

HUMANITIES INSTITUTE

FRENCH LITERATURE – Early Modern Period

Frederic Will, Ph.D.

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16TH CENTURY

Overview

The literature of the French Renaissance had many of the characteristics of Italian Renaissance literature. Individualism, humanism, a spirit of adventure, and a careful attention to form and technique were usually evident. The era of the French Renaissance in literature has been divided into four parts: the period of origins (1494-1515); the national period (1515-1550); the Italian period (1550-1572); and the age of Montaigne (1572-1598).

No literature of importance was written during the age of origins.

At the beginning of the national period the so called *Grands Rhetoriciens*, the Great Rhetoricians, were dominating French poetry; they emphasized technique, rhetoric, and intricacy of versification and rhythm. They were opposed by Clément Marot (1497-1544) who aimed at simplicity, clarity, and elegance. The poetry of Marguerite de Navarre falls into this period. Her best poems are either religious or personal. Her *Prisons* is an allegorical poem in which Christianity and Platonism are blended, and her *Mirror of the Sinful Soul* is a series of theological discussions. In prose, as distinct from poetry, this period saw huge achievements: the work of Rabelais, Calvin's *Institutes*, and a work by Marguerite de Navarre, her *Heptameron*, based around a collection of short stories by Boccaccio.

The Italian period is dominated by the *Pleiade*, a group of poets who stressed the importance of Greek and Latin poetry, and who attempted successfully to enrich the French language.

Montaigne was the greatest writer of the last period of Renaissance French literature. The religious troubles of the time inspired both poetry and prose. The most notable pieces are by Agrippa d'Aubigné: *Les Tragiques*—seven cantos of poetry giving the Protestant view of the religious wars—and the *Menippean Satire*, a piece of religious and political satire written by Catholics, but supporting the moderate party and expressing preference for a French Protestant rather than a foreign Catholic as King of France.

Discussion questions

Is Marguerite de Navarre's *Heptameron* a naughty set of tales, following in the model of Boccaccio, or a complex period piece, exploring social values and women's views of life?

How does Ronsard's view of poetry cohere with those of other members of the Pléiade? Dubellay and de Baif? Is there a philosophical dimension to the work of this school? Or is metric and attitude the dominant base of the movement?

Does Rabelais share, with François Villon, a sense of the intersection between the very serious, even the 'sacred,' and the gross? Is Rabelais noticeably more ironic than Villon, toward the blending of these two forms of sensibility?

Montaigne claims to present himself just as he is. Is that the way you read him? Does he conceal himself in order to reveal himself? What is his attitude toward mankind's tendency to deceive itself?

Poetry

Ronsard, Pierre de

Ronsard, life and works. Pierre de Ronsard (1524-1585), called in his day the ‘Prince of Poets,’ was born in the Valley of the Loire, into an illustrious family. His ancestors had founded the French branch of the family in their Manoir de la Poissonnière, having behind them a history of noble exploits in the Hundred Years War. Ronsard himself was educated at home, then sent, in the fashion of aristocratic youth, to a nearby College, the College de Navarre where he benefitted from the traditional firm training in Greek and Latin. At the age of twelve he became a page of the Duke of Orleans; from that portal his way was opened into an early life of travel and sophisticated exposure. When Madeleine of France was married to the King of Scotland, Ronsard was sent along to serve as a page; his subsequent youthful travels thus included extensive stays in Scotland and England, and shortly later in Germany and Italy. He was by age twenty fluent in English, German, and Italian, no small part of his qualifications for poetic eminence, not to mention his diplomatic prospects, for at this point Ronsard seemed destined for an important role as a representative of the monarchy. At this fulcrum point in his brilliant youth, however, he was struck by deafness, a handicap challenging his strongest powers; and only the power of his personality led him to a life of extraordinary literary creativity. Ronsard determined quickly that he would be unable to pursue a diplomatic career, and betook himself to study the College Coqueret, where he was to confirm his true vocation, as a poet, and to make the acquaintance of those other distinguished young men—with whom he was to become immersed in the *Pleiade* movement. (The *Pleiade* were a cohort of seven brilliant and congenial poets, who named themselves after the Alexandrian septet of ancient fame, and who numbered such luminaries as Ronsard, du Bellay, and Antoine du Baif.) Ronsard’s self-deepening took over with several years of intense study of Greek and Latin literatures—one might think of the studious preoccupations of Rabelais or Margaret of Navarre—and before long came an increasingly close friendship with a kindred spirit, Joachim du Bellay, who was to be Ronsard’s partner in his literary career. Not long after the formation and fruition of the *Pleiade*, Ronsard was ready to retire to his country home, to take advantage of many kinds of royal perquisites, and to create the works that have made him famous: works touching every literary genre except drama, and paying constant close tribute to the poetries of Latin authors like Ovid and Horace.

Ronsard’s genius in poetry: deeply immersed in the subtle turns of phrase, enjambements, and feeling for interior cesurae, Ronsard did his best work when letting deep feeling out in measured and nostalgic tone. (The works we turn to with greatest pleasure are the *Hymns*, (1555), and the *Amours* (1556). His immense popularity in his day—the next two centuries would usher in a sharp decline in Ronsard’s literary reputation—is to us clearest in the infinite (and perfect) sadness of a sonnet like the following translation by the equally great English poet, W.B. Yeats:

*When you are very old, at evening, by the fire,
spinning wool by candlelight and winding it in skeins,
you will say in wonderment as you recite my lines:
“Ronsard admired me in the days when I was fair.”
Then not one of your servants dozing gently there
hearing my name’s cadence break through your low repines
but will start into wakefulness out of her dreams
and bless your name — immortalised by my desire.*

Reading

Primary source reading

Wolfe, Humbert, *Sonnets for Helen*, 1972.

Secondary source reading

Kenny, Neil, *An Introduction to Sixteenth century French Literature and Thought*, 2008.

Further reading

Castor, Grahame, *Pleiade Poetics*, 1964.

Original language reading

Fumaroli, Marc, *L'age de l'éloquence*, 1980.

Suggested paper topics

Do you think that we, today, are still enchanted by the Renaissance poetic theme of immortalizing a beloved individual, or oneself, in poetry? Is that a poetic conceit that leave us cold, or a perennial desire of the human imagination?

Ronsard, unlike Villon for example, lived and wrote from a very privileged background. Do you feel the results of this privilege in his poetry? Does he nonetheless seem to write for the human condition in a broad sense? Was Renaissance lyric, in France, largely a creation of the upper middle class or aristocracy?

Excerpt http://www.poetryintranslation.com/PITBR/French/Ronsard.htm#_Toc69989198

*I'd like to turn the deepest of yellows,
Falling, drop by drop, in a golden shower,
Into her lap, my lovely Cassandra's,
As sleep is stealing over her brow.*

*Then I'd like to be a bull, white as snow,
Transforming myself, for carrying her,
In April, when, through meadows so tender,
A flower, through a thousand flowers, she goes.*

*I'd like then, the better to ease my pain,
To be Narcissus, and she a fountain,
Where I'd swim all night, at my pleasure:*

*And I'd like it, too, if Aurora would never
Light day again, or wake me ever,
So that this night could last forever.*

Fiction

Rabelais, Francois

Francois Rabelais. Francois Rabelais (1495-1553) was born in the province of Touraine, and by an uninterrupted progression passed through religious education and into monkhood as a Franciscan friar in the convent of Fontenay-le-Comte. From the start, though, Rabelais' passion had been for learning, and he had rapidly found his way into the study of Greek, Hebrew and Arabic. This scholarly turn alienated the Franciscans, who had come to prefer poverty to learning, and were glad to see Francois join the Benedictine order, which soon he left in order to serve as a simple parish priest. Needing more income he then turned toward the study of medicine, which was to become his career, and in the course of which he grew close to many of the opinion shapers of his time, like Clément Marot or Maurice Scève. Through a series of partially realized writings, which were the true muscle of Rabelais' daily life, he created two remarkable works, *Gargantua* (1534) and *Pantagruel* (1532), which established his reputation.

Main Themes of his Work. The basic outline of Rabelais's writings is simple: talk, philosophy, anecdote, history, gossip, scandal, and a hearty secular philosophy of 'do what you will,' 'fais ce que vouldra,' weave their ways around a tale involving Gargantua (a hero out of Arthurian legend), his immense and grossly vulgar son, Pantagruel, and Pantagruel's buddy in arms, Panurge. It characterizes the subordination of plot to tale and brilliant chatter that much of the long work of Rabelais is devoted to the tricky question of whether Panurge should get married.

The Cultural Position of Rabelais: Rabelais—like all the authors included earlier—thought and worked in a firm and still orthodox Christian tradition. The mediaeval perspective from which he emerged to a secular career, clung to him in his scorn for women, common among mediaeval men, his deep sense of allegory, and the heavy coarseness of much of his imagination—how about the hero who floods Paris by pissing copiously from the summit of Notre Dame Cathedral? On the other hand, though, Rabelais builds on a pagan joie de vivre and a love of secular life which allies him with many post Christian energies of French literature.

Reading

Primary source reading

The Complete Works of Francois Rabelais, tr. Frame, 1999.

Secondary source reading

Bahtin, M., *Rabelais and his World*, 2013.

Further reading

Febvre, L., *The problem of unbelief in the 16th century*, 1982.

Original language reading

Faure, Paul, *La Renaissance*, 1999.

Suggested paper topics

Much of the material, in Rabelais's work, is taken from rough scenes of life, one might say from the scatological imagination. Are you surprised at this turn of sensibility in one who was for a long time a Franciscan friar? Is there a broadly scatological tenor to some late Mediaeval and Renaissance art?

