HUMANITIES INSTITUTE

FRENCH LITERATURE

Course Description
This course provides a close look at French literature, from medieval times until late twentieth century, with particular focus on genre, aesthetic trends, and philosophical foundations.

About the Professor
Frederic Will, Ph.D. is a widely published professor of comparative literature who has been a Fulbright Scholar in Greece, Tunisia, and Ivory Coast. He is the founding editor of *Micromegas,* a journal of poetry in translation, and has served as administrator and faculty member of Dartmouth, University of Massachusetts, and University of Iowa.

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Topics

Medieval French Literature
16th Century French Literature
17th Century French Literature
18th Century French Literature
19th Century French literature
20th Century French Literature

ASSIGNMENTS

Unit Essays

Unit I Medieval French Literature

Between *The Song of Roland* and the work of Montaigne and Rabelais, centuries elapse. What indicators of that time passage do you find most striking? Break your response down into a few basic points.

Unit II 16th century French literature

What viewpoints do Rabelais and Montaigne have in common? What qualifies them as major figures of what we call Renaissance thought? How do they relate to the ancient Classics, as well as to Mediaeval Christian thought? Which author seems to you closer to our own time?

Unit III 17th Century French literature

Does drama seem the natural genre to represent the classical achievement of French literature? In answering, reflect on the public character of drama, unique among literary genres—with the possible exception of the epic, when it was a widespread form of popular entertainment.

Moliere clearly writes a social critique of his own time. Do Racine and Corneille also address issues of their own time, in the works you have read? Is their concern with ancient themes a covert way of dealing with contemporary issues?

Unit IV 18th Century French Literature

What common traits seem to you to bind together the 18th century texts we have read? A new social and scientific world is in the making, new ideals for the well lived life: these changes should be palpable to you. Do you feel identifiably closer to the 18th century mind than to the 17th, to judge from the examples we have read?

If you review our readings for the 18th century, you will see that we put little stress on imaginative literature. This is because the lasting texts of the period, in France, are philosophical or critical. Do you see some reason for the dearth of French imaginative writing in this century? Does this dearth belong to the larger picture of the century as a whole?

Unit V 19th Century French Literature

How does the realism of Flaubert's and Zola's fiction fit with the philosophy of love you find in Stendahl? Do you see some important themes in common, among the views of the romantic in those three authors?

How wide is the range of style and viewpoint among the four poets we read in this section? Does Verlaine, say, have anything substantial in common with Rimbaud?

You now have a brief survey of the major literary forms of the French l9th century. Can you still discern the continuity with earlier French culture? At first glance it might seem that this period of French culture generates new concepts of prose fiction and lyric poetry; formal and substantial changes in perspective. Do developments in these two genres seem to you

sharply new, or rooted in earlier French culture?

Unit VI 20th century French literature

Review the 20 th century French literature we have read. How does it reflect the 'historical period' in which it was written, a period replete with wars, international tensions, social crises. How is literature a mirror of its time, or a flight from its time? What are the outstanding provocations to particular works? Do writers respond to public or private events?

What role does lyric poetry play in expressing the French life experience in the 20th century? How might the turn toward language and unique personal experience, as the particular fascination of much poetry—Apollinaire, Valery—limit the capacity of poetry to represent the tumultuous turns of 20th century French history?

Final Essay (Please choose one question from the selection below for your final essay)

As you review the development of French literature, from the Late Middle Ages to the end of the 20th century, do you see anything you would want to call "progress"? Or is there no "progress." In answering this question you are invited , of course, to consider whether the idea of progress applies at all, in the realm of the arts. You are free to prefer terms like "change" or "development," for "progress"—if that seems to you a better line of argument.

Can you see a pattern in the development of the different genres—epic, lyric poetry; drama; fiction; philosophy—as French literature "develops." Does each genre seem to be the leading form of expression at a particular period, then to yield to another genre? Does any one genre seem to be of preeminent importance in French literature?

Selected Secondary Sources:

Turnell, Martin, The Classical Moment, 1948
Fowlie, Wallace, A Guide to Contemporary French Literature from Valery to Sartre, 1957
Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics, 1993
Hollier, Denis, A New History of French Literature, 1994
Thompson, William, ed., The Contemporary Novel in France, 1995
Hawcroft, M., Rhetoric: Readings in French Literature, 1999.
Small Worlds: Minimalism in Contemporary French Literature, 1999.
Angel Flores, Anchor Anthology of French Poetry from Nerval to Valery, 2000
Distant Voices Still Heard: Contemporary Readings of French Renaissance Literature, 2000

Texts:

The texts used in this course are available online. (In addition, each of these books is available in hard copy.)The appropriate author/text online citations are as follows:

Apollinaire, Guillaume, Lyrics, http://www.poetryintranslation.com
Balzac, Honore de ,The Magic Skin, http://www.readprint.com
Baudelaire, Charles, Les Fleurs du Mal, http://books.google.com
Beckett, Samuel Waiting for Godot www.samuel-beckett.net
Beaumarchais: The Marriage of Figaro, http://oll.libertyfund.org
Camus, Albert, The Stranger, http://books.google.com
Chanson de Roland, http://omacl/.org/Roland
Chateaubriand, Memoires d'outre tombe, http://www. tkline.pgcc.net
Chrétien de Troyes, http://omacl.org/Yvain
Claudel, Paul, The Hostage http://books.google.com
Corneille, Pierre, Cinna and Le Cid, http://www.gutenberg.org
Descartes, René, Discourse on Method, http://www.literature.org
Flaubert, Gustave, http://book.google.com
Froissart, Chronicles, www.fordham.edu
Gide, Andre, http://books.google.com
Lafayette, Madame de, The Princess of Cleves, http://www.gutenberg.org
Larochefoucault, Maxims, http:// books.google.com
Mallarmé, Stephane, http://www.poetryintranslation.com
Moliere, The Bourgeois Gentleman, The Imaginary Invalid, Tartuffe http://www.gutenberg.org
Montaigne, Michel de, Essays, http://www.gutenberg.org
Pascal, Blaise, Pensees, http://www.gutenberg.org
Proust, Marcel, www.gutenberg.org/etext
Rabelais, Gargantua and Pantagruel, http://www.gutenberg.org
Racine, Iphigeneia, Phedre http://books.google.com
Ronsard, http://www.everypoet.com
Rimbaud, Arthur, Lyrics, http://www. mag4.net
Sartre, Jean Paul, Nausea, No Exit http://books.google.com
Stendahl, De l"Amour, http://books. google.com
Valery, Paul, Lyrics, http://www.textetc.com
Villon, Francois, Lyrics, http://www.everypoet.com
Voltaire, Candide http://books.google.com
Zola, Emile, Therese Raquin, www.online-literature. com

Medieval French Literature

Song of Roland

Introduction

Chivalry, Warfare, and Fate. The Song of Roland is the first artistic expression of the French national spirit. In this heroic poetry, which pits French monarchy and chivalry against the Muslim invader from Spain. The conflict of religious cultures, as we might put it today, is absorbed into human conflict. There are seeds of tragic humanity. (As you read along, when do the characters in this tight formally expressed poetry, with its ritualistic refrains, begin to attach themselves to your feelings?)

