

HUMANITIES INSTITUTE

FRENCH LITERATURE – 19th Century

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Overview

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19th century

Overview French literature of the nineteenth century can be roughly divided into two sections.

The first half of the century can be called by the term Romantic, for it picks up on tendencies evident in the French literature of the late 18th century, like the *Querelle des anciens des modernes*, which reflected a growing interest in the expression of feelings, and in independence from the past, which had the germs of the Romantic in it. But that is just a literary beginning, to the change in sensibility the Romantic heralds in. The first half of the 19th century in France also explodes with political and social energies, in which were released many of the open feelings and freed thoughts which became part of the Romantic perspective in literature and the other arts, as well as in morals and philosophy. The declaration of Napoleon as consul, in 1799, and Emperor in 1804, was the launching pad first for great French optimism, that a new era of growth and justice was at hand, and then for growing dismay at the abuses and humiliations of Napoleon. After Waterloo, in 1815, a despotic monarch was chosen to lead the nation, then replaced by a revolution, then a second (constitutional) monarchy was called in, headed by Louis Philippe, who was again replaced in 1848, by Louis Napoleon, a nephew of Napoleon I. As a result of these many changes, and the uncertainties accompanying them, creative forces, as well as hindrances, were freed in the society, and took expression in new literary voices which seem to come from a different world from that of Malherbe and Boileau, in the preceding century.

A survey of French literature of the last half of the nineteenth century consists in large measure of a discussion of four *isms*: realism, naturalism, Parnassianism, and Symbolism.

By 1842 the old forms of Romanticism that had been triumphant during the fourth decade of the century were already on their way out, although Hugo and a few others continued to write some Romantic verse for many years thereafter. Realism, of which there had been distinct traces since 1830, now received a powerful boost from several sources: first, the large number of eccentric—and usually indigent—writers and artists who lead a “Bohemian” life in the Latin Quarter of Paris, and who scoffed both at the ugly mediocrity of the bourgeoisie, and at the egoistic pessimism of some of the Romantics; and second, the caricaturists and painters of the Barbizon school (especially Corot and Millet) who reacted against the violence and unreality of the Romantic school of painting; the Barbizon artists turned to French landscapes and simple life for their subjects.

After 1850 two kinds of realism became discernible: first, artistic realism promoted by the proponents of “art for art’s sake,” a school of which Théophile Gautier was a prominent member, and in which we might well want to include Flaubert and the Parnassians; second, the schools of realism or naturalism, which Emile Zola, the founder of naturalism, defined as “the formula of modern science applied to literature.” Naturalism actually went a step beyond the earlier realism in targeting the sordid and unsavory for particular attention.

Discussion questions

Can you see a case for considering Alfred de Musset and Alphonse de Lamartine as the quintessential Romantic poets? If so, what traits do they share? If not, what authors seem to you to epitomize the Romantic spirit in France?

Compare Hugo to Balzac as a novelist of vast panoramic ambitions. Which writer seems to you better able to grasp the whole spirit of a time?

The lyrics of Mallarmé and Rimbaud are profoundly different, the one condensed and pure, the other expansive and visionary. Do you see something in common to the work of these two writers?

De Maupassant’s great literary model was Gustave Flaubert. What did de Maupassant learn from Flaubert? Did he learn style, viewpoint, or philosophy from his master?

How do you explain the extraordinary political canniness of Benjamin Constant? Is that canniness related to the view of human nature expressed in *Adolphe*?

Poetry

Lamartine, Alphonse de

Alphonse de Lamartine; life and Works. Alphonse de Lamartine (1790-1869) was born in Macon in Burgundy, of an old aristocratic family. After a happy childhood, he went to school at the Jesuit Seminary in Belley. Then he spent four years of leisure and reading at Milly. In 1811, while traveling in Italy, he became infatuated with a young cigarette maker in Naples, whom he later idealized in the book *Graziella*. Returning to France, he served first as a member of the royal guard of Louis XVIII and later as an attaché to the diplomatic corps at Naples. In 1816 he fell in love with Mme. Julie Charles, who died the following year; she inspired many of his poems. The publication of *The Poetic Meditations*, in 1820, assured his fame. In 1829 he was elected a member of the *Académie Française*. After the fall of Charles X, he gave up his diplomatic career and campaigned for a seat in the Assembly. At first unsuccessful, he was eventually elected (1833), and from then until 1848 played an increasingly important role in national politics. He opposed the bourgeois government of Louis Philippe. Directly after the Revolution of 1848 he was the virtual dictator of France—for about three months. Then the fickle and radical mob abandoned him for the glamorous Louis Napoleon, and Lamartine retired permanently from politics. Always extravagant and generous, he now fell into financial difficulties and spent the last years of his life writing continually, principally hackwork for periodicals.

The poetry of Lamartine. The chief literary influences on Lamartine were the Bible, Rousseau, Bernardin de Saint-Pierre, Chateaubriand, Petrarch, Tasso, Milton, Ossian and Young. Whereas Chateaubriand wrote about religion, nature, and himself, Lamartine wrote about religion, nature, and women; and, like Chateaubriand, he often associated two or perhaps all three of the topics in one work. His religious is vaguer and less orthodox than that of Chateaubriand, but it is also deeper and more idealistic, sometimes inclining toward pantheism. Lamartine's imagination is aural rather than visual; his descriptions are usually lacking in color—done principally in blacks and whites and grays. He prefers to describe floating or soaring things—clouds, winds and waves—it being, as a critic observed, his nature to dematerialize everything he touches. Much of his love poetry is idealistic and Platonic, and, like that of Petrarch, tends to identify the physical with the spiritual. It often displays a note of melancholy.

Some individual works. Some of Lamartine's best individual lyrics are 'The Lake,' which combines melancholy, love, and appreciation for nature; the 'Crucifix,' in which he associates his love for Elvire (Julie Charles) with his religious beliefs; and 'Song of Love,' a poem to his wife. *Jocelyn* is a long narrative poem which tells of the pure love of a priest for a young girl, and of his renunciation. The 'Fall of an Angel' is a long (11,000 lines) epic about an angel who, through love for a human woman, becomes human himself. Lamartine also wrote several prose works. *Raphael* (1849) and *Graziella* (1852) are semiautobiographical novels. The first is partially based on his love for Mme. Charles; the other on his affair with the Neapolitan cigarette maker. The *History of the Girondins* (1847) is an inspirational but untrustworthy account of one portion of the French Revolution; the book helped to foment the Revolution of 1848.

Reading

Primary source reading

<http://poemsintranslation.blogspot.com/2010/04/lamartine-lake-from-french.html>

Secondary source reading

Fortescue, William, *Alphonse de Lamartine: A Political Biography*, 1983.

Further reading

Mackay, John, *Inscription and Modernity: From Wordsworth to Mandelstam*, 2010.

Original language reading

Benichou, Paul, *Le Sacre de l'écrivain*, 1985.

Suggested paper topics

Do you see a bond between Lamartine's Romantic poetic creativity, and his political prominence? Was it his belief that the individual should express and promote all his skills and talents? In whatever realm?

Does Lamartine's poetry mark a sharp break from the French lyric of the century that preceded him? Where, in French poetry before Lamartine, would you have to go to find the deep expression of lyric emotion? Would it be Ronsard?

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

If greatness of purpose, smallness of means, and astonishing results are the three criteria of a human genius, who could dare compare any great man in history with Muhammad? The most famous men created arms, laws, and empires only. They founded, if anything at all, no more than material powers which often crumbled away before their eyes. This man moved not only armies, legislations, empires, peoples, dynasties, but millions of men in one-third of the then inhabited world; and more than that, he moved the altars, the gods, the religions, the ideas, the beliefs and the souls. Philosopher, Orator, Apostle, Legislator, Conqueror of Ideas, Restorer of Rational beliefs... The founder of twenty terrestrial empires and of one spiritual empire — that is Muhammad. As regards all standards by which human greatness may be measured, we may well ask, is there any man greater than he?

Sometimes, only one person is missing, and the whole world seems depopulated.

Time, arrest your flight! and you, propitious hours, arrest your course! Let us savor the fleeting delights of our most beautiful days!

I say to this night: "Pass more slowly"; and the dawn will come to dispel the night.

Let us love the passing hour, let us hurry up and enjoy our time.

Love alone was left, as a great image of a dream that was erased.

Limited in his nature, infinite in his desires, man is a fallen god who remembers the heavens.

What is our life but a succession of preludes to that unknown song whose first solemn note is sounded by death?

Musset, Alfred de

Musset, Alfred de; his significance for his time. Alfred de Musset (1810-1857) was a French poet, dramatist, moralist, and arguably one of the first French Romantic poets, who fit many of the stereotypes frequently attached to that breed of creator: susceptibility to intense and idealistic amour, vanity, powerful imagination, and, interestingly enough, an interest and involvement with the public sphere. He is especially remembered for his *Confession d'un Enfant du Siecle* (1836), *Confession of a Child of the Century*.