How would you characterize the 'freedom' that Rabelais considers of supreme importance in life? Is it a freedom for license, the freedom of justified self-control, or the freedom of a society in which individuals feel mutual respect for one another? Does Rabelais' sense of freedom derive from his particular religious training?

Excerpt <http://www.historyguide.org/intellect/rabelais.html>

Now every method of teaching has been restored, and the study of languages has been revived: of Greek, without which it is disgraceful for a man to call himself a scholar, and of Hebrew, and Latin. The elegant and accurate art of printing, which is now in use, was invented in my time, by divine inspiration; as, by contrast, artillery was inspired by diabolical suggestion. The whole world is full of learned men, of very erudite tutors, and of most extensive libraries, and it is my opinion that neither in the time of Plato, of Cicero, nor of Papinian were there such faculties for study as one finds today. No one, in future, will risk appearing in public or in any company, who is not well polished in Minerva's workshop. I find robbers, hangmen, freebooters, and grooms nowadays more learned than the doctors and preachers were in my time.

Why, the very women and girls aspire to the glory and reach out for the celestial manna of sound learning. So much so that at my present age I have been compelled to learn Greek, which I had not despised like Cato, but which I had not the leisure to learn in my youth. Indeed I find great delight in reading the *Morals* of Plutarch, Plato's magnificent *Dialogues*, the *Monuments* of Pausanias, and the *Antiquities* of Athenaeus, while I wait for the hour when it will please God, my Creator, to call me and bid me leave this earth.

Therefore, my son, I beg you to devote your youth to the firm pursuit of your studies and to the attainment of virtue. You are in Paris. There you will find many praiseworthy examples to follow. You have Epistemon for your tutor, and he can give you living instruction by word of mouth. It is my earnest wish that you shall become a perfect master of languages. First of Greek, as Quintilian advises; secondly, of Latin; and then of Hebrew, on account of the Holy Scriptures; also of Chaldean and Arabic, for the same reasons; and I would have you model your Greek style on Plato's and your Latin on that of Cicero. Keep your memory well stocked with every tale from history, and here you will find help in the *Cosmographies* of the historians. Of the liberal arts, geometry, arithmetic, and music, I gave you some smattering when you were still small, at the age of five or six. Go on and learn the rest, also the rules of astronomy. But leave divinatory astrology and Lully's art alone, I beg of you, for they are frauds and vanities. Of Civil Law I would have you learn the best texts by heart, and relate them to the art of philosophy. And as for the knowledge of Nature's works, I should like you to give careful attention to that too; so that there may be no sea, river, or spring of which you do not know the fish. All the birds of the air, all the trees, shrubs, and bushes of the forest, all the herbs of the field, all the metals deep in the bowels of the earth, the precious stones of the whole East and the South -- let none of them be unknown to you.

Marguerite de Navarre

Public importance of Marguerite de Navarre. Marguerite de Navarre (1492-1549) was princess of France, queen of Navarre, and wife to Henry II of the kingdom of Navarre. Her brother was to become King of France, as Francis I, and she herself was to become the ancestress of the Bourbon line of Kings of France. (She was grandmother to Henry of Navarre, who as Henri IV was to become the first Bourbon king of France.) Nor were these noble frameworks the peak of Marguerite's worldly importance, for she was a serious imaginative writer, a patroness to the greatest French writers of her time—Rabelais, Montaigne, Marot—and what some have called the first modern woman. One might give some thought in this setting to Christine de Pisan, also viewed—from a different optic—as the first modern woman.

Life and work of Marguerite de Navarre. Marguerite was already in birth privileged with a distinguished gene pool: her father took an eleven year old bride, Louise, who was in absolute truth a prodigy, and though Marguerite was obliged by her father—for reasons of estate consolidation—to marry an older man widely considered a laggard and a dunce, she took advantage of her enforced move to the city of Cognac, close to Italy, to enlarge her cultural awareness, and to fall under the spell of the great Italian tale-teller Giovanni Boccaccio. For this intense growing atmosphere Marguerite was well prepared by the classical education she had been given as a child, and when her brother became king she was enabled to give full vent to her literary talents. She became the center of a literary salon, the 'New Parnassus,' and began to share out the distinguished personality she had been forming for herself. Her first published work, the *Miroir de l'ame pecheresse* (1511), *Mirror of the Sinful Soul*, grew from the loss of her first and only child and serves as a rich complement to the imaginative tales she constructed in the *Heptameron* (1558). In the *Mirror* she writes 1400 lines of verse lamenting her miserable behaviors in life—her faithlessness, her unreliability, her lack of faith—and then tracking her path back to grace.

Marguerite the confessional writer. The intensity of her soulful confessions not only seemed arbitrary and self-indulgent, to the many contemporaries who found her self-confessions heretical, but found an attentive ear in others, such as Anne Boleyn, the wife of Henry VIII, who quite probably promoted Marguerite's ideas in England, on the highest levels and at such a degree that the Protestant turn to Elizabethan religious life may owe something to Marguerite's work. Marguerite's most famous work, the *Heptameron*, reflects a very different turn of imagination—a turn which shows how many sided the Renaissance French mind could be. As we see, in the prologue to this work, the influence of Boccaccio's *Decameron* is strong—and the parallel to Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales* is evident. A group of travelers is detained in an abbey, while waiting for the completion of a bridge, which will enable them to continue on their way. Each traveler in turn—though the sequence was incomplete at Marguerite's death—offers a diverting tale, which will help the company pass the time. It is surprising for the modern reader to discover how bawdy, risqué, and entertaining these tales can be. What can be more guaranteed to keep you awake, than the tale of the nobleman who, becoming aware that the king is cuckolding him with his wife, then takes up with the queen, generating a pattern of mutual deceits which keeps the foursome quite happy.

Reading

Primary source reading

The Heptameron, tr, intro by Paul Chilton, 1984.

Secondary source reading

Cholakian, P and Cholakian., R., *Marguerite. de Navarre, Mother of the Renaissance*, 2006.

Further reading

Lyons, J. and McKinley, M., *The Heptameron and early modern Culture*, 1993.

Original language reading

Janda, Pierre, *Une princesse de la Renaissance, M. d'Angouleme*, 1973.

Suggested paper topics

What interface do you see between *The Mirror of the Sinful Soul* and the *Heptameron*? While some of the tales in the latter are provocative and sensuous, the former text appears to beg for freedom from the temptations of the body, and its sinful life. Do these two texts fit together? Can you think of contemporary (to us) parallels to this kind of double sensibility?

How would you compare the narrative contents of the *Heptameron* with those of the *Canterbury Tales* and the *Decameron* of Boccaccio? Is Marguerite, a lady, far more delicate in sensibility than her two male counterparts? Is she more complex and devious, as a narrator?

Excerpt <http://digital.library.upenn.edu/women/navarre/heptameron/heptameron.htm>

TWO children were born of the marriage of Charles of Orleans, Count of Angoulême, a prince of the blood royal of France, and Louise, the daughter of Philip Duke of Savoy, and Margaret of Bourbon. The elder of the two was Margaret, the principal subject of this memoir, born on the 11th of April, 1492; the younger, born on the 12th of September, 1494, was the prince who succeeded Louis XII. on the throne of France, February, 1515, under the name of Francis I.

Married when she was little more than eleven years old, Louise of Savoy was left a widow before she had completed her eighteenth year, and thenceforth devoted herself with exemplary assiduity to the care of her children, who repaid her solicitude by the warm affection they always felt for their mother and for each other. She was a woman of remarkable beauty and capacity, and her character and conduct were deserving, in many respects, of the eulogies which her daughter never wearied of lavishing upon them; but less partial writers have convicted her of criminal acts, which brought disasters upon her son and her country. In the first year of his reign, Francis I. committed the regency of the kingdom to his mother, and set out on his expedition to Italy. He was absent but a few months; nevertheless, this first regency enabled Louise of Savoy to fill the most important offices with men entirely devoted to her interests, and even to her caprices and to gratify by any and every means the insatiable thirst for money with which she was cursed.

In the beginning of the year 1522, Lautrec, one of the king's favorites, who commanded his forces in Italy, lost in a few days all the advantages which Francis had gained by the victory of Marignano. He returned to Paris with only two attendants, and sought an audience of the king, who refused at first to receive him. Finally, at the intercession of the Constable of Bourbon, Francis allowed Lautrec to appear before him, and after loading him with reproaches, demanded what excuse he could offer for himself. Lautrec calmly replied, "The troops I commanded not having been paid, refused to follow me, and I was left alone."—"What!" said the king, "I sent you four hundred thousand crowns to Genoa, and Semblançay, the superintendent of finance, forwarded you three hundred thousand."—"Sire, I have received nothing." Semblançay being summoned to the presence, "Father," said the king, (who addressed him in that way on account of his great age), "come hither and tell us if you have not, in pursuance of my order, sent M. de Lautrec the sum of three hundred thousand crowns?"—"Sire," replied the superintendent, "I am prepared to prove that I delivered that sum to the duchess your mother, that she might employ it as you say."—"Very well," said the king, and went into his mother's room to question her.

Essay

Michel de Montaigne

Montaigne the man. Michel de Montaigne (1533-1592) was a French essayist, diplomat, psychologist, and perceptive student of human behavior, and in these roles exercised an unparalleled influence over his Renaissance contemporaries, as well as over thinkers and writers to our own day.