*Overview :*The *Chanson* (composed around 1100) is one of a series of some 120 poems that constitute the *Chansons de Gestes*. This assortment of sung epic poems, handed down by professional singers in regional courts, celebrates the exploits and historical importance of the court of Cbarlemagne, the King from whom French mediaeval culture takes many of its shaping impulses. These poems are immersed in two cultures, and there is dispute about the axis of their inspiration: Charlemagne's court itself, which thrived in the 8th century, or the Crusades, during which many of the Chansons were composed. In either case all agree that the works are saturated in reverence for the figure of the holy King, and in chivalric Christian values.

Summary: The epic—composed in decasyllabics, often accompanied by musical notation—concerns a rear guard action historically fought—but profoundly reimagined by the poet--between a cohort of men under the leadership of Count Roland, a major retainer of Charlemagne himself, and a band of so-called Saracens, probably Basques, in the mountains of the Pyrenees. The line of chivalric horsemen are ambushed by the wiles of Ganelon, a disgruntled traitor to the king, furious that Roland has designed him as messenger to the enemy camp, who has urged the Basques to attack the line of horse. and to a nearly sure death. The tale brings together crisp language, sharp portrayals of chivalric aristocrats, and a seething treachery, which in a further stage of the epic leads to the trial and execution of Ganelon.

The Puzzle: as with an equally ancient British epic, *Beowulf,* there is dispute whether the *Chanson de Roland* was the product of an individualistic creator or of a group project from within the anonymous body of oral epic creators of mediaeval France. In either case a further central question is raised by the historicity of the text. The Saracens are cast as pagans, and out and out foils for the God and King honoring chivalric warriors in Roland's train. Is this sharpening of religious conflict, within the poem, a reflection of a specific moment in French history, or part of the religious imagination of the author?

Reading

Chanson de Roland, http://omacl/.org/Roland Verses I-LXXXVII 50 pages

Questions

Theme: The Foundations of a Literature
What do you make of the literary craft of this epic text? Is there tension in the plot? (Do you wonder how it will turn out?) How does the narrator induce us to sympathize with the ardor of the French knights? Has your own culture a founding epic?

Idea: Epic nationality
Does the culture world described in the *Song of Roland* resemble the world Froissart depicts? Is the author of the *Song of Roland* conscious of his own nationality, or are his allegiances to international Christian chivalry?

Idea: Chivalry
The theme of the Chanson de Roland is chivalresque, highlighting the drama of conflict between Christians and Moors. How does the author show his preferences? Is there tension in the "plot"? How does the perspective of the Roland mesh with that of the Arthurian legends that Chrétien dramatizes?

Comparative Literature :Epic and History
The Song of Roland
Homer *The Iliad*
Homer *The Odyssey*
In origin, the epic that was to become The Song of Roland commemorated a battle dating from the period of Charlemagne (8th century A.D) fought against the Basques. The Song of Roland, it seems, was an enspiriting tale told to the French soldiers, in that Battle of Roncevalles (78). In the transformation of the epic before us, into a revered text of its own, we see the indirectness with which epic literature relates to the historical base. Epic literature is if nothing else always artifice. It transforms history.

Like epic material in Homer, The Song of Roland was kept alive by a tradition of oral recitation. The Iliad and Odyssey, and the vast body of epic material that compose the earliest Greek oral literature, were recited by itinerant 'specialists' in the epic tradition. The Song of Roland was kept alive, far more actively than in its textual form, by traveling jongleurs, actors cum performers, who recited the epic to audiences throughout France. This tradition could be found in the French countryside, three centuries after the actual creation of The Song of Roland.

Chretien de Troyes, Perceval

Introduction

The Quest for the Holy Grail. You might say that the basis for Chivalry, the dominant late mediaeval quest of Christianized Europe, was the search for the Holy Relics of Jesus Christ. The Crusades were built from this quest, and so was the greatest epic poetry of the time, like *Perceval.* By an exaggeration you might compare the pure/hearted and faithful Percival, in search of the Grail, to Roland. Both figures are models for manly valor in their time.

Overview: Chretien de Troyes lived in the second half of the l2 th century, in the province of Champagne, but beyond that we know little of his life. He was the foremost author of courtly romances, and a major concern of his work was the Arthurian legends of the Round Table. The best of his work is devoted to reconciling the chivalresque traditions of the *Chansons de Geste*—see above, *Chanson de Roland*—with the growing cult of devotion to women, inspired by worship of the Virgin Mary. Characters like Lancelot and Queen Guinevere were prominent in shaping the narratives of his verse.

Principal work: *Perceval, or the Story of the Grail* was written between ll80 and ll90. This work consisted of 9,234 octosyllabic lines, and is notable for the grail quest which motivates the characters' actions, though we note that the theological hunger driving Perceval is also an expression of the interest the author takes in the rhetorical adventure through which he puts the hero questing for the most holy relic of Christ's passion. The ensuing quest of Lancelot takes him to a lifeless water presided over by a mysterious Fisher King, who eventually yields to Lancelot a presence to the grail itself, the chalice allegedly taken by Joseph of Arimatheia at the Crucifixion: 'the grail…was made of fine, pure gold; and in it were set precious stones of many kinds, the richest and most precious in the earth or the sea…' The theological quest, the subtle language of exposition, and the collateral theme of linguistic inquiry make of this poem a sophisticated end product of the long developing Arthurian tradition.
Literary distinctiveness: Chrétien deals in the *Lancelot* with a profoundly Christian theme, the longing mediaeval quest for the final relics of Jesus Christ. Just as Roland and his cohort, on sortie to protect the nation of France and its kind, Lancelot goes questing to rediscover the holy relics of his faith. The archetypal profundity of the grail quest, with the Castle in the background, the half dead waters before the Holy Castle, and the chivalric persistence of the hero—this powerful mythography waited 900 years, til T.S. Eliot's *The Wasteland*, to receive a twist as mystical as Chrètien gave it.

Reading

Chrétien de Troyes, http://omacl.org/Yvain (*Part. I* Verses 1-2328) 85 pages

Questions

Theme: Arthurian legend and Chretien de Troye's Perceval
What is the reason for the power of the Arthurian cycle in the Middle Ages? What kind of view of history is embodied in the Arthurian legends? Has this view of history any connection with the linear chronological history of the period, what you would read on the "history timeline"

Comparative Literature
Chretien de Troyes, *Perceval*
King Arthur: Legends
In Chretien de Troyes' Perceval, the knight is a member of King Arthur's Roundtable, and as a holy knight he acquires the role of guarding the Grail, the chalice from which Christ reputedly drank at the Last Supper. As such an honored guardian, Perceval becomes a hero within Christian legend and evokes testimony from any number of Mediaeval legend framers. The immediacy of the Christian story was heightened by the rather empty information landscape separating the later Middle Ages from the actual events of Christ's life.

