of view, characterization, and imagery. Kundu adds that *My Ántonia*, *A Lost Lady*, and *The Great Gatsby* recapture the past and dramatize the West, thus perceived as a viable alternative community but “not, as the apologists of New England puritanism commonly argued, as a Faustian temptation.” Kundu concludes that despite such mutualities of taste and feeling, it is undoubtedly Fitzgerald’s own voice that we hear in *The Great Gatsby*. In “La Construction de l’espace dans *The 42nd Parallel*” (*Cynos* 15, i: 59–69) Patricia Bleu assesses how Dos Passos deals with American space in the first part of *U.S.A.* in an unprecedented attempt at defining its specificity as well as its complexity. Dos Passos’s treatment rests on a tension between two conflicting systems—determinism and relativism—thus creating a dynamic that has remained the novel’s hallmark to this day. Two distinct approaches—modernism and pastoralism—correspond to the opposition between city and country. It is the passage of the one to the other that both actualizes and “de-realizes” space so that, in the end, it becomes pure motion and, by way of consequence, an illusion and an artifact.

Faulkner scholars will be pleased with two significant contributions. In a volume that gathers papers presented at the workshop on Faulkner translations held during the 1995 European Association for American Studies biennial conference in Warsaw, François Pitavy’s “Faulkner’s Reception in France” (*The Translation of Faulkner in Europe* [EAAS Publications], pp. 11–21) provides a new lens for envisioning Faulkner’s translations previously considered in Pitavy’s article “Revision and Translation in William Faulkner’s *If I Forget Thee, Jerusalem*” (*Le Traduzioni di William Faulkner* [Venice: Istituto Veneto Di Scienze, Lettere ed Arti, 1997], pp. 165–74). Pitavy’s highly perceptive analysis highlights

the process of re-creation of Faulkner's reputation that has led to the dis-Americanization of Faulkner and to his European recognition.

d. 20th-Century Fiction since World War II In a well-grounded introduction to *Deux millénaires et après* (Arles: Actes sud), Liliane Kerjan's "Fins de siècle" (pp. 13–14) offers a perceptive vision of changes in authority in a century that mirrors the expectations and dissatisfactions of the community. Addressing American fiction is Marc Chénétier's "La fiction américaine dans tous ses états" (pp. 79–89). Characterizing the present state of American fiction as multidimensional and boundless, Chénétier offers a splendid overview of this type of literature, which he defines as incessantly shifting; it has focused in the late 1990s on the social conscience of the group as well as on collective identity.

In an issue on "Contemporary U.S. Literature: A Collective Assessment," ed. Antoine Cazé et al. (*Sources* 5), Marc Chénétier's introduction, "Whithers and Whethers" (pp. 7–9), offers a significant definition of the literary activities of the LOLITA group and its attempts at discovering young writers. Then William H. Gass reconsiders the novel to come in the context of computerization that will tend to both tighten language and loosen it toward talk ("The Future of Fiction," pp. 10–15). In "Stray Thoughts on American Writing in the Age of Pleonastic Reproduction" (pp. 16–20) Patrick O'Donnell focuses on the obsession with trials and tribulations perceived as sheer processes of dramatization of the polysemous "ongoingness" of things within the frame of narrative structure. Dealing with the strategic use of language, Ben Marcus's argument in "Deafness, Prayer, and the Irrational" (pp. 21–25) is that the culture should be cleared of useless or dead information to make room for more suggestive notions of how the world operates. Starting from the remark that on the Internet a large number of commercial hypertexts are disguised as labyrinths, Bertrand Gervais in "The Broken Line: Hypertexts as Labyrinths" (pp. 26–36) investigates nonsequential texts, challenging the reader to control the links between fragments without prior knowledge of the whole. Discussing the representation and significance of nature in the wake of the formal revolution, Thomas Pughe proceeds to a careful and interesting exploration of the collaboration between the pastoral tradition and the comic genre in "Writing Nature After the Formal Revolution" (pp. 37–44).

