

AATF Liège 2008
University of St Thomas Presentation Abstract

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TITLE:

Whose reality? Playing with perspective in French literature, media, and film

ABSTRACT:

This panel will propose ways to help students understand the role of perspective and subjectivity in both the composition and the reception of "texts" – that is to say, any medium serving as a vehicle for discourse – from medieval literature to modern news media and film.

GENERAL DESCRIPTION OF THE PANEL:

The words we use reflect our reality. They define us and we use them to define our world. Let us take for example the following phrases culled from French legal and political documents:

- "Les programmes scolaires reconnaissent en particulier le rôle positif de la présence française outre-mer, notamment en Afrique du Nord [...]" (Article 4, Loi du 25 février 2005).
- "La France des croisades et des cathédrales, la France des droits de l'homme et de la Révolution" (Nicolas Sarkozy, speech delivered in Besançon, March 2007).
- "Le ministère de l'immigration, de l'intégration, de l'identité nationale et du codéveloppement" (Created May 18, 2007).

What is meant by the words *rôle positif*, *croisades*, and *identité nationale*? They evidently will not have the same meaning for all readers.

When we discuss with our students France's role in international affairs, her colonial past and present multicultural society, as well as *la francophonie*, we need also to teach them to think critically about the available sources of information on these subjects. Such critical thinking necessarily assumes an understanding of perspective and the subjective nature of discourse.

Each presentation will examine questions such as how to identify the signposts that signal perspective and what happens when authors and filmmakers challenge these conventions.