Comparative Literature: Medieval Faith and Art
Chretien de Troyes, *Perceval*
Richard Wagner *Parsifal*
Richard Wagner, the German opera composer, presented Parsifal as his final opera, in l882. You will note the profoundly personal tone Wagner infuses the music with. Parsifal is there not only the Knight who controls the Grail, but a model of the virtue Wagner came most to admire, compassion. This same trait—don't you agree?—defines the character of Perceval.

Froissart, *Chronicles*

Introduction

History between Chronicle and Diary. Froissart's chronicles touch every object of interest for the historian of 14th century France. Not an academic historian, Froissart tells the tale of court, warfare, social dynamics, and labor practices. He becomes, thereby, one of the first historians of modern Europe, and a recorder of reference for the self-awareness of the gradually shaping French nation.

Overview: Froissart (1337-1410) was above all a chronicler, the French term for an early stage of what we might call the 'scientific historian.' His *Chronicles* (1369-1400) of French (and British and Scottish) culture in the waning stages of that chivalry which is highlighted in the *Roman de la Rose*, and even more profoundly in the *Perceval* of Chrétien de Troyes, where love of the lady links to theology, mark a moment of cultural transition, from the truly mediaeval in France to the pre modern. The time of Froissart, of course, is the Hundred Years War, which was a time of national suffering and hardship, and with it of a growing development of that pre-capital urbanization which would make the period of chivalry a nostalgic memory. Froissart stands at a crossroads, as we see it in retrospect, though to him the Chivalric was still alive, though waning.

Main themes: The dominant of the *Chronicles* is given in the Prologue, where Froissart calls on all young gentlemen of worth—which to him meant either the clergy or the nobility—to become 'preux chivaliers,' 'proud knightly gentlemen, a concept fully in place in the times of earlier historians, like Villehardouin two centuries earlier, but already 'old fashioned' in Froissart's time. In the following pages Froissart colorfully depicts a world, of knights and ladies, jousts and impregnable castles, manly devotion to the Virgin, a world which perhaps English language readers find in the similarly nostalgic fictions of a writer like Sir Walter Scott, in the l9th century. We need only return to the *Chanson de Roland,* with its 'true epic spirit,' to realize how sophisticatedly far Froissart has come from that tone.

The Tone (in the also archaizing English of an early 20th century translation): *Thus they set forth as they were ordained, and they that went by the sea took all the ships that they found in their ways: and so long they went forth, what by sea and what by land, that they came to a good port and to a good town called Barfleur, the which incontinent was won, for they within gave up for fear of death. Howbeit, for all that, the town was robbed, and much gold and silver there found, and rich jewels: there was found so much riches, that the boys and villains of the host set nothing by good furred gowns…*

Reading

Froissart, Chronicles, www.fordham.edu (Battle of Poitiers) 30 pages

Questions

Concept: History
How did the first significant writer of history, in the French language, conceive of his nation's history? He dealt with his own culture as though it represented a nation in the modern sense. What were some of the characteristics of what he considered to be a uniquely French identity?

Theme: The relation of history to fiction

How does Froissart's conception of history correspond to the Arthurian legend concept, or the concept inherent in *The Song of Roland*? Can you think of all these texts we are presently reading as pre-modern? What ties bind them to the older world of the Middle Ages? What does the term "modern" mean to you?

Idea ; Cultural Change and what it means

Does Froissart's relative "realism" make him seem more "modern" than Chretien and the author of *The Song of Roland*? We will be asking this kind of question frequently. Do you feel comfortable with the idea of "modernity?" Would you say that the term "modern" applies to your own culture, or is the "notion of modernity" itself now old fashioned?

Comparative Literature: Chronicle and History

Froissart, Chronicles
Sima Qian, Histories
Ibn Khaldun, Histories.

As a chronicler of his own time, Froissart is one of our chief sources of "information" about the France of the l4th century. His work is (not accidentally) coeval with the coming into national self-consciousness of France itself.) Note that historiography developed at different paces throughout the world, and in every case marks a culture's initial coming to grips with its own identity: consult China's first historian of account, Sima Qian (145-90 B.C.) or the Arab thinker and scientist Ibn Khaldun (14th century A.D.), both of whom did much to create sense of cultural identity, as did Froissart.

Comparative Literature: Court and Daily Life – East and West

Froissart, Chronicles
The Pillow Book
Lady Murasaki, The Tale of Genji.

To Froissart's inside history of court and peasant life, in 14th century France, you might want to compare the "historical observations" of two great Japanese works of fiction/chronicle/ gossip/thoughts about life. I refer to the Pillow Book and the Tale of Genji, both written around 1000 CE, or a little later. Each of these works, like Froissart's, sheds light on the social life of its time.

Renaissance French Literature

Rabelais, *Gargantua, Pantagruel*

Introduction

Between The Middle Ages and Modern Sensibility. Rabelais joins Montaigne as a passionate Renaissance man, educated in the classics but intensely interested in the real world around him, and in the realities of corporeal life in society. Can you see the beginnings of the novel form in work like that of Rabelais?

Overview: Francois Rabelais (1495-1553) was born in the province of Touraine, and by an uninterrupted progression passed through a 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 the Clément Marot of our previous entry, 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 voudra,' 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

Rabelais, Gargantua and Pantagruel, http://www.gutenberg.org
(Book I, Chapter I-XV; Book V, Chapter XXXVIII-XLVII), 75 pages)

Questions

Question ; Medieval/Renaissance Interface
What identifies Rabelais as a post-mediaeval sensibility? Does he still write with one foot in the Middle Ages?

Theme: Story lines and the Medieval Literary Tradition

We are familiar with the novel form, which reigns in literature today. Though that genre has changed through the centuries, it retains a consistent form: a coherent narrative that runs from beginning to end, a narration. Rabelais was writing under the spell of the mediaeval fabliaux, discontinuous entertainments. He was pre-novel. Can you see the tension in *Gargantua* between earlier and later literary forms? Between the fabliau and the novel to-be?

Comparative Literature : Rabelais as "Medieval Man"
Rabelais, Gargantua
Bakhtin, The Dialogic Imagination.
The Russian critic, Bakhtin, (The Dialogic Imagination, 1981), has written extensively on Rabelais and his sense of reality. The new literary form of the novel, says Bakhtin, was a step toward realism—"the zone of maximal contact with contemporary reality in all its openendedness." Rabelais, says Bakhtin, was on his way toward that kind of realism we find in the novel. Can you see the ways in which Rabelais is both on the modernizing track and still part of the Middle Ages? Is Rabelais still of a "fantastic" and myth filled imagination, without a reality base of the kind you associate with the novel? Does Rabelais display that head-on self-knowledge that characterizes Montaigne?

