

HUMANITIES INSTITUTE

# FRENCH FICTION

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## GENERAL OVERVIEW OF FRENCH LITERATURE

French literature has its roots in the late Middle Ages, and is from its origins inflected by the pre modern world view of late antiquity. Epic and lyric both thrive in the growingly sophisticated work of the thirteenth to fifteenth centuries. Without a sense of nationhood, however, even the strong individuals among these writers—Christine de Pisan, Francois Villon—seem almost to be voices creating in a geopolitical vacuum.

By the sixteenth century the French monarchy had consolidated much that was undefined in earlier centuries, and the great Renaissance voices we hear—the Pléiade, Rabelais, Montaigne—come through to us with that individuality Montaigne proclaimed to be the keynote of his entire opus, a massive testimony to the simple nature of being here as a human being. In a poet like Ronsard we begin to hear the tones of love, romance, hope, pathos which mark the multi sided lyricist in its increasingly accessible contemporary form. We *hear* Ronsard.

The seventeenth century, much of it presided over by a rich, powerful, despotic, and stimulating monarchy, imposes on us, to this day, as the *Grand Siècle*, the *Great Century*, of French culture. During this period, as France grows into cultural self-awareness, there is an explosion of powerful, and publically supported theatre: the great tragedies of Racine and Corneille, the comedies of Moliere, which so sharply mock the foibles of the rising Middle Class. Prose writers as diverse as the maximist duc de la Rochefoucauld or the subtle social analyst, Mme. de Lafayette, converge on the traits of a rapidly evolving social and economic culture, in which the elite still retains the sense of *noblesse oblige*, and the person on the street looks up with admiration.

The eighteenth century, an age of 'Enlightenment,' brings the new science, and its new egalitarian mentality, to the front of social awareness. Diderot and his associates, in creating the *Encyclopédie*, bring to general attention the new world views of a modern society raising questions about traditional values, and especially about the traditional religious world views of earlier France. Brilliant thinkers, like Voltaire and Rousseau, plunge into the effort to describe and promote a new world, in which mankind will improve at avoiding traditionalist pitfalls, and at acquiring self-awareness. Needless to say, this is a century of prose, not of poetry.

The nineteenth century, ushered in by the Revolution and the Napoleonic Wars, traverses a roller coaster of political transformations and upheavals, sees the nation move into new cultural complexities of a world gradually becoming international. With the growth of the cities, urban culturoscapes attract the attention of writers fascinated with the texture of the real: Balzac, de Maupassant, or Flaubert, who anatomizes life in the loneliness of the heart in the provinces. Where once, at century's beginning, there was the effusiveness of Romantic poetry, in Lamartine or de Musset, now there is the cold abstract poetry of Valéry or Mallarmé who, at century's end, seek refuge in the cold air of the pure.

The twentieth century, as all Westerners know, is the period when mankind decided to tear things apart and start all over again. Surrealism is one of the byproducts of this World War chaos, and we see it thrive in the poetries and manifestos of Breton and Aragon. Brilliant novelists, like Gide and Sartre, look closely at the character of their evolving society, and at the vise, between joy and despair, which increasingly constricts modern man. Inner life novelists like Marcel Proust and Francois Mauriac go into those places of despair, envy, hope, and frustration which increasingly mark the character of the person in the middle, the little person caught in the juggernaut of our time. One of the finest minds, and stylists, at work on defining the contemporary human condition is Albert Camus, whose small masterpiece, *The Stranger*, has crystallized in itself a sense of the entire perplexity of trying how to relate to the rapidly self-transforming twentieth century.

## MEDIAEVAL

### Overview

Though the deep origins of both the people and the language of France must be traced as far back as the tribe of the Galli, a tribal group living on the borders of the declining Roman Empire, and ultimately destined to build their Gallo-Roman dialect into what we call Old French, the language form in which we find the first authentic texts of French literature, is found in the 11th century.

From the outset, the creative output of this culture devolved about a variety of kinds of expression: religious poetry, *chansons de gestes*, 'songs of heroic deeds,' and epic style romances.

Four short works, chiefly of linguistic interest, were written in the tenth century. In the eleventh century, The importance of the Church and of feudalism are indicated by the three types of literary productions: saints' lives, neo-Latin religious works; and *chansons de geste*, poems concerning the mighty deeds of heroes. Both the large number and the excellence of *chansons de gestes*, poetic romances, and lyrics written during the twelfth century, have led critics to call this the Golden Age of mediaeval French literature. This poetry shows an increase in polish, in sophistication, and in social consciousness over that of preceding centuries.

The thirteenth century is noteworthy for its prose romances, its drama, its satire, its lyrics, and its allegory. Much of the literature of this century reflects the rise of the bourgeoisie. It shows an increasing tendency toward rationalism, realism, and cynicism. The literature of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries shows the disastrous effects of the Hundred Years' War. There was at that time little opportunity or inspiration for imaginative works. A few narrative poems, a few prose chronicles, and a few lyrics were written, but as a whole the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries were literarily sterile.

## 16<sup>TH</sup> 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'Aubigne: *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?

Does Rabelais share, with Francois 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?

## **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.



## 17<sup>TH</sup> 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

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?

## **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.

## Larochefoucauld, Duc de la

**Duc de Larochefoucauld, 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 *honnête 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. Larochefoucauld's tough and impartial views, of such conflicts, were clearly the breeding ground for his 'honnête homme' perspective onto human nature. His work of greatest importance to us is the *Maximes* (1665)

**The Maxims of Larochefoucauld.** 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 Larochefoucauld.

*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, *Littérature 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](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.