Musset, Alfred de: life and career. De Musset was born in Paris. His family was upper class but poor, in the sense that de Musset's father was stingy and refused any money for his son. De Musset's mother was a society hostess. Between the two not very nurturing parents, Alfred de Musset carved out a private world, in which as a youngster he created and acted out mini-plays, and told poems and stories to himself. At the age of nine de Musset was sent to the distinguished Lycée Henry IV, where he displayed his brilliance and won the highly competitive Latin Prize. At the age of seventeen he was invited to join the prestigious literary salon of the poet Charles Nodier, but he was surrounded by voices telling him it was time to 'get a job.' In search of a congenial job, Alfred de Musset tried medicine, law, drawing, tutoring English, giving piano lessons. None of these professions caught his commitment, but fortunately he was about to score a public success with a piece of writing that was engaging him, the *Contes d'Espagne et d'Italie* (1829), *Tales of Spain and Italy*. By the age of twenty he was a popular literary figure in Paris and a dandy around town. Soon afterwards he, like Lord Byron in England, began to poke fun at some of the absurdities of the foppish or spaced out Romantics. Nor was Alfred de Musset living off the air all this time, for like many of the supposedly dreamy Romantics he was involved in political social affairs. He was appointed Librarian of the Ministry of the Interior during the July Monarchy, and played a substantive role in the Rhine crisis which developed between France and Germany in 1840. The burning drama of de Musset's life, his two year love affair with the writer Georges Sand, was just in the offing (1833-35), and was to form the substance of much of de Musset's best poetry. The later years of de Musset's life were to open him to welcome honors—in 1853 he was made Minister of Public Instruction, in 1845 he was awarded the Legion d'honneur, and in 1852, on the third try, he was inducted into the *Académie française*.

Alfred de Musset works. All of de Musset's poems are contained in two volumes: *Premières poésies* (1829-1835) and *Poésies nouvelles* (1836-1852). *The Tales of Spain and Italy* are youthful effusions full of Byronic swagger and cynicism. The affair with Georges Sand sobered and matured de Musset, and transformed his swagger into despair. The four "Night poems," perhaps his best efforts, reflect that despair. In "Memory," 1841, de Musset finds consolation in the thought that beautiful memories can live on even after love is dead. With the possible exception of Vigny, he is the most introspective of the French romantic poets, and he is about the only one who gives us genuine and intimate descriptions of the joys and pains of love.

Reading

Primary source reading

The Confession of a child of the Century, Alfred de Musset, tr. David Coward, 2014.

Secondary source reading

Levin, Susan, *The Romantic Art of Confession*, 1998.

Further reading

Alfred de Musset, *Historical Dramas*, tr. Sices, 1987.

Original language reading

Barnell, Rex, *Etude analytique de l'influence de Shakespeare sur le theatre d'Alfred de Musset*, 1988.

Suggested paper topics

What do you think of the public prominence of Alfred de Musset? Does it play a similar role in his life, to that played in the life of Lamartine, who also served in high office while writing passionate poetry?

Look closely into some of de Musset's love poetry. What kind of passions does he express there? Is there 'sensuous material,' as we might expect it today, or is the level of discourse somewhat formulaic and idealistic?

Excerpt http://www.goodreads.com/author/quotes/224009.Alfred_de_Musset

"How glorious it is – and also how painful – to be an exception. "

"You're like a lighthouse shining beside the sea of humanity, motionless: all you can see is your own reflection in the water. You're alone, so you think it's a vast, magnificent panorama. You haven't sounded the depths. You simply believe in the beauty of God's creation. But I have spent all this time in the water, diving deep into the howling ocean of life, deeper than anyone. While you were admiring the surface, I saw the shipwrecks, the drowned bodies, the monsters of the deep"

"Romanticism is the abuse of adjectives."

"Man is a pupil, pain is his teacher."

"Alas, everything that men say to one another is alike; the ideas they exchange are almost always the same, in their conversation. But inside all those isolated machines, what hidden recesses, what secret compartments! It is an entire world that each one carries within him, an unknown world that is born and dies in silence! What solitudes all these human bodies are!"

"Life is a deep sleep of which love is the dream"

"What I need is a woman who is something, anything: either very beautiful or very kind or in the last resort very wicked; very witty or very stupid, but something."

Hugo, Victor

Victor Hugo, the general profile. Victor Hugo (1802-1885) was a French poet, novelist, dramatist, and political activist, who lived through and responded to the tumultuous passages from Empire to Monarchy to Republicanism back to Regency, passages which marked the 19th century in France. He was two years old when Napoleon declared himself Emperor, and only eighteen when Napoleon fell.

Victor Hugo the life. Victor Hugo was born in Besancon to a father who held a high position in the French army, and was a freethinking Republican, and to a mother who was a Catholic Royalist; a blend of ideologies which could have been invigorating but in the end drove the two partners apart. While living with his father, as a youngster, Victor Hugo was taken on a six month trip to Spain, the Alps, and Italy, and kept a vivid memory of that experience, which was one of many travel exposures he was to enjoy in his earlier years. For some time afterwards he stayed with his father in Spain, but after Waterloo Victor returned to Paris. His formal education was neglected by both his parents, but during this time he read a great deal (especially the works of Rousseau and Chateaubriand, who was to be Victor Hugo's lifelong idol) and while in his early teens became devoted to the idea of being a writer. He wrote a tragedy when he was fourteen, and three years later edited a newspaper, the *Literary Conservator*. In 1822, the year in which he married Adele Foucher, he published his first volume of poetry. In the early twenties he was a conservative and royalist, but by 1830 he had become an ardent liberal and democrat. His numerous novels, plays, and volumes of poetry, published between 1822 and 1840, his self-confidence and his vociferous advocacy, of the romantic theories of life and literature, made him the recognized leader of the French romantics during the fourth decade of the century. In 1841 he was elected to membership in the *Académie française*. Between 1843 and 1848 he forsook literature for politics; he soon became one of the leaders of the democratic party. His opposition to Napoleon III and the Second Empire led to his being exiled. He remained abroad from 1852 til 1870—at Brussels, in Jersey, and mainly in Guernsey. His last fifteen years were spent in Paris, where he enjoyed the role of grand old man of French letters.

Victor Hugo the poet and novelist. He believed that the poet sees truth more intuitively and more clearly than other men, and feeling that the poet's mission is to lead those other men to the light. Two of Hugo's greatest poetic gifts are imagination and rhetorical dexterity. He also wrote romantic novels of adventure and social novels, and for both of those achievements he is best known outside of France. (While his *Odes et Ballades*, 1824, are perhaps the most known achievements of his vast poetic oeuvre, his best known prose eminences are *Notre Dame de Paris*, 1831—in English *The Hunchback of Notre Dame*—and *Les Misérables*, 1862, which celebrates and commiserates with the life of the truly poor of Paris.

Evaluation of Hugo's work. As a classic monument of French literature, Hugo has engendered praises of every kind. Perhaps the flip side of the case is more instructive. He was immensely egotistical, believing that the city of Paris should be named for him. His novels are misshapen and extravagant. His poetry is often empty and rhetorical. Yet for all that flip side, the immensity of this man's achievement, and the breadth of his spirit, continue to lead and inspire world wide readers.

Reading

Primary source reading

Les Misérables, tr. Fahnenstock, 2013.

Secondary source reading

Barnett, Marva, *Victor Hugo on Things that Matter: A Reader*, 2009.

Further reading

Halsall, A.W., et. al. *Victor Hugo and the Romantic Drama*, 1998.

Original language reading

Viala, Alain, et al, *Le Theatre en France des origines à nos jours*, 1997.

Suggested paper topics

The musical, *Les Miserables*, has scored a tremendous success in North America, and elsewhere. Check into that musical, if you don't know it, and see what magic of Hugo it captures? Is there in Hugo a powerful sympathy for humanity and its tumultuous history?

Investigate the writing practices of Victor Hugo, who was an immensely prolific writer—like Voltaire before him, and Balzac later—but who at the same time as writing played a vigorous role in the politics of his time and country. How was this achievement possible? What was his secret?

Excerpt http://journals.lww.com/academicmedicine/fulltext/2006/04000/les_miserables___excerpt_.11.aspx

Come in," said the Bishop.

The door opened. A singular and violent group made its appearance on the threshold. Three men were holding a fourth man by the collar. The three men were gendarmes; the other was Jean Valjean.

A brigadier of gendarmes, who seemed to be in command of the group, was standing near the door. He entered and advanced to the Bishop, making a military salute.

"Monseigneur—" he said.

At this word, Jean Valjean, who was dejected and seemed overwhelmed, raised his head with an air of stupefaction.

"Monseigneur," he murmured. "So he is not the curé?"

"Silence!" said the gendarme. "He is Monseigneur the Bishop."

In the meantime, Monseigneur Bienvenu had advanced as quickly as his great age permitted.

"Ah! here you are!" he exclaimed, looking at Jean Valjean. "I am glad to see you. Well, but how is this? I gave you the candlesticks too, which are of silver like the rest, and for which you can certainly get two hundred francs. Why did you not carry them away with your forks and spoons?"

Jean Valjean opened his eyes wide, and stared at the venerable Bishop with an expression which no human tongue can render any account of.

"Monseigneur," said the brigadier of gendarmes, "so what this man said is true, then? We came across him. He was walking like a man who is running away. We stopped him to look into the matter. He had this silver—"

"And he told you," interposed the Bishop with a smile, "that it had been given to him by a kind old fellow of a priest with whom he had passed the night? I see how the matter stands. And you have brought him back here? It is a mistake."

"In that case," replied the brigadier, "we can let him go?"

"Certainly," replied the Bishop.

The gendarmes released Jean Valjean, who recoiled.

"Is it true that I am to be released?" he said, in an almost inarticulate voice, and as if speaking in his sleep.

"Yes, thou art released; dost thou not understand?" said one of the gendarmes.

"My friend," resumed the Bishop, "before you go, here are your candlesticks. Take them."

