

Rethinking Narratives of War and Occupation in France: a preliminary *bilan*

This panel proposes to provide a preliminary *bilan* of the major AHRC-funded three year research project into Narratives of War and Occupation in France from 1939 to the present day, based at the University of Leeds and led by Professor Margaret Attack (Leeds) and Professor Chris Lloyd (Durham). The presentation will consist of one overview paper given by Dr Nina Sutherland (Leeds) and two in-depth studies, each of twenty minutes, one on collaboration, given by Richard Harness (Durham) and the other on guilt, delivered by Ruth Kitchen (Leeds).

Reassessing Narratives of War and Occupation: Why?, How? and Audience (Nina Sutherland)

Two years into this major research project, this paper will provide an insight into the first conclusions that have been drawn by the research team working on a project that aims to reassess, both empirically and theoretically, the dominant critical paradigms governing readings of war and occupation literature, and the corpus of novels produced since 1939. What post-war literary and historical myths and master narratives about depictions of War and Occupation have been upheld or shattered? To what extent has public perception of central themes, such as Guilt and Collaboration, been shaped by this literature or on the contrary how have historical and political perspectives coloured readings of these narratives? What are these works' recurrent central themes; the most popular locations; the decades that witnessed the greatest literary activity? And who is writing such works; members of the first, second or third generation; men or women; French/ Francophone or foreigners? The paper will conclude by revealing to the conference how this project could enhance and enrich their own work through use of the database that will be made freely available in 2009.

Degrees of Collaboration: Representing Collaborators in Post-War French Narratives (Richard Harness)

Reassessing representations of collaboration across the period plays a vital role in this research because of their importance in *mode retro* and other critical approaches. This paper will analyse immediate Post-War representation of collaboration in Marcel Aymé's *Le Chemin des écoliers* (a chronicle of Parisian life under German occupation), by reflecting a gradated depiction from fascistic ideological commitment to collaborationism, through collaboration for personal gain (for example economic), to more ambiguous interaction with/ attraction to/ intercourse with the German occupiers (such as social/romantic). An examination of collaboration will be offered which will allow, through a focused analysis of the psychology and mentality of collaborators, an assessment of the emotions and motives of this phenomenon at an individual level within the various degrees of collaboration that the paper identifies. By removing the judgement of collaborators from both the politico-legal judgements of the post-war period and from the abstract judgement of historians and by placing it within the realm of fictional narratives a clearer view of the individual's choice and motivation will be shown. In turn this will illustrate the importance of narratives in both creating and mirroring public

perceptions of history, as well as showing the significance of works such as this in serving as the conduits through which wartime collaboration is ethically represented and judged.

Reading Guilt (Ruth Kitchen)

Addressing the question of guilt and shame in literature of the Occupation, the paper will outline how texts written about and influenced by this period in French history can be read as evolving cultural theory. The paper will expound the manifold and changing expression of Occupation guilt within literature since 1939. Beginning with an expiation of a theory of guilt constructed from Occupation literature of the established canon of writers such as Sartre, Beauvoir, Camus, Bataille, and Blanchot it will argue the case for reading this literature as a type of cultural theory that communicates a pervasive and evolving fixation on guilt about the Occupation. The paper will then consider the psychoanalytic and philosophical undertones of contemporary writing about Occupation guilt in terms of its function with French cultural production and ask whether it is possible to view this writing as engaging in a cathartic process of working through, of affirmative repetition, or rather, whether it is the expression of unrelenting and irresolvable remorse and despair. In terms of the project, the thesis undertakes a systematic review of narratives of guilt, a theme central to writing about the Occupation, from the time and also in the mode *rétro* scenario.