

# Dissertation Defense: Michèle Schaal

March 1, 2012

1:30 PM

Sassafras Room

Indiana Memorial Union

## COMMITTEE IN CHARGE

Margaret E. Gray, Chair,  
French & Italian

Fedwa Malti-Douglas,  
Gender Studies

Emanuel Mickel,  
French & Italian

Oana Panaite,  
French & Italian

Rebeca Wilkin,  
Pacific Lutheran University

Margarete Zimmerman,  
Free University Berlin

If you would like to attend, please  
contact Professor Gray at 855-7884  
or [megray@indiana.edu](mailto:megray@indiana.edu)

INDIANA UNIVERSITY

## ALTÉRITÉ, PERFORMANCE, HYBRIDITÉ: UNE ESTHÉTIQUE DE LA TROISIÈME VAGUE FÉMINISTE

France has recently experienced a renewed interest in feminist and gender-related issues. Both in academia and society at large, a younger generation of theorists, authors and activists, influenced by American third-wave feminism and gender studies, has reasserted the necessity to fight for equal rights. My research reveals that as early as the mid-nineties, Marie Darrieussecq, Virginie Despentes and Nina Bouraoui anticipated these feminist discourses in their novels. In particular, they mirrored the concepts of alterity, gender performance, and hybridity. My dissertation investigates the literary manifestations of these concepts, as well as their fundamental interdependence. After introducing contemporary feminism in France and analyzing the feminist and socio-philosophical evolution of alterity, performance and hybridity, I proceed to examine their thematic and aesthetic deployment in three particular novels. While the authors naturally translate these concepts in their own specific ways or according to a specific invoked literary genre, a pattern still emerges. The female protagonists all start out as incarnations of Otherness, whether social, sexual, gendered or racial, oftentimes nearly all of them combined. These characters, thus, become illustrations of the essential intersectionality of alterities women still face today. Aware or not of this process of othering triggered within themselves or by society, they are nevertheless strongly affected by it. The latter process usually leads the protagonists to perform a specific gender, whether masculine or feminine. In some instances, it disrupts this very staging. In all cases, the novelists deliberately expose gender as a performance and not an essence, a fact all protagonists come to acknowledge. As an outcome of this alterity and performance of gender, a third and hybrid identity is slowly generated. More than a mere amalgam of their former and present selves, the characters truly become a third entity and attempt to reconcile within themselves their various alterities and performances.