He stepped to the chimney-piece, took the two silver candlesticks, and brought them to Jean Valjean. The two women looked on without uttering a word, without a gesture, without a look which could disconcert the Bishop.

Jean Valjean was trembling in every limb. He took the two candlesticks mechanically, and with a bewildered air.

"Now," said the Bishop, "go in peace. By the way, when you return, my friend, it is not necessary to pass through the garden. You can always enter and depart through the street door. It is never fastened with anything but a latch, either by day or by night."

Vigny, Alfred de

Vigny, Alfred de: Life and Letters. Alfred de Vigny (1797-1865) was born at Loches, in Touraine—a city to which he never returned. He was of an aristocratic family, which suffered considerable loss of prominence and assets during the Napoleonic Revolution. His father was an aged veteran of the Seven Years War, who died before Alfred's twentieth birthday; his mother was a devout follower of the philosophy of Rousseau, and the primary supervisor of her son's education. After serving about fourteen years in the army, and rising only from the rank of lieutenant to that of captain, de Vigny resigned (1827), married an Englishwoman, enrolled in an aristocratic club which conferred on him membership in the *Maison du Roi (The King's House)*, and decided to devote himself entirely to literature. (Already active as a writer, de Vigny had published two of his finest works before his marriage: *Poemes antiques et modernes*, 1826, and a fine historical novel, *Cinq-Mars*, 1826.) Thereafter he wrote volumes of poems, two plays, some journals, and stories. (Marcel Proust considered de Vigny the best French poet of the nineteenth century.) As life wore on, and his marriage declined in joy—his wife was not well, nor did she wish to adapt to French culture—he fell violently in love with an actress, Marie Dorval, whose infidelity and lack of honor embittered him. In 1845 he was received into the French Academy. Twice he tried to win an election to the National Assembly. In 1848 he retired to his chateau in Angouleme, where, after a protracted and stoical battle with stomach cancer, he died.

The thought of Alfred de Vigny. De Vigny, unlike most of the other French Romantic poets, was a deep and original thinker. He was a pessimist, a solitary, and a stoic. He said that he was born “serious to the point of sadness,” and his disappointments in the army, in love, and in politics did nothing toward improving this mindset. He was a disillusioned idealist who had decided that in a world composed of good and evil the evil had far the upper hand, that all was for the worst in the worst of all possible worlds. He decided that no person or thing is trustworthy or benevolent. The human throng is either stupid or dishonest; women are always more or less unreliable. Nature is more like a tomb than a mothering womb. Even God is ill intentioned, or deaf, dumb, and blind. The poet, the man of genius, is therefore condemned to silence, loneliness, and suffering. De Vigny is, however, anything but a whiner. He believed that it is the obligation of each man to “suffer and die without speaking.” This is a resignation made up of pride plus an awareness of the futility of resisting. There is one ray of hope breaking through the dark sky of his pessimism. There is a true God, the God of the eternal realm of ideas, where noble souls may find impalpable and immortal treasures.

An evaluation of de Vigny's life and work. As a novelist, storyteller, and dramatist, de Vigny is barely remembered; and his poetry has never been widely popular. But he will never be forgotten by the few who refuse to be repelled by his austerity and his pessimism, and who value classical restraint, vivid imagery, original thought, and intellectual honesty.

Reading

Primary source reading

The Servitude and Grandeur of Arms, tr. Roger Gard, 1997.

Secondary source reading

Broome and Chesters, *The appreciation of Modern French Poetry (1850-1950)*, 1976.

Further reading

Duncan, Phillip, ‘Alfred de Vigny's “La Colere de Samson” and Solar Myth,’ *Nineteenth Century French Studies*, XX, 1992, 478-481.

Original language reading

Gouvard, Jean-Michel, ed. *De la langue au style*, 2005.

Suggested paper topics

Alfred de Vigny was a pessimist, but also a Romantic. That is, he believed strongly in human ideals, but found himself in a world where, as he saw it, mankind was a victimized puppet, never able to realize the ideal. Were other Romantic poets in France 'optimists,' in contrast to this view point of de Vigny?

One of de Vigny's finest poems is 'La Mort du Loup,' the 'Death of the Wolf.' Read and master this poem, and evaluate it as an expression of the ancient Roman Stoicism Vigny admired. Do you see the presence of the classical tradition in other poems of de Vigny?

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

L'existence du Soldat est (après la peine de mort) la trace la plus douloureuse de barbarie qui subsiste parmi les hommes.

The soldier's lot is the most melancholy relic of barbarism (next to capital punishment) that lingers on among mankind.

Tout homme a vu le mur qui borne son esprit.

Every man has seen the wall that limits his mind.

L'histoire est un roman dont le peuple est l'auteur.

History is a novel whose author is the people.

On étouffe les clameurs, mais comment se venger du silence?

Clamour can be stifled, but how avenge oneself on silence?

Un désespoir paisible, sans convulsions de colère et sans reproches au ciel est la sagesse même.

A calm despair, without angry convulsions or reproaches directed at heaven, is the essence of wisdom.

Les acteurs sont bien heureux, ils ont une gloire sans responsabilité.

Actors are lucky, they have glory without responsibility.

La presse est une bouche forcée d'être toujours ouverte et de parler toujours. De là vient qu'elle dit mille fois qu'elle n'a rien à dire.

The press is a mouth forced to be forever open and forever talking. Consequently it says a thousand times that it has nothing to say.

Un livre est une bouteille jetée en pleine mer sur laquelle il faut coller cette étiquette: attrape qui peut.

A book is a bottle thrown into the sea on which this label should be attached: Catch as catch can.

Le théâtre n'a jamais été en Angleterre qu'une mode des hautes classes ou une débauche du bas peuple.

In England the theatre has never been anything but a fashion for the upper classes or a debauch for the common people.

Baudelaire, Charles

Charles Baudelaire's achievement. Charles Baudelaire (1821-1868) was a French Romantic poet, critic, and translator (especially of Edgar Allan Poe) who assimilated the spirit of early Romantic poetry—de Vigny, de Musset, Victor Hugo—and who carried it into more innovative directions which would eventually prove formative for the whole of twentieth century poetry.

Baudelaire, life and works. Charles Baudelaire, whom some have called the father of all subsequent modern poetry in France, was born in Paris in 1821. His father, a senior civil servant, was thirty four years older than his mother, and died when Charles was a youngster, leaving the mother to remarry—to the lifelong displeasure of Charles, who adored his mother. Charles was given a conventional education, and eventually sent to the Lycée Louis le Grand, where he proved to be a restless and inconstant student, with a taste for rebellion. While at school he ran after prostitutes—contracting syphilis and gonorrhea-- and ran through a small fortune, coming out on the other side into heavy debt. He was even sent on a trip to Calcutta at this time, 1841; an effort by Charles' stepfather to 'bring him down to earth.' But in fact the sights and scenes of India only served as raw material for the sights and scenes that Baudelaire was to make of them in poetry. (The strains and abuses of this period, added to what was going to be a life filled with laudanum and excess alcohol, contributed to his early death, and to the massive stroke which ultimately left him aphasic for the last year of his life.) A fellow writer to the Parnassians, he was during his early years vigorously engaged with the writing of lyric, and with the formulating of the 'modernist' aesthetic, for which he is deeply remembered today. His greatest poetic work, which goes to the heart of his lifetime of writing, is *Les Fleurs du Mal, The Flowers of Evil* (1857), in which Baudelaire fully develops his basic themes—the essential power of symbols to move the soul, the richness of combined sense impressions as we take them in from nature, and ultimately the boredom, or 'ennui' resident in the human condition, which links to our susceptibility to evil. addictions, and a taste for the darkness of the occult. All of these basic themes echo out in other works: *L'Art romantique* (1868), *Petits Poèmes en prose* (1868) in which Baudelaire creates the new genre of the prose poem, and a brilliant translation of Poe's short stories; and, indirectly, in the writing and engagement of Baudelaire with his own cultural moment, defending the art of the painter Delacroix and the opera creator Wagner, and figuring prominently in the Parisian art scene, most notably in the reviews published in his *Salon* of 1845.

Evaluation of Baudelaire's work. It is hard to overstate the breakthrough of Baudelaire into a new poetic atmosphere. In addition to the 'modernist' traits mentioned above, he excelled at a sense of the meaning of the city, that new expanding, polluting, thrilling sensibility-shaper that was looming over the citizens of Paris as the nineteenth century took shape. It was in this matrix that Baudelaire saw the interesting evil of mankind, the ways in which nature is less interesting than human society, and the complexities of the moral compass. His chaste but sensuous formal verse, and his highly original prose poems, openly totally new vistas into the creation of the aesthetic.

Reading

Primary source reading

Baudelaire, *Selected Writings on Art and Artists*, tr. Charvet, 1981.

Secondary source reading

Wilson, Edmund, *Azel's Castle*, 1962.

Further reading

Hyslop, Lois, *Baudelaire, Man of his Time*, 1980.

Original language reading

Kristeva, Julia, *La révolution du langage poétique*, 1974.

Suggested paper topics

Review what we know of Baudelaire's youth. What kind of a rebel was he? Was the imagination, from the start, the site of his true inner life? Does Baudelaire's taste for evil seem to you imaginative evil or 'real evil'? What drives him to his kind of concern with the 'diabolic'?

What is the meaning of the city, for Baudelaire? Was the city itself, the real living city, a new phenomenon in Western society? How old and big was a city like Paris, when Balzac walked its streets? What parts of Paris were dear and meaningful to Baudelaire, the flaneur?