## 18<sup>th</sup> 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

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?

## **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 he 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 Waldberghofftrarb-dikdorff, 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](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](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'acquérir 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.

## 19<sup>th</sup> 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

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?

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*?

## **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](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](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.** Honore de Balzac was born at Tarn, in the south of France. His family was rather poor, and his father eager to teach Honore 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 Vendome 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](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 (*Salamambo*) 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."

## 20<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY

**Overview** A new idealism and positive faith, which permeated French thinking toward the end of the 19th century—powered by faith in science, economic progress, exuberant forms of nationalism—found expression in the vitalist philosophies of such pan European thinkers as Bergson and Nietzsche. However intimations of upcoming political strife, of ominous force, were on the horizon.

The boiling conflicts within Germany came to the surface as early as 1905, when the Kaiser insulted France at Tangiers; there was more friction at Agadir in 1911. Then in 1914, came the First World War, and with it the destruction not only of the German Empire but virtually of France along with it. The era between the first and second world wars was one of disillusionment, frustration, and cynicism. Conflicting economic and political beliefs made for instability in governments, and pacifism met opposition from those who feared the resurgence of German militarism, especially after Hitler's rise to power in 1933. The pragmatic philosophy of William James and the psychology of Sigmund Freud had deep effect on French thought during this interim period.

Like the period following World War I, the years since the end of the last conflict, were filled with insecurity, disillusionment and fear—especially, in the United States, the fear of Russia and communism.

In literature, many of the fin de siècle writers continued to produce into the twentieth century. Naturalism and symbolism were already on the decline, but no new school of significance took their place. Many minor schools had brief vogues—neoromanticism, vitalism, Dynamism, Paroxysm, Futurism, and others. Several general tendencies, however, can be noted. First, during the early years of the century, the optimism, nationalism, patriotism, and activism of the era determined the course of much of the literature. At the same time some writers were turning to mysticism and religion. During each world war some good war literature was written, and after each conflict the literature reflected the pessimism and frustration of the nation. During the twentieth century there have been other persistent trends, all of them inflected by the ominous Cold War which separated the Soviet Union from the rest of Europe and the United States, and which remained a reality almost to the end of the century. One of the trends is an increasing interest in the inner workings of the mind—a trend opened widely by the researches of Sigmund Freud. Another trend might be considered the exacerbation of social and racial tension—as new nations are formed in Africa, as civil rights movements manifest in powerful societies, and as the classical threats of World War between nations are replaced by civil and ideological conflicts. A third trend should be the widening of global communications through the internet, which was an operative force by the late eighties, and the resultant changes, still hard to explore, in the relationships among individuals and the operations of entertainment and world news itself.

### Discussion questions

Does the view of mankind, which Sartre develops in his plays and philosophy, resemble at all the view of Racine, in his tragedies, toward man and the human condition? Would Beckett concur with Sartre's vision of the human condition?

How does Malraux, in his *Psychology of Art*, describe the new world of international, intercultural art experience? Has the advent of the internet dated the perceptions central to Malraux?

Marcel Proust takes us back into the tangled moral complexities of an earlier social culture. How does Proust's view of that 'older world' compare to the view taken by Mauriac, in a dark novel like *The Nest of Vipers*?

## **Gide, André**

**André Gide, his importance.** André Gide (1869 -1951) was a French novelist, autobiographer, social commentator, and a dramatic experimenter out at the limits of ethical behavior. He was one of the most influential of modern French novelists.

**André Gide, the Life.** Gide was born in Paris of a middle class Protestant family, which had recently converted to Catholicism; indication, right in the family, of the kind of religious querying that would be part of Gide's own temperament. His father was a Professor of Law in Paris; he died in 1880. Young Andre was sent to the Ecole Alsacienne for his education, but due to frequent severe illness he often found himself taken to the south of France, for more benign weather. (In 1895 he met Oscar Wilde in Algeria; the two discussed homosexuality, to which Gide was become increasingly drawn, though not yet publicly. Wilde later claimed, probably wrongly, to have had an effect on Gide's turn to the homosexual. In that regard, to note that Gide's novel, *Les nourritures terrestres*, 1897, *Terrestrial nourishment*, concerns a young man's recovery from a near fatal disease, to find himself in love with this world, first of all with its sensual pleasures.) Gide began early to make fiction from his creative mind, that of a lover of the south and the senses, who was however brought up in a strictly moral religious environment, and who was destined to live the resultant conflict all his life. He published his first novel when he was twenty one, then married his cousin—the marriage was not consummated—then from 1901-1907 he rented a home on an island near the Isle of Jersey, where he looked for peace, and gave some thought to the direction of his life. In 1908 Gide became one of the founders of the influential *Nouvelle revue française*; while at the same time he fled to London with his fifteen year old lover, with whom he would later travel to Central Africa. (During his absence in London his wife burned all of Gide's correspondence, which he considered the most important part of his life.)

**The crux of Gide's works.** Andre Gide was prolific. His *Notebooks* and journals, which cover the period of 1889-1949, document his daily life, the life of Paris and his country, and the evolution of his values and views on the place of man in society. There is no more intense record of the character of modern life in our times. Gide's novels and travel memoirs reinforce the insights of his *Notebooks*. His *Voyage au Congo* (1927) recounts a boat trip up the Congo River with his young lover, and their encounters with Colonialism in action. Gide returns from the trip with insights, into the French colonial economic exploitation of the Central African Republic, and creates in this text one of his many persuasive documents protesting Colonial policy. The same critical social insights, which were pervasive throughout Gide's journals, percolate through the various texts in which he records his relationship with Communism. One of those texts is the *Return from the USSR* (1936) in which he recalls and then recants his former positions as a fellow traveler. The moral questions raised by these radical new political horizons, like Communism, are the same ones he presents to himself in a masterly novel like *La Porte Etroite* (1909), *Straight is the Gate*, which probes the question of moral fidelity and salvation—which was always of interest to Gide, the inheritor of a profoundly religious family tradition.