The background of this essayist. Michel de Montaigne was born near Bordeaux, of a very rich family. (His great grandfather, a brilliant merchant in herring, had purchased the great estate on which Michel and his father were raised, and with it conspicuous social prominence. In that privileged condition, Montaigne was raised with extraordinary care, and after a design worked out by his father, who remained the most powerful influence in Montaigne's own life. (Father and son both occupied the role of Mayor of Bordeaux.) The pedagogical design, with which Montaigne was raised and to which he referred often in his writings—cf. the renowned essay 'On the Education of Children'—was based both on closeness to the ancient classics, and on practice—learning through doing. The practical side of this pedagogy was in place from early in Montaigne's life, when he was sent to live with a peasant family, so that he would know how the world works and how things are done. As Montaigne developed, his father exposed him, through travel, personal contacts, and techniques of self-examination, to a keen psychological self-awareness. As for the 'higher culture' exposure of Michel, to the classics, to literature and the arts, and to languages, no son has been more specially trained. For education the young man was turned over to a tutor who spoke only German—so that Michel learned perforce, and, in the same vein, all the servants in the Montaigne household spoke only Latin with the young man—with the expected quick learning curve. The young man was waked every morning to the sound of a different instrument—so that he would grow instrumentally sensitive—and was given a rigorous physical training program, to keep body in sync with mind.

The career and work of Montaigne. In 1539, when he was six, Montaigne was sent for formal education to the College de Guyenne, where he began his studies with the foremost Hellenist of his age, George Buchanan. Upon graduation he pursued legal studies, served as a courtier in the court of Charles IX, and entered into a pre-arranged marriage—common among the elite of his culture—in which he had little interest, though enough to father six children, all girls. (Throughout his writing he looks down on marriage as a necessary social invention, nothing more.) In 1568 his active writing career assumed form, opening with the extraordinary complex *Apology for Raymond de Sebonde*, a philosophically subtle work, laying the stamp of skepticism firmly on his work and thought. (His famous query, *que-sais je, what do I know*, is first enunciated in the *Apology*, and will become a leitmotif of his thinking, as it grows. In the vast body of essays which Montaigne will establish, until his death, he will write—often both skeptically and humanely—of a diverse array of matters: the *noble savage* in the new worlds being discovered at the time; the education of small children, marriage and its uses; the power (and weakness) of memory; the infinite variety of human types on the globe (as Montaigne knew it); the elements of problem solving and of diplomatic objectivity. In dealing with all such themes Montaigne brings to bear his uniquely direct, accessible, modest but strong personality.

Reading

Primary source reading

The Complete Essays of Montaigne, trans. Frame, 1989.

Secondary source reading.

Hoffman, G., *Montaigne's Career*, 1998.

Further reading

Original language reading

Hollier, Denis, *A New History of French Literature*, 1995.

Suggested paper topics

Jama, Sophie, *L'histoire juive de Montaigne*, 2001.

Montaigne wishes to write directly about himself, as a distinct but representative human being. That is the foundation of his essay project.

Does he come off as in some sense a 'universal human being?' Or is he a highly distinct, time bound perceiver of the world?

What do you think of Montaigne's pedagogy, based as it is on a strict and extensive use of Latin? Are there merits to that kind of teaching and learning? Is the classical tradition in education solidly founded? Or has it properly yielded to much more pragmatic and psychologically complex views of the way young people learn?

Excerpts http://en.wikiquote.org/wiki/Michel_de_Montaigne

We are, I know not how, double in ourselves, so that what we believe we disbelieve, and cannot rid ourselves of what we condemn.

Without straining or artifice; for it is myself that I portray...I am myself the matter of my book.

As for extraordinary things, all the provision in the world would not suffice.

In my opinion, every rich man is a miser.

How many we know who have fled the sweetness of a tranquil life in their homes, among the friends, to seek the horror of uninhabitable deserts; who have flung themselves into humiliation, degradation, and the contempt of the world, and have enjoyed these and even sought them out.

Things are not bad in themselves, but our cowardice makes them so.

The thing I fear most is fear.

Whatever can be done another day can be done today.

17TH CENTURY

Overview

At the beginning of the century, and in anticipation of the sharp classicism of the 17th century, there was at this time considerable literary scourging of the attitudes of the late Renaissance. The poet Malherbe (1555-1628) violently attacked the mannerisms, affectation, and exaggeration of the later poets of the Baroque period. His emphasis on impersonality, clarity, sobriety and purity and precision of diction virtually killed lyricism, and substituted eloquence in its place.

The destructive criticism of Malherbe, the rationalism of Descartes, the absolutism of the court, the elegance and refinement of the salons, and the stabilizing influence of the Academy—all these combined to clear the way for French classicism, which was triumphant in the last half of the century. Boileau (1636-1711), who succeeded Malherbe as literary dictator, continued the work of purifying diction, and propounded the literary dogma of French classicism: Truth alone is beautiful. The poet should imitate nature, which is true. Reason should dominate the poet's work. Poetical expression should conform to good taste. Imitation of the ancients should be cultivated. Originality is not novelty of idea but the perfect expression of an idea. These ideas of Boileau were immensely influential, and he summed them up in a brilliant *Art Poétique*, which was of immense importance in both England and France.

During the last decades of the seventeenth century literary discussion revolved around the Querelle des Anciens et des Modernes (1687-1715), the Quarrel between the Ancients and the Moderns, over whether the ancient authors were superior to the modern ones. At stake was one's view of whether the arts were progressive, and, in a wider sense, of whether human cultural life is progressive.

Discussion questions

To what factors would you point, in trying to explain the explosion of great drama in mid-seventeenth century France? Do you think the social milieu created by the grand monarch, Louis XIV, was an important factor?

What conception of the tragic does Racine extract from ancient Greek drama? Does Racine view the human as a helpless victim of 'divine plans'?

In what way is middle class society the essential target of Moliere's comedy? What is it that he 'pokes fun' at most?

Does *La Princesse de Cleves* qualify as a novel, or is it more nearly an historical memoir? Do you see novels, or the novel tendency, in French literature before the work of Mme. de Lafayette?

How does Corneille implicitly evaluate the culture of his own time, in his works which regularly draw on older and more honor-bound traditional cultures?

Drama

Corneille, Pierre

Pierre Corneille, man and works. Pierre de Corneille (1606-1684) was born and grew up in Rouen. His father was a distinguished lawyer (and his younger brother a well known playwright, like Corneille himself.) He received a thorough Jesuit education at the College de Bourbon, and at eighteen began to study for a career in the law, following his father. This plan failing, and Corneille losing interest in law, his father got him two successive posts with the Rouen Department of Forests and Rivers but by that time Corneille had convinced himself that the stage was his destiny. (Already in 1629 he had drawn attention to his first play; he offered it to a troupe of traveling actors, who carried it all the way to a small audience in Paris.) In 1634 he produced his first so-called tragic-comic drama, *Médée*, and in the next year his tragedy, *Le Cid*, brought him fame and attention after the successes of a single night's performance.

Corneille and Le Cid. *Le Cid* was a fruit of Corneille's long time preoccupation with Spanish drama and chiefly with the stage of Calderon (1600-1681). This play deals like its predecessors with those questions of honor, fate, and destiny which belong to the Spanish tradition. For several reasons, among which was the tribute to the Spanish tradition—the Spaniards being the greatest foreign rivals of France at the time—*Le Cid* aroused huge controversy, and though the newly formed Académie Française objected strongly to many violations of the Aristotelian unities, and to the play's 'primitive' addictions to dueling and honor, the play won enormous approval from the French public, and Corneille was from then on the principal father of French classical drama. In retrospect it is easy to see why *Le Cid* scored so strongly with the French public. The play intertwines several passions: lust, honor, glory on the battlefield, and although the tale ends as what was at the time called a "romantic comedy," it had spilled much blood and evoked much heroism before it concluded. In literary historical terms, this play will remind you of the world setting of the twelfth century *Song of Roland*, where honor and chivalry join. The element of Romance—Rodrigue and Chimene are "destined for one another"—marks the modernity of this quasi mediaeval tale. In *Cinna* (1643), a few years later, we expect bloodshed to come out of the hero's hostility to the Emperor Augustus. But what happens? To our surprise, and pleasure, the Emperor's benign and guileless attitude wins over his enemies. The "sentimentality" of the modern stage remodels the starker world presentations of older literature. Corneille went on from dramas like these to a prolific dramatic career, comedies as well as tragedies, and it is generally felt that the four tragedies he created between 1636 and 1643—*Le Cid*, *Horace*, *Cinna*, *Polyeucte*—were not only his finest work but one of the triumphs of the French tragic drama, which was establishing the 17th century as one of the world's most fertile, in skilled and wise portrayals of human fate.

The themes of Corneille's work. The general themes of these works turn repeatedly around issues of honor and the dignity with which the tragic hero, representing a summit of human virtue, can survive the most dreadful events with his tragic endurance. Many of Corneille's finest plays were based on ancient Roman history, though not from a desire to be historically accurate, rather, to use the Roman event as background for staging eternally valid truths about human nature and its destiny. It is worth noting that for Corneille it was essential at least broadly to follow the dramatic rules of the three unities, which were at that time enshrined in the value system of the French Academy. The unities of place, time, and action, as Aristotle was interpreted to have meant them, in his *Poetics*, held firm sway over French dramatic creation throughout the 17th century.

Reading

Primary source reading

The Cid, *Cinna*, tr. Cairncross, 1976.

Secondary source reading

Moriarty, M. *Fallen Nature, Fallen Selves*, 2003.

Further reading

Benichou, Paul, *Morale du grand siècle*, 1949.

Original language reading

Bonnet, Jean-Claude, *Essai sur le culte des grands hommes*, 1998.

Suggested paper topics

In what ways did Corneille rethink and rework the Spanish tradition of heroic drama, from which he took much inspiration? Did he deepen that drama, by converting it from histrionics to fundamental human issues? Or don't you find Corneille's drama that 'human'?