Excerpt <http://www.press.uchicago.edu/Misc/Chicago/039250.html>

To the Reader

Folly, depravity, greed, mortal sin
Invade our souls and rack our flesh; we feed
Our gentle guilt, gracious regrets, that breed
Like vermin glutting on foul beggars' skin.
Our sins are stubborn; our repentance, faint.
We take a handsome price for our confession,
Happy once more to wallow in transgression,
Thinking vile tears will cleanse us of all taint.
On evil's cushion poised, His Majesty,
Satan Thrice-Great, lulls our charmed soul, until
He turns to vapor what was once our will:
Rich ore, transmuted by his alchemy.
He holds the strings that move us, limb by limb!
We yield, enthralled, to things repugnant, base;
Each day, towards Hell, with slow, unhurried pace,
We sink, uncowed, through shadows, stinking, grim.
Like some lewd rake with his old worn-out whore,
Nibbling her suffering teats, we seize our sly
delight, that, like an orange—withered, dry—
We squeeze and press for juice that is no more.
Our brains teem with a race of Fiends, who frolic
thick as a million gut-worms; with each breath,
Our lungs drink deep, suck down a stream of Death—
Dim-lit—to low-moaned whimpers melancholic.
If poison, fire, blade, rape do not succeed
In sewing on that dull embroidery
Of our pathetic lives their artistry,
It's that our soul, alas, shrinks from the deed.
And yet, among the beasts and creatures all—
Panther, snake, scorpion, jackal, ape, hound, hawk—
Monsters that crawl, and shriek, and grunt, and squawk,
In our vice-filled menagerie's caterwaul,
One worse is there, fit to heap scorn upon—
More ugly, rank! Though noiseless, calm and still,
yet would he turn the earth to scraps and swill,
swallow it whole in one great, gaping yawn:
Ennui! That monster frail!—With eye wherein
A chance tear gleams, he dreams of gibbets, while
Smoking his hookah, with a dainty smile. . .
—You know him, reader,—hypocrite,—my twin!

Mallarmé, Stéphane

Stephane Mallarme and his importance. Stephane Mallarmé (1842-1898) was a French Symbolist poet, deeply influenced by Charles Baudelaire, who carried the abstract and futurist possibilities of lyric poetry to a new level, where they anticipate many currents of thought and art which will dominate French literature in the twentieth century.

Mallarmé, Life and Works. Mallarme was born in Paris, son of a civil servant. He was an excellent student, excelling in languages and writing, and showing from childhood remarkable promise. He got his baccalaureat degree in 1860, and had his first poem published two years later. From that point on we would say that he led a relatively quiet life. In 1883, when he was forty one, he married a German governess, with whom he had one daughter. The career element of Mallarme's life consisted of teaching English—or rather teaching French in England, which he had visited and where he had studied, and English in France, which was his primary bread winning activity. He began his teaching in Tournon, to which he ultimately returned, after spending the bulk of his work life in Paris. It was in Paris that he became known for his remarkable literary salon, which met on Tuesdays—hence acquiring for its members the name 'les Mardistes', those who 'Meet on Tuesday.' That gathering point became an attractive venue for many of the finest writers of the time—Andre Gide, W. B. Yeats, Rainer Maria Rilke, Paul Valéry—and it was in this setting, as well as in his writings, that Mallarme began to impose himself as the leader of the Symbolist Movement.

The Work of Mallarmé. Mallarmé was deeply influenced by the works of the Pre-Raphaelites in England, of Baudelaire, of Verlaine, and of Edgar Allen Poe, some of whose works he (like Baudelaire) translated into French. (The power of sonority, in Poe's mesmerizing poetry, attracted both of these Frenchmen, and led, through them, into 20 th century adventures in verse which could not have been imagined fifty years earlier, among the first generation of Romantics.) But Mallarmé had an elliptical mind which placed him in a category of his own; he deliberately encouraged obscurity in his writing, and he virtually ignored expected patterns of syntax. He wrote that "a poem must be an enigma for the vulgar, chamber music for the initiated." (These same sentiments had been formulated in spades by Baudelaire, for whom, as he said, 'copulation is the poetry of the masses.') Mallarmé's desire to "free poetry from matter and to suggest, by means of sounds and images, our subconscious thoughts and feelings,, accounts for the obscurity of his prose and verse." Almost every one of his poems is built around a single image or metaphor, around which is grouped a cluster of subordinate images which help to develop the central idea. Mallarmé's most important volumes are *The Afternoon of a Faun* (1876), *Verse and Prose* (1893), a collection of some of his earlier pieces, and *Divagations* (1897), a book of prose containing many of his aesthetic theories. In *The Afternoon of a Faun* (to accompany which Debussy composed his tone poem of the same name) a faun gives voice to his amorous longings—"a dream of desire told at length"; and in "The Swan" Mallarmé symbolizes the "cold and sterile poet." We are very far, now, from the softness, passion, and romance of the poetry of the early Romantics like de Musset and Alphonse de Lamartine.

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Reading

Primary source reading

Collected Poems, tr. Weinfield, 1996.

Secondary source reading

Lloyd, R., *Mallarmé: The Poet and his Circle*, 1999.

Further reading

Johnson, Barbara, *A World of Difference*, 1982.

Original language reading

Richard, Jean-Pierre, *L'univers imaginaire de Mallarmé*, 1961.

Suggested paper topics

What seems to drive Mallarmé's poetry toward the absolutely pure? When you review the poetry of Lamartine, Hugo, or de Musset you find much repetition, much rhetoric. Was Mallarmé pressing to free poetry of such verbal baggage?

Does Mallarmé's poetry provide a natural cross over point into music? Listen to Debussy. Can you hear some search for the kind of purity that haunts Mallarmé? Is it more than a metaphor, to speak of the music of poetry?

Excerpt <http://www.qotd.org/search/search.html?aid=6410>

A throw of the dice will never abolish chance.

Dreams have as much influence as actions

Every soul is a melody which needs renewing.

In a museum in London there is an exhibit called "The Value of Man": a long coffinlike box with lots of compartments where they've put starch — phosphorus — flour — bottles of water and alcohol — and big pieces of gelatin. I am a man like that.

In reading, a lonely quiet concert is given to our minds; all our mental faculties will be present in this symphonic exaltation

It is in front of the paper that the artist creates himself.

That virgin, vital, beautiful day: today.

The flesh is sorrowful, alas! And I've read all the books

The poetic act consists in suddenly seeing that an idea splits into a number of motives of equal value and in grouping them; they rhyme.

The work of pure poetry implies the elocutionary disappearance of the poet, who yields the initiative to words.

The world was made in order to result in a beautiful book.

We do not write poems with ideas, but with words.

Yes, I know, we are merely empty forms of matter, but we are indeed sublime in having invented God and our soul. So sublime, my friend, that I want to gaze upon matter, fully conscious that it exists, and yet launching itself madly into Dream, despite its knowledge that Dream has no existence, extolling the Soul and all the divine impressions of that kind which have collected within us from the beginning of time and proclaiming, in the face of the Void which is truth, these glorious lies!

Rimbaud, Arthur

Arthur Rimbaud, life. Arthur Rimbaud (1854-1891) was a precocious French poet, whose visionary work, completed before he was 21, made an indelible mark on the development of later French poetry, and whose personal destiny has haunted the imaginations of subsequent generations of writers worldwide.

Arthur Rimbaud; a portrait of his career. Rimbaud was born in Charleville, in the province of the Ardennes. His father, a military captain cited for bravery in the Conquest of Algeria, was almost never at home—postings, then disinclination, kept him away, until he had no presence at all in the family. Rimbaud's mother dominated the family—there were five children—and won from her precocious Arthur, who already as a pre schooler was writing poems, the sobriquet 'bouche d'ombre,' 'mouth of darkness,' for her sullen and stern ways and her omnipresent control over her children. Nothing stopped Rimbaud's youthful activity as a poet, and, given his generally rebellious style, his Mother's brooding insistence on education was probably beneficial; she oversaw young Arthur's intense memorization of Latin poetry, and gave him youthful freedom only to continue his schooling at the Collège de Charleville. At that school, and with the tutelage of a couple of understanding intellectuals, Arthur became a stunning academic success, top of his class except in math and science. He was, however, not destined to an academic career, nor was this teen ager patient after graduation from Charleville. With the advent of the Franco-Prussian War, in 1870, Rimbaud began a series of attempts to run away and seek his freedom. In the course of these efforts at liberation he took the liberty of writing to the poet Paul Verlaine, who invited Rimbaud to stay with him in Paris in 1871; the two rebels became lovers, traveled together to and lived in England, and eventually—after stormy times, during which the teen age Rimbaud wrote constantly—broke up, but not before Verlaine, drunken and wild, had shot and seriously wounded Rimbaud. In the midst of such scenes Rimbaud truly decided upon escape from all that he had known, and in 1876 enlisted with the Dutch Colonial Army—only to desert not long after, and to make his way exhaustedly back to Paris. By this stage Rimbaud is just over twenty, and has virtually finished his writing career. The remaining years of his life—as a businessman in Harar, Ethiopia, and the first major coffee trader in that country, as well as jack of all trades working his way from port to port along the East African coast—remain outside our scope in this entry, except as living materials of an improbably brilliant poetic career. Rimbaud died of cancer at the age of thirty seven.

