**SEMINAIRE MODERNITES BRITANNIQUES**

**19 février, 17h15**

**MSH de Clermont-Ferrand, amphi 219**

Nous accueillerons deux conférencières :

**Jennifer Reid (Birkbeck College), ‘Wearing the Horn’: Class and Community in the Shakespearean Hunt**

References to and images of the deer hunt recur in two of William Shakespeare’s so-called ‘forest comedies’, *As You Like It* and *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, both written in the last few years of the sixteenth century, as well as throughout his oeuvre. In his depictions of hunting rituals, Shakespeare draws upon and demonstrates the symbolic significance of the early modern hunt, and its relationship to a number of early modern folk customs which used the body of the dead animal to enact and explore social relationships. My paper will ask why Shakespeare chooses in these plays to draw upon hunting rituals and, at the same time, upon early modern calendrical customs which performed a stylized, parodic version of the hunt. I will suggest that in these plays, the slaughtered deer becomes a useful metaphor for communal conflict and division, resonances which the aristocratic sport easily evoked given the prohibitive expense it incurred, the discourses of exclusion and elitism which surrounded it, and its importance in the construction of noble male identity. Nevertheless, these associations of the hunt sit alongside an altogether more popular festive performance of hunting in early modern culture, and this intertext is also determinedly present in the comedies under discussion.

As is well attested in contemporary records, a number of contemporary calendar customs existed which saw the processing of a buck’s head around the local parish, often accompanied by costumed participants, dancing, and music, and which mirrored the descriptions in medieval hunting manuals of the ritualism at the conclusion of the aristocratic hunt. These hunting ceremonies enacted an elaborately ceremonial dissection and distribution of the body of the slain quarry. At the same time, folk custom demonstrates a pervasive cultural interest in hunting at all levels of early modern society, a preoccupation which Shakespeare consistently displays. Literary scholars such as Edward Berry in his comprehensive study on *Shakespeare and the Hunt* (2001) have built upon the substantial social historical scholarship on hunting and poaching to draw attention to its all-pervasive cultural resonance in the early modern period, its imaginative draw for playwrights, poets, and songsters, and the ongoing controversies over customary rights and land use which it generated. Nevertheless, emphasis on contemporary discourses surrounding such controversies and on high-profile poaching protests can serve to rehearse a critical distinction between ‘high’ and ‘low’ culture which characterises hunting as, in Berry’s words, ‘a repressive social custom’, and which presents as self-evident the conclusion that, while ‘the views of commoners on the hunt are rarely recorded, […] the most important was probably popular rage’. Yet although the excessive expense and ritualistic ceremonies of the aristocratic hunt do make clear the deliberate strategies by which its exclusionary and performative nature was maintained, I aim to demonstrate that it is not quite the case that no ‘commoner’ approaches to hunting exist.

René Girard’s discussion of sacrifice as symbolic action which is protective of social harmony, through its deflection of violence to an external rather than internal target, provides a perspective from which to explore what the dismembered animal meant, and why, when it appeared in these apparent expressions of communal harmony. These ritualised events were usually overt statements of community cohesion and co-operation, yet they drew their symbolic charge from the inherent violence of the hunt and the sacrificial prominence of the dead animal’s physical dismemberment. Shakespeare’s references to ritualised hunting customs encapsulate a similar concern with community and social identity. The status, power, and virtue signalled by aristocratic hunting on the one hand, and its visual emphasis on savagery and sacrifice on the other, lent it a particular emblematic charge in early modern popular culture. I will suggest that Shakespeare exploits this resonance, using the body of the dead deer to represent and explore the subtexts of social inclusion and exclusion, hierarchy, status, and local identity which were so bound up in folk customs incorporating the hunt. This paper will therefore propose that investigating the presence of references to hunting in popular calendrical customs qualifies rather the assumption that hunting was viewed as the cultural property only of the highest ranks. In these comedies, references to hunting also evoke calendrical customs, in the process complicating the implications of the former and extending our understanding of the festive hunt.

**Professor Janet Clare (University of Hull), ‘The Circulation of Cosmographical Knowledge and Thomas More’s *Utopia*’**

The translation in 1406-1409 of Ptolemy’s Geography as *Cosmographia* indicates a European revival of interest in cosmography, The Renaissance elicited a transformation in cosmographical thinking, as the more God-centred medieval attitudes were confronted by a resurgence of interest in the geographical writings of Ptolemy and Strabo. The voyages of Vespucci and Columbus added to the mix, as lands were discovered that were —it was generally agreed — unknown to the ancients and without mention in the Bible. Although it was not until 1652 that England was to produce a vernacular cosmography, from the beginning of its European revival, cosmography fed into the English literary imagination.

In this paper I begin by examining the cosmographical turn in Europe and the early circulation of cosmographical knowledge in England. In the second part, I will consider as a foundational text, Thomas More’s *Utopia* (Louvain, 1516), a work which assumes its readers are familiar with the discoveries and letters of the navigator, Amerigo Vespucci. Utopia’s fictionality is belied by its connections with the European cartographers and explorers of its age. Its anthropological account of an advanced society draws on accounts of primitive societies while its rationality is affirmed by its distance from the excesses of embellished travellers’ tale. Through its links with contemporary voyages and voyagers More’s work is embedded in the poetic geography of Renaissance cosmography and, I will suggest, no more fantastical than accounts of hitherto unknown worlds.