**DIAPO** « L’Allemagne comme lointain et comme profondeur ». « Germany as distance and depth”. The very title of André Belleau’s well-known essay, of which a first version was presented at Ottawa’s Goethe-Institut in 1981 in the context of a series of reflections on the theme “Quebecois writers and literatures of German-language countries,” is, in my eyes, representative of a common mode of perception of Germany in Québec before the 1990s. In this essay, Belleau dwells on the seductive appeal of the German language and German-language literatures for his generation, that of Québec scholars and writers who were in their twenties in the 1950s. He describes German as a “*langue choisie*” (Belleau 1982, 35), « a chosen language », a language that is neither imposed by birth nor by political and economical constraints. Belleau’s account also reveals that, although he took various courses and made several attempts, he was never really able to learn German. Belleau states that a number of Québec scholars of his generation were in a similar situation: a generation of true Germanophiles that were in a sense condemned to remain Romanicists, because, according to him, for a Francophone Quebecer to enroll in a German program to become a Germanist was almost “*inconceivable*” in 1950s Montreal. According to Belleau’s own admission, Québécois intellectuals of his generation have offered often naïve readings of German literature – focusing, incidentally, mostly on German Romantic Literature, on the “good Germany”, the Germany that French intellectuals loved in the tradition of Madame de Staël. Nevertheless, members of Belleau’s circle, although they misunderstood Germany in many ways, saw German culture as “*porteuse des signes de la profondeur et de l’authenticité*” (33), “as the bearer of the signs of profundity and authenticity”: the idea of profundity or “depth” being almost automatically associated with the German language.

Sherry Simon’s fine analysis on the presence of the German language in Jean Forest’s novel *le mur de Berlin, P.Q. / The wall of Berlin, Province of Quebec,* **DIAPO,** could have borne the same title as Belleau’s essay. According to Simon, in the novel published in 1983, Forest’s narrator, from a working class background, is condemned to view German as a “fantasmatic idiom” in 1950s Montreal. Simon draws on an engaging sequence in Forest’s work in which the narrator mentions the difficulty of translating the expression “Sehnsucht nach der Heimat”, or “longing for home”, into French – and furthermore, the complexity of translating it to describe the feeling he experienced towards Quebec the only time he had left Canada to spend a month in Old Orchard, Maine. For Simon, the cultural reality that is associated with the nostalgia that the German Romantics felt towards their mythologized country is incommensurate with that of Francophone Quebecers who grew up in the Montreal of the 1950s, in a sort of pre-modern world, a world characterized by cultural and linguistic poverty: therefore, the German words point to a reality that cannot really be translated into the narrator’s words. As was the case with André Belleau, German is viewed as a profoundly *distant* language.

**DIAPO**

In the 1980s, a crucial decade for the perceptions of Germany in various cultural and intellectual circles in Quebec, entire journal issues are devoted to German culture, including in well established journals such as *Études littéraires.* Of course, critics have emphasized with good reason Québec’s interest in German playwriting in the 1980s and 1990s, at a time when Québec theater was ready to turn towards other traditions after having asserted its actual existence in the preceding decades. In the *Cahiers de théâtre Jeu*, Diane Pavlovic went so far as to use the expression “*Allemagne québécoise*”, “a Quebecoise Germany”, to describe Québec’s theatrical scene from 1982 to 1987; in fact, as of 1987, approximately 30 German-language playwrights had been staged in Québec theatres. However, Quebec theater is not always able, at this time, to avoid clichés and stereotypes that are typically associated with Germany. Numerous performances also include characters that represent Hitler and : I’m translating here Pavlovic’s article:

-usually present a subverted, ridiculed, even in some cases a completely depoliticized vision of totalitarian power. The Hitlers of *Opéra-Fête* are both socialites and mechanical beings; the Hitler of the *Roi Boiteux* is included in a heterogeneous horde of false rulers; and the Hitler of Carbone 14 is the only one that, despite of having sometimes the appearance of a puppet who brags, remains troubling.

Pavlovic ascribes the choice of “carnivalizing” horror – in the Bakthinian sense – to the fact that the Québécois cultural context of reception is very remote from the Hitlerian adventure. In offering only a few glimpses on this important text, I first and foremost wish to emphasize that, in my opinion, the expression “iune Alleamgne québécoise”, “a Québécoise Germany”, never really allows to break with the perception of a fundamental distance, both historical and intellectual, separating Quebec from Germany.

