

CALL FOR PAPERS
FIRST GRADUATE STUDENT CONFERENCE IN FRENCH LITERATURE
THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO

Le personnage romanesque dans la France des XIX^e et XX^e siècles

May 1st, 2009

Keynote Speaker: Professor Isabelle Daunais (McGill University)



Ne demandez point quel charme singulier trouvent les hommes des âges démocratiques à vivre égaux, ni les raisons particulières qu'ils peuvent avoir de s'attacher si obstinément à l'égalité plutôt qu'aux autres biens que la société leur présente: l'égalité forme le caractère distinctif de l'époque où ils vivent; cela seul suffit pour expliquer qu'ils la préfèrent à tout le reste.

- Alexis de Tocqueville

This conference will facilitate a dialogue among history, political philosophy, and literary studies in order to shed light on the relationship between the democratization of French society and the evolution of the French novel in the 19th and 20th centuries. Drawing from Isabelle Daunais' work on the realist novel, which identifies a tension between characters' aspirations and quotidian reality, one can see in the development of the genre a trend towards the lowering of aspirations that resolves this tension, whereby the ideals to which characters are committed more closely approach the desires of ordinary life. As a result, the novel undergoes a shift from a straightforward narration of adventures to a formal and sometimes abstract depiction of a passive way of being in the world. Could this literary trend be linked to the progress of equality in French culture? A change in the political and sociological climate undoubtedly transformed the nature of both exemplarity and heroism, two crucial components in the construction of fictional character.

We invite proposals for papers (in French or English) about fictional characters relating to this genre and period. Possible themes include, but are not limited to:

- Characterization: portrait, description, gender, speech.
- Consciousness: thoughts, inner discourse, memory, gaze.
- The individual and society: identity/otherness, person, groups, relationships, public and private spheres.
- French history and politics: citizenship; the character facing the Republic, revolution, war.

Email proposals of 250-300 words to Sylvie Goutas (sgoutas@uchicago.edu) or Julia Chamard-Bergeron (chamardbergeron@uchicago.edu) by February 20th, 2009. Please include your name, academic affiliation and contact information in the body of the email only and attach abstract.