Comparative Literature : The Somatic in Literature
Rabelais, Gargantua
Swift, Gulliver's Travels.
You will notice the exuberant references to body parts and body functions in Rabelais' Gargantua. (Pissing from the top of Notre Dame Cathedral, Gargantua drowns so many thousands of little Frenchmen!) Are you startled by this kind of directness? Do you see some traces of it in Montaigne? Have you every read Jonathan Swift's Gulliver's Travels, (1726). Which is often but differently 'scatological'? We today are said to live in an age freeing itself of denial, letting it all hang out. But do you think that the scatological/defecatory material in Rabelais would be acceptable in the cultural media of advanced Western society? (If not, why not?) Why is even talking about "breaking wind" more of a conversation stopper than affirming an unpopular political position?

Montaigne, *Essais*

Introduction

The Discovery of the Self. From Froissart to Montaigne is a large jump in time, two centuries, and from a world still basically "Mediaeval" to one in which the stirrings of the city-state, "modern commercial patterns," even "early science" are making themselves felt.

Overview: Michel de Montaigne (1533-1592) was born of an old merchant family, in the year that saw the publication of the first book of Rabelais' *Pantagruel*. It was the particular good luck of Montaigne, that his father had firm and original ideas of childhood education, and brought up his son on Latin, which the young man learned and loved as the result of imaginative pedagogy. After an intense period of education, Montaigne retired from public life at the age of thirty-seven. In the tower of his family chateau Montaigne entered into the life of a country gentleman, and began to write the first of his essays, probably around 1571. A period of travels then ensued, especially in Italy, until Montaigne was called back to be Mayor of Bordeaux, and after four more years he retired once more, this time more permanently, and began devoting himself to writing the *Essais* for which we primarily know him.

The Essais of Montaigne (1580): Montaigne writes of himself with a directness we would never have imagined from, say, the works of Rabelais or Ronsard, two of the most personal of Renaissance French writers. Montaigne takes us right into his life, and doing so becomes one of the first truly modern voices, telling us his tastes, his weaknesses, his attitudes toward life and death, his view of friendship—which was immensely important to him, of married wives—which was much less important to him, and of ethical responsibility. We awaken from reading him with huge respect for his civility, his good sense, his basically secular perspective, and his dignity.

A Sample from the Essay on Age:
Of all the great human actions I ever heard or read of, of what sort soever, I have observed, both in former ages and our own, more were performed before the age of thirty than after; and this ofttimes in the very lives of the same men. May I not confidently instance in those of Hannibal and his great concurrent Scipio? The better half of their lives they lived upon the glory they had acquired in their youth; great men after, 'tis true, in comparison of others; but by no means in comparison of themselves. As to my own particular, I do certainly believe that since that age, both my understanding and my constitution have rather decayed than improved, and retired rather than advanced.

Reading

Montaigne, Michel de, Essays, http://www.gutenberg.org
(Chapters XXIV, XXV, XXVII, X, XX, XXXVIII) 60-70 pages

Questions

Topic : Self-awareness in Literature
How does Montaigne display his self-awareness? Can you see why he has been called the first personal identity in Western literature? In what ways has the cultural world changed, as you pass from the earlier French literature we have read into the mind of Montaigne? What viewpoints do Rabelais and Montaigne have in common? What qualifies them as major

figures of what we call *Renaissance* thought? How do they relate to the ancient Classics, as well as to Mediaeval Christian thought?

Comparative Literature : Montaigne and the Classics
Montaigne, Essays
Plato, Apology, Crito
St. Augustine, Confessions
Montaigne speaks like a 'real person' because he examines himself frankly and directly, without denial as we might say today. You might want to compare Montaigne's thinking, in the Essays, with that of Socrates in the dialogues (Apology, Crito) in which that independent Greek philosopher asks himself ultimate questions about moral value and relation to one's community. What makes Montaigne the more "modern" of the two men? Compare also St. Augustine's Confessions (4th century CE.) Augustine examines himself meticulously and unsparingly—opening out his innate "sinfulness." Does something about Augustine reflect the fact that he lived more than a millennium before Montaigne?

Comparative Literature : Montaigne and the Classics
Montaigne, Essays
Sandys, History of Classical Scholarship
Highet, The Classical Tradition
Montaigne was deeply versed in Latin, a language in which his father tried to make the whole household converse—even though by Montaigne's time Latin was fast becoming a language for the educated few, not for regular conversation. Locate a copy of a classic of scholarship, Sandys, History of Classical Scholarship, l921; reprinted 2009. (You might also like The Classical Tradition by Gilbert Highet (1985), a somewhat more popular account of the development of classical learning) Sandys will give you insight into the several stages of recovery of classical texts during the European Renaissance, and enable you to appreciate the kind of deep immersion in Latin Montaigne felt all his life.

Poetry (Villon, Ronsard, Lyric Poems)

Introduction

Overview: Francois Villon (1431-1480) was born in the year when Joan of Arc went to the stake. He was a man of the streets, born in a poverty of which we know no details, and when not studying at the University of Paris he was a thief and fugitive, often in flight from the law, frequently imprisoned, and twice close to death by hanging. He was also a poet known to us today by a slim selection, notably by two *Testaments* (Wills), one large the other brief, in which he verbally bequeaths his few worldly goods to friend real or imaginary whom he conjures up into his poetry. (Attempts to identify the people and places he describes ultimately fail, for the mixture of crazy fantasy with authenticity defeats the project, and attests to Villon's native genius, which belies all efforts to turn him into that kind of representative of literary history that scholars treasure.) In many ways Villon speaks intensely to us in the fashion of Christopher Marlowe, a similar 'brilliant rascal' who lit up the sky of Elizabethan England fifty years after Villon. Villon's *Testaments* are full of turbulent emotions—*hatred, scorn, vulnerability to the transitoriness of life, the horror of death*—and thanks to his brilliance, sense of humor, and superb ear he comes down to us as the first powerful and individual voice in French literature. Yet at the same time, as you can see at every point in his poetry, he lives soaked in the world values of the mediaeval writers we have sampled to this point, wrapped up in the Virgin Mary, true to the Christian senses of order, transitoriness, grace, and despair which we can find in all the works sampled here.

How it sounds: a stanza from the *Ballad of the Hanged (1461)*

The rain has soaked us, washed us: skies
Of hot suns blacken us, scorch us: crows
And magpies have gouged out our eyes,
Plucked at our beards, and our eyebrows.
There's never a moment's rest allowed:
Now here, now there, the changing breeze
Swings us, as it wishes, ceaselessly,
Beaks pricking us more than a cobbler's awl.
So don't you join our fraternity,
But pray that God absolves us all.

