



ESSE-8: LONDON 2006

29 August – 2 September 2006

S52. Representations of Fluid Identities

Wednesday 30 August: 2.30-4.30pm

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This seminar aims to explore how identity politics permeates into literature in the form of fluid character representations, for example transnational identities, characters suspended between the centre and the margins (such as Hanif Kureishi's Karim Amir of *The Buddha of Suburbia*) or fragmented by gender politics such as Edward of Caryl Churchill's *Cloud Nine*, a feminist and queer play at the same time, questioning and debunking the fundamentals of fixed sexual and racial identity. As more and more hybrid forces are at play in a variety of texts we feel that new paradigms of analysis are needed and we will therefore focus on the politics underlying identity.

Kazuo Ishiguro's Otherhood: a World in flux

Pascal Zinck (University of Cergy-Pontoise & Paris 4, Sorbonne)

This paper explores the trauma of exile and deracination in Kazuo Ishiguro's fiction, particularly the Doppelgänger figures in *A Pale View of Hills* and the significance of orphanhood in *When We Were Orphans*. Reflecting the writer's sense of his own alienation, the narrator's exilic condition is presented in the wider context of diaspora discourse.

With the ubiquitous, yet subservient butler struggling to author *The Remains of the Day*, identity politics challenges the notions of 'hegemonic centre' and 'margins', racial as well as sexual stereotyping. Hybridity writ large figures as Ishiguro reconfigures the boundaries of identity in *Never Let Me Go*.

"Queering" Identities in Jeanette Winterson's *The Passion* (1987)

Silvia Antosa (University of Palermo)

My intention is to discuss how in *The Passion* (1987) Jeanette Winterson defines the paradigm of fluidity as opposed to a static idea of identity in order to explore its cultural constructedness, which results from the opposition between body and soul within Western patriarchal and heterosexual frame. The starting point of her search is the body.

By blurring bodily boundaries, Winterson unveils a multilayered version of reality to show the infinite potentials of identity. No longer entrapped by the “dead” matter of the Cartesian worldview, it becomes a fluid entity without definite borders. As a consequence, the superimposed naturalness of sexual categories and their hierarchization in power relations is subverted. In the wake of queer theories, the protagonists of *The Passion* aim at decentring the main ontological discourses produced by Western hegemonic power, and constantly search for alternative forms of sexuality which go beyond the categories of lesbian/straight opposition towards “queer”, fluid identities.

Paola Gaudio (University of Bari)

Translation as Antidote to the Loss of Identity in a Postcolonial Context

There exists a close but not absolute connection between language and cultural identity. In fact it is not possible in principle to assert that one language equals one cultural identity, because throughout their lives people speak or are exposed to a variety of languages or language varieties. Translation plays a paramount role in allowing cultural acts of identity, thus permitting communication between otherwise unintelligible cultures. Both inbound and outbound translation can be considered as an antidote to the loss of identity: by reformulating in one’s own words the other’s culture, there takes place an appropriation of that very culture; on the other hand, by reformulating one’s culture in the other’s words, it is possible to be known and thus validated by the other. In this kind of exchange there are inherent threats too, especially when cultural interaction occurs within a postcolonial context. Total translation – when there remains nothing else to translate – would entail annihilation. *Waiting for the Barbarians* by J.M. Coetzee depicts the predicament of someone who gets lost in translation: his source culture is not perceived as being consistent with his own set of values, and the only attempt he makes to translate himself into the target culture by engaging in a relationship with a barbarian woman fails. He is caught in-between. In his case the antidote is counterproductive: as representative of the Empire on the frontier, his role in its essence is that of a cultural mediator, that is a translator. As translator he is also a traitor, and that is how he gets treated in the end.

Jean Rhys: the Language of Displacement

Mirella Billi (University of Tuscia)

Jean Rhys drew her literary material from her own experience with ethnic, social, cultural and gender displacement. The contradictions Rhys experienced in the Dominica decaying colonial system were the origin of a personal unease, later reflected in the representation of the displaced and alienated characters of her heroines.

The effort to reconcile complex multi-positional stances and cultural identities results in their troubled and divided subjectivities. Trapped in an area of cross-cultural communication and confronted by a mobile and migratory reality, they develop forms of speech that verbalize displacement and the mutilation of their identities, and even their irreparable loss.

To express this, Rhys appropriates – and employs – modernist stylistic techniques such as abstractions, multiple temporalities, and a particular kind of stream-of-consciousness made of truncated or suspended sentences, contracted language, mutilated syntactic

structures, expressing rather than the free flow of thoughts and sensations, total dehumanization and disruption.

Changing Identity of Oroonoko in Aphra Behn's Novel

Violetta Trofimova (Institute of Foreign Languages, St. Petersburg)

Aphra Behn's *Oroonoko, or The History of the Royal Slave* (1688) is a rare novel of the Restoration period which shows an African man in a positive way. In this novel the main hero undergoes a change from a Europeanized "other," a gallant Black prince educated by a French heretic, to a slave freethinker, a leader of a slave rebellion, and again a "Hero," a great man." His identity is unstable, as well as the ideology of the novel: the aristocratic ideology of romance, the ideology of the oncoming Enlightenment, and the developing ideology of the slaves fighting for freedom.

Fluid Identities: Ottoman Sultans on the English Stage

Esin Akalin (Istanbul Kultur University)

This seminar aims to discuss paradigm shifts in representations of the Ottoman sultans on the English stage by concentrating upon a selective range of plays such as *Tamburlaine* (1590), *The Siege of Rhodes* (1656), *The Conspiracy* (1680), *Irene* (1749) and *A Peep into Seraglio* (1775). In exploring how representations of fluid identities ultimately fulfilled the needs of drama as much as the discipline of the historian, the discussion will draw upon the transformation of the Grand Turk from that of a cruel tyrant into a benevolent ruler – a shift which occurred in response to historical changes. The seminar will focus on a cluster of issues revolving around the concept of identity in the context of history, ideology and representation.