REVIEW

Des inconnus à qui parler, by Camille Bordas

by Benjamin Hoffmann

April 5, 2026 · On *Des inconnus à qui parler (Denoël)*

A choral novel set over a single day in Chicago, following a class of master's students in stand-up comedy: a fresh reflection on artistic creation in the age of social media.



This weekend, French Press recommends *Des inconnus à qui parler*, a novel by Camille Bordas. Originally published in English as *The Material*, it was translated into French by the author and published last year by Denoël.

An impressive choral novel that moves fluidly from one character's point of view to another, *Des inconnus à qui parler* takes place over a single day in Chicago and tells of the aspirations of a class of students in a master's program in stand-up comedy as they prepare to perform on stage in front of their teachers.

Sharply raising the perennial question of the relationship between art and life, the author explores how hard it is to transform lived experience into aesthetic form. An American novel, *Des inconnus à qui parler* evokes academia and the cultural shifts running through the United States today, in particular the debate over

political correctness and its impact on artistic expression.

What might have been just another campus novel had it been about a creative writing program rather than a stand-up program instead offers, thanks to the shift in perspective that comedy brings, a fresh reflection on artistic creation in the age of social media. Ambitious in the range of its themes, original in its mastery of the unity of time, and masterful in the way it weaves together a plurality of narrative points of view, *Des inconnus à qui parler* is, quite simply, a great literary achievement.

Have you read it? What are you reading this weekend?

— Benjamin Hoffmann

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