The relationship between literature and democracy is not as easy and simple as one would have liked to think. If sometimes the literary works served as a way to promote democracy, it is also true that the power exerted by writers on the people does not necessarily fit into democratic institutions, of whatever nature this literary power might be. The seminar will thus provide a historical journey through some of the most significant episodes of this dialectical tension between literature and democracy:

1. Plato’s condemnation of poetry in ancient Athens;
2. 1. The coronation of Voltaire in Paris in 1778 as a prerevolutionary event;
2. 2. Flaubert’s and Zola’s fight against the republican power of the bourgeois;
3. C. P. Snow’s indictment of literary culture in modern democracies;
4. 1. Bourdieu’s sociological analysis of the antidemocratic use of literature in schools;
4. 2. President Sarkozy’s polemics against masterworks of French literature;
5. Writer Christine Angot’s fight against the right-wing candidate in the last French presidential election.

The seminar will be given entirely in English. The French texts provided in the handout will be translated or summarized and commented in English.

Essential Bibliography

- Frank Raymond Leavis, *Two Cultures? The Significance of C. P. Snow* (1962), with introduction by Stefan Collini, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2013. The answer of the most famous British critic of the 1960s to C. P. Snow’s attacks against literary culture. Useful introduction by historian Stefan Collini.