### **Reading**

#### **Primary source reading**

*The Immoralist*, tr. Howard, 1996.

#### **Secondary source reading**

Sheridan, Alan, *Andre Gide: A Life in the Present*, 1999.

#### **Further reading**

Best, Victoria, *An Introduction to Twentieth Century French Literature*, 2002.

#### **Original language reading**

Felman, Shoshana, *La Folie et la chose littéraire*, 1978.

#### **Suggested paper topics**

Look into Gide's *Journals*, which provide a view into his thinking and feeling throughout his writing career. Does his private and personal life play a large role in his fiction and drama? Do themes like moral strictness, anti-colonialism, homosexuality bleed from his private life into his written work?

In the large sense, does Gide seem to you a Humanist, who is willing to live without God but believes that mankind will prevail? Or is the religious querying, which we experienced in his childhood, a preoccupation with him, even into morally 'open' middle years? Is there a complexity, to his blend of license with Calvinism, which adds a special interest to his work?

**Excerpt <http://www.goodreads.com/work/quotes/480721-l-immoraliste>**

"Envy another man's happiness is madness; you wouldn't know what to do with it if you had it."

"You have to let other people be right' was his answer to their insults. 'It consoles them for not being anything else.'"

"What would a narrative of happiness be like? All that can be described is what prepares it, and then what destroys it."

"A man thinks he owns things, and it is he who is owned"

"Yet I'm sure there's something more to be read in a man. People dare not -- they dare not turn the page. The laws of mimicry -- I call them the laws of fear. People are afraid to find themselves alone, and don't find themselves at all. I hate this moral agoraphobia -- it's the worst kind of cowardice. You can't create something without being alone. But who's trying to create here? What seems different in yourself: that's the one rare thing you possess, the one thing which gives each of us his worth; and that's just what we try to suppress. We imitate. And we claim to love life."

"The capacity to get free is nothing; the capacity to be free is the task."

"The loveliest creations of men are persistently painful. What would be the description of happiness?"

"They establish distinctions and reserves which I cannot apply to myself, for I exist only as a whole; my only claim is to be natural, and the pleasure I feel in an action, I take as a sign that I ought to do it."

## **Proust, Marcel**

**Marcel Proust: The Life.** Marcel Proust (1871-1922) was born in Auteuil, at that time a quite rustic region of the sixteenth arrondissement of Paris. His father was a prominent physician and epidemiological researcher, who had contributed greatly to the fight against cholera in his time. His mother came from a well placed Jewish family in Alsace. (Marcel was baptized and brought up in the Catholic faith, but never practiced it.) The young Proust was born during the last two months of the Franco Prussian War, during the brutal suppression of the French Commune; an era which can be taken to mark the moment of decline of the French aristocracy, and the significant development of the new Middle Class. Marcel was hypersensitive to these surrounding events, which may well have contributed to the rapid development of his chronic asthma, and already in his teens was writing about his social and political world, work that would eventuate in his *Les Plaisirs et les jours* (1896), *Pleasures and the Day*, and his first real novel, *Jean Santeuil*, which he would later abandon, in 1899—and which would not be published until 1952. Meanwhile he was enriching his voracious interest in the upper class social milieux of Paris, profiting from several contacts he had made among the fading nobility, during his school days at the Lycée Condorcet and at University. He was also interacting increasingly with the debilitating asthmatic condition that would do much to shape his later life

**Marcel Proust, the mature works.** The social scene presented by the decline of the aristocracy, the growth of the middle class, and new money in the economy was of intense interest to Proust, from childhood on. (He was intimately fond of his mother, and through her of the world of finer sentiments, complex social ramifications, and emotional experimentation.) In other words this was the transition point of society that was to fascinate Marcel Proust throughout his life, and to form the material of the huge series of seven novels which was the fruit of his writing life, a life which saw little activity, but much reading, no marriage, a closeted homosexuality. Proust himself was fully prepared for this work; highly educated at the Lycée Condorcet, from early on a social climber with a fascination for the declining aristocracy, and with a suitable private income. He was able to devote his life attention to the sequence of novels making up *In Search of Times Past* (1913-1921), arguably the most powerful work of literary Modernism.

**The gist of Proust's major work.** *In Search of Times Past, A la recherche du temps perdu*, has as its theme the moral decadence of French society and the obliteration of class distinctions. Three strata of society are shown: the aristocracy (the Guermantes family), the bourgeoisie (Swann and his coterie), and the nouveaux riches (the Verdurin family). These strata, all interlinked by marriage, are blended in the novels by the presence of Marcel, the author and narrating persona of the novels, who moves from one scene to another. Worth noting: considerable portions of the novel are devoted to Marcel's love affairs, and his tastes in painting, music, and literature. The consequence of this narrative material and structure, is that Proust's novel is wide ranging, includes a vast material of testimony to his own age and its political/social condition, and is loose in construction. Many readers complain that the whole of this seven part fabric is too loose (and decadent) to keep their attention; others, and there are many, proclaim Proust the greatest novelist of all time.