A most significant essay is Sylvie Mathé's "*Self-Consciousness* de John

Updike" (*Annales* [Université de Savoie] 24: 233–41). In this special journal issue devoted to representation and identity in art and literature, Mathé uses the ambivalence of Updike's title for this collection of essays to urge an exploration of the oddity of consciousness in a work that, as she argues convincingly, combines childish mystery and awareness of a preexistent "I" to probe into his subjective geography in order to reach the midpoint and transcribe middlelessness. Josée Antoine, "Histoire et Fiction: Lore Segal et Cynthia Ozick" (*EA* 51: 271–83), examines how history and fiction overlap in Segal's autobiographical *Other People's Houses* (1963) and Ozick's *The Cannibal Galaxy* (1983). Both texts are deeply rooted in the World War II period and focus on the search for historical truth, through personal experience in the case of Segal and imaginary representation in Ozick's case. At odds though they may first appear to be, both texts offer a common approach to the issue of historical truth as the fluid exchanges among history, autobiography, and fiction gradually accumulate. More complementary than antithetic, such discourses question the widely assumed belief that a subjective representation is inconsistent with historical goals.

The annual issue of the journal of the Center of North American Research Studies, University Montaigne in Bordeaux, is titled *L'Imposture dans le Littérature Américaine*. Aside from established authors, the volume, ed. Christian Lerat and Yves-Charles Grandjeat, reflects an interest in other fiction. In "Contrefaçon et épuisement de la mimésis dans *Recognitions* de William Gaddis" (pp. 29–43) Xavier Daverat explores a world of imposture whose central figure is Wyatt Gwyon, the member of a counterfeit ring inspired by Bosch's *Seven Deadly Sins*. In a game involving secrets and forgeries, *The Recognitions* is seen to introduce the decline of mimesis. For Véronique Béghain-Richard, "Biffure et imposture dans les fictions de John Cheever" (pp. 65–78), the word "impostor" is recurrent in Cheever's novels and short stories. It also is related to the questions of identity and the author's conception of his birth as a chance happening—manipulation and deletion being closely associated with his narrative strategies. In "Impostures en tous genres: de Maupin à Monette" (pp. 79–88) Françoise Brousse suggests how Armistead Maupin and Paul Monette are committed to a social and cultural reconstruction based on the domestic values of the ideal gay household. Both highlight the impostures behind heterosexual role models, denounce the subterfuges implicit in "passing," and offer a sustained

meditation on the intersections of heterosexuality and gay sexuality. Martine Chard-Hutchinson discusses the paradoxical link and the trick/miracle dichotomy in Paul Auster's *Mr. Vertigo*, "a *Bildungsroman* with a Hitchcockian flavor." Distortion is the main device used by the novelist to suggest the gap between the biblical hypotext, hypofilms such as *The Birds* (1963) and *The 39 Steps* (1935), and the re-creation of them through writing, while the theme of initiation is given an ironic twist with the trickster motif ("Mr. Vertigo: imposture ou miracle?" pp. 95–104). In "Ecriture, imposture et magie dans 'Usurpation' (*Other People's Stories*) de Cynthia Ozick" (pp. 105–18) Paule Lévy addresses the issue of artistic creation as a violation of Jewish identity. She shows that "Usurpation" is actually an attempt to reconcile aesthetics and ethics and to achieve a new definition of Jewish American literature. In "*Mazel*: 'Lipton, N.J.' or 'Schluftchev . . . with a Designer Label'" (pp. 119–28) Ginette Castro identifies Rebecca Goldstein's controversial point of view as the resurrection of the antagonism between universalism and cultural particularism, the supporter of the former arguing that particularism threatens the human ideal of the Enlightenment. Moreover, Goldstein's various forms of impersonation are intended to express truth by steadily disclosing impostures. For Suzanne Durruty, "Du Héros à l'anti-héros: tragédie et imposture dans *The Prince of West End Avenue*," pp. 129–36), Alan Isler's novel constantly oscillates between comedy and tragedy. Through successive identifications with Hamlet, the narrator unveils the complex relationships between life and art. Tragedy is eventually transmuted into derision as the protagonist accepts his status as an antihero. "L'Imposture heuristique dans *The Tent of Orange Mist* de Paul West" (pp. 169–78) by Anne-Laure Tissut centers on the paradoxical nature of impostures intended to reveal rather than to deceive. The intricate mesh of make-believes calls into question the very notion of truth, imagination being a major creative force in the effort to survive. In "Variations sur l'Imposture dans l'Oeuvre d'Anne Tyler" (pp. 189–200) Stéphanie Durrans concentrates on the character of Delia in Tyler's *Ladder of Years*, caught between the "prosaic text of her ordinary life and the fantastic subtext of a new Alice in Wonderland." For Durrans, Anne Tyler eventually posits the need for alternative identities in the strategy for survival.