Arthur Rimbaud, works. Rimbaud's best known works are *A Season in Hell*, *Une Saison en Enfer*, and the *Illuminations*, 1874. These works of visionary poetry and prose poetry take their springboard in Baudelaire's own addled eye for contemporary society, but move far out toward the kinds of acid-inspired envisionings we may find among the American Beats of the mid-twentieth century. Rimbaud's own formulation of his quest is the last word on the matter:

I say that one must be a seer, make oneself a seer. The poet makes himself a seer by a long, prodigious, and rational disordering of all the senses. Every form of love, of suffering, of madness; he searches himself, he consumes all the poisons in him, and keeps only their quintessences. This is an unspeakable torture during which he needs all his faith and superhuman strength, and during which he becomes the great patient, the great criminal, the great accursed – and the great learned one! – among men. – For he arrives at the unknown!

Reading

Primary source reading

Arthur Rimbaud, *Complete Works*, tr. ed. Wallace Fowlie, Jean Nicolas, 2005.

Secondary source reading

Wilson, Edmund, *Rimbaud: the Double Life of a Rebel*, 2000.

Further reading

Nicholl, Charles, *Somebody Else: Arthur Rimbaud in Africa (1882-91)*, 1999.

Original language reading

Jeancolas, Claude, *Passion Rimbaud: L'Album d'une vie*, 1998.

Suggested paper topics

Rethink the scandalous relation between Rimbaud and Paul Verlaine. Would we not still today, after we have 'seen everything,' be startled by such a public relationship? (Or would we?) What kind of contempt for settled social norms was driving these writers? Did it lie in 'hatred of the bourgeoisie'?

Look into Rimbaud's career as a coffee trader, after he stopped writing at the age of twenty. Was Rimbaud successful as a businessman? What kind of trading operations did he supervise in Harar? Was the poet-visionary still at work in him there?

Excerpt <http://www.poemhunter.com/poem/childhood-70/>

That idol, black eyes and yellow mop, without parents or court,
nobler than Mexican and Flemish fables;
his domain, insolent azure and verdure,
runs over beaches called by the shipless waves,
names ferociously Greek, Slav, Celt.

At the border of the forest-- dream flowers tinkle, flash, and flare,--
the girl with orange lips, knees
crossed in the clear flood that gushes from the fields,
nakedness shaded, traversed, dressed by rainbow, flora, sea.

Ladies who stroll on terraces adjacent to the sea;
baby girls and giantesses,
superb blacks in the verdigris moss,
jewels upright on the rich ground
of groves and little thawed gardens,--
young mothers and big sisters with eyes full of pilgrimages,
sultanas, princesses tyrannical of costume and carriage,
little foreign misses and young ladies gently unhappy.
What boredom, the hour of the 'dear body' and 'dear heart.'

II.

It is she, the little girl, dead behind the rosebushes. --
The young mamma, deceased, comes down the stoop.--
The cousin's carriage creaks on the sand.--
The little brother (he is in India!) there,
before the western sky in the meadow of pinks.

The old men who have been buried upright
in the rampart overgrown with gillyflowers.
Swarms of golden leaves surround the general's house.
They are in the south.--

You follow the red road to reach the empty inn.
The chateau is for sale; the shutters are coming off.
The priest must have taken away the key of the church.
Around the park the keepers' cottages are uninhabited.

The enclosures are so high that nothing
can be seen but the rustling tree tops.
Besides, there is nothing to be seen within.

The meadows go up to the hamlets without anvils or cocks.

The sluice gate is open.

O the Calvaries and the windmills of the desert,
the islands and the haystacks!

Magic flowers droned.

The slopes cradled him.

Beasts of a fabulous elegance moved about.

The clouds gathered over the high sea,
formed of an eternity of hot tears.

Fiction

Stael, Mme. de

Mme. Stael: an appreciation. Anne Marie Germaine Necker,(1766-1817), commonly known as Mme. de Stael, was a distinguished French woman of letters, novelist, salon presider, and lifetime enemy of Napoleon. She left her mark on many aspects of French literature and culture in the 19th century.

Mme. de Stael: life and works. Mme. de Stael was born in Paris, daughter of the prominent French-Swiss banker, Jacques Necker, who was at the time Prime Minister of France under Louis XVI. During her childhood she spent much time in the salon of her mother—a salon frequented by such luminaries as Buffon, Marmontel, and Edward Gibbon, who were charmed by the brilliant youngster. Her mother devoted much attention to Germaine's education, which was consciously modeled on the pedagogy of Jean Jacques Rousseau, blended with a strong dose of Calvinist discipline. In 1792 the Reign of Terror led to the dismissal of Necker as Prime Minister; whereupon the family moved to Switzerland; from which Mme. de Stael returned to Paris in 1797, setting up her own salon. (in 1785 she had been married to a legate of the Swedish Embassy in France, but this relationship appears to have been tepid at best, and Mme. de Stael continued to engage intimately with the most distinguished literary men of the time, in particular Benjamin Constant, the author of *Adolphe*. Mme. de Stael maintained a stout opposition to Napoleon, throughout this time, and in 1803 that opposition led to her second banishment from Paris. For the next ten years she traveled in Germany, Switzerland, Austria and Italy. Especially drawn to German Romanticism, she wrote *De l'Allemagne* (1813), On Germany, which was an eye opener for the French, who had long been unacquainted with developments in their neighboring country across the Rhein. As a result of this widely read publication Mme. de Stael earned herself banishment from all of France—Napoleon had come out badly in the text. In 1815 she was once more allowed to return to Paris, where she spent the last two years of her life entertaining in her salon, and editing her works.

Mme. de Stael's work. Mme. de Stael created both novels and extensive books of literary and cultural criticism. Her sentimental novels, *Delphine* (1802) and *Corinne* (1807) were great hits, not least because they drew attention to the intense actual inner life of the women conventionally treated, in literature, as mothers and window dressing for their husbands. Far more important than these novels are her two critical treatises. On *Literature considered In its relation to Social Institutions* (1800) she suggests that one must not judge a work by an absolute and objective standard, but must take into consideration the social, political, religious, and philosophical environment in which it was written. In *On Germany* (1813) she examines German customs, literature, philosophy, ethics, and religion. She introduces the French reading public to such prominent but in France little known thinkers as Lessing, Herder, Goethe, and Schiller. She urges a closer intellectual relationship between France and Germany. Her enthusiasm popularized German Romanticism in France, and in other countries of Europe and was a most potent force in bringing about the triumph of French Romanticism.

Reading

Primary source reading

Delphine, tr. Goldberger, 1995.

Secondary Source Reading

Fairweather, M., *Mme. de Stael*, 2006.

Further Reading

Herold, J., *Mistress to an Age: A Life of Mme. de Stael*, 2002.

Original language reading

Bredin, Jean-Denis: *Une singuliere famille: Jacques Necker, Suzanne Necker, Germaine de Stael*, 1999.

Suggested paper topics

What caused the remarkable influence of Mme. de Stael's *De l'Allemagne*? To answer this, look into the geopolitics of the time, which created an almost total break between the French and German cultures which met at the Rhine.

Look into Mme. de Stael's fiction. Try *Delphine*, to see how de Stael viewed the inner sentiments of women in her society. Is it easy for you to imagine a culture in which literature of this sort was all the rage? (It was.)

Excerpt http://en.wikiquote.org/wiki/Anne_Louise_Germaine_de_Sta%C3%ABl

. We cease loving ourselves if no one loves us.

Love is the whole history of a woman's life; it is an episode in a man's.

The evil arising from mental improvement can be corrected only by a still further progress in that very improvement. Either morality is affable, or the more enlightened we are, the more attached to it we become.

If we would succeed in works of the imagination, we must offer a mild morality in the midst of rigid manners; but where the manners are corrupt, we must consistently hold up to view an austere morality.

One must, in one's life, make a choice between boredom and suffering.

A man must know how to fly in the face of opinion; a woman to submit to it

It seems to me that life's circumstances, being ephemeral, teach us less about durable truths than the fictions based on those truths; and that the best lessons of delicacy and self-respect are to be found in novels where the feelings are so naturally portrayed that you fancy you are witnessing real life as you read.

In matters of the heart, nothing is true except the improbable.

Superstition attaches to this life, and religion to the next; superstition is allied to fatality, and religion to virtue; it is from the vivacity of earthly desires that we become superstitious, and it is, on the contrary, by the sacrifice of these same desires that we are religious.

Life often seems like a long shipwreck, of which the débris are friendship, fame, and love.

Sand, Georges

Georges Sand and French literature. Georges Sand (1804-1876) was a widely read and discussed French novelist, memoirist, and challenger of social mores. Her flamboyant affairs with literary and artistic figures were widely known, as was a fling with Lesbianism—for all these ‘dubious behaviors’ of the time were heralding a significant new freedom for women.

