



The serious in the nineteenth century: A suspect virtue

Publication type: Journal article

Journal: [Revue d'Histoire littéraire de la France](#)
2 – 2023, 123e année, n° 2. varia

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Abstract: An image of a nineteenth century whose culture is defined by joking and derision is prevalent today. The image is not a false one, but a partial one, and it constitutes a counterpoint with another equally incontestable reality: that of elites who, liberated from the grip of the Napoleonic, fervently commit to intellectual cogitation. But is this an instance of “seriousness”? Seriousness is not only an antonym of gaiety; it also implies a form of sincerity and respect for accepted rules. It falls not only under the purview of the Bourgeois, who is intrinsically ridiculous, but even more so, the professor and scholar, who, over the course of a secular narrative, comes gradually to rival the author’s free play of fantasy.

Pages: 283 to 295

Journal: [Journal of French Literary History](#)

CLIL theme: 4027 -- SCIENCES HUMAINES ET SOCIALES, LETTRES -- Lettres et Sciences du langage -- Lettres -- Etudes littéraires générales et thématiques

EAN: 9782406148906

ISBN: 978-2-406-14890-6

ISSN: 2105-2689

DOI: 10.48611/isbn.978-2-406-14890-6.p.0027

Publisher: Classiques Garnier

Online publication: 04-26-2023

Periodicity: Quarterly

Language: French

Keyword: ridiculous, realism, bourgeois culture, Bohemian, irony, Flaubert, Stendhal, Zola

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