

Dissertation Defense: Erin Edgington

Thursday, January 24th
2013
3:30 PM
IMU
Charter Room

COMMITTEE

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French and Italian, Literature

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INDIANA UNIVERSITY

Unfolding the Éventail: the Fan as a Poetic Object in France, 1880-1927

The fan, fashionable in Europe since the Renaissance, rose to an even greater prominence in fin-de-siècle France where it was revered both as a fashion accessory and as an art object. Because of the prevailing fascination with the surviving material culture of the ancient régime and with all things Oriental, in the second half of the nineteenth century and until World War I the fan was a cultural phenomenon attracting the attention of some of the period's most noteworthy collectors, aesthetes and artists, and littérateurs. Numerous works of art celebrated its charms, drawing inspiration from contemporary modes and manners as much as from the rich mythology of the fan. Literary treatments of the fan, however, have received surprisingly little scholarly attention; this dissertation explores, via three case studies, the unique role of the fan as a site of poetic inscription in late-nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century France. I first treat Octave Uzanne's *L'Éventail* (1882) before moving on to consider Mallarmé's éventails of the 1880s and 1890s, which I then link with Claudel's *Cent phrases pour éventails* (1927). *L'Éventail* is a literary history of the fan focused on the connection between fans and poetry. Importantly, it details the network of metaphors for the fan that features in Mallarmé's contemporary fan poetry and in Claudel's subsequent fans. Mallarmé's fans are not mere tokens of friendship and love; they also grapple with the themes and images that haunt his larger body of work. Claudel's texts catalogue his impressions of Japan and document his experience working in this nontraditional form. I conclude that these authors' works suggest a new function for the fan near the end of the nineteenth century as a book form particularly suited to the reception of poetic texts.