How do you evaluate the role of the 'three unities' both as it plays out in Corneille's work, and in its overall contribution to theatricality? Do those 'unities' add to the value of a work like *Le Cid*? How do they strengthen the work?

Excerpt <http://www.gutenberg.org/files/14954/14954-h/14954-h.htm#>

Chimène. Elvira, have you given me a really true report? Do you conceal nothing that my father has said?

Elvira. All my feelings within me are still delighted with it. He esteems Rodrigo as much as you love him; and if I do not misread his mind, he will command you to respond to his passion.

Chimène. Tell me then, I beseech you, a second time, what makes you believe that he approves of my choice; tell me anew what hope I ought to entertain from it. A discourse so charming cannot be too often heard; you cannot too forcibly promise to the fervor of our love the sweet liberty of manifesting itself to the light of day. What answer has he given regarding the secret suit which Don Sancho and Don Rodrigo are paying to you? Have you not too clearly shown the disparity between the two lovers which inclines me to the one side?

Elvira. No; I have depicted your heart as filled with an indifference which elates not either of them nor destroys hope, and, without regarding them with too stern or too gentle an aspect, awaits the commands of a father to choose a spouse. This respect has delighted him—his lips and his countenance gave me at once a worthy testimony of it; and, since I must again tell you the tale, this is what he hastened to say to me of them and of you: 'She is in the right. Both are worthy of her; both are sprung from a noble, valiant, and faithful lineage; young but yet who show by their mien the brilliant valor of their brave ancestors. Don Rodrigo, above all, has no feature in his face which is not the noble representative of a man of courage and descends from a house so prolific in warriors, that they enter into life in the midst of laurels.'

Racine, Jean

Racine the man and the early work. Jean Racine (1639-1699) Racine was born in Aisnes, in the province of Picardy, in the north of France. Orphaned at the age of four, by the death of both his parents, his grandmother moved, with him, to the Convent of Port-Royal, the stronghold of Jansenist faith and culture. (The Jansenists constituted an influential and highly controversial group within the Catholic Church, insisting on predestination, original sin, and man's incapacity to form his own destiny. Racine remained under the influence of this perspective all his life.) Brought up, like Molière, in the center of Paris--which is where the Port Royal convent was located-- Racine however was of high middle class background, and at an early age, in the schools of Port Royal, he received the most thorough classical education available, coming especially into a mastery of Greek, which was to be a major source of inspiration throughout his dramatic career. (The Greeks, rather than the Romans, were becoming the inspiration of choice in the French theater of the time.) After an unsuccessful attempt to study theology, which did not interest him, Racine returned from seminary to Paris, and once more embraced the excitement of urban life, making influential and agreeable friendships, with the fable writer La Fontaine, and soon with Molière and Boileau. Racine's first tragedy was published in 1664.

Racine in full career. There followed a period of pain and growth for Racine, as his masters of religious instruction, from whom he had learned so much at seminary, published their strong disapproval of his devotion to the stage, a slur which brought sharp response from Racine, and a firm new decision to commit his life to the theater. Already his first efforts on the Parisian stage were met with strong approval from the critic par excellence, Boileau, the author of the doctrinal masterpiece *L'Art Poétique*, with its brilliantly expressed obeisance to Aristotle. With the superb play *Andromaque* (1667) Racine initiated a series of masterpieces—*Britannicus*, *Iphigénie*, *Phèdre*—which would establish for French tragedy, as Molière did for comedy, a world wide pre eminence. It comes to us as a shock that at the height of his powers and fame, with *Phèdre* in 1677, Racine virtually abandons the theater, marries a woman who has never read a line of his work, reconciles with his Port Royal masters, and devotes himself henceforth to God, king, and family.

The remaking of the ancient Classics. Montaigne and Rabelais were both steeped in the texts of Ancient Greece and Rome. Racine, creating a century later, reinterprets those same ancient texts for the stage, and in so doing must bring his new vision to a living audience with its own contemporary tastes. Take a small example of the new sensibility Racine introduces. In the play of Euripides, from which Racine's *Phedre* derives, Phedre herself is not on stage when she receives the tragic news of the death of Hippolytus. In Racine's play *Phèdre* remains on stage, to absorb the full brunt of the news. Can you see the sensational vivacity Racine is driving at, which contrasts with the reticence of the Greek playwright?

The nature of Racinian tragedy. Racine is a psychologist, at his best dissecting the intense emotions of passionate, vengeful, and introspective women. His sense of structure is faultless in his finest plays, like *Phèdre*, and mounts to a purifyingly tragic climax, handled with infinite verbal subtlety, in the consummate French classical blend.

Reading

Primary source reading

Racine, *Phedre*, trans. Wilson, 1987.

Secondary source reading

Butler, Philip, *Racine: A Study*, 1974.

Further reading

Moriarty, M., *Early modern French Thought*, 2003.

Original language reading

Forster, Georges, *Jean Racine*, 2006.

Suggested paper topics

It is roughly true that Racine takes his greatest inspiration from the ancient Greeks, while Corneille takes his from the Romans. Evaluate that perception. Do, say, *Britannicus* and *Iphigenie* provide good examples of the point? What kind of inspiration does the Greek matrix provide?

Does Racine, at his best, provide the kind of shock and awe that the greatest of Greek dramas, like *Oedipus the King*, provide? Or does the modern, courtly setting, of Racine limit its fundamental power?

Excerpt <http://archive.org/stream/phaedra01977gut/phrdr10.txt>

HIPPOLYTUS My mind is settled, dear Theramenes, And I can stay no more in lovely Troezen. In doubt that racks my soul with mortal anguish, I grow ashamed of such long idleness. Six months and more my father has been gone, And what may have befallen one so dear I know not, nor what corner of the earth Hides him. THERAMENES And where, prince, will you look for him? Already, to content your just alarm, Have I not cross'd the seas on either side of Corinth, ask'd if aught were known of Theseus where Acheron is lost among the Shades, visited Elis, doubled Toenarus, and sail'd into the sea that saw the fall Of Icarus? Inspired with what new hope, under what favour'd skies think you to trace His footsteps? Who knows if the King, your father, wishes the secret of his absence known? Perchance, while we are trembling for his life, The hero calmly plots some fresh intrigue, And only waits till the deluded fair-- HIPPOLYTUS Cease, dear Theramenes, respect the name Of Theseus. Youthful errors have been left behind, and no unworthy obstacle Detains him. Phaedra long has fix'd a heart Inconstant once, nor need she fear a rival. In seeking him I shall but do my duty, And leave a place I dare no longer see. THERAMENES Indeed! When, prince, did you begin to dread these peaceful haunts, so dear to happy childhood, Where I have seen you oft prefer to stay, rather than meet the tumult and the pomp of Athens and the court? What danger shun you, Or shall I say what grief? HIPPOLYTUS That happy time is gone, and all is changed, since to these shores The gods sent Phaedra. THERAMENES I perceive the cause of your distress. It is the queen whose sight offends you. With a step-dame's spite she schemed your exile soon as she set eyes on you. But if her hatred is not wholly vanish'd, It has at least taken a milder aspect. Besides, what danger can a dying woman, one too who longs for death, bring on your head? Can Phaedra, sick'ning of a dire disease of which she will not speak, weary of life And of herself, form any plots against you? HIPPOLYTUS It is not her vain enmity I fear, Another foe alarms Hippolytus. I fly, it must be own'd, from young Aricia, The sole survivor of an impious race...

Molière

Molière the man; the early career. Jean Baptiste Poquelin Molière (1622-1673) was raised in the heart of Paris, son of an upholsterer, who became valet de chambre to King Louis XIV. He was educated by the Jesuits, in whose College he became active in Latin learning and in acting of Roman comedy. The following years found Molière gradually making his way into the world of street theaters—he spent thirteen years on the road as an itinerant actor—and getting a sense of the whole dramatic territory. His confidence at last well established, after the favorable reception of certain of his youthful efforts, he returned to Paris in 1658, and had the perfect luck to catch the favorable attention of King Louis XIV. (Acquiring a stage and theater in which to perform was of top importance, and Molière skillfully ingratiated himself with royalty, never touching that target in his wide ranging career as a dramatic satirist. Even so, he spent considerable time in deep poverty, and had at one point to be rescued from debtor's prison by his father.) In 1668 he returned to Paris from a barnstorming tour of the provinces—with a number of high successes to his credit—*Le Medecin malgre lui* (*The Doctor in spite of himself*) 1666; *Tartuffe* 1664; *The Misanthrope* 1666-- and the final fifteen years of his life were spent in a high creative mode. He created nineteen plays during this period, many of them among the highest achievements of French literature.

The nature of Molière's plays. In the highest, and most universal of his comedies, Molière comes close to portraying universal types, characters who act out, indeed almost become, traits of what is 'always and everywhere valid.' *The Doctor in spite of Himself*, *The Would be Middle Class Gentleman*, *The Miser*, *The Misanthrope*; all these characters are known to all at all times. Underneath this level of broad humanity, in many of Molière's satirical dramas, lies a level of farce and slapstick, which was always part of the French dramatic tradition, from the times of the rough and tumble streets dramas of mediaeval times. Molière himself was used to the street performance, and the local country farce.