Overview: Pierre de Ronsard (1524-1585), called in his day the 'Prince of Poets,' was born in the Valley of the Loire, into an illustrious family. At the age of twelve he became a page of the Duke of Orleans; from that portal his way was opened into an early life of travel and sophisticated exposure, including extensive stays in Scotland and England, and shortly later Germany and Italy. He was by age twenty fluent in English, German, and Italian, no small part of his qualifications for poetic eminence. At this fulcrum point in his brilliant youth he was struck by deafness, a handicap challenging his strongest powers; and it is the power of his personality that led him to a life of extraordinary literary creativity. His self-deepening took over with several years of intense study of Greek and Latin literatures—one might think of the studious preoccupations of Rabelais or Margaret of Navarre—and before long a meeting with a kindred spirit, Joachim du Bellay, who was to be a significant partner in his literary career. It was the

point at which Ronsard was nearly ready to retire to his country home, to take advantage of many kinds of royal privilege, and to create the works that have made his famous: works touching every literary genre except drama, and paying constant close tribute to the poetries of Latin authors like Ovid and Horace.

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

When you are very old, at evening, by the fire,
spinning wool by candlelight and winding it in skeins,
you will say in wonderment as you recite my lines:
"Ronsard admired me in the days when I was fair."

Then not one of your servants dozing gently there
hearing my name's cadence break through your low repines
but will start into wakefulness out of her dreams
and bless your name — immortalised by my desire.

Reading

Villon, Francois, Lyrics, http://www.everypoet.com
Ronsard, http://www.everypoet.com

Question

Different though these two lyric poets are, they share a robust universality—passion for life and sadness at loss, love of beauty, joy in language and its forms for their own sakes. What identifies these two poets as partners in the Renaissance perspective, as we are encountering it in this course?

Unit Review

Try to get in the habit, throughout this course, of thinking texts into their broad cultural setting: in these first weeks, remember that we are in culture that thrives on local courts, the strong influence of Christian theology and myth, and a pre-urban stability with great emphasis on agriculture. It will be useful to you, if you can, to depart from your own world's assumptions, as you reach out to this older world.

17th Century French Literature : *NeoClassical Literature*

Moliere, *Le bourgeois gentilhomme (The Middle-Class Gentleman)*

Introduction

Middle Class Society and its Foibles. Racine and Corneille are tragic or tragic-comic dramatists, but Moliere introduces us to a new register in French literature, irony or satire. (Rabelais seems to write a mixture of caricature and fantasy.) For that, French literature needed an analytic genius as playwright; in return French culture served up, to Moliere, a new phenomenon, the middle class. This class was starting to make prominent appearance throughout Europe, by the mid-17th century. Once again, many factors—economic, political, military-- contributed to that social phenomenon, which was sure to generate all those foibles that assert themselves when what we might call "family values" are called to perform like the chivalric values of old.

Overview: Jean Baptiste Poquelin Molière (1622-1673) was raised in the heart of Paris, son of an upholsterer, and educated by the Jesuits, in whose College he became active in Latin learning and in acting of Roman comedy. The following years found Moliere gradually making his way into the active world of street theaters, private enterprise wandering theater shows, and getting a sense of the whole dramatic territory. His confidence at last well established, after the favorable reception of certain of his youthful efforts, he returned to Paris in l658, and had the perfect luck to catch the favorable attention of King Louis XIV. The final fifteen years of his life were spent in a high creative mode, and he created nineteen plays during this period, many of them among the highest achievements of French literature.

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

A sample: from the opening of Act 1 of The Imaginary Invalid: SCENE I.--ARGAN (sitting at a table, adding up his apothecary's bill with counters).

ARG. Three and two make five, and five make ten, and ten make twenty. "Item, on the 24th, a small, insinuative clyster, preparative and gentle, to soften, moisten, and refresh the bowels of Mr. Argan." What I like about Mr. Fleurant, my apothecary, is that his bills are always civil. "The bowels of Mr. Argan." All the same, Mr. Fleurant, it is not enough to be civil, you must also be reasonable, and not plunder sick people. Thirty sous for a clyster! I have already told you, with all due respect to you, that elsewhere you have only charged me twenty sous; and twenty sous, in the language of apothecaries, means only ten sous. Here they are, these ten sous.

Reading

Moliere, The Bourgeois Gentleman, The Imaginary Invalid, Tartuffe
http://www.gutenberg.org (both plays entire) 50 pages per play

Questions

Idea : Social Stratification
The two plays we are reading are social commentary, unlike the work of Racine and Corneille. What is Molière's view of the social classes in French society? Is the title, *The Bourgeois Gentleman*, ironic? What is the status of the bourgeoisie in France at Molière's time? Have you met anything like the bourgeois individual or bourgeois view-point in the earlier readings in this course? Is the imaginary invalid a universal figure or does he too stem directly from the social world out of which Moliere is writing? What is Molière's own social situation, and how does it play out in these two dramas?

Question : The universality of the imaginary invalid
Is the imaginary invalid a universal figure or does he too stem directly from the social world out of which Moliere is writing? What is Molière's own social situation, and how does it play out in these two dramas?

Theme : Satire
How is Molière's comedy a satire? What is he satirizing? Is the vice of hypocrisy universal, or culturally bound? Is satire the principal genre of comic drama? How do the effects of satire differ from those of tragic drama, like Phèdre? Are the emotions sought for different from one another?

Question : The Background to Our Readings
Literature, as you know, comes into being from a society and a historical moment in that society. It is, however, wise to read the literature first, then to "fill in the background." Do you believe that "background" is essential for understanding "the great classics"?

Comparative Literature: Comedy and the Foibles of Society
Moliere, Le Bourgeois gentilhomme
Aristophanes, Comedies
Theophrastus, Characters
Moliere's comic perspective requires a keen eye for social foibles. Check out the Greek comic dramatist Aristophanes, for the supreme master of such foibles. His targets are such laughable (in his view) aspects of Athenian society as its addiction to the law courts, its tolerance for abstract philosophers, its inclination to make war. In each play Aristophanes directs his humor against some such absurd development of his society. You might be interested in Theophrastus' Characters, (300 BCE), a kind of handbook of typically eccentric and "abnormal characters" that appear in society. The Greek dramatist drew models from this (categorizing and judgmental) Theophrastus.

Comparative Literature : Social Comedy throughout the Ages
Moliere, Dramas
Contemporary Television
In contemporary western comedy do we pillory the same character failings as Moliere? The hypocrite, the imagined ill person, the pretentious magistrate? More generally, do we indict general types of failing? If you are a follower of the "popular cultural media," which have assumed prominence in the last thirty years through television, do you find such broad types playing a role in our amusement industry? Jefferson, Jack Tripper, Archie Bunker, George Costanza (on Seinfeld)? Are these the kinds of character we love to pillory?