Georges Sand, the Life. George Sand was born in Paris. Her mother was a commoner, but her father, a grandson of the Marshal General of France, loomed like a beacon of distinction over the family. Georges Sand was raised by her grandmother, primarily at the family estate near Nohant, in the province of Berry. (There she was raised in the spirit of Jean-Jacques Rousseau, a lover of nature, a lover of the natural in the human, and no adulator of social structures.) From 1817-1820 she removed to a convent, where her education continued, and she became for a time fervently religious. In 1820 she returned to Nohant, where her fervor began to decline. Two years later she married Baron Dudevant, a coarse but well meaning squire, whom she left in 1831, and whom she later divorced. (She often voiced her scorn for him—scorning his claim to nobility, and mocking his bourgeois habits.) She went back to Paris, where she indulged in what was to be a wide range of affairs with literary, artistic, and musical figures of the day—including Alfred de Musset, Prosper Mérimée, Frédéric Chopin, Franz Liszt, and in the end (though perhaps as friend and not lover) with Gustave Flaubert, who greatly admired her. (We speak here of full fledged affairs, not one night stands; for example she spent the winter of 1838-9 on Majorca with Frédéric Chopin, and her own children; until internal squabbling broke the pair apart. She had a good dozen serious affairs, all of which, given her prominence as a writer, at the same time, brought sustained attention onto her; as did a probably Lesbian affair with the for a time extremely popular stage actress, Marie Dorval, with whom Georges Sand collaborated.) To all of these prominent ‘scandalous’ situations Georges Sand added the component of fairly permanent social rebellion. She dressed in men’s clothing, smoked in public—quite a daring act at the time—and engaged actively in politics and social movements. (One of her areas of commitment was to the Fourieriste commune system advocated by many free thinkers in the Paris of the time.) In 1860 she retired to Nohant, where she lived and wrote for the remainder of her life.

Georges Sand, the written work. George Sand’s novels, which are rarely read for pleasure today, fall into four more or less distinct categories: novels of love; novels of political and sociological reform; novels of country life; novels of manners. Although these novels are not popular today, and are too ‘local’ for our tastes, Sand was of considerable importance in her day. She did much to spread the doctrines of social justice and the equality of women, and her novels had a great effect on Russian thought in the last part of the nineteenth century. Although her ideas were generally borrowed ideas, she wrote in her own style—clear and fluid—and lived a life which was considered liberated and liberating.

Reading

Primary source reading

My Life, Georges Sand, tr. Hofstadter, 1979.

Secondary source reading

Szulc, Tad, *Chopin in Paris: the Life and Times of the Romantic Composer*, 1995.

Further reading

Travers, Martin, *European Literature from Romanticism to Postmodernism*, 2006.

Original language reading

Maurois, Andre, *Lelia ou la vie de Georges Sand*, 1985.

Suggested paper topics

Georges Sand may strike us today, more for her lifestyle—which was liberated to the max—than for her fiction, but in her time she was widely read. Read a novel like *Indiana* (1832), and see what you think of the new liberated social world, of her time, as presented by a Romantic woman's discourse.

In your mind pair Mme. de Stael, as a bridge builder but liberated woman, with Georges Sand. What do you see in common between the two women, as inner revolutionaries? What drove both of them to write extensive interior fictions? Are they precursors of the liberated woman of our day? Or of a special kind of modern femme fatale?

Excerpt <http://en.proverbia.net/citasautor.asp?autor=16419>

There is only one happiness in life -- to love and to be loved.

Faith is an excitement and an enthusiasm: it is a condition of intellectual magnificence to which we must cling as to a treasure, and not squander on our way through life in the small coin of empty words, or in exact and priggish argument.

I regard as a mortal sin not only the lying of the senses in matters of love, but also the illusion which the senses seek to create where love is only partial. I say, I believe, that one must love with all of one's being, or else live, come what may, a life of complete chastity.

Once my heart was captured, reason was out the door, deliberately and with a sort of frantic joy. I accepted everything, I believed everything, without struggle, without suffering, without regret, without false shame. How can one blush for what one adores?

Work is not man's punishment! It is his reward and his strength, his glory and his pleasure.

If they are ignorant, they are despised, if learned, mocked. In love they are reduced to the status of courtesans. As wives they are treated more as servants than as companions. Men do not love them: they make use of them, they exploit them, and expect, in that way, to make them subject to the law of fidelity.

It is sad, no doubt, to exhaust one's strength and one's days in cleaving the bosom of this jealous earth, which compels us to wring from it the treasures of its fertility, when a bit of the blackest and coarsest bread is, at the end of the day's work, the sole recompense and the sole profit attaching to so arduous a toil.

Constant, Benjamin

Benjamin Constant, his importance for his time. Benjamin Constant (1767-1830) was a distinguished novelist (of one novel) and a committed and influential Liberal in the early Revolutionary sense. He has left a firm mark on many aspects of literary/social thought in France.

Benjamin Constant, the life. Constant was born in Lausanne, Switzerland, of French Huguenots who left France as dissidents as early as the sixteenth century. His father—like his grandfather and uncle—was a high ranking officer in the French Army, and Constant himself was soon to sign up with the Dutch States Army. Prior to that he had been carefully trained and educated by both his grandmothers, and was a zealous student under private tutoring in Brussels (1779), in the Netherlands (1780), and in Erlangen (1783), the Protestant University. Drawing on family connections, he moved from France to Scotland. There he accumulated sizeable gambling debts, which at his departure he promised to return and pay. In 1787 Constant returned to Scotland—traveling by horseback through England—and paid off his debts. (He was all this time writing fervently, but not publishing his work.) In 1792 he moved to the Court of Charles William Ferdinand, and then in 1795 made the acquaintance of Mme. De Stael, with whom he was to live and have a highly public affair, which lasted until 1811. After his separation from Mme. de Stael Constant devoted himself not only to the writing of his novel *Adolphe*, which he started in 1816, but to fervent political activity, becoming a member of the Council of State, and achieving election to the Chamber of Deputies.

Constant's political philosophy. Constant was familiar with much of Europe, and like many Frenchmen of his Revolutionary period, particularly admired the Constitutional Monarchy of England. In developing, and expounding, this opinion, Constant wrote and thought innovatively about the nature of government, which he firmly believed exists only to serve the people. The modern state, he believed, was too extensive and impersonal to – proceed like the ancient classical democracies, on the basis of direct representation, and needed to adopt a new kind of democracy, fitted to mass culture and accepting commerce as its driving force. Constant's exposition of his political ideology drew wide attention, and was consulted and put into practice by a wide variety of new governments. The list, in its breadth, shows the extent of influence of Constant's liberalism: Spain, Portugal, Greece, Belgium, and social developments taking place in Brasil and Mexico.

Constant's fiction. *Adolphe*, 1816, Constant's one major work of fiction, shows with brilliant clarity the kind of Romantic ideology that pervaded European literature from the time of Goethe's *Werther*. The story is simple, but emblematic for the social/emotional world of Romanticism. The narrator is an introverted son of a government minister, who is of melancholy disposition, and has fallen under the influence of a rather cynical older friend. Under the spell of this viewpoint he devises a plan to seduce a beautiful Polish woman, ten years his senior. The seduction is successful, the pair fall in love, and lose all awareness of the world around them. Unfortunately, however, Adolphe's father, and many aiding voices, feel Adolphe is wasting his life. Much is done to break up the pair, and a final blow—a letter discovered by Ellenore, revealing Adolphe's decision to leave her—leads to her death, and his even deeper alienation from the world than he had been drowned in as a young man.

Reading

Primary source reading

Adolphe, trans. Tancock, 1990.

Secondary source reading

Wood, Dennis, *Benjamin Constant: A Biography*, 1993.

Further reading

Biancamaria, F., *Benjamin Constant and the Post-Revolutionary Mind*, 1991.

Original language reading

Todorov, T., *Benjamin Constant: La Passion démocratique*, 1991,

Suggested paper topics

Read and think about *Adolphe*, and then compare its message to the political activism of Constant, which appears based on a profound faith in mankind's democratic possibilities. Do you see any conflict between the novel and the political position?

Give some thought to the remarkable influence of Constant on political ideologies and rulers in post-Revolutionary Europe. Does Constant appear to you to have relevance and meaning for political developments in our own time?

Excerpt http://quotes.liberty-tree.ca/quotes_by/benjamin+constant

First ask yourselves, Gentlemen, what an Englishman, a Frenchman, and a citizen of the United States of America understand today by the word 'liberty'. For each of them it is the right to be subjected only to the laws, and to be neither arrested, detained, put to death nor maltreated in any way by the arbitrary will of one or more individuals. It is the right of everyone to express their opinion, choose a profession and practice it, to dispose of property, and even to abuse it; to come and go without permission, and without having to account for their motives or undertakings. It is everyone's right to associate with other individuals, either to discuss their interests, or to profess the religion which they or their associates prefer, or even simply to occupy their days or hours in a way which is more compatible with their inclinations or whims. Finally, it is everyone's right to exercise some influence on the administration of the government, either by electing all or particular officials, or through representations, petitions, demands to which the authorities are more or less compelled to pay heed. Now compare this liberty with that of the ancients. The latter consisted in exercising collectively, but directly, several parts of the complete sovereignty; in deliberating, in the public square, over war and peace; in forming alliances with foreign governments; in voting laws, in pronouncing judgments; in examining the accounts, the acts, the stewardship of the magistrates; in calling them to appear in front of the assembled people, in accusing, condemning or absolving them. But if this was what the ancients called liberty, they admitted as compatible with this collective freedom the complete subjection of the individual to the authority of the community.

Balzac, Honoré de

Balzac, Honoré de: importance for French literature. Honoré de Balzac (1799-1850) was a French novelist, playwright, and author of a long sequence of short stories and novels, *La Comédie humaine*, *The Human Comedy*, in which he left the world a fascinating and influential portrait of many aspects of French society in the year following 1815 and the fall of Napoleon.