### **Reading**

#### **Primary source reading**

*In Search of Lost Time*, tr. Enright, 2003.

#### **Secondary source reading**

Green, F. C., *The Mind of Proust*, 1949.

#### **Further reading**

Deleuze, Gilles, *Proust and Signs: The Complete Text*, 2004.

#### **Original language reading**

Chardin, Phillipe, *Proust ou le Bonheur du petit personnage qui compare*, 2004.

## Suggested paper topics

Compare Marcel Proust, as an analyst of society, with, say, Emile Zola or the Goncourt brothers. Has Proust, like the others, any interest in making a scientific survey of the society (even the upper class society) of his time? Or does he simply look for interesting studies and situations, to feed his narrative?

Certain great French novelists write in a style, and in a narrative structure, which their critics have called loose, not sharply focused. (Flaubert, for instance, scorns Balzac's style.) What do you think of the huge range of Proust's *Remembrance of Things Past*? Does it hold together? Does it keep making points? Does it hold your interest?

**Excerpt** <http://www.fisheaters.com/proust.html>

I feel that there is much to be said for the Celtic belief that the souls of those whom we have lost are held captive in some inferior being, in an animal, in a plant, in some inanimate object, and so effectively lost to us until the day (which to many never comes) when we happen to pass by the tree or to obtain possession of the object which forms their prison. Then they start and tremble, they call us by our name, and as soon as we have recognised their voice the spell is broken. We have delivered them: they have overcome death and return to share our life.

And so it is with our own past. It is a labour in vain to attempt to recapture it: all the efforts of our intellect must prove futile. The past is hidden somewhere outside the realm, beyond the reach of intellect, in some material object (in the sensation which that material object will give us) which we do not suspect. And as for that object, it depends on chance whether we come upon it or not before we ourselves must die.

Many years had elapsed during which nothing of Combray, save what was comprised in the theatre and the drama of my going to bed there, had any existence for me, when one day in winter, as I came home, my mother, seeing that I was cold, offered me some tea, a thing I did not ordinarily take. I declined at first, and then, for no particular reason, changed my mind. She sent out for one of those short, plump little cakes called 'petites madeleines,' which look as though they had been moulded in the fluted scallop of a pilgrim's shell. And soon, mechanically, weary after a dull day with the prospect of a depressing morrow, I raised to my lips a spoonful of the tea in which I had soaked a morsel of the cake. No sooner had the warm liquid, and the crumbs with it, touched my palate, a shudder ran through my whole body, and I stopped, intent upon the extraordinary changes that were taking place. An exquisite pleasure had invaded my senses, but individual, detached, with no suggestion of its origin. And at once the vicissitudes of life had become indifferent to me, its disasters innocuous, its brevity illusory--this new sensation having had on me the effect which love has of filling me with a precious essence; or rather this essence was not in me, it was myself. I had ceased now to feel mediocre, accidental, mortal. Whence could it have come to me, this all-powerful joy? I was conscious that it was connected with the taste of tea and cake, but that it infinitely transcended those savours, could not, indeed, be of the same nature as theirs. Whence did it come? What did it signify? How could I seize upon and define it?

I drink a second mouthful, in which I find nothing more than in the first, a third, which gives me rather less than the second. It is time to stop; the potion is losing its magic. It is plain that the object of my quest, the truth, lies not in the cup but in myself. The tea has called up in me, but does not itself understand, and can only repeat indefinitely with a gradual loss of strength, the same testimony; which I, too, cannot interpret, though I hope at least to be able to call upon the tea for it again and to find it there presently, intact and at my disposal, for my final enlightenment. I put down my cup and examine my own mind. It is for it to discover the truth. But how? What an abyss of uncertainty whenever the mind feels that some part of it has strayed beyond its own borders; when it, the seeker, is at once the dark region through which it must go seeking, where all its equipment will avail it nothing. Seek? More than that: create. It is face to face with something which does not so far exist, to which it alone can give reality and substance, which it alone can bring into the light of day.



## **Mauriac, Francois**

**Francois Mauriac, the importance.** Francois Mauriac (1885-1970) was a French novelist, essay writer, journalist, and defender of the Catholic Church, who lived through and recorded almost a century of change in French culture and society. He was awarded the Nobel Prize for fiction in 1952.

**Francois Mauriac, the life and writings.** Francois Mauriac was born in Bordeaux. His father was an upper middle class banker, who died when Francois was eighteen months old. That death left Francois' mother with five children, of whom Francois was the youngest. The atmosphere in the family of youngsters appears to have been exceptionally protective, and for Francois the protective mode was sustained when he went off to school with the Marianist sisters. In 1905 Francois went to the University of Bordeaux, where he studied literature, then moved to Paris, in preparation for study at the prestigious Ecole des Chartes. Instead of continuing with advanced research, however, Mauriac decided to throw in his lot with writing, and achieved his first limited attention with the publication of *Les Mains Jointes* (1909), *Joined Hands*, a volume of poetry. A novel, *Le Baiser aux Lépreux* (1922), *The Lepers' Kiss*, drew further attention to Mauriac's accomplishment. Later fictional work was to establish Mauriac as a major national figure; especially through *Le Désert de l'Amour* (1925), *The Desert of Love*, and *Le Noeud de Vipères* (1932), *The Nest of Vipers*. (It was on the basis of such works that Mauriac was elected to the *Académie française* (1933), awarded the Nobel Prize in 1952, and in 1958 awarded the Grand Croix of the Légion d'honneur.