Moliere, *Le Malade Imaginaire (The Imaginary Invalid)*

Le Malade imaginaire (The Imaginary Invalid) was Molière's final play, first performed in February 1673 in Paris. A satire of the medical profession and a comedy-ballet, or a comedy combined with song and dance, the play contains a good deal of farce and was written to amuse King Louis XIV. It is also a superb character study of a hypochondriac, or a patient obsessed with being ill, and it contains a brilliant social and political commentary on Paris in the 1670s. Many critics have even found a subtle but powerful philosophical strain in the work, and it is an excellent example of the stylized comedy-ballet popular in Louis XIV's courtly theater. Molière himself played the main role of the hypochondriac Argan, and famously coughed up blood during his fourth performance, dying later that evening in what came to be known as a bitter irony, given the play's subject of imaginary illness.

Reading

The play is now widely available in collections such as the 2000 Penguin Classics edition of *The Miser and Other Plays: A New Selection*, in which it is translated as *The Hypochondriac.*
http://www.enotes.com/imaginary-invalid

Questions

Question : The universality of the imaginary invalid
Is the imaginary invalid a universal figure or does he too stem directly from the social world out of which Moliere is writing? What is Molière's own social situation, and how does it play out in these two dramas?

Descartes, *Discourse on Method*

Introduction

Clear and Distinct Ideas. Parallel to the literary traditions we have seen evolving, over several centuries, runs a robust trans-European philosophical tradition, which is as culture-expressive as the literary movements philosophy is involved with. The growth of scientific thinking, which is already highly advanced in the realms of astronomy, engineering, anatomy, is by the 17th century sharing its insistence on clear method with the philosophers of the time, like Descartes.

The Concept of Human Nature and Reason. In the *Discourse on Method*, Descartes makes much of "clear and distinct ideas," which he considers the basis of significant thought. How does this perspective relate to that of the dramatists whom you have read? Which of them seems most "rationally analytical"? What connections do you see between Descartes' mindset and that of the world changing scientists--Galileo, Newton—who were shaping the thought of his time?

Overview: René Descartes (1596-1650) , like Corneille, was educated by the Jesuits; he subsequently went on to take part in three campaigns of the Thirty Years War, which was ravaging Europe through the Catholic Protestant conflict, the intensity of which we sampled earlier in discussing Agrippa d'Aubigné. It was in winter quarters during his first campaign (1619) that Descartes conceived the ideas for his best known work, *A Discourse on Method*, which would finally be published eighteen years later. After his military period Descartes returned to the social scene of Paris, but not for long, as his growing preoccupation with philosophy and mathematics drew him toward the congenial intellectual atmosphere of Holland again. There he remained until l649, when Queen Christina of Sweden invited him to teach her philosophy in Stockholm. It was there that he died, having left a large body of groundlaying philosophical work, which would constitute a turning point for the foundations of modern thought as a whole.

The Bent of Descartes' Work: Descartes' philosophical work—at its most developed in what we call the *Meditations*—got its lasting imprint from the reflections that first besieged him in the *Discourse*. As a mathematician, Descartes was from the outset disposed to doubt—mathematics, living from hypotheses, demands proof at every stage. As he surveyed the propositions on which he depended, for the view he had of the world itself, he concluded that only one proposition could not be doubted, namely that he was thinking as he surveyed. That he was capable of thought—*je pense, donc je suis*—was the one thing Descartes felt he could be certain of. On the rock of this conviction he constructed a philosophical perspective which gave priority to ideas, and consequently prioritized mind over matter, the immortality of the soul—which was immaterial, and the existence of that God whose infinite and perfect existence could only have entered our thinking if indeed he existed, as he does. In another influential work, *A Treatise on the Passions of the Soul* (1649), Descartes asserts that the passions are good, and that only our misuse of them is dangerous and evil; a perspective that Corneille embraced and exemplified in many of his dramas.

Reading

Descartes, René, Discourse on Method, http://www.literature.org

(Chapters 1-6) 45 pages

Questions

Theme : What is the relation of philosophy to literature?
While our course topic is French literature, we cannot exclude a number of great texts, like Descartes' *Discourse*, which reflect deeply on the nature of thought, of human personality, and of values. Do you see any connections between Descartes' thinking and the work of the 17th century dramatists you are about to read?

Comparative Literature : Clear and Distinct Ideas
Descartes, Discourse on Method
Lao-tzu, The Way
Descartes used his capacity for clear and distinct ideas to found sectors of advanced mathematics, philosophical speculation, and moral reasoning. While avowedly "a faithful Christian," his thinking was for the most part a triumph of reason rather than faith. You might find it instructive to compare this thought direction of Descartes with the address of a Buddhist thinker, like Lao-Tzu, to the world out there. Lao-tzu too is interested in a clear relation between our consciousness and the world to be "known." Lao-tzu, however, believes in clearing the mind and letting the world just happen, unshaped by reason or any other force. By fine tuning this difference between Descartes and Lao-tzu you will find yourself probing the difference between Western reason and Eastern letting it be.

Comparative Literature
Descartes, Discourse on Method
Coleridge, Biographia Literaria
Descartes' rationalism may seem to be unfriendly to the exercise of imagination. (As we understand "imagination," today, it customarily conflicts with the "spirit of scientific inquiry.") But in fact Descartes points out at length, in his Meditations, that imagination is a property of God, and our most reliable guide to the nature of our Creator. Our contemporary sense of "imagination'" customarily links that faculty to an "emotive state" '"full of fancy," and not implicated in the practical weave of reality. In order to sort out the development of the concepts of reason and imagination you might want to take a look at the key text of modern literary thinking about Imagination, Coleridge's Biographia Literaria (1818).

Pascal, *Pensees*

Introduction

Taking a Chance on Order. Like his contemporary, Descartes, Pascal was a profound mathematician and philosopher. Unlike Descartes, Pascal devoted more thought to "spiritual" and "moral" issues than to scientific questions. Pascal contributes both to the religious and the philosophical life of his time. He is renowned as the founder of analytic geometry, and as a probing philosopher of the moral life and the faith life. Tradition draws special attention to his noted argument of "the bet," which he formulates in his *Pensees*. As you will have read, "the bet" is that God exists, the decision for God being in your favor if He does exist, and of no harm to you if He doesn't.

Overview: Blaise Pascal (1623-1662) was born in the Auvergne, of a good and responsible family. With his two sisters, Pascal was a genius from the start, and when the mother died early Pascal's dad, who was himself passionately interested in mathematics, moved the family to Paris, where they would have more contact with the intellectual currents of the day. Before he was twelve, Pascal had mastered the elements of Euclid. Not much later, the family moved to Rouen, where Blaise aided his father, employed in administrative calculations, by inventing a calculating machine which would be the forerunner of the first cash register. In the subsequent years both Pascal and his sister moved to Paris again, and became acquainted both with Descartes, whom we visited in an earlier entry, and with the Jansenist movement—a religious movement, within Catholicism, which flourished in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, and which stressed human depravity and the need for divine grace—with its religious center at Port Royal. Both Pascal and his elder sister committed themselves to the movement, which was to play a sharp role in Pascal's later development. In defence of the Jansenist leader, Arnauld, Pascal composed a brilliant series of *Provincial Letters*, designed to defend Jansenism and Arnauld, and though the success of this work was powerful Pascal eventually turned to writing a defence of Christianity in general. Incomplete at his death, the remains of this large work, now called the *Pensées (1669)*, were to become Pascal's most famous legacy—in addition to his incomparably important work in mathematics, especially in advanced calculus.