Middle Class Society and its Foibles. Racine and Corneille are tragic or tragic-comic dramatists, but Molière introduces us to a new register in French literature, irony or satire. (Rabelais seems to write a mixture of caricature and fantasy.) For that, French literature needed an analytic genius as playwright; in return French culture served up, to Molière, a new phenomenon, the middle class. This class was starting to make prominent appearance throughout Europe, by the mid-17th century. Once again, many factors—economic, political, military-- contributed to that social phenomenon, which was sure to generate all those foibles that assert themselves when what we might call "family values" are called to perform like the chivalric values of old. Molière had an ample field for satire in the pretentious or self-deluded individuals who surrounded him in the court and streets of Paris. It was only when Molière attacked the clergy, physicians, courtiers, bores and *precieuses* that the critics closed in savagely on Molière. At such times only the protection and patronage of the king saved him. It comes as a supreme irony that Molière met his death while playing the lead role in *Le Malade Imaginaire* (*The Imaginary Invalid*); while playing that character he was seized by a hemorrhage and died a few hours later.

Reading

Primary source reading

Tartuffe, tr, Richard Wilbur, 1992.

Secondary source reading

Scott, V., *Molière, a Theatrical Life*, 2000.

Further reading

Riggs, L., *Molière and Modernity*, 2005.

Original language reading

Simon, Alfred, *Molière, une vie*, 1988.

Suggested paper topics

Is the growth of Middle Class society essential for the development of comedy like Moliere's? What is it about Middle Class society that generates the character types Moliere needs for his process of ridiculing? Is American society today oriented around the Middle Class? Is it comic?

Is it a healthy sign, when a society, through its drama or fiction or tv, is able to make fun of itself? Is it a sign of self-confidence? Are we in the West able to make fun of ourselves? Do we enjoy the portrayal of stock types of 'losers,' such as the character types Moliere pillories?

Excerpt <http://moliere-in-english.com/doctorinspiteof.html>

GERONTE That's my baby's wetnurse.

SGANARELLE (*Aside*)

A juicy bit of crumpet, I must say ...

(*Aloud.*) Ah, nurse, my doctorship is but the clay

To which your nurseship gives a shape and form.

Ah, would I were the tot, all snug and warm,

(*Putting his hand on her breast.*)

Who tastes here at the font of your good graces.

At such abundance, my small art abases.

Would that my skills might by you yet be known ...

LUCAS

Your pardon, sir, please leave my wife alone.

SGANARELLE

What! Is this girl your wife?

SGANARELLE (*Going as if to embrace LUCAS, he embraces JACQUELINE instead.*)

Oh such a wondrous joy that is to me!

I celebrate your mutual affection.

LUCAS (*Drawing SGANARELLE away.*)

That's fine, sir, please, not quite such strong inflection.

SGANARELLE

I do delight to see you so well matched,

I do commend you two, so well attached.

I thrill for her, and risking some redundancy,

Salute you, finding wife of such abundance.

(*Makes, again, as if to embrace LUCAS, but passes under his arm to throw himself on JACQUELINE.*)

LUCAS (*Pulling him off again.*)

Good Lord, sir! Not so many compliments!

I beg you --

SGANARELLE

You'd not place impediments

To celebration of how your rare hearts

Should join in blessed union of fair parts.

LUCAS

Ay, celebrate unto your hearts content,

With me, but not my wife to such extent.

SGANARELLE

I share the joy of both; know, if I clasp

You in such honor, that I also grasp

(*Repeating business.*) Your lovely wife for such respectful aim,

To fully know the breadth of --

Fiction

Lafayette, Mme. de

Mme. de Lafayette the person. Mme. de Lafayette (1634-1693) was the daughter of a doctor working in the service of King Louis XIV, and was thus a member of the minor nobility, a fact of great importance for the kind of exposure she was later to have to affairs of high society, literary salons, and court. At sixteen, the future Mme. de Lafayette was appointed Maid of Honor to Queen Anne of Austria, and in that capacity qualified for an exceptional education, especially in Latin and Italian. Not only was she gaining formal education, but was gradually being drawn inward up toward the social and cultural life of the court. A number of favoring personal relations enhanced her position in the milieu of upper class social life. Her mother was in close relation with a distinguished man around court, Renaud de Sévigné, whom she married at the death of her own husband, in 1649. This was an important development for the daughter, both because her step father was to remain one of her closest friends, and because Monsieur de Sévigné was the uncle of the Mme de Sévigné who was the doyenne of the most flourishing literary salon in Paris. The period was one where literary opinion and taste setting trends were largely generated by the power of literary salons, typically under the direction of women of class and fashion. Mme. de Sévigné and Mme. de Lafayette was soon to form a literary salon of their own, at which Mme. de Lafayette met and exchanged ideas with luminaries of the period, like Artaud, Henrietta of England, and the incomparably prolific and influential Mlle de Scudery, whose approval was decisive for success on the salon scene. Contacts of the highest level were important to bringing Mme. de Lafayette to wide public attention, but her own work was at the same time growing in maturity. From her novel, *La Princesse de Montpensier* ((1662) to her summit achievement, *La Princesse de Cleves*, Mme. de Lafayette shows a brilliant upward curve.

La Princesse de Cleves. *La Princesse de Cleves* (1678) was Mme. de Lafayette's masterpiece, and an overnight success in France. It is often considered the first novel by a woman, and however one feels about that, no doubt exists that the fictional landscape is jumpstarted with this work. The reason for the success of this tale of love in a court setting, temptation and prudence at war, and ultimate abnegation, surely has to do with the way it replicates both history and the author's own life. The short novel is set in the court of Henry II of France, about a century before Mme. de Lafayette's time, and is in all essentials—except the character of the heroine, La Princesse de Cleves—true to the facts. A young provincial lady is taken to Paris in search of a good match, finds the market shrunken, settles for a decent man twenty years her elder, then meets a dashing nobleman to whom love immediately draws her. She comes to suspect the honorable nature of that gentleman, but is then reassured and deepened in love, while all the time her husband's suspicions have been growing, until eventually La Princesse confesses her weakness, and leaves her husband heading for an early grave, while remorse leads the Princesse, now at last free, to retire to a convent, and to reflect on her life. The tale, which bears a subtle but continual relation to Mme. de Lafayette's own life, is told with a chastity of narrative and rhetoric which takes the breath away; only the dramatist Racine rivals Mme. de Lafayette, in the ability to compress, understate, and select with awesome relevance.

Reading

Primary source reading

Mme. de Lafayette, *The Princess of Cleves*, tr. Mitford, 2008.

Secondary source reading

Beasley, Faith, *Women's Fiction and Memoirs in 17th century France*, 1990.

Further reading

Showalter, English, *The Evolution of the French Novel, 1641-1782*, 1972.

Original language reading

Coulet, Henri, *Du roman jusqu'à la révolution*, 2 vols., 1967-68.

Suggested paper topics

Does *La Princesse de Cleves* seem clearly modeled on the court life and experience of Mme. de Lafayette? How has the author tweaked her own life, in order to create this fiction? What is the mystery that transforms life into art?

Does Mme. de Lafayette adopt an attitude, finally, toward the desires of the flesh? Is she a penitent and confessional personality type, or a cool observer? How does her imagination work, in comparison to that of Marguerite de Navarre in the *Heptameron*?

Excerpt

<http://www.gutenberg.org/files/467/467.txt>

Grandeur and gallantry never appeared with more lustre in France, than in the last years of Henry the Second's reign. This Prince was amorous and handsome, and though his passion for Diana of Poitiers Duchess of Valentinois, was of above twenty years standing, it was not the less violent, nor did he give less distinguishing proofs of it. As he was happily turned to excel in bodily exercises, he took a particular delight in them, such as hunting, tennis, running at the ring, and the like diversions. Madam de Valentinois gave spirit to all entertainments of this sort, and appeared at them with grace and beauty equal to that of her grand-daughter, Madam de la Marke, who was then unmarried; the Queen's presence seemed to authorise hers. The Queen was handsome, though not young; she loved grandeur, magnificence and pleasure; she was married to the King while he was Duke of Orleans, during the life of his elder brother the Dauphin, a prince whose great qualities promised in him a worthy successor of his father Francis the First. The Queen's ambitious temper made her taste the sweets of reigning, and she seemed to bear with perfect ease the King's passion for the Duchess of Valentinois, nor did she express the least jealousy of it; but she was so skilful a dissembler, that it was hard to judge of her real sentiments, and policy obliged her to keep the duchess about her person, that she might draw the King to her at the same time. This Prince took great delight in the conversation of women, even of such as he had no passion for; for he was every day at the Queen's court, when she held her assembly, which was a concourse of all that was beautiful and excellent in either sex. Never were finer women or more accomplished men seen in any Court, and Nature seemed to have taken pleasure in lavishing her greatest graces on the greatest persons. The Princess Elizabeth, since Queen of Spain, began now to manifest an uncommon wit, and to display those beauties, which proved afterwards so fatal to her. Mary Stuart, Queen of Scotland, who had just married the Dauphin, and was called the Queen-Dauphin, had all the perfections of mind and body; she had been educated in the Court of France, and had imbibed all the politeness of it; she was by nature so well formed to shine in everything that was polite, that notwithstanding her youth, none surpassed her in the most refined accomplishments. The Queen, her mother-in-law, and the King's sister, were also extreme lovers of music, plays and poetry; for the taste which Francis the First had for the Belles Lettres was not yet extinguished in France; and as his son was addicted to exercises, no kind of pleasure was wanting at Court. But what rendered this Court so splendid, was the presence of so many great Princes, and persons of the highest quality and merit: those I shall name, in their different characters, were the admiration and ornament of their age. The King of Navarre drew to himself the respect of all the world both by the greatness of his birth, and by the dignity that appeared in his person; he was remarkable for his skill and courage in war. The Duke of Guise had also given proofs of extraordinary valour, and had, been so successful, that there was not a general who did not look upon him with envy; to his valour he added a most exquisite genius and understanding, grandeur of mind, and a capacity equally turned for military or civil affairs. His brother, the Cardinal of Loraine, was a man of boundless ambition, and of extraordinary wit and eloquence, and had besides acquired a vast variety of learning, which enabled him to make himself very considerable by defending the Catholic religion, which began to be attacked at that time.