**Mauriac as Public Figure.** Nor was it only through these writings that Mauriac was becoming a culture shaping figure in post War France. He was involved in a couple of high profile debates, which concerned issues of burning importance to French consciousness of the time. One of these debates was between Mauriac and the celebrated Resistance figure and novelist, Albert Camus. This debate, which was carried on in the press, Mauriac writing in *Le Figaro*, Camus in the newspaper *Combat*, concerned the policy of the French government, in post War time, toward former French Nazi collaborators or sympathizers—or at the extreme simply of those who went about their business under the Occupation, without protesting. (It was Mauriac's conviction that a complete purge was impossible and impractical, and that one should learn to live in a compromised and healing society.) A second equally conspicuous debate was carried on between Mauriac and Roger Peyrefitte; and like the earlier debate was carried on publically in the press. Peyrefitte, an aggressive critic of the Vatican, made serious allegations against that institution in a popular book of 1953. Mauriac, whose roots and practice were Catholic, took up arms for the Church, and defended her in the pages of *L'Express*. Nor was this the last public intervention of his career, for in the spirit of many French intellectuals—Valéry, Sartre, Camus—Mauriac felt called on to adopt an active position toward the central events of the day. He was, for example, to write fiercely against French interventions in Viet Nam, and French torture in Algeria.

**The religious tone in Mauriac.** Mauriac is customarily thought of as a Catholic writer but, like his fellow Catholic Graham Greene, in England, he brings out the religious thematic through a portrait of the dark sides of life. In *The Desert of Love* he portrays a wasting love triangle among a woman, her father, and her son. In *The Nest of Vipers* he lets an aging and bitter man, who has great insight into human failure, write a corrosive letter in which the rottenness of their family is rather inspiring given prominence.

### **Reading**

#### **Primary source reading**

*Therese Desqueyroux*, tr. M. and R. MacKenzie, 2006.

#### **Secondary source reading**

Sowerwine, Charles, *France since 1870: Culture, Politics, and Society*, 2001.

#### **Further reading**

*God and Mammon and What was Lost*, tr. MacKenzie, 2003.

## Original language reading

### Mauriac, Francois, De Gaulle, 1964.

#### Suggested paper topics

Do you see a bond between Mauriac's public journalist life, with the high profile issues in which he engaged, and the themes of his fiction? Reflect on that relation in terms of *The Nest of Vipers*, which at first glance appears a darkly psychological text.

Does Mauriac seem to you to be a 'Catholic' writer? What role do 'Catholic' themes play in his writing? What 'Catholic' stances did he adopt as a public figure?

#### Excerpt

Excerpt <http://www.wf-f.org/02-1-Mauriac.html>

After the short Vespers of Holy Thursday, the officiating priests strip the altar of all ornaments and recite meanwhile the twenty-first\* Psalm with the choir. It is the Psalm of which the first verse was cried out by the dying Christ: "O God, my God...why hast Thou forsaken me"?

The evangelists did not falter before this apparent acknowledgement of defeat, and no doubt it was necessary that the chalice be drunk to the dregs, even to this total abandonment. At that minute, nothing but vanquished humanity appeared any longer in Christ.

How could the Son of God have believed Himself to be forsaken? Had He not known and accepted His martyrdom beforehand? He knew it, without doubt, and He also knew that everything that was happening in that moment had been prophesied in that very twenty-first Psalm, the first verse of which He was crying out to His Father.

None of the scribes, who at the foot of the Cross were shaking their heads and scoffing at the dying victim, thought of drawing a parallel between the desperate appeal which opens this Psalm and what follows: "All they that saw me have laughed me to scorn; they have spoken with the lips and wagged the head. He hoped in the Lord, let him deliver him: let Him save him, seeing He delighteth in him".

But then was it not precisely the same mockery which the chief priests and rulers had just used against Jesus crucified? Were they not laughing at Him because, having saved others, He could not save Himself? Were they not challenging Him to come down from the Cross because He said He was the Son of God?

But, above all, they who knew the Scriptures should have remembered verses seventeen through nineteen, which were being confirmed at that very moment in an astonishing manner: "They have pierced my hands and feet. They have numbered all my bones. They parted my garments amongst them and upon my vesture they cast lots."

And this twenty-first Psalm, which begins with a cry of doubt and distress, ends with the promise of a triumph that the Crucified alone was to achieve. "All the ends of the earth shall remember and shall be converted to the Lord: and all the kindred of the Gentiles shall adore in His sight. For the Kingdom is the Lord's; and He shall have dominion over the nations."

## Malraux, André

**André Malraux: his importance for French culture.** Andre Malraux (1901-1976) was a French novelist, art theorist, and public cultural figure who was of great influence on the social policy and creative thinking of mid twentieth century France.