The life of Balzac. Honoré de Balzac was born at Tarn, in the south of France. His family was rather poor, and his father eager to teach Honoré a frugal life style; the results were a pinched youth for the young man, who got used to being laughed at in school, for the limited spending money he had available. The College to which he was sent was the College de Vendôme in his native city, but while there he was indifferent to his studies—except when it came to voracious reading, which he devoured during his prolonged and regular periods of detention. After graduation he was sent to Tours, where he became an apprentice in a law office. (This effort bored Balzac, who found himself exhausted by the experience of the ups and downs of ordinary human existence, but who learned vastly for his future literary work.) After this venture he gave up law, and several other unsuccessful business ventures, for a life in literature, though not without having paid his dues to the educational system. He studied at the Sorbonne, where he had distinguished and stimulating Professors, and by 1845 he was beginning to make a considerable living from his books. He plunged into the writing life with an amazing fervor, than which nothing else could have driven him to the vast achievement of his fictional world. In 1850 he married a wealthy Polish countess, but died of a heart disease a few months after the wedding.

Balzac's work and style. The masterpiece of Balzac's life was the *Comédie Humaine*. It was not until 1830-1834 that he clearly formulated a plan to write a comprehensive and detailed sketch of all French life. Just as Dante's *Divine Comedy* had portrayed the denizens of all the regions of hell, purgatory, and paradise, so *The Human Comedy* would depict every sort of person on earth, or at least in France. He planned to fit all his novels—those already written as well as those to come—into one great cycle. Into this framework he poured ninety five titles, and planned approximately fifty five more, which he did not live to write. The amount he did write, however, was overwhelming—more than four million words, containing over two thousand characters, of whom about five hundred appear in more than one story. Some of the stories are merely short tales; some novelettes; others full length novels. In an effort to reproduce the real, Balzac often begins his fictions with long and tedious expositions. Often he inserts digressions for the purpose of expounding his pet theories or of convincing the reader of the authenticity of his account. Frequently his narration is in the first person. In the novels dealing with social groups he uses complex plots. In the novels of character, however, the plots are simple, and the details of characterization are sometimes accumulated till a caricature results. Often there is one trait which dominates a person, and so drives him to distraction. For example, Father Goriot's paternal devotion almost turns into criminal indulgence; Grandet's love for gold becomes a mania; and Cousin Bette's envy and jealousy are her undoing.

Reading

Primary source reading

Old Man Goriot, tr. McCannon and Robb, 2011.

Secondary source reading

Brook, Peter, *Realist Vision*, 2005.

Further reading

Lehan, Richard, *Realism and Naturalism*, 2005.

Original language reading

Maurois, A., *Prométhée ou la vie de Balzac*, 1965.

Suggested paper topics

You are aware of the huge fictional universe Balzac created around him. Do you suppose this kind of capacious imagination, which has rarely been equaled—in France the only rivals might be Victor Hugo or Emile Zola—blots out the real world, so that the author substitutes fictive values for real, in his work? Would that apply to Balzac?

Does Balzac in his fiction display the kind of large hearted sympathy for the poor, the losers, of his society which we associated with the work of Victor Hugo? Is there a tone in Balzac such as that we hear in Hugo's *Les Miserables*?

Excerpt <http://racheltapley.wordpress.com/2012/11/09/translation-excerpt-from-balzacs-the-unknown-masterpiece/>

Strictly speaking, drawing does not exist! Don't laugh, young man! However strange this idea might seem to you, one day you'll understand the reasons behind it. The line is the way man realizes the effect of light on objects; but there are no lines in nature, where everything is full: it's by modeling that we draw, that is to say, we detach things from the environment where they are, only the distribution of light gives the body its appearance! So I have not fixed the lines, I have spread over the contours a cloud of blond, warm middle tints which makes it so that you cannot put a finger on where exactly the contours meet the background. From close, this work seems cloudy and appears to lack precision, but from two steps back, everything becomes firm, fixed and detached; the body turns, the forms begin to stand out, you feel the air circulate all around. And yet I am still not content, I have doubts.

Zola, Emile

Emile Zola, life and works. Emile Zola (1840-1902), who was to become known as the Father of French Naturalism, and who has left a powerful mark on the French fictional tradition, as well as on liberal politics in France, was born in Paris, son of an Italian engineer. After moving to the south of France, as a youngster, he returned to Paris in 1858, at the age of eighteen. He worked for some time, unsuccessfully, as a sales clerk, then as a journalist. At that point he decided to devote his attention to literature. He began his literary career, as did Balzac, by writing popular horror and mystery stories. (An early autobiography, found sordid by the public, showed what was to be his lifelong talent for probing the dark side of human social nature.) From early on, however, he began conceiving the ideas of an extensive series of fictions in which the novel would become a kind of sociology, recording the growth of industrialization and the new middle class in France. His novel *Thérèse Raquin* (1867) heralded this large systematic vision—one thinks in this connection of Balzac's *La Comédie Humaine*—which was the first step toward the novel of Naturalism, and toward the series, *Les Rougon-Macquart*, of which twenty volumes were eventually to be written. It should be added that the cultural climate into which Zola wrote this work supported the idea of society, and its members, as parts of a vast evolving organism: the ideas of Darwin, of Hippolyte Taine (1828-1893), who formulated the notion of *race*, *moment*, and *milieu* as the determining shapers of society, and even the first texts of 'social science' were creating a new climate of social analysis. As it happened Zola chose to exemplify his vision/theory by a single family and its many members, all of whom were socially limited and even physiologically broken; good examples, therefore, of the broadly scornful view Zola had, of the human animal. Despite the limitations theory imposed on his vision, however, Zola has left us with three wonderfully powerful novels, on the level with the work of Dreiser, in America: *L'Assommoir* (1877), a brutal attack on the damages done by drink; *Germinal* (1885) on the conflict between capital and labor in a miner's strike; and *La Débâcle* (1892) a study of politics and war.

Zola's literary theories and methods. In many senses, Zola is most remembered for his startlingly new conception of the role and nature of the novel. The key term here is Naturalism, a word chosen by Zola himself, to indicate that his method is similar to that used in the natural sciences. This technique is a combination of minute and impersonal observation (derived from Balzac and Stendahl) and the experimental method used in science. This method was suggested to Zola by his reading of Claude Bernard's *Introduction to Experimental Medicine* (1865). Zola explains his theories in *The Experimental Novel* (1880). His own usual procedure is to begin not with a plot or some character, but with a cross section of life he wants to portray. Then he selects some suitable characters and endows each with a few elementary traits. (He regularly visited the real scenes of upcoming fictions—a strike, an industrial plant, a certain urban neighborhood, before starting to write.) The cross section he chose to portray is almost invariably sordid, and the portrait is nearly accompanied by the pessimism characteristic of the realists and naturalists.

Reading

Primary source reading

The Ladies' Paradise, tr. Brian Nelson, 2008.

Secondary source reading

Brown, Frederick, *Zola: A Life*, 1995.

Further reading

Hemmings, F.W.J., *Emile Zola*, 1966.

Original language reading

Mitterand, Henri, *Zola*, 1999.

Suggested paper topics

What do you think of the kind of 'scientific perspective' onto society, with which Zola intends to guide us through his fictions? Is it truly scientific? Does it work artistically?

Does Zola emerge from his hugely ambitious work with a respect, even love, for humanity? Does he find the lovable in the human beings he portrays, or does he bring that love, if that is the right word, to his vision of the human whole?

Excerpt http://www.culinate.com/books/book_excerpts/the_belly_of_paris

Especially was this the case with the peaches, the blushing peaches of Montreuil, with skin as delicate and clear as that of northern maidens, and the yellow, sunburnt peaches from the south, brown like the damsels of Provence. The apricots, on their beds of moss, gleamed with the hue of amber or with that sunset glow which so warmly colors the necks of brunettes at the nape, just under the little wavy curls which fall below the chignon.

The cherries, ranged one by one, resembled the short lips of smiling Chinese girls; the Montmorencies suggested the dumpy mouths of buxom women; the English ones were longer and graver-looking; the common black ones seemed as though they had been bruised and crushed by kisses; while the white-hearts, with their patches of rose and white, appeared to smile with mingled merriment and vexation.

Then piles of apples and pears, built up with architectural symmetry, often in pyramids, displayed the ruddy glow of budding breasts and the gleaming sheen of shoulders, quite a show of nudity, lurking modestly behind a screen of fern leaves. There were all sorts of varieties — little red ones so tiny that they seemed to be yet in the cradle, shapeless Tambours for baking, *calvilles* in light yellow gowns, sanguineous-looking Canadas, blotched *châtaignier* apples, fair, freckled rennets, and dusky russets. Then came the pears — the *blanquettes*, the British queens, the *beurrés*, the *messirejeans*, and the duchesses — some dumpy, some long and tapering, some with slender necks, and others with thick-set shoulders, their green and yellow bellies picked out at times with a splotch of carmine.

By the side of these the transparent plums resembled tender, chlorotic virgins; the greengages and the Orleans plums paled as with modest innocence, while the mirabelles lay like the golden beads of a rosary forgotten in a box among sticks of vanilla. And the strawberries exhaled a sweet perfume — a perfume of youth — especially those little ones which are gathered in the woods, and which are far more aromatic than the large ones grown in gardens, for these breathe an insipid odor suggestive of the watering pot.

Flaubert

Gustave Flaubert: his place in French Literature. Gustave Flaubert (1821-1880) was the most artistic of the great realist novelists of nineteenth century France, and exercised extraordinary influence over such followers as de Maupassant, Edmond de Goncourt, Alphonse Daudet, and Emile Zola. He set benchmark standards for purity of prose expression and care for literary structure.

