

## Conference Report: London Postgraduate French Conference 2018.

### Tummy Trouble: The Gut in French and Francophone Literature, Culture, and Theory.

Saturday 10 November 2018, IMLR, London.

Organisers: Sophie Eager (KCL), Joey Hornsby (KCL), and Rebecca Rosenberg (KCL).

Tummy Trouble, the London Postgraduate French Conference 2018, took place on Saturday 10 November, 9-6pm at the Institute of Modern Languages Research (IMLR), Senate House, London, with the generous support of the ASMCF. The conference brought together postgraduates from a variety of universities and from across several areas of French studies. There were three panels, and nine papers delivered by postgraduates in French and English, a keynote lecture delivered by Dr Manon Mathias (University of Glasgow), as well as a fantastic lunch, wine reception, and a conference dinner in the Bloomsbury area. The day showcased the fascinating research being conducted on the representation of the gut, ranging from eating and drinking, to digestion and egestion, as well as metaphors of the tummy, gendered bellies, and monstrous appetites.

The panels were organised across themes, with each bearing a quotation relating to the gut. The first panel entitled « celui qui sort par embas est trop sale » (Michel de Montaigne, *Des Coches*) and chaired by Sophie Eager (KCL), provided the opportunity to explore bodily taboos and offer a more nuanced response than disgust or humour to questions of consumption and excretion. Françoise Campbell (University of Melbourne/ l'Université Paris Diderot (Paris VII)) opened proceedings with a discussion of the abject body both as an expression of and as of a means of critiquing capitalist societies in Houellebecq's *Les Particules*; Jean-Francois Poisson-Gueffier (Sorbonne Nouvelle (Paris III)) explored the different uses of (and responses to) scatological language in l'épopée d'*Audigier*; and Aureo Neto (University of Padua) provided a history of the representation of cholera symptoms across nineteenth-century French literature and visual art, confirming that, to quote the title of his paper, sh\*t really does happen.

The second panel entitled « dis-moi ce que tu manges... » (Jean Anthelme Brillat-Savarin, *La Physiologie du goût*), chaired by Joey Hornsby (KCL) provided an insight into the gastronomies and eating habits of vagrants, vampires, and cyborgs. Molly Crozier (KCL) explored the appearances of food in two of Beckett's plays, and the ways in which the food belied communion and dependency between the characters. In contrast to Beckett's root vegetables and meagre biscuits, Colton Valentine (University of Oxford) explored the feasting and excess in Huysman's *À Rebours*, challenging the usual pathologising reading of the text and revalorising the descriptions of eating and pleasure as aesthetic. Finally, Kate Foster (KCL) explored the eating, or non-eating, of non-human beings in *La Poupée Sanglante* by Gaston Leroux, and asked in what sense the ritual of eating underpins what it means to be human.

The third and final panel entitled « il serait insoutenable d'être colonisé de l'intérieur sans le savoir » (Claire Legendre, *Le nénuphar et l'araignée*), chaired by Rebecca Rosenberg (KCL), explored the monstrous, fearful, and criminal imaginaries about the female belly. Pierre-Elie Pichot (Sorbonne Nouvelle (Paris III)) gave insight on representations of (mother) Earth in Renaissance poetry and visual art through the metaphor of 'le ventre de la terre'; Beatrice Fagan (University of Kent) explored nineteenth-century fear and (often morbid) curiosity about the female, and specifically the pregnant, tummy; and Anne-Lucile Gerardot (Université de Reims) established several monstrous female fairy-tale and myth archetypes that act as ciphers in Duras' works for desire and alcoholism.

These postgraduate papers raised a range of important questions related to not only their specific areas of French studies, but also broader issues about how individuals and societies conceptualise and medicalise tummies. A highpoint of the day for all was the ASMCF keynote lecture delivered by lecturer Dr. Manon Mathias entitled 'Digestive health and individual identity: Balzac and Sand', which delved into the metaphorical and medical representations of the gut as an axis of individual character and becoming in the two authors. Mathias cited recent research into the gut-brain axis, and asked the provoking question of how our guts inform our brains, thoughts, intellect, and personalities. If our gut is linked to our brain, and can be conceptualised as a 'thinking' organ, then has our gut got it all? Dr Mathias was also closely engaged in the debate that resulted at the end of each panel, and together the attendees came to an even richer understanding of the content presented in each case in the exchange of ideas that followed.

The conference fostered productive and fruitful discussions about the gut and its place in wider conversations around the body, leaving the participants with ideas for future research and a keenness to keep in touch regarding each other's progress in this exciting area of research.

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