I have alluded to these 3 cases because they are exemplary of how forms of fascination with German-language cultures, which have long been expressed by Québec intellectuals and writers, often manifested themselves before the 1990s. When I started looking into perceptions of German-language cultures in contemporary Quebec Literature, my readings rapidly encouraged me to develop a hypothesis pointing in the opposite direction: indeed, from the 1990s until today, numerous Quebecois writers have integrated representations of Germany and appropriations of German-language works based on an ideal of proximity. Rather than associating German-language cultures with remote worlds, the Québécois writer of the last 30 years often features these as cultures from which he can or should be close to, at times even allowing himself to display a truly irreverent attitude towards them. I have explored this idea of proximity in different ways throughout the years: today, I will explain how I have explored it in the last chapter of my recent monograph “*Literary Usages of Thomas Bernhard and Peter Handke in Québec. Forms of an intercultural affiliation*”. Before this, though, I will briefly present my book, show how the latter fits into a broader conceptual framework and what contribution it makes to my field of research.

My book draws on a representative corpus of poetry and prose works published in Québec in the last thirty years that conduct intertextual dialogue with the works of major postwar German-language authors Thomas Bernhard and Peter Handke. Through my research, I have found that 7 Québec contemporary authors – Normand de Bellefeuille, Diane-Monique Daviau, Denise Desautels, Nicole Filion, Catherine Mavrikakis, Yvon Rivard and Rober Racine – have been substantially nourished by the works of Handke and Bernhard, producing a profoundly original form of intercultural writing, and at times,

even integrating Bernhard and Handke as fictional characters in their works. From an intercultural point of view, the appropriations of Thomas Bernhard’s works in Quebec, are especially interesting. For students in the audience who wouldn’t be familiar with Bernhard’s works, the latter is what one could call an antipatriotic writer. Apart from having developed uses of repetitions that made his style distinctive and almost automatically recognizable, Bernhard has indeed attacked his country, Austria, in a particularly virulent way. Quebec writers have been especially interested in Bernhard’s works that depict the hypocrisy of Viennese artistic circles, and the profoundly institutional functioning of artistic production in Austria. Writers such as Nicole Filion and Catherine Mavrikakis go so far as to demand, in their fictional works, a “Quebecois Bernhard”. Noticing this during my research, I found this particularly interesting, because I had also went over all issues of all scholarly journals published in Quebec since the 1980s in an attempt to see which German-language authors were commented in their pages. I had then discovered that many observers of literary life in Quebec raised the question of the possible existence of a writer like Bernhard in Quebec: I have included on this slide references to a few interesting articles. Many of the writers of these articles belived that a “Quebecois Bernhard” remained difficult to imagine, as if Quebec, whose intelllectuals are often attentive to defend an ideal of national survival, wasn’t yet ready to welcome such as an uncompromising writer. Régine Robin wrote, for example, in 2001:

Quebec has managed this tour de force to not produce a single truly dissident author or intellectual, a Thomas Bernhard, a detested troublemaker (…) but who would inspire thought through his strong mark and would participate, through his provocation and controversies, in the creation of a plural political thought here, that couldn’t be reduced to the eternal false dialogue between “federalists” and “sovereignists”.

Contrary to Robin’s argument, my book reveals that some Quebec writers have increasingly sought in the past 30 years to transfer Bernhard’s obdurate critique of his society to the Quebec context; in doing so, they rely, among other means, on forms of parody and pastiche.

**How did I work?** When I first designed what was originally a dissertation, I was noticing various similarities in the way Quebec authors related to Bernhard and Handke. For example, works from different writers include characters that are in some sense properly haunted by the works of Bernhard or Handke. One example of this can be found in Rober Racine’s 1992 novel *Le mal de Vienne*, whose very title refers to a rare but serious illness from which the main character, Studd, suffers, a so-called “thomasbernhardovite” which forces him to live, think, and feel what Thomas Bernhard and his characters live, think and feel. I have identified 4 main forms of appropriation of Bernhard’s and Handke’s works in Quebec, and developed a quadripartie typology. The question of ghosts and specters, which I just alluded to, is presented in the second chapter of the book, where I also reflect on what it means for a comtemporary character to be haunted by a foreign literary tradition, rather than by works and authors from his own culture. I won’t attempt to explain here the 4 forms of appropriation, but as I said, I will in this talk have a closer look with you on the book’s fourth chapter, which presents developed examples of pastiche and parody of Bernhard’s works that are anchored in a very finely described Québécois cultural context of reception. All 4 modes of appropriation are placed under the egis of the central concept of *affiliation*, which I will present.