From *Les Pensées*:

Montaigne's faults are great. Lewd words; this is bad, notwithstanding Mademoiselle de Gournay. His opinions on suicide, on death. He suggests an indifference about salvation, without fear and without repentance. *As his book was not written with a religious purpose, he was not bound to mention religion; but it is always our duty not to turn men from it. One can excuse his rather free and licentious opinions on some relations of life; but one cannot excuse his thoroughly pagan views on death, for a man must renounce piety altogether, if he does not at least wish to die like a Christian. Now, through the whole of his book his only conception of death is a cowardly and effeminate one.*

Reading

Pascal, Blaise, Pensees, *http://www.gutenberg.org*
(Chapters III, IV, IX, XIII) 80 pages

Questions

Dilemma : Irreconcilable differences in world view
Like his contemporary, Descartes, Pascal was a profound mathematician and philosopher. Unlike Descartes, Pascal devoted more thought to "spiritual" and "moral" issues than to scientific questions. Do you see connections between the thought in Pascal's *Pensées*, and the perspectives in the dramatists who were his contemporaries?

Theme : What is the Religious Leaning of the 17th Century Dramatists?
Do the great creators of 17th century drama seem to you to take a position toward religion? Do their plays presuppose order and meaning in the universe? A good god who cares for the creation? Or are Racine and Corneille basically tragic in viewpoint, and Moliere simply a satirist?

Comparative Literature
Pascal, Pensees
Charles Peguy, Poems
Paul Claudel, Poems
Francois Mauriac, The Nest of Vipers
Pascal's religious sensibility belongs to an age for which the religious categories of Christianity are coming under close inspection, and even the God worshipped among thinkers is regularly called "un dieu caché," a godhead revealing itself covertly, and in its own absence. Pascal's "bet" springs from such a perspective. We learn to love God by believing, but are always casting in the dark. You might want to look up figures like Charles Peguy, Paul Claudel, or Francois Mauriac, all of whom are distinguished 20th century French Catholic figures, all of whom are searchers. Then go back in mind into the perspectives of Perceval, which we read earlier. Do you see how different the Christian narrative appears in this still mediaeval believer?

Comparative Literature
Pascal, Pensees
Soren Kierkegaard, Either/Or
Pascal views the human being as cast into the sea of life, and struggling to orient himself, intermediate as he is between the infinitely small and the infinitely vast. Our finitude and our high aspirations mark us. This kind of thinking made Pascal a creative forerunner to the founder of Existentialism, Soren Kierkegaard, for whom man is in transit in life, reaching toward God but anchored in mud. Try reading Kierkegaard's Either/Or or Concluding Unscientific Postscript (1846), for a sense of the connection of this thinking with that of Pascal.

Racine, *Iphigeneia, Phedre*

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

Overview: Jean Racine (1639-1699) Brought up, like Molière, in the center of Paris, Racine however was of high middle class background, and at an early age, in the schools of Port Royal, he received the most thorough classical education available, coming especially into a mastery of Greek, which was to be a major source of inspiration throughout his dramatic career. After an unsuccessful attempt to study theology, which did not interest him, Racine returned from seminary to Paris, and once more embraced the excitement of urban life, making influential and agreeable friendships, with the fable writer La Fontaine, and soon with Molière and Boileau. Racine's first tragedy was published in l664. There followed a period of pain and growth for Racine, as his masters of religious instruction, from whom he had learned so much at seminary, published their strong disapproval of Racine's devotion to the stage, a slur which brought sharp response from Racine, and a firm new decision to commit his life to the theater. With the superb play *Andromaque* (1667) Racine initiated a series of masterpieces—B*ritannicus, Iphigénie, Phèdre*—which would establish for French tragedy, as Molière did for comedy, a world wide pre eminence. It comes to us as a shock that at the height of his powers and fame, with *Phèdre* in l677, Racine virtually abandons the theater, marries a woman who has never read a line of his work, reconciles with his Port Royal masters, and devotes himself henceforth to God, king, and family.

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

Sample, from Phèdre:

This malady of mine is from far back.
Only just married to Aegeus' son,
My peace, my happiness seemed safe at last,
When Athens showed me my proud enemy.
I saw him. First I blushed and then grew pale;
At sight of him my troubled soul was lost.
My eyes no longer saw, I could not speak;
I felt my blood run icy and then burn;
I recognized Her! Venus! Dreaded fires,
Inevitable torments for that blood
Which she pursues.

Reading

Racine, Iphigeneia, Phedre [*http://books.google.com*](http://books.google.com) (both plays entire) 50 pages per play

Questions

Idea : Modernization of Greek themes in l7th century drama
Compare the assigned French tales to the ancient Greek legends that lie behind them; how has Racine remodeled the ancient theme? What fatal twist has he given to Phèdre's passion? What kind of passion has Racine added to the Greek legend of Iphigeneia and sacrifice? What is the playwright's view of human nature, as we see it emerge in these plays? Is he keenly interested in his audience, as he shapes his dramatic ideas? How does he take his audience into account?

Theme: Passion and Classical Drama
Compare these tales to those of the ancient Greek legends that ground them. How are some 17th-century French plays constituted of modernizations of Greek themes? How has Racine modeled his new version? What fatal twist has he given to Phedre's passion? What is the playwright's view of human nature, as we see it emerge in this play?

Comparative Literature
Racine, Phedre
Euripides, Hippolytus
Robert Graves, The Greek Myths
The classical tradition in drama is fertile because the Greek myths, as activated on stage, were flexible, accessible to many subtle and profound interpretations. You might draw a connection between Phedre and Euripides's Hippolytus; read the newer play first, for this course, and then retreat. When you have finished Euripides' play, go to a handbook like Robert Graves, The Greek Myths, in which you will see that there were many versions of the myth in Greek literature besides that in Euripides. In other words, our habit of reading a modern version of the classics in terms of a classical version, like a play by one of the great Athenian playwrights, is deceptive. There is in fact no ground zero of any of the Greek myths; they regress into the multiple mists of the past.

Corneille, *Cinna*, *Le Cid*

Introduction

Honor and Revenge on The 17th Century Stage. *Le Cid* intertwines several passions: lust, honor, glory on the battlefield. Although the tale ends as a "romantic comedy," it has spilled much blood and evoked much heroism before it concludes. In literary historical terms, this play will remind you of the world setting of *The Song of Roland*, where honor and chivalry join. The element of Romance—Rodrigue and Chimene are "destined for one another"—marks the modernity of this mediaeval tale. In *Cinna*, you see, we expect bloodshed to come out of the hero's hostility to the Emperor Augustus. But what happens? The Emperor's benign and guileless attitude wins over his enemies. The "sentimentality" of the modern stage remodels the starker world presentations of older literature.