The Life and Writings of Gustave Flaubert. Flaubert was born in Rouen, in Normandy, and except for a few years of travel, as a young man, he lived either in Rouen or in the nearby town of Croisset, where he died. By the age of eight he was immersed in his writing projects, which he carried with him to the Lycée Pierre Corneille. (He was also busy absorbing the ambience of the medical world, which he picked up from his father, a physician, and would apply generously to some of his best work in fiction.) An attempt by his father to make a lawyer of him (1840-45) was a failure, not least because toward the end of his legal studies he was assailed with an attack of epilepsy, one of a number of ailments that would plague him til his death.) From 1846-54 Flaubert was immersed in an intense, and much talked about, love affair with Louise Colette, and found himself spending considerable time in Paris, which he disliked, though while there he made significant acquaintances, with Victor Hugo, Daudet, Turgenev, and the Goncourt brothers. During the same period he took off time for an extensive trip—with his friend Maxime du Camp—to Greece, Egypt, and Istanbul, sites from which he took profuse mental and correspondence notes on every kind of local color—including, unfortunately prostitutes of both sexes, from whom he acquired the venereal diseases, which in the days before antibiotics persisted for a lifetime. During these years Flaubert was already actively writing, as he had been since childhood, and in 1856 came out with his first significant, and probably greatest novel, *Madame Bovary*, which penetrates the bitter and ultimately tragic life of provincial romance. Two years later Flaubert published a daring novel (*Salammbô*) of ancient Carthage, for which he prepared by a trip to Tunisia, and the site of the ancient Empire which stood up so boldly to Rome. In 1869 Flaubert published a long worked on self-study, in which he investigated both the roots of the Romantic temper, and the way they exfoliated in his own life; it was called *L'Education sentimentale*. His later years were afflicted with the maladies mentioned above—epilepsy, neurasthenia, venereal disease—aggravated, perhaps, by the labor of writing, to which he relentlessly drove himself. He died suddenly of a stroke of apoplexy.

Theories and Methods of his writing. By temperament Flaubert was a Romantic. He loathed everything that was bourgeois and ordinary, and he loved the violent, the unusual, and the colorful. Furthermore, his literary tastes preferred Chateaubriand, Hugo, and Gautier; he thought Balzac second rate, because of his careless style. (Flaubert himself would occasionally spend up to a week in the revision of a single page of prose.) He was a proponent of the theory of the 'mot juste,' the proper word, and claimed that in every instance there was just one word which precisely suited a writer's meaning. Consequently he was probably the most painstaking and self-critical novelist the world has known.

Reading

Primary source reading

Madame Bovary, tr. Davis, L., 2011.

Secondary source reading

Brown, Frederick, *Flaubert: A Biography*, 2006.

Further reading

Barnes, Julian, *Flaubert's Parrot*, 1984.

Original language reading

Hennequin, E., *Quelques écrivains français*, 2004.

Suggested paper topics

Discuss the use Flaubert made of the medical experiences to which he was exposed in his youth, and, by observation, throughout his life. What is the role of the doctor's profession in *Madame Bovary*, and what is Flaubert's attitude toward it?

Flaubert was famous for his meticulous attention to style, and would sometimes spend a week writing and rewriting a page. Can you see the effects of this procedure in a text of his? Go for examples!

Excerpt <http://theinkbrain.wordpress.com/2011/12/31/madame-bovary-gustave-flaubert-an-excerpt/>

She gave up playing the piano. Why practice? Who would ever hear her? Since she would never play for an audience, in a short-sleeved velvet dress, on an Erard piano, skimming over the ivory keys with the lightest of fingers, never feel a murmur of ecstasy rising about her, what was the point of practicing any more? She left her sketch books and tapestry in the cupboard. What was the use? What was the use? Sewing made her nervous. "I've read everything," she said to herself.

So she sat there idly, holding the tongs in the fire until they turned red, or watching the rain fall.

How sad she felt on Sundays, when the church bell sounded for vespers! She stood in a kind of expectant daze, listening as each broken note rang out again, and again. A cat was stalking about the rooftops, arching its back in the last pale rays of sunshine. The wind blew trails of dust along the highroad. In the distance, a dog howled now and then, and the bell kept up its tolling, each monotonous note dying out over the countryside.

Meanwhile, people had begun to walk home from church.

Maupassant, Guy de

Guy de Maupassant: life and works. Guy de Maupassant (1850-1893) was born in the Chateau de Miromesnil, near Dieppe, in the province of Seine-Maritime. His parents were prosperous middle class, and his family life stable and comfortable until the divorce of his parents, his mother having taken the unusual step of legal divorce from her husband. The young man's relation to this mother was close, and sponsored his intense interest in reading. (His mother was an avid reader of Shakespeare.) At the age of thirteen, de Maupassant was sent to a nearby seminary for classical studies, but found the religious atmosphere highly unappetizing. (He was much happier with sports like boating and fishing.) In 1868 de Maupassant entered the Lycée Pierre Corneille in Rouen, then from 1868-1871 he moved to Paris, where he worked as a clerk in the Ministère de la Marine. It was at this time that he made the acquaintance of Turgenev and Zola, and of course worked at his writing, which was beginning to be published but had not yet attracted significant attention. In 1880 his most popular work, *Boule de Suif*, (*Tallow Ball*) was published, and would usher in his most productive period of writing, 1880-1891. In those years he turned out several novels, and at least three hundred short stories. Incessant work, plus dissipation began then to ruin his good health, and after 1885 he became obsessed with a fear of death. His mind became more and more unbalanced, and by 1892 he was insane. He died on the Riviera, in 1893, of general paralysis.

Style and theories. Maupassant formulated no artistic theories, in the fashion of Zola, but he worked according to a firm set of principles. He subscribed to Flaubert's realism, without imitating his master's prolixity, his romantic tendencies, or his contempt for anything bourgeois. De Maupassant is the most purely realistic of French writers, not in the sense that he strives to portray the down side of life, like Zola and the Goncourt brothers, but that he maintains an impersonal and scientific distance from his material. In that spirit he totally concurs with Flaubert, about the importance of the mot juste; and his diction is not only precise but concise, natural, sober, and often caustic. Like the works of most of the realists and naturalists, his stories are pessimistic and morbid, and he is inclined to seek out the immoral—if not those depths of social loss which fascinated Zola. He does not seek the bizarre or the sensational; he prides himself on describing and relating only what he himself has witnessed.

A typical plot. *One Life (Une Vie*, 1883) may give us an impression of an aspect of de Maupassant's work. This novel concerns Jeanne, a sensitive and idealistic Norman girl who whose friends crush her by their betrayal. Her husband, Julien, proves to be a faithless mate, having an affair first with Jeanne's maid, Rosalie, and then with Jeanne's close and trusted friend. Jeanne is further disillusioned by discovering that both her father and mother have had extracurricular affairs; and finally Jeanne's son, Paul, shows his lack of affection for her by leaving home to live with a prostitute, on whom he wastes the family fortunes. The title says it all.

An estimate of de Maupassant. Although his field is narrow, within in de Maupassant has never been surpassed. He has the careful artistry which Balzac lacks, and he has to an eminent degree Balzac's ability to render full characters and live social reality.

Reading

Primary source reading

Bel-Ami, tr. Vassiliev, 2012.

Secondary source reading

Gregorio, Laurence, *Maupassant's Fiction and the Darwinian View of Life*, 2005.

Further reading

Donaldson-Evans, M. *Woman's Revenge: The Chronology of Dispossession in Maupassant's Fiction*, 1986.

Suggested paper topics

De Maupassant is one of the world masters of the short story. Study one of his stories closely, and examine the narrative strategies he employs there. What are his devices and above all what are his viewpoints?

Have you encountered the French short story before the nineteenth century? Is there any sense in which the short story belongs to the modern period? Was there an equivalent to the short story in older, earlier French literature?

Excerpt <http://www.online-literature.com/maupassant/bel-ami/1/>

After changing his five-franc piece Georges Duroy left the restaurant. He twisted his mustache in military style and cast a rapid, sweeping glance upon the diners, among whom were three saleswomen, an untidy music-teacher of uncertain age, and two women with their husbands.

When he reached the sidewalk, he paused to consider what route he should take. It was the twenty-eighth of June and he had only three francs in his pocket to last him the remainder of the month. That meant two dinners and no lunches, or two lunches and no dinners, according to choice. As he pondered upon this unpleasant state of affairs, he sauntered down Rue Notre Dame de Lorette, preserving his military air and carriage, and rudely jostled the people upon the streets in order to clear a path for himself. He appeared to be hostile to the passers-by, and even to the houses, the entire city. Tall, well-built, fair, with blue eyes, a curled mustache, hair naturally wavy and parted in the middle, he recalled the hero of the popular romances.

It was one of those sultry, Parisian evenings when not a breath of air is stirring; the sewers exhaled poisonous gases and the restaurants the disagreeable odors of cooking and of kindred smells. Porters in their shirt-sleeves, astride their chairs, smoked their pipes at the carriage gates, and pedestrians strolled leisurely along, hats in hand.

When Georges Duroy reached the boulevard he halted again, undecided as to which road to choose. Finally he turned toward the Madeleine and followed the tide of people.

The large, well-patronized cafes tempted Duroy, but were he to drink only two glasses of beer in an evening, farewell to the meager supper the following night! Yet he said to himself: "I will take a glass at the Americain. By Jove, I am thirsty."