**The broader conceptual framework of the book**

Scholars in the field of comparative literature have made various attempts to describe phenomena of literary influences precisely without referring to the concept of “influence”, that may be perceived as somewhat static and likely to foreground the work of the influencer to the detriment of the work of the writer who appropriates the literary works of the past. In France and in Québec, since the publication of Dominique Viart’s landmark article in 1999, entitled “Filiations littéraires,” the concept of filiation has been very frequently used by scholars to reflect on the sustained reflection on issues related to literary legacies which they have identified as one of the essential tendencies of contemporary fiction in France and Quebec. The results presented in the works of these scholars depict a contemporary literature whose leading form of relationship with texts of the past is one of reading and reception, rather than one of creative appropriation. According to Viart and his adepts, for the contemporary French or Québécois writer, it is not a matter of identifying models of anterior writers, nor of inventing triumphantly from scratch a lineage for himself; on the contrary, that contemporary writer prefers to include characters whose relationship with literary texts of the past places them in the position of rather passive heirs, often incapable of even identifying their own desires when they turn to texts of the past. From my very first readings of the texts of Quebecois writers who have developed forms of appropriation of German-language works, I had noticed how these staged characters who turned to anterior texts in a concerted gesture, through a concerted decision whose steps were often represented. Indeed, the texts of Quebecois writers who have appropriated the works of Bernhard and Handke are structured by a defined agenda, and renew with the idea of chosen literary models, chosen heritages and legacies, often undermined by scholars. The idea of creating a typology likely to offer another vision of the treatment given to literary heritages in Quebec Literature of the past 30 years has thus caught on: a typology that, naturally, would allow to characterize in the best possible way the specific modes of appropriation of Bernhard and Handke in Québec, and to shed light on the cross-cultural impact of these appropriations.

My book, proposing an *affiliative* view of contemporary Quebec literature rather a *filiative* one, also puts forward a vision of “affiliation” very different than the one elaborated by Edward Saïd in his famous book *The World, the Text and the Critic*. In this book, Said has developed the most significant reflection on the notions of “filiation” and “affiliation” within literary criticism beyond the Francophone world. Said uses these terms so as to establish a dual concept; this dual concept has afterwards been taken up by several researchers working in the field of postcolonial studies. In Said’s and his adepts’ work, *affiliation* is frequently a characteristic of the global dimension of literary texts. The word is often used to describe a considerable network of cultural associations or identifications in the works of the postcolonial writer. As for me, I am using the concept of « affiliation » not to describe a *network* of relations, but rather to describe contemporary writers’ ability to *choose,* that is, according to a unidirectional model. Thus, each Québécois writer affiliates with either Bernhard or Handke (and not both of them). My book also reflects on the utility of the concept of “affiliation” against other concepts that have often been used in the past 30 years to reflect on cross-cultural appropriations of canonical literary texts (for example, the concepts of “productive reception,” and “cultural transfer”).

Concretely, in my book, the central concept of *affiliation* is defined as one that needs to be reserved for contemporary fictional works that do not only present developed forms of cross-cultural appropriation of literary works of the past, but also imagine a process through which the contemporary writer’s “*signature d’auteur*”– that is, the author’s *signature,* or his authorship and authority – tends to be reinforced through the relationship developed with the literary heritage. In my book, the notion of “signature d’auteur” is used as Gérard Leclerc presents it in his study *Le sceau de l’oeuvre*, published in 1998. In this study, Leclerc uses the concept of “signature d’auteur” to describe works in which the enunciation emphasizes a form a “responsibility-property” of the author vis-à-vis his work. To detect within my corpus of Québécois works strong author signatures also means to postulate that the contemporary writer does not renounce, when he affiliates with writers of the German-language literary canon, to claim a such “responsibility-property,” first vis-à-vis his own work, but also vis-à-vis the knowledge his work passes on, and of which he is the mediator, sometimes through characters that are precisely depicted as “heirs.”