**André Malraux: the life.** André Malraux was born in Paris in 1901. His parents separated when he was four years old, and divorced soon after; Andre was raised largely by three women—his mother, his maternal aunt, and his maternal grandmother, who had a small grocery store in a nearby village. (His father, who was a stockbroker, committed suicide in 1930, having lost all at the beginning of the Great Depression.) One result of this not completely stable childhood has been suggested (but is not certain); that Andre developed a case of nervous tics, bordering on Tourette's syndrome. It is certain that while the young man did not pursue a regular course of education, he was a voracious reader, and an intense visitor to the many glorious museums of Paris. In 1922 Malraux married for the first time, and had one daughter. Divorce followed. For some time, then, he lived with the novelist Josette Clotie, with whom he had two children; wife and children all died in accidents. For the remainder of his life Malraux lived in loving but unmarried relations. Throughout these years he was also engaged with the literary milieu of Paris, making friends with many of the formative cultural creators of the moment: Jean Cocteau, Francois Mauriac, Max Jacob. In 1923 he made a trip to Cambodia, with the intention of buying *objets d'art* from Khmer temples, and selling them to art collectors in the West; however he was arrested by the French on leaving the country, and had to surrender what he had collected. By this time, however, Malraux had begun to draw public attention with his writing. In the thirties and forties he was to publish his best known works—*La Condition Humaine* (1933), *Man's Fate*; *The Psychology of Art* (1947-1949)—and to begin to occupy an important public cultural function on the French scene. Already in the thirties Malraux was politically active, supporting the Republicans in Spain, the anti-Fascist Popular Front in France, and, during the Resistance, fighting courageously against the Occupation—an effort for which he received the Croix de Guerre. For his many patriotic efforts Malraux was significantly honored by President Charles de Gaulle. Malraux was made Minister of Information in 1945-46, and was appointed as the first Minister of Cultural Affairs, from 1959-69.

**André Malraux: the work.** Malraux's greatest novel, *Man's Fate*, deals with four fascinating and diverse characters caught up in a (failed) Communist rebellion in Shanghai, against the Chinese government of Chiang kai Shek. The interplay of vivid, risk taking, existentially diverse figures brings to a clarity Malraux's intense experience of the bruisingly international culture of his time. Malraux's *Psychology of Art* (1947-49) is only one of his many profound inquiries into the new aesthetics of his time. In the separately published first part of this work, entitled *Museums without Walls*, Malraux addressed the transtemporal, transcultural character of the global art scene, as it displays itself in the new art gallery of the later twentieth century. The new art world, Malraux points out—and actualizes in his distribution of support for Paris museums—is open to works of any kind from any culture, and takes particular interest in non western works, which force the West to reflect on itself.

### Reading

#### Primary source reading

*Man's Fate*, tr. M. and H. Chevalier, 1990.

#### Secondary source reading

Alan, Derek, *Art and the Human Adventure: Andre Malraux' Theory of Art*, 2009.

#### Further reading

Cate, Curtis, *Andre Malraux: A Biography*, 1997.

#### Original language reading

Aubert, Raphael, *Malraux ou la lutte avec l'ange*, 2001.

## Suggested paper topics

Malraux was perhaps the most officially important of the writers of 20<sup>th</sup> century France. Review the public contributions of Malraux' contemporary French writers. Is there in France of the last century a pronounced emphasis on the public role of the major literary figure?

Does Malraux' a major *Psychology of Art* reflect his international travels, and his active globalism? As a Minister of Culture he was faced with issues of support and development for France's museums. How did Malraux respond to that challenge?

**Excerpt** [http://en.wikiquote.org/wiki/Andr%C3%A9\\_Malraux](http://en.wikiquote.org/wiki/Andr%C3%A9_Malraux)

No one can endure his own solitude.

The human mind invents its Puss-in-Boots and its coaches that change into pumpkins at midnight because neither the believer nor the atheist is completely satisfied with appearances.

What is man? A miserable little pile of secrets.

Our civilization ... is not devaluing its awareness of the unknowable; nor is it deifying it. It is the first civilization that has severed it from religion and superstition. In order to question it.

Chanel, General De Gaulle and Picasso are the three most important figures of our time.

The artist is not the transcriber of the world, he is its rival.

On this earth of ours where everything is subject to the passing of time, one thing only is both subject to time and yet victorious over it: the work of art.

If a man is not ready to risk his life, where is his dignity?

The great mystery is not that we should have been thrown down here at random between the profusion of matter and that of the stars; it is that from our very prison we should draw, from our own selves, images powerful enough to deny our own nothingness.

The attempt to force human beings to despise themselves... is what I call hell.

"Why do you fight?" ... He kept his wife, his kid, from dying. That was nothing. Less than nothing. If he had had money, if he could have left it to them, he would have been free to go and get killed. As if the universe had not treated him all his life with kicks in the belly, it now despoiled him of the only dignity he could ever possess — his death.

The sons of torture victims make good terrorists.

One cannot create an art that speaks to me when one has nothing to say.

There are not fifty ways of fighting, there is only one, and that is to win. Neither revolution nor war consists in doing what one pleases.

## **Sartre, Jean Paul**

**Jean Paul Sartre, his influence and importance.** Jean Paul Sartre (1905-1980) was a French novelist, playwright, theater director, literary critic, and public activist. He exercised great influence on younger writers, and, through his very popular plays, on a wide sector of the French public.

**Jean Paul Sartre, the Life.** Sartre was born in Paris, son of an officer in the French navy. (His father died of a fever two years after Jean Paul's birth, and the young man was turned over to his mother's care. When Sartre was twelve years old his mother remarried, and moved to La Rochelle. (His mother's new marriage was to a cousin of the Nobel Laureate Albert Schweitzer.) Young Sartre, an avid but quirky reader, went on to study at the Ecole Normale Supérieure, the premier center for philosophical thought in France. (The great inspiration for Sartre, and what led him into philosophy, was the thought of Henri Bergson, about the nature of time.) At the Ecole Normale Sartre formed a lasting, if volatile, relationship with the eminent political philosopher to be, Raymond Aron; Sartre also perfected his gifts for pranks, on several occasions fooling the administration of the ENS into imagining impending disasters, against which they needed to protect themselves immediately. Subsequently he taught in Laon and Le Havre and then studied in Berlin. In France he became a professor at the Lycée Pasteur in Neuilly. In 1929 he met the woman who was to be his lifetime companion, Simone de Beauvoir. By 1946, at which time he founded the revue *Les Temps Modernes*, he had almost completely left teaching for journalism. He had begun writing full time. He had behind him the experience of having been arrested by the Gestapo, during the Occupation, and held for over a year, during which time he was able to read all of Martin Heidegger's *Being and Time*, and to take many steps toward his own version of Existentialism.