Duc de Larocheffoucauld, man and public figure. Francois VI, duc de la Rochefoucauld, Prince de Marillac (1613-1680), was a nobleman of military expertise, social sophistication, and high literary skill, who has left us, in his *Maxims*, memoirs, and letters, an unsurpassed characterization of the world of the *honnete homme*, the commendably generous and self-aware gentleman, who became the admirable human norm for cultured society in seventeenth century France, and who was the correction from against which Moliere proceeded to portray the multiple distorted figures who are the stock of his brilliant satirical drama. De la Rochefoucauld chiseled in his maxims with sharp edged accuracy, neither sentimental nor judgmental, and set a standard we still look up to.

Public life of de la Rochefoucauld. De la Rochefoucauld was born into the higher nobility, at a time when there was major royal conflict, in France, concerning the attitude of the King toward the nobility; some wanting a rapprochement, others feeling that the Monarchy should remain strictly for the people as a whole, and not for the nobility. It was in the light of this conflict, especially, that de la Rochefoucauld appeared on the national scene as an exemplar of the finest nobleman. He was well educated, highly trained in military tactic and warfare—which was in fact for much of his life a career—an expert at hunting, the etiquette of life at court, and in the arts of public converse, especially in high society. We must think that from this matrix of public exposures and skills, de la Rochefoucauld sharpened his eye for human nature and its limitations.

The Duke as power player. Apart from service in a number of military campaigns—against Spain, with his monarchy in Flanders, and in several internal French conflicts—de la Rochefoucauld found himself drawn into the vortex of French social politics, which in this period involved the jockeying for power of competing Ministers of State, like the Cardinals Richelieu and Mazarin, who deployed their own armies, and competed in openly secular contravention of their churchly roles. Larocheffoucauld's tough and impartial views, of such conflicts, were clearly the breeding ground for his 'honnete homme' perspective onto human nature. His work of greatest importance to us is the *Maximes* (1665)

The Maxims of Larocheffoucauld. The perspective from which Moliere satirizes, and toward which the elite of seventeenth century France strove, is perfectly crystallized in the views of man deployed in the *Maxims* of Larocheffoucauld.

Our virtues are most frequently but vices in disguise.

What we term virtues are often but a mass of various actions and divers interests, which fortune or our own industry manage to arrange; and it is not always from valour or from chastity that men are brave, and women chaste.

Self-love is the greatest of all flatterers.

Reading

Primary source reading

Maxims, de la Rochefoucauld, tr. Tancock, 1959.

Secondary source reading

Moriarty, M. *Early Modern French Thought: The Age of Suspicion*, 2003.

Further reading

Viala, A., *La naissance de l'écrivain sociologue de la littérature à l'âge classique*, 1985.

Original language reading

Bury, Emmanuel, *Literature et politique, l'invention de l'honnête homme, 1580-1750*, 1996.

Suggested paper topics

Is de la Rochefoucauld an original thinker or simply a sharp observer with a sense of literary style? What is involved in social observation which leads to maxims? Is the writing of de la Rochefoucauld reminiscent of that of Moliere, or even Montaigne?

Do you find de la Rochefoucauld cynical, or just 'accurate'? Is the intention of his 'maximes' to inspire us or teach us? Or is it to make us take pleasure in looking down on ourselves? What is the psychology at work in this kind of writing?

Excerpt http://en.wikiquote.org/wiki/Fran%C3%A7ois_de_La_Rochefoucauld

Our virtues are most frequently but vices in disguise.

What we term virtues are often but a mass of various actions and divers interests, which fortune or our own industry manage to arrange; and it is not always from valour or from chastity that men are brave, and women chaste.

Self-love is the greatest of all flatterers.

Passion often renders the most clever man a fool, and even sometimes renders the most foolish man clever.

The passions are the only advocates which always persuade. They are a natural art, the rules of which are infallible; and the simplest man with passion will be more persuasive than the most eloquent without.

In the human heart there is a perpetual generation of passions, such that the ruin of one is almost always the foundation of another

We should not be upset that others hide the truth from us, when we hide it so often from ourselves.

18th century

Unlike the literary productions of the seventeenth century, the literature of the Age of Enlightenment was more concerned with content than with form and technique. Much of it was utilitarian, purposive, and didactic. "It was dominated by a skeptical philosophy, a hatred of any form of tradition or authority, and a desire for political and social reform..." The watchwords of the age were reform, freedom of thought, and tolerance. Seventeenth century authors superseded the ancients as models, but classical forms and genres were still employed, and the rules of Boileau's *Art Poétique* were not questioned. Wit and cosmopolitanism were frequent ingredients, and, after the middle of the century, "sensibility" became popular.

Quite understandably, all eighteenth century French literature is prose. Voltaire, it is true, wrote many types of poetry, and at the end of the century Andre Chénier (1762-1794) wrote interesting lyrical and philosophical poems.

In the field of the essay, Montesquieu (1689-1755) was one of the leaders. His *Persian Letters* (1721) were satires on Parisian culture. Of more importance was his *Spirit of the Laws* (1748), an analysis of various governments which demonstrates that they are the results of moral, economic, and physical conditions, and that human laws are relative. Another distinguished essayist was the Comte de Buffon, who wrote a thirty-six volume *Natural History* (1749-1788). The most famous and influential undertaking of the eighteenth century was the *Encyclopedie* (1750-1777), of which the principal editor was Denis Diderot, and to which most of the leading intellectuals of the time contributed. The *Encyclopédie* attempted to gather and systematize all knowledge about the sciences, arts, and trades. Its contributors, however, used it for attacking tyranny in all its forms, and for championing individual liberty and human reason in all their forms. The work played a large part in the development of ideas which would be influential in the French Revolution.

While stage drama was weak in this period, the French novel reached its maturity at this period. Marivaux began two novels of which the main feature was psychological analysis, the Abbé Prévost (1697-1763) wrote one now famous novel, *Manon Lescaut* (1731), and Bernardin de Saint Pierre (1737-1814) wrote *Paul et Virginie*, a sentimental novel deeply involved with nature, which proved an important precursor of Romanticism.

Discussion questions

Is Beaumarchais basically a political playwright? Does the figure of Figaro represent the little man of his time? The vox populi?

What is Rousseau's view of mankind? What kind of childhood education does he advocate, in *Emile*? Is the child to be left free to develop as it wishes? Or are there boundaries and guidelines in childhood education?

What is Voltaire's view of human nature, as he works it out in *Candide*? Does Voltaire believe that society is destined to provide a satisfying home for mankind? What does it mean to 'cultivate your own garden'?

Does Choderlos de Laclos evaluate, as well as anatomize, the cynical sexual games of the high elite? What is, or would be, his evaluation?

Drama

Beaumarchais, Pierre-Augustin de

Pierre-Augustin de Beaumarchais (1732-1799) was a watchmaker, playwright, inventor, musician, diplomat, fugitive, spy, arms dealer, satirist, revolutionary, who lived the intense years of the American and French revolutions, at century's end, as well as the inscape of high court politics under Louis XIV. Born in Paris, the son of a watchmaker, Beaumarchais enjoyed the blessings of a comfortable middle class childhood. At ten he was sent to 'country school' where he learned some Latin, and incidentally, in the same years, pursued his interest in the craft of watchmaking. (By researching closely into the mountings of pocket watches, he invented an escapement that made those watches both more compact and more accurate. For Mme. de Pompidou, the mistress of King, Louis, Beaumarchais created a brilliant watch mounted on a ring.) As a skilled musician, Beaumarchais used this ability to get himself employed as harp instructor for the daughters of King Louis XIV. Having proven himself witty, vitriolic, and articulate, Beaumarchais, who wrote a number of better forgotten plays, found his way into the creation of the three plays which made his fame, to this day: *Le Barbier de Seville* (1775) *Le Mariage de Figaro* (1784), and *La Mère Coupable* (1792). Nor, though, was this major literary achievement all Beaumarchais undertook at court. For one thing he was deeply involved in financial investments, in partner with a highly placed business person—Beaumarchais saw moments of high poverty and high wealth in these years—for another he served the French government as a spy on England, and as the period of the American Revolution approached he found himself engaged increasingly in somewhat covert, and high level effectual, dealings to support both the American and French Revolutions. His sympathy for the 'common man' was not only a driver for his political stance, but the mainspring of his viewpoint in his greatest dramatic achievements.

The major plays. All three of his major plays revolve around the mischief of Figaro, a man of all trades, educated and quick, who ends up as a Barber. In the first of these plays Figaro acts out the role of a witty partner in a love triangle, but in the second play, *Le Mariage de Figaro*, Figaro takes on the role of a critic of the aristocracy, an embittered victim of a privileged society with no respect for the common man; and he expresses these feelings with an incendiary vigor which, in looking back, we may feel part of the spirit that impelled Beaumarchais toward a revolutionary position at century's end. The final address of Figaro to the monarchy, in the last act of *Le Mariage de Figaro*, brought down the ire of establishment France, and is seen, by many, as among the many clarion calls being sounded throughout late eighteenth century Europe, to remind the powers on high that their time was limited. Figaro speaks:

A tirade of Figaro. 'I throw myself full-force into the theatre. Alas, I might as well have put a stone round my neck! I fudge up a play about the manners of the Seraglio; a Spanish author, I imagined, could attack Mahomet without scruple; but immediately some envoy from goodness-knows-where complains that some of my lines offend the Sublime Porte, Persia, some part or other of the East Indies, the whole of Egypt, the kingdoms of Cyrenaica, Tripoli, Tunis, Algiers and Morocco. Behold my comedy scuppered to please a set of Mohammedan princes—not one of whom I believe can read—who habitually beat a tattoo on our shoulders to the tune of "Down with the Christian dogs!" Unable to break my spirit, they decided to take it out on my body. My cheeks grew hollowed: my time was out. I saw in the distance the approach of the fell sergeant, his quill stuck into his wig.'