e. Ethnic Literature In "Regards croisés: création et réception des personnages dans *Home to Harlem* de Claude McKay" (*Annales du*

Monde Anglophone 8: 197–208) Corinne Duboin first argues that McKay attempts to enhance African American identity and culture through a network of typified characters evoking the “New Negro.” Then her in-depth analysis concentrates on the dynamics of fictional representations as well as the outer play between the crystallization of traditional clichés and the rejection of puritanical hegemony. An acute analysis of Gwendolyn Brooks’s poetry is provided by Françoise Clary in “Humeur, Fureur, Douleur: les mouvements de la poésie de Gwendolyn Brooks” (*La Communauté des Poètes aux Etats-Unis*, Publication of the Centre de Recherches sur les Littératures Modernes et Contemporaines, Université Pascal, Clermont-Ferrand, pp. 135–51). Offering a well-grounded reading of Brooks’s poems, Clary discusses how she moves beyond European influences and canonical literature, deconstructing and reconstructing the American Dream by foregrounding gender and racial issues.

Expanding the notion of ethnic identity to that of symbolic citizenship, Michel Feith, “De la citoyenneté symbolique: *China Men* de M. H. Kingston” (*RFEA* 75: 76–87), explores the various alternative narratives in the text of *China Men* that subjectify the Eurocentric perspective and reveal a subtle interplay between “national” and “immigrant” outlooks. The result, concludes Feith, is a dialogic expansion of the meaning of “American.” In the wake of last year’s plethoric production on Native American literature, Phyllis Toy in “Racing Homeward: Myth and Ritual in *House Made of Dawn*” (*EA* 51: 27–38) examines how Scott Momaday brings together the two disparate strands of experience that the Native American has increasingly had to face since the arrival of the white man on North American soil. While Euro-American and Native American cultures have been historically in conflict, Momaday successfully interweaves them in a new synthesis or hybridization that asserts the persistence of Indian culture in the 20th century. Hence, *House Made of Dawn* does not merely repudiate modern Euro-American values, but it incorporates them within a native perspective that projects a new worldview.

f. Poetry Critical interest in American poetry continues to increase as shown through this year’s issue of *Sources*. Referring to the cultural context of doggerel, Ellen Hinsey explores the dichotomy between free verse perceived as progressive and formal verse considered as conservative (“The Rise of Modern Doggerel,” *Sources* 5: 45–53). Antoine Cazé’s “Re-configuring Lyricism: New Directions in American Poetry” (*Sources* 5: 54–61) exemplifies a systematic way of studying the paradox of a lyricism

emerging from formal disruption. According to Cazé's carefully wrought argument, modern poetry has moved away from the concept of personal voice toward that of dialogic tool, making the dissenting voice more intelligible. If Cazé emphasizes the necessity for a centrifugal movement, Bob Perelman's stimulating essay "A Tentative Map of Contemporary American Poetry" (*Sources* 5: 62–67) studies the interplay between language writing, social context, and poetic device, stressing that issues of time, space, and history dominate our century and thwart coherence.

Alain Suberchicot enlists his stylistic stamina in *Treize façons de regarder Wallace Stevens* (Paris: L'Harmattan), a full-length study attempting to "americanize the poet" in the light of Harvard pragmatism. The epistemological achievement of Stevens's poetry is evaluated as the "lyricism of the uncertain," stemming from ironic defiance toward mimetic superfluity. Culling well-worn notions from a philosophical wasteland of rejected concepts, the poet echoes the "doldrums of what happens," while also suggesting his participation in an avant-garde. Suberchicot's interpretation is often provocative, especially when he associates Stevens with the negation of the *Aufklärung*. Never enslaved to a single theoretical approach, Suberchicot's comments often define original parallels between Stevens and Stéphane Mallarmé and John Ashbery. Not least, Suberchicot's translations of selected poems are both limpid and brilliant.

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