**Sartre's Works.** Jean Paul Sartre was a prolific writer, who wrote in many genres. Arguably his most compelling novel is his first, *La Nausee*, *Nausea*, published in 1938. Returned after years of traveling to his home town of Bouville—which resembles the Le Havre where Sartre taught—Antoine Roquentin settles down to write a biography of an eighteenth century French gentleman. As time goes by, and he pursues his daily scholarly routine, Roquentin becomes growingly aware of the natural world around him. On one famous occasion he finds himself facing the roots of a gnarled tree in the park. He feels threatened by the inhuman knot of roots, then, in looking for a word to protect himself with, for *racines*, he finds he is on the other side of language, and this occasion becomes a revelation, to him, of the human unfriendly character of nature. That is not all he realizes. At the same time he makes this discovery about the roots he realizes that man is on his own, unsupported by nature or by anything other than his own will; this is essentially the foundation of existentialism, which Sartre will write out through all his major works, in the following years. The basic premises active in this novel will pervade Sartre's ambitious: *L'Être et le néant*, 1943, *Being and Nothingness*, in which he lays out his philosophy formally.

### **Reading**

#### **Primary source reading**

*Existentialism is a Humanism*, tr. Carol Macomber, 2007.

#### **Secondary source reading**

Hayman, Ronald, *Sartre: A Life*, 1987.

#### **Further reading**

Aronson, Ronald, *Camus and Sartre*, 2004.

#### **Original language reading**

Wittman, H., *L'esthétique de Sartre*, 2001.

### **Suggested paper topics**

Look into the early relation of Sartre to his intellectual hero, Henri Bergson. What attracted Sartre to Bergson notions of time? Does Sartre's *Being and Nothingness*, or his *Nausea*, reflect an ongoing preoccupation with the nature of time? Was the later influence of Martin Heidegger important for this same relationship?

Look into Sartre's drama and short fiction. Some think he is at his finest in those genres, where the inherent ambiguity of human existence is at its sharpest, as is the need to choose. Does Sartre's philosophy, in the formal sense, interface effectively with his fictions?

**Excerpt <http://www.anselm.edu/homepage/dbanach/nausea.htm>**

6.00 p.m.

I can't say I feel relieved or satisfied; just the opposite, I am crushed. Only my goal is reached: I know what I wanted to know; I have understood all that has happened to me since January. The Nausea has not left me and I don't believe it will leave me so soon; but I no longer have to bear it, it is no longer an illness or a passing fit: it is I.

So I was in the park just now. The roots of the chestnut tree were sunk in the ground just under my bench. I couldn't remember it was a root any more. The words had vanished and with them the significance of things, their methods of use, and the feeble points of reference which men have traced on their surface. I was sitting, stooping forward, head bowed, alone in front of this black, knotty mass, entirely beastly, which frightened me. Then I had this vision. It left me breathless. Never, until these last few days, had I understood the meaning of "existence." I was like the others, like the ones walking along the seashore, all dressed in their spring finery. I said, like them, "The ocean *is* green; that white speck up there *is* a seagull," but I didn't feel that it existed or that the seagull was an "existing seagull"; usually existence hides itself. It is there, around us, in us, it is *us*, you can't say two words without mentioning it, but you can never touch it. When I believed I was thinking about it, I must believe that I was thinking nothing, my head was empty, or there was just one word in my head, the word "to be." Or else I was thinking . . . how can I explain it? I was thinking of *belonging*, I was telling myself that the sea belonged to the class of green objects, or that the green was a part of the quality of the sea. Even when I looked at things, I was miles from dreaming that they existed: they looked like scenery to me. I picked them up in my hands, they served me as tools, I foresaw their resistance. But that all happened on the surface. If anyone had asked me what existence was, I would have answered, in good faith, that it was nothing, simply an empty form which was added to external things without changing anything in their nature. And then all of a sudden, there it was, clear as day: existence had suddenly unveiled itself. It had lost the harmless look of an abstract category: it was the very paste of things, this root was kneaded into existence. Or rather the root, the park gates, the bench, the sparse grass, all that had vanished: the diversity of things, their individuality, were only an appearance, a veneer. This veneer had melted, leaving soft, monstrous masses, all in disorder—naked, in a frightful, obscene nakedness. I kept myself from making the slightest movement, but I didn't need to move in order to see, behind the trees, the blue columns and the lamp posts of the bandstand and the Velleda, in the midst of a mountain of laurel. All these objects . . . how can I explain? They inconvenienced me; I would have liked them to exist less strongly, more dryly, in a more abstract way, with more reserve. The chestnut tree pressed itself against my eyes. Green rust covered it half-way up; the bark, black and swollen, looked like boiled leather. The sound of the water in the Masqueret Fountain sounded in my ears, made a nest there, filled them with signs; my nostrils overflowed with a green, putrid odour.

## Camus, Albert

**Albert Camus, importance and influence.** Albert Camus (1913-1960) was a French novelist, essayist, prominent political activist, and journalist. Through his own clear sighted and flexible responses to war and inequality, he made himself an internationally respected voice of contemporary thought. He was awarded the Nobel Prize for literature in 1957.

