

Dissertation Defense: Marie-Line Brunet

Thursday, May 9th, 2013

2:00 pm

Indiana Memorial Union

Walnut Suite

COMMITTEE IN CHARGE

Margaret Gray , Chair

French and Italian, Literature

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French and Italian, Literature

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INDIANA UNIVERSITY

Jean Renoir : de la caméra au stylo, ou, l'itinéraire d'un cinéaste passé écrivain

This dissertation investigates the influence of cinema on Twentieth Century prose fiction. Since the early ages of cinema, the question of its influence on literature has raised many concerns amongst literary critics and purists. However, it remains a vague concept and it is with great difficulty that scholars have been able to provide concrete examples of this phenomenon. Moreover, critics tend to see this influence as limited to fairly recent prose fiction. I argue that this phenomenon occurs much earlier. Son of the impressionist painter Pierre-Auguste Renoir, Jean Renoir carried on his family's artistic legacy thanks to his mastery of filmmaking. To this day, *Grand Illusion* and *The Rules of the Game* remain two of the most influential movies in the history of cinema. Movies directed by Renoir continue to be the object of scrutiny of many scholars. However, it is far less known that Renoir dedicated the last phase of his life solely to writing. I aim at unveiling this part of Renoir's artistic achievement by tracing his itinerary as a writer. I investigate the early stages of Renoir's coming to writing through the lens of two unpublished manuscripts. A genetic study of *Le fiancé de Mlle Thomson* and *La peur* reveals, in filigree, the premise of literary works by Jean Renoir. I propose that the manuscripts are Renoir's first attempt at prose writing. I underline the challenges he encountered, as well as disclosing the embryo of his literary aesthetic. The publication of *Orvet* (1955) served as a stepping-stone for Renoir officially to launch his career as a dramatist. This first literary incursion was facilitated by the genre itself, for I believe drama and cinema share common features. Furthermore, writer Jean Renoir built on his experience as a filmmaker by transposing into literature several camera shots that had become associated with his directing style. Finally, in the last two decades of his life, Renoir published four novels (*Les cahiers du capitaine Georges* (1966); *Le cœur à l'aise* (1978); *Le crime de l'Anglais* (1979); *Geneviève* (1979)). I explore Renoir's musical sensibility and the way music, another key component of the filmic medium, permeates the Renoir novel in a manner that strongly echoes its usage in movies. I reflect on the difficulties Renoir faced as a novice writer, especially in terms of compliance with literary conventions. Cinema, then, did not have a negative influence on Renoir's prose; rather it constitutes the very essence of his literary aesthetic, an aesthetic I call *filmitude*. Furthermore, beyond the framework of Renoir studies, my goal is to posit a new way of considering the interaction between cinema and literature, an interaction that leads to the mutual enriching of both arts. The importation of cinematic techniques and devices indeed allows for innovative and renewed forms of prose writing, as Renoir demonstrates.