Overview: Pierre de Corneille (1606-1684) grew up into a Jesuit education, and early convinced himself that the stage was his destiny. In 1634 he produced his first tragic drama, *Médée*, and in the next year his tragedy, *Le Cid*, brought him fame and attention after the successes of a single night's performance. *Le Cid*, a fruit of Corneille's long time preoccupation with Spanish drama, and chiefly with the stage of Calderon (1600-1681), deals like its predecessors with those questions of honor, fate, and destiny which belonged to the Spanish tradition. For several reasons, among which was the tribute to the Spanish tradition—the Spaniards being the greatest foreign rivals of France at the time—*Le Cid* aroused huge controversy, and though the newly formed Académie Francaise objected strongly to many violations of the Aristotelian unities, and its 'primitive' addictions to dueling and honor, the play won enormous approval from the French public, and Corneille was from then on the principal father of French classical drama.

Corneille went on from there to a prolific dramatic career, comedies as well as tragedies, and it is generally felt that the four tragedies he created between l636 and 1643—*Le Cid, Horace, Cinna, Polyeucte*—were not only his finest work but one of the triumphs of the French tragic drama, which was establishing the l7th century as one of the world's more fertile, in skilled and wise portrayals of human fate. The general themes of these works turn repeatedly around issues of honor and the dignity with which the tragic hero, representing a summit of human mirror, can survive the most dreadful traits with his tragic endurance. Many of his finest plays were based on ancient Roman history, though not with a desire to be historically accurate, rather, to use the Roman event as background for staging eternally valid truths about human nature and its destiny. It is worth noting that for Corneille it was essential at least broadly to follow the dramatic rules of the three unities, which were at that time enshrined in the value system of the French Academy. The unities of place, time, and action, as Aristotle was interpreted to have meant them, in his *Poetics*, held firm sway over French dramatic creation throughout the l7th century.

Readings

Corneille, Pierre, Cinna and Le Cid, http://www.gutenberg.org
(both plays entire) 50 pages per play

Questions

Theme : Power

How does Corneille, in *Le Cid*, treat the question of Absolute Power? Does he support the Emperor, and if so how can he excuse the Emperor's execution of Emilie's father? Do you find the conclusion a satisfying resolution of the dramatic conflict?

Theme : Honor and Revenge
How does Corneille treat the question of honor and revenge, in Cinna? Does he support the Emperor, and if so how can he excuse the Emperor's execution of Emilie's father? Does *The Cid* reflect the same concept of honor, chivalry, and romance which we find in *Cinna*? Do you find the conclusion of Le Cid a satisfying resolution of the dramatic conflict?

Theme : The Construction of Drama
Have the characters in Corneille's plays full personalities, or do they "represent" virtues and vices? You might want to view this question in terms of literary theory: what goes into making a full literary character, one who is "rounded." Is the question meaningful? Has the human being, in his/her personality, a "roundedness" which can be captured in imaginative literature?

Theme : Heroes
Ancient Greek and Roman cultures were noted for their love of the hero, famed for his glorious actions. Does Corneille preserve this emphasis in *Cinna* and *Le Cid*? Does the hero retain his "noble traits" even in a culture which, say, has tastes for such as Rabelais and Montaigne, who are "modern" in the sense of demystifying the grand and noble in human affairs?

Comparative Literature
The Song of Roland
Corneille, Le Cid
Think back to The Song of Roland, almost a millennium earlier than Corneille, and you may find a cultural world that bears resemblance to the world Corneille's plays take place in. (It is a cliché that Corneille's plays are hard to appreciate today, and belong to an earlier era. Is this true?) What are the links between the world of Corneille and that of The Song of Roland? Do we confront in Corneille the Roman tradition which was so influential in forming the language and nation of France as it emerged from the Middle Ages?

Comparative Literature
Thomas Kuhn, The Structure of Scientific Revolutions
Think about clusters of great writers practicing their craft at the same moment in culture history: the great French dramatists we are studying; the three great Ancient Greek tragic dramatists; the burst of Tang Dynasty lyric poetry in China; the dense productivity of vast poetic theology in early India. How do you explain such cluster energy in the arts? (The Italian Renaissance provides a superb instance for painting; the Baroque period in Germany for music). You might want to look at a book like Thomas Kuhn, The Structure of Scientific Revolutions, (1962), which develops the idea that scientific development takes place when a critical mass of observers attends to a defined set of problems, in one time and place. Can Kuhn's point be translated to the way the arts develop?

Rochefoucault, *Maxims*

Introduction

The Lapidary Maxim. The *Maxims* take a sharp and often bleak look at human nature. Does Larochefoucault resemble Montaigne in his view of mankind? Is his perspective "dark," like that of Racine? Does Molière, in particular, seem to hone in on foibles in the way La Rochefoucault does?

Reading

Larochefoucault, Maxims, http:// books.google.com

Questions

Theme : The French Classical Style
Translation inevitably modifies the tone of the original, but can you see through the translation into the kind of poetic language in which the three classical French dramatists composed? Educate yourself, please, in some of the niceties of the Alexandrine, the line of preference in the "grand siècle." Even a step in this direction will fortify your sense of this drama's reality.

Issue : The Background to our Readings
Literature, as you know, comes into being from a society and a historical moment in that society. It is, however, wise to read the literature first, then to "fill in the background." Do you believe that "background" is essential for understanding "the great classics"?

Review

You have now read from three dramatists of the classical period of French Literature. Step back and consider how sharply the world picture of these writers differs from that of the writer of *The Song of Roland*. Are you also beginning to get any sense of a "French" quality to that literature?

18th Century French Literature : Enlightenment Literature

Voltaire, Candide

Introduction

Irony in the Face of a Dark Universe. 18th century thinkers were constantly concerned with issues of free will and determination, and especially with "justifying the ways of God to man," that is making sense to man of the way the world plays out. Voltaire, in *Candide*, gives classic expression to man's concern with this "justification." But in this he is part of a skeptical spirit which infuses the critical-scientific minds of his time, as they look back on the orthodoxies of earlier periods. What is Voltaire's view of God's place in the universe?

Overview: Francois Marie Arouet (Voltaire) (1694-1778) was educated by the Jesuits, at the renowned Collège de Clermont, and at an early age launched into his literary career—having abandoned the law for art, to the horror of his father. Satires, an early drama, a couple of light comedies; Voltaire was already launched on an aggressive career which would send him to the Bastille for wounding aristocratic sensibilities. Freed from prison a second time he was exiled to England, where he made 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.) In l734 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.

Sample: from the conclusion of Voltaire's tale, *Candide* (1759):

Pangloss used now and then to say to Candide:

"There is a concatenation of all events in the best of possible worlds; for, in short, had you not been kicked out of a fine castle for the love of Miss Cunegund; had you not been put into the Inquisition; had you not traveled over America on foot; had you not run the Baron through the body; and had you not