**Albert Camus, the life.** Albert Camus was born in French Algeria and died before the outbreak of the great conflict between France and Algeria, in which Algeria would break from her colonizer. His parents were *pieds noirs*, that is French colonial settlers who had remained to colonized country. His mother was of Spanish extraction, and was half deaf, His father was a very poor agricultural worker, who was killed at the Battle of the Marne, in WW I. Albert was educated at the University of Algiers, where he was an excellent goalkeeper for the University football team. He earned his baccalaureat degree in 1935, then went on to advanced studies. (He wrote his Master's dissertation on the ancient Greek philosopher Plotinus, and the relation of his thought to early Christianity.) Further educated both in Algeria and France, Camus' deep involvement with Parisian culture began with his activist engagement in the French Resistance, during WWII. Already he had been deeply involved in public journalism, forming a group to combat the malign effects of technology. In 1933 he joined the Communist Party, but was soon booted out by Moscow, when he switched part of his allegiance to the Algerian Communist Party. During this period, when Resistance struggles and Communist intervention were swirling over France, Camus founded the journal, *Combat*, which was devoted to the Free French cause, but in the subsequent years he eventually broke from forms of Communism, as he discovered the tyrannical side of a movement initially intended to liberate the people. (That break with Communism was also Camus' break with his close friend and 'study partner' Jean-Paul Sartre, who felt Camus 'had gone soft.') Camus waged a lifelong battle on behalf of human individuality, and a lifelong quest for the meaning of life in what often seemed an absurd world. The Nobel Prize was awarded to him for his clear sightedness in analyzing the complex problems of his time. On only point, perhaps, did he sustain an unvarying determination.. He was an ardent and lifelong opponent of capital punishment.

**The work of Albert Camus.** As a journalist, Camus was from early in life active at the forefront of opinion making and political argument. The clear lines of his thought are evident in his most effective writing. *The Stranger* (*L'Étranger*, 1942) This powerful novel attests to Camus' abilities as a master of controlled art, and deliberately simple narration. *The Plague* (*La Peste*, 1947), a novel, is Camus' most anti-Christian work. It dwells on the injustice of Christianity, evidenced by the sacrifice of the innocents, as exemplified by the death of child victims of the plague. The chronicle testified to the violence and injustice imposed on the city of Oran, and to the belief that in times of tribulation man reveals more admirable than despicable traits. It is marked by constant understatement in descriptive style, the precise use of administrative terms and official language, the deliberate banality of words, and the use of irony to bring out the whole horror of a situation.

### Reading

#### Primary source reading

*The Stranger*, tr. M. Ward, 1989.

#### Secondary source reading

Todd, Olivier, *Albert Camus: A Life*, 1997.

#### Further reading

Mumma, Howard, *Albert Camus and the Mind*, 2000.

#### Original language reading

Salas, Denis, *Albert Camus, la juste révolte*, 2002.

#### Suggested paper topics

One of Camus' lasting concerns was with the issue of capital punishment, which he considered nothing better than state sponsored murder. How does that viewpoint play out in Camus' writing, fictional and critical. Remember that Sartre believed Camus had 'gone soft,' when he backed out on Communism.

Although Camus is a lasting friend to human solidarity, and people's mutual fidelity, his perhaps finest novel, *The Stranger*, concerns a person who is essentially alien to human concerns. Is that character, Meursault, created by Camus for our admiration? Or our amazement?

**Excerpt** <http://www.goodreads.com/work/quotes/3324245-la-chute>

You know what charm is: a way of getting the answer yes without having asked any clear question."

"I used to advertise my loyalty and I don't believe there is a single person I loved that I didn't eventually betray."

"People hasten to judge in order not to be judged themselves."

"Men are never convinced of your reasons, of your sincerity, of the seriousness of your sufferings, except by your death. So long as you are alive, your case is doubtful; you have a right only to their skepticism."

"Friendship is less simple. It is long and hard to obtain but when one has it there's no getting rid of it; one simply has to cope with it. Don't think for a minute that your friends will telephone you every evening, as they ought to, in order to find out if this doesn't happen to be the evening when you are deciding to commit suicide, or simply whether you don't need company, whether you are not in the mood to go out. No, don't worry, they'll ring up the evening you are not alone, when life is beautiful. As for suicide, they would be more likely to push you to it, by virtue of what you owe to yourself, according to them. May heaven protect us, cher Monsieur, from being set upon a pedestal by our friends!"

"Don't lies eventually lead to the truth? And don't all my stories, true or false, tend toward the same conclusion? Don't they all have the same meaning? So what does it matter whether they are true or false if, in both cases, they are significant of what I have been and what I am? Sometimes it is easier to see clearly into the liar than into the man who tells the truth. Truth, like light, blinds. Falsehood, on the contrary, is a beautiful twilight that enhances every object."

"I love life - that's my real weakness. I love it so much that I am incapable of imagining what is not life."

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Is the division of French literature into century units significant? Do the different centuries of French literature have their own character? If so, why might that be true?

Do women writers make a unique contribution to French literature, or is there no separate character to women's contribution? Who seem to you the greatest French women writers?

France has historically deep roots in Catholicism, and more generally in the religious sensibility. But in what writers does this trait of French culture most clearly manifest itself? When does 'freethinking' start to shape the national temperament? With what writers is freethinking most prominent?

Is French literature on the whole a politically/socially engaged literature? At what periods do you find this engagement most evident? Can you extend your response into our own century? Is French literature engaged today? Or was Jean Paul Sartre the last large example of French literary *engagement*?

Does the Greco Roman past play a significant role in the shaping of French literature? Where do you find that influence most evident? Is it still present today?