



**INSTITUTE OF  
LANGUAGES  
CULTURES AND  
SOCIETIES**

**SCHOOL OF  
ADVANCED STUDY  
UNIVERSITY  
OF LONDON**

## **Occupation and Resistance, Crime Fiction and Memory** **A day symposium in honour of Margaret Atack**

**18<sup>th</sup> October 2024 at ILCS, London**

**Organisers: Professors Diana Holmes and Max Silverman, University of Leeds**

This symposium will honour the life and work of Professor Margaret Atack who died last year. Margaret was one of the leading scholars on French fiction about the Occupation of France in the Second World War and on French post-war feminisms. Her book *Literature and the French Resistance: Cultural Politics and Narrative Forms 1940–1950* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1989) is still a major reference point for scholars of resistance and occupation in France, including French specialists in the field. Three co-edited books and numerous articles and chapters on French post-war feminism are evidence of her work and reputation in this field too. Invited speakers at the symposium have all been influenced by Margaret's work and will address particular areas in their presentations. We then hope to edit the papers for a special issue of a journal.

- 11.15am**      **Arrival and reception**
- 11.30am-1pm**   **Session 1**  
**Michael Kelly** (University of Southampton)  
**Hilary Foottit** (University of London)
- 1pm-2pm**      **Lunch**
- 2pm-3.30pm**   **Session 2**  
**Claire Gorrara** (University of Cardiff)  
**Debra Kelly** (University of Westminster)
- 3.30pm-5pm**   **Session 3**  
**Ruth Cruickshank** (RHUL)  
**David Platten** (University of Leeds)
- 5pm**          **Drinks reception**

## Abstracts

### **Michael Kelly, 'Ambiguity in French culture of the 1940s'**

This paper begins with Margaret Atack's insight into the enduring paradoxes of the Occupation. She argues that the polarisations and conflicts of the wartime period left a legacy of complexities and ambiguities that haunted France through the postwar period. In support of this, we examine some of the cultural movements of the French left, including the review *Esprit*, published in 1940-41, *Les éditions de Minuit*, published in 1942-4, and the existentialism of Simone de Beauvoir and Jean-Paul Sartre. Each of these sought to articulate a national spirit that could manage polarisations of the occupation. And each emerged as a leading institution of the postwar period, carrying a complex legacy of ambiguities from their immediate history. Implicitly or explicitly, they all looked to a degree of resolution in French national unity. While some emphasised the basis of ambiguity in social and political conflicts, others tended to locate them more in the situation of human consciousness. We suggest that the culture of ambiguity came to an effective end with the deepening Cold War, but that its legacy has re-emerged whenever issues of national unity have resurfaced.

### **Hilary Footitt, 'Storying the Archive of War'**

This paper situates Margaret's early doctoral research, resulting in the seminal study *Literature and the French Resistance: Cultural Politics and narrative forms, 1940-50* (MUP, 1989), within the 1970s/80s context of Resistance historical scholarship in which she was working. This scholarship was dominated by the *Comité d'Histoire de la Deuxième Guerre Mondiale* (the predecessor, 1951-1979, of the *Institut d'Histoire du Temps Présent*). The paper examines the conception, methodology and gendered ownership of the Resistance historiography established by the *Comité* and explores how Margaret's work forcefully critiqued their notions of history and historical truth: 'To assess the contribution of the Resistance to the war effort in primarily military terms entails a fundamental misrecognition of the value to be accorded to the ideological and the discursive at this time; it is difficult to see how, without public expression, there could have been a Resistance' (4). In doing this, she challenged historians like me to pay attention to words and to see the value of building our own/alternative archives of war. In the current 'digital age' of archives, Margaret's direct engagement with the materiality of her study – the original *Lettres Françaises* for example (see her *Ego-Histoire*, 2018) – is a salutary reminder of how the archive itself was part of our story as (re)searchers.

### **Debra Kelly, "'Books that record great events do not explain how ordinary people of a great city live during momentous days": mapping the experiences of French women in wartime London'**

This contribution is framed by Margaret Atack's approaches across her career to literature and the French Resistance, French fiction by women and particularly to the work undertaken on 'new readings' which underpinned the FRAME project which she led, investigating fictional narratives of and about war and Occupation in France and identifying large numbers of novels which had disappeared from literary historical knowledge. Moving from Occupied France to Free France in London, the focus here is on the wartime trilogy of novels by Madeleine Henrey. It considers the everyday experiences and writings (fiction, journals and letters) of a range of French women living in London during the Second World War, whether already resident in the city or members of the Free French who joined de Gaulle there. It takes in, for example, London's 'French Colony' established since the 19th century, Simone Prunier of Prunier's restaurant, some of the young women of the Free French Corps des Volontaires Françaises and the vivid observations and commentaries of Madeleine Henrey herself in her fictional narratives.

