

# MUSEUMS IN LITERATURE

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## International Conference

7-8 November 2019

Université Paris 8-St-Denis  
Université Paris Nanterre  
Musée d'art et d'histoire Paul Éluard, Saint-Denis  
Maison des Sciences de l'Homme Paris Nord  
RIMELL

This international conference is part of the MuséaLitté research programme on the interaction between museums and literature.

Museums are both highly symbolic spaces and sites for the construction and dissemination of culture. Writers visit, appropriate, and mediatise all kinds of museums (Public or private, natural history museums, ethnographic collections, science and technology museums, art galleries, cabinets of curiosities, world expositions) as well as places where literature is preserved and classified (libraries, literary archives, and manuscript centres).

Museums and museum-like spaces, be they real, imaginary or revisited, are discussed, represented, or narrativised in all literary genres. Participants are invited to study their representation in fiction, poetry, drama, biography, essay, exhibition notebooks and travel journals, or iconotextual works such as *bandes dessinées*, comics, graphic narratives, children's picture story books, hypermedia works.

Authors visit or imagine museums and museum-like institutions or spaces and their readers follow in their steps looking for traces of their texts or emotions. The imaginary museum may even pop out of the book to exist as a real life space, like Orhan Pamuk's *Museum of Innocence* (2008) in Istanbul. In what ways do artists' books stage museum spaces? To what extent may one consider that some websites, such as writers' or fans' sites, or some books, such as the *bande dessinée* series *Axelot* (2014—) by Patrick Baud function as museums?

In what ways are museums, themselves sites of preservation, ordering and patrimonialisation of the material world as well as spaces of fabrication and dissemination of narratives, fictionalised or integrated into argumentative or theoretical discourse? Are museums described as spaces of mediation of living and vital art or of deadly accumulation? Do literary discourses on museums and like spaces express dislike or admiration? Between reality and fiction, material culture and representation, museums are paradoxical loci. Paul Valéry sees them as oxymorons, "a hubbub of congealed creatures" ("*tumulte de créatures congelées*" ("*Le problème des musées*", 1923), and Michel Foucault categorises them as "heterotopias" ("*Other Spaces*", 1967). As sanctuaries or common graves, spaces of knowledge and aesthetic experience between isolation and interaction, order and disorder, what poetics do they inform?

Notable examples are the private collections of *Le Cousin Pons* (Balzac, 1847), Dorian Gray (*The Portrait of Dorian Gray*, Oscar Wilde, 1890) and its contemporary counterpart in Will Self's rewriting (*Dorian*, 2002), Denis Diderot's salons (1759-1783), the Babelian library by Schuiten and Peeters (*La Tour*, 1987), Adèle Blanc-Sec's natural history museum (Tardi, *Le Secret de la salamandre*, 1981), Hilda V. Bach's *Cabinet de curiosités* (2016), Aragon's Musée Grévin (« le Musée Grévin », 1943), or the British Library in *Murder at the Museum* by John Rowland (1938), the British Museum (David Lodge, *The British Museum is Falling Down*, 1965 ; Anthony Horowitz, *Alex Rider. Scorpio Rising*, 2004 ; Roald Dahl, *The Mildenhall Treasure*, 1946), the V&A (Noel Streatfeild, *Ballet Shoes*, 1936) and the Ashmolean (Susan Cooper, *The Dark is Rising*, 1984), as well as the Louvre (Dan Brown, *Da Vinci Code*, 2003 ; Marc-Antoine Mathieu, *Les sous-sol du révolu*, 2006, and, specifically ordered by the museum, Enki Bilal, *Les Fantômes du Louvre*, 2012 ; Naoki Urasawa, *Le Signe des rêves*, 2018). We would welcome further examples from European literature.

Museums may be analysed as crime scenes (*The Murder Room*, PD James, 2003), theatrical set (*Musée Haut Musée Bas*, Jean-Michel Ribes, 2004), intricate, devious spaces (*Le musée des valeurs sentimentales*, Gaëlle Obiégly, 2011) or critical spaces (Paul Valéry, « Le problème des musées », 1923 ; Theodor Adorno, « Valéry Proust Musée » 1967 ; André Malraux, *Le musée imaginaire*, 1965).

We invite proposals for 20 minute contributions in English or French focusing on European literature from any period. We welcome submissions with theoretical, comparative, or diachronical perspectives, as well as case studies.

The conference will be held in English and French.

Please send proposals (500 words max.) and short bio-bibliographies to Charlotte Estrade (Université Paris Nanterre) and Caroline Marie (Université Paris 8): [musealitte@gmail.com](mailto:musealitte@gmail.com) no later than July 10<sup>th</sup> 2019.

Applicants will be notified by Monday September 2<sup>nd</sup> 2019.

### Scientific Board:

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