Reading

Primary source reading,

The Figaro Trilogy, tr. David Coward, 2008.

Secondary source reading

Lever, M. *Beaumarchais: A Biography*, 2009.

Further reading

Paul, J.R., *Unlikely Allies: How a Merchant, a Playwright, and a Spy saved the American Revolution*, 2011.

Original language reading

Dussert, Gilles, *La machinerie Beaumarchais*, 2012.

Suggested paper topics

What connection do you see between Beaumarchais' political underground activities and the view of life and society he develops in *The Marriage of Figaro*? Is he in some sense a 'political writer'?

What significance do you see in Beaumarchais' technical skill as a watchmaker? How does that skill, in your opinion, play out into his genius as musician, director, playwright? Give some thought to the escapement he invented for improving watch performance. What kind of intelligence was required for a discovery of that sort?

Excerpt http://en.wikiquote.org/wiki/Pierre_Beaumarchais

Ce qui ne vaut pas la peine d'être dit, on le chante.

That which is not worth speaking they sing.

Que les gens d'esprit sont bêtes.

What silly people wits are!

Aujourd'hui, ce qui ne vaut pas la peine d'être dit, on le chante.

Nowadays what isn't worth saying is sung.

Je me presse de rire de tout, de peur d'être obligé d'en pleurer.

I hasten to laugh at everything, for fear of being obliged to weep.

Médiocre et rampant, et l'on arrive à tout.

Be commonplace and creeping, and you attain all things.

Calomniez, calomniez; il en reste toujours quelque chose.

Calumniate, calumniate; there will always be something which sticks.

Il n'est pas nécessaire de tenir les choses pour en raisonner.

It is not necessary to retain facts that we may reason concerning them.

De toutes les choses sérieuses, le mariage étant la plus bouffonne.

Of all serious things, marriage is the most ludicrous.

Boire sans soif et faire l'amour en tout temps, madame, il n'y a que ça qui nous distingue des autres bêtes.

Drinking when not thirsty and making love all the time, madam, is all that distinguishes us from other animals.

Parce que vous êtes un grand seigneur, vous vous croyez un grand génie! ... vous vous êtes donné la peine de naître, et rien de plus. Du reste homme assez ordinaire!

Because you are a great lord, you believe that you are a great genius! You took the trouble to be born, no more. You remain an ordinary enough man!

Sans la liberté de blâmer, il n'est point d'éloge flatteur; et qu'il n'y a que les petits hommes qui redoutent les petits écrits.

If censorship reigns, there cannot be sincere flattery, and only small men are afraid of small writings.

Fiction

Voltaire, Francois-Marie Arouet

The importance of Voltaire. Francois Marie Arouet (Voltaire) (1694-1778) was a French philosopher, playwright, poet, letter writer, and political activist, who left a mark on all genres of writing and thinking in 18th century France. By many he is considered the epitome of the Enlightenment and the forerunner of the French Revolution, whose ideas of liberty and equality he championed throughout his life.

The Early Life of Voltaire. Francois Marie Arouet de Voltaire was born in Paris, the youngest of five children. His father was a lawyer and his mother hailed from a noble family in Poitou. The young Voltaire was educated by the Jesuits, at the renowned lycée of Louis le Grand, where Voltaire learned Latin and Greek. (He was later to add on a good working knowledge of French, English, and Spanish.) While studying and learning Voltaire spent a lot of his time—on the sly—writing poetry, although it was his father’s desire that his should study law. Plans were made to send Voltaire to Caen, for law studies, but the young man rebelled, and was instead posted—by his father’s arrangement—as a Secretary to the French Ambassador in the Netherlands. (There he fell in love with a French Huguenot émigrée, planned elopement with her, and was quickly sent back to his father in Paris.) In subsequent years, Voltaire continued to work and behave as an irritant to settled bourgeois society, which he thought complicit with all the oppressive forces of top downward monarchical economy. Not long after returning from the Netherlands he was found guilty of composing a satirical verse about the Monarch himself; a crime for which Voltaire paid with eleven months in the Bastille. (Where, incidentally, he wrote his first presentable play, *Oedipe*.) On release from prison he proliferated satires and a couple of light comedies; freed from prison a second time he was sent to the Bastille, and, finding himself faced with the prospect of life in prison, proposed exile to England. The proposal being accepted, Voltaire went to England, where he was to spend the next three years of his life, and to make the acquaintance of many of the influential English intelligentsia: Swift, Congreve, Young, Bolingbroke. (His lifelong respect for British social justice and freedom springs from this experience.)

Return from England. In 1734 his *Lettres philosophiques* was published, and with the frank expression of bitter criticism of his own country, he became once again an endangered species, and retreated quietly to a country house in Champagne, where he was to spend the next fifteen years—not quietly but out of sight, and writing most of his best dramas, and the first of his prose tales, *Zadig* (1747). The remainder of Voltaire’s long life was spent largely in Switzerland, close to France but not dangerously so, and saw him in constant literary and cultural activity, corresponding voluminously with many of the literati and intelligentsia of his time, and in every work attempting to speak out for tolerance, freedom, good sense, and justice. Though a conservative in all matters but religion—which he considered pure bigotry—he was relentless in his Enlightenment pursuit of the kind of mature monarchical/democratic society he encountered in England.

The Legacy of Voltaire. Voltaire wrote voluminously, histories (of France in the 18th century), satires (superb satire on Leibnizian optimism in *Candide*), neo classical dramas, a couple of epic poems no longer read, 20,000 letters, and went so far as to carry out and write up a vast number of scientific experiments, especially on the nature of fire. He was, in short, a Renaissance man for the Enlightenment, and as well an activist, a foe of social or legal injustice wherever he found it, and on important legal occasions an effective defender of the innocent and weak.

Reading

Primary source reading

Candide, Voltaire, tr. Ware, 2005.

Secondary source reading

Davidson, Ian, *Voltaire, a Life*, 2010.

Further reading

Cronk, Nicholas, *Cambridge Companion to Voltaire*, 2009.

Original language reading

Lilti, Antoine, *Le monde des salons: sociabilité et mondanité à Paris au xviii siècle*, 2005.

Suggested paper topics

Do you think Voltaire is the perfect embodiment of the Enlightenment? What did Voltaire think of the dictatorial monarchy that ruled France? How do you explain his great admiration for British culture and the British government? Did he admire the pomp and circumstance of that government?

At the end of *Candide*, Voltaire recommends the ideal of cultivating one's own garden, and keeping your nose clean. But was not Voltaire himself a lifetime activist, and a striver for justice whenever it was abused? And what about Voltaire's strenuous love life, epistolary life, and scientific experiments? Did he not belong powerfully to this world?

Excerpt <http://www.gutenberg.org/files/19942/19942-h/19942-h.htm>

Candide, driven from terrestrial paradise, walked a long while without knowing where, weeping, raising his eyes to heaven, turning them often towards the most magnificent of castles which imprisoned the purest of noble young ladies. He lay down to sleep without supper, in the middle of a field between two furrows. The snow fell in large flakes. Next day Candide, all benumbed, dragged himself towards the neighbouring town which was called Waldberghofftrarbkdikdorff, having no money, dying of hunger and fatigue, he stopped sorrowfully at the door of an inn. Two men dressed in blue observed him.

"Comrade," said one, "here is a well-built young fellow, and of proper height."

They went up to Candide and very civilly invited him to dinner.

"Gentlemen," replied Candide, with a most engaging modesty, "you do me great honour, but I have not wherewithal to pay my share."

"Oh, sir," said one of the blues to him, "people of your appearance and of your merit never pay anything: are you not five feet five inches high?"

"Yes, sir, that is my height," answered he, making a low bow.

"Come, sir, seat yourself; not only will we pay your reckoning, but we will never suffer such a man as you to want money; men are only born to assist one another."

"You are right," said Candide; "this is what I was always taught by Mr. Pangloss, and I see plainly that all is for the best."

They begged of him to accept a few crowns. He took them, and wished to give them his note; they refused; they seated themselves at table.

"Love you not deeply?"

"Oh yes," answered he; "I deeply love Miss Cunegonde."

"No," said one of the gentlemen, "we ask you if you do not deeply love the King of the Bulgarians?"

"Not at all," said he; "for I have never seen him."

"What! he is the best of kings, and we must drink his health."

"Oh! very willingly, gentlemen," and he drank.

"That is enough," they tell him. "Now you are the help, the support, the defender, the hero of the Bulgarians. Your fortune is made, and your glory is assured."

Instantly they fettered him, and carried him away to the regiment. There he was made to wheel about to the right, and to the left, to draw his rammer, to return his rammer, to present, to fire, to march, and they gave him thirty blows with a cudgel. The next day he did his exercise a little less badly, and he received but twenty blows. The day following they gave him only ten, and he was regarded by his comrades as a prodigy.

Rousseau, Jean Jacques

Jean Jacques Rousseau. Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712-1778) was a French philosopher, essayist, composer, and political and educational theorist whose ideas were the most influential expression of the Enlightenment world view, and at the same time rich harbingers of the thought of early Romanticism.