### **Claire Gorrara, 'Incendiary Women: Edith Thomas and the Cultural Politics of Resistance'**

This paper will explore the cultural politics of Resistance in the wartime short story collection, *Contes d'Auxois*, written by Edith Thomas. As the only women writer to publish in the largest clandestine publishing house in occupied France, Les Editions de Minuit, Thomas offers us cultural representations of Resistance inflected by her personal history, professional training as an archivist – and of course her gender. Thomas was a twentieth-century trail blazer in many respects. She was an accomplished journalist, diarist, novelist, and historian, sensitive to the cultural politics of her times. In this paper, I will explore her short story collection through the prism of Margaret Attack's pioneering study of French war and early post-war fiction, *Literature and the French Resistance: Cultural Politics and Narrative Forms, 1940-1950* (1989). Focusing on the representation of female protagonists in Thomas's wartime short stories, this paper will analyse how these 'incendiary women' project forward into Thomas's post-war work, such as her historical biography *Les Pétroleuses* (1963), devoted to the women of the French Commune. Here resistance takes on a transhistorical dimension, but ever rooted in Thomas's experiences of wartime Occupation.

### **Ruth Cruickshank, 'Enduring post-war (eating) disorder: re-reading Elsa Triolet's food insecurity and the psychopathologies of the *Trente glorieuses*'**

After Attack's challenging of dominant narratives about nation, the Occupation and post-war French experiences, this paper investigates the critical potential of exploring textual evidence of the impact of radical food insecurity. Historians have explored the ambivalence of the Occupation in terms of German and Vichy weaponization of food; grey- and black-market profiteering; and differential food-provisioning challenges (e.g. Grenard 2012, Mouré 2023, Rousso 1992). However, the enduring effects of traumatically disordered eating in occupied and post-Liberation France and their potential for re-contextualise psychological challenges of the *Trente glorieuses* have been overlooked. (This despite Ross' evocation of an extreme post-War hunger for modernization (1995); Rousso's pathologizing of the Vichy syndrome (1987); and Conan and Rousso's undigested trauma of 'passé qui ne passe pas' (2013).)

I begin by comparing the average Occupation energy intake (1,300 calories against 3,000-calorie expenditure), with the 1944 eight-month 1,560-kcal, 25%-body-weight-reduction Minnesota Starvation Experiment, anticipating post-war re-feeding challenges in Europe. Distress, compulsion and disordered eating were reported across restrictively-fed Minnesota subjects, including the 11% expelled for bingeing or stealing food (Keys and Brozek 1950). Albeit ethically problematic (and ongoingly contributing to disproportionate focus on restrictive eating disorders), the Minnesota results lead me to suggest that the traumatic, longer-running (rationing ended in 1950), greater calorific deficit in France led to an enduring, unexplored spectrum of eating disorder symptoms. Identifying fictional representations of psychological distress associated with prolonged semi-starvation and trauma, I argue, can therefore supplement understandings of post-War France.

Representations of food insecurity and obsessive psychopathology in Elsa Triolet's war-time 'Les Amants d'Avignon' (1943/44) intensify in her novel *Roses à Crédit* (1959), prompting me to supplement dominant understandings such as Ross' (1995) of the novel in terms of compulsive capitalist consumption.

Questioning diagnostic labelling of madness (Sellier 2008) and abjection (Walker 2011), I re-frame the novel's eating-disordered, ruinously consumer-goods-obsessed protagonist Martine as a case study for identifying how overlooked eating-disordered psychopathologies can underscore the intersections of the enduring psychological impact of the Occupation with those of consumer capitalism.

### **David Platten, "'There is no justice, there is just us": Saying and (not) doing in Camus's *La Chute* (1956).'**

Camus's *La Chute* was one of Margaret's favourite novels. Described by Sartre as a black diamond, of Camus's outputs 'le plus beau et le moins compris', it is a complex work of literature that welcomes readings from diverse academic constituencies. Is it a comment on existentialism, on the trauma of

genocide, on freedom of speech, or on literature itself? The scaffold over which multiple readings have been slung is a narrative whereby a man attempts to evaluate his life. Camus's biographers discern an authorial presence more tangible in *La Chute* than in any other of his works, yet Clamence is a slippery narrator, and he talks a lot. In this paper I will take an angular approach to this internal monologue, drawing on the concept of the *personnage-délégué* deployed by Pierre Bayard in *Aurais-je été résistant ou bourreau?* (2013), and also borrowing ideas from the field of neuroscience, notably Michael Gazzaniga's notion of 'the interpreter of experience' (Caruso and Flanagan eds., *Neuroexistentialism*, 2018, 223-234). The paper will conclude with some reflections on how and why Camus had a special place in Margaret's professional life.