Rousseau's Life. Rousseau was born in Geneva, in 1712, and throughout his life, which involved a tremendous amount of wandering, exile, flight, changes of residence, he was proud to consider himself a citizen of the Free Republic of Geneva. of a Genevan watchmaker and descended from a long Huguenot line, with its strong Calvinist morality. His mother was raised by an upper class family in the city, and his father was—as were all the ancestor males in Rousseau's family—a watchmaker. His father was also a romantic and impractical dreamer, who raised Rousseau—whose mother died when he was born. (At night, sometimes all through the night, the young Rousseau and his father would read to each other, sharing in the thrill of fiction and imagination.) In 1722 his father got embroiled in a dispute with a fellow citizen, and had to flee the city; Rousseau himself being sent off to school with a Calvinist minister. A couple of years later the young boy ran away from home, and began a wandering existence, blessed by some guardian angel who directed him from neighbor to friend and finally out into the large world, serving as tutor, handyman, music teacher, until eventually in 1744 he made his way to Paris. He was at that time assailed by a variety of inspirations, which enabled him to see what seemed to him the true character of human existence. He formed acquaintances, with such as Diderot, and gradually embedded himself in the turbulent intellectual milieu of Paris. It was there, and later in Geneva, to which he returned, that he began the writing life that would impose his lasting influence.

The works of Rousseau. The first work to bring widespread attention to Rousseau was his *Discours sur les Sciences et les Arts* (1750); there he developed ideas which, in more elaborated form in his *Le Contrat Social* (1762), were to make him both famous and of exceptional influence on his entire century. These ideas were rich, both n strengthening beliefs fermenting in his time—belief in the natural goodness of man, and in the potential evil of social institutions, which corrupt us—and in original directions, contrary to the mode of his time—such as a deep distrust of the power of reason, which was widely viewed at the time, by the intellectuals, as the supreme gift to man from his creator. (It was in fact Rousseau's belief in the natural goodness of man which, though moving to many, deeply alienated the authorities in Geneva who, with their Calvinist convictions that man is a degraded being, ever after made Geneva an unwelcoming home to Rousseau.) Already in his theory of education, *Emile* (1750), he had promoted a liberal view of the learning process, and stressed the importance of the experience of nature in education. In his epistolary novel, *Julie, or the Nouvelle Heloise* (1761), Rousseau writes a long sentimental love tale the evil behaviors of which he blames on society, and not on the self-enthralled lovers. In his *Confessions* (1765-1770) Rousseau surveys the first fifty three years of his life, largely defends himself against the various charges that had been leveled against him in a long and controversial career, and gives a model of the art of self-analysis, which is surpassed perhaps only by Saint Augustine in his Confessions.

Reading

Primary source reading

Emile, or on Education, tr. Allan Bloom, 1979.

Secondary source reading

Dent, Nicholas, *Rousseau*, 2005.

Further reading

Cranston, Maurice, *The Noble Savage*, 1991.

Original language reading

Kitsikis, Dimitri, *Jean-Jacques Rousseau et les origines francaises du fascisme*, 2006.

Suggested paper topics

What was Rousseau's view of human nature? Did he believe in essential goodness, or was his viewpoint more nuanced than that? What kind of pedagogy for children did Rousseau promote? Does Rousseau remind you of Montaigne, in his general view of human nature?

Of what lasting influence on Rousseau is it, that he was so deeply rooted in Geneva, and in the Calvinist culture that flourished there? What lasting values, for his own thought, did Rousseau inherit from Calvinism?

Excerpt http://en.wikiquote.org/wiki/Jean-Jacques_Rousseau

An honest man nearly always thinks justly.

A country cannot subsist well without liberty, nor liberty without virtue.

Virtue is a state of war, and to live in it means one always has some battle to wage against oneself.

What good is it to possess the whole universe if one were its only survivor?

I have entered on an enterprise which is without precedent, and will have no imitator. I propose to show my fellows a man as nature made him, and this man shall be myself.

I know my heart, and have studied mankind; I am not made like any one I have been acquainted with, perhaps like no one in existence; if not better, I at least claim originality, and whether Nature did wisely in breaking the mould with which she formed me, can only be determined after having read this work.

When the last trumpet shall sound, I will present myself before the sovereign judge with this book in my hand, and loudly proclaim, thus have I acted; these were my thoughts; such was I.

Laclos Choderlos de

Choderlos de Laclos and his fame. Choderlos de Laclos (1741-1803) a French novelist, official, military man and general, and novelist, was best known for his *Les Liaisons Dangereuses* (1782), *Dangerous Liaisons*, which has enjoyed two centuries of censure and ultimately fame, having entered today's ordinary life in cinema, television, and even as a tweet novel.

Life of Choderlos de Laclos. Laclos was born to a bourgeois family in the northern French city of Amiens. He was trained from youth for a military career, and sent for his education to the *Ecole Royale d'Artillerie*. He served in action in the last year of the Seven Years War, and until 1776 was regularly posted to different garrisons. In 1771 he was promoted to captain, and somewhat later saw sporadic battle action during the early stages of the Napoleonic Wars. (He was ultimately, after a promotion to general, able to make the acquaintance of Napoleon, with whose Republican ideas he sympathized, and whom he served.) The reason we know these details is that, during an extensive career in the military, the cynical and experienced Laclos managed to find time for writing, which increasingly took over his interest and attention. Though he began by writing poetry, and even an opéra comique, it was not until he started to work on *Les Liaisons Dangereuses*, ultimately published in 1782, that he found his true artistic voice. He was by no means through with his active military and public career, when this novel was published. In 1786 he was busy, as a military official, with the job of numbering the streets of Paris. In 1788 he left the army, and entered the service of Louis Philippe, duc d'Orleans, then went off, as we have noted, to fight with the Republican armies in the Napoleonic Wars. (He found time, in this latter capacity, to invent the modern artillery shell). It was however the novel, *Les Liaisons*, on which he had been working for years, which was the burning concern of Choderlos de Laclos. At its publication this novel enjoyed overnight success, speaking as it did to the self-awareness of the sophisticated reading public of late eighteenth-century France.

Les Liaisons Dangereuses. was the subject of much moral reprobation during its time, for the text, highlighting as it did the last corrupt years of an ancien régime which was soon to give way to the Napoleonic era, and after that to a new 19th century world in which the intricacies of court corruption were no longer fashionable, was offensive to many. (Highlighting, at the same time, some fascinating strategies of depravity among privileged nobility, for whom the game between the sexes took on the ever interesting charms of humiliation and oppression.) The novel itself involves two separate but intertwined themes in which figures of aristocratic background, the Viscomte de Valmont and the Marquise de Merteuil, who were formerly lovers, conspire to seduce and corrupt two relative innocents at court. (The Marquise assigns Valmont the job of seducing a young lovely destined for marriage with the Marquise's ex lover—out of revenge. Valmost refuses, finding the challenge too easy, and prefers to attempt the seduction of a certain high born lady at court—beautiful because 'inaccessible.' The drama plays on forward from this wily seduction plot, with eventual tragic results, expected to be sure, and in the end less fascinating than the machinations of the super sophisticated aristocrats. The novel continues to fascinate, and begs juxtaposition with the other earliest and most brilliant of French novels, Mme. de Lafayette's *La Princesse de Cleves*, written roughly a century earlier.

Reading

Primary source reading

Dangerous Liaisons, tr. Constantine, 2007.

Secondary source reading

Brooks, Peter, *The Novel of Worldliness*, 1969.

Further reading

Davis, N.Z. *Society and Culture in Early modern France*, 1975.

Original language reading

Bertaud Jean-Paul, *Choderlos de Laclos, l'auteur des Liaisons dangereuses*, 2003.

Suggested paper topics

Does the cynicism of Laclos reflect a basic respect for humanity, for which he feels compassion? Does he in that sense resemble, say, de la Rochefoucauld? Or is he more deeply hostile to the human project?

Do the *Liaisons Dangereuses* seem to you a new departure in the development of the French novel? Does de Laclos seem to have taken the novel form farther than it went in the work of his brilliant predecessor, Mme. de Lafayette, in *La Princesse de Cleves*.

Excerpt http://en.wikiquote.org/wiki/Pierre_Choderlos_de_Laclos

Le succès, qui ne prouve pas toujours le mérite, tient souvent davantage au choix du sujet qu'à son exécution.

Success, which is not always a proof of merit, depends more often on the choice of a subject than on its execution.

On peut citer de mauvais vers, quand ils sont d'un grand poète.

One may quote bad poetry if it is by a great poet.

L'amour est, comme la médecine, seulement l'art d'aider à la nature.

Love, like medicine, is only the art of encouraging nature.

J'ai été étonné du plaisir qu'on éprouve en faisant le bien.

I was astonished at the pleasure to be derived from doing good.

- *Le scélérat a ses vertus, comme l'honnête homme a ses faiblesses.*

The scoundrel has his good qualities, and the good man his weaknesses.

Une occasion manquée se retrouve, tandis qu'on ne revient jamais d'une démarche précipitée.

An opportunity missed once will present itself again, whereas a too hasty action can never be recalled.

On a toujours assez vécu, quand on a eu le temps d'acquiescer l'amour des femmes et l'estime des hommes.

One has lived long enough if one has had time to win the love of women and the esteem of men.

Une main occupée pour la force, l'autre pour l'amour, quel orateur pourrait prétendre à la grâce en pareille situation?

One hand was needed for power, the other for love: where is the orator that could aspire to grace in such a position?

Le luxe absorbe tout: on le blâme, mais il faut l'imiter; et le superflu finit par priver du nécessaire.

Luxury, nowadays, is ruinous. We criticize, but must conform, and superfluities in the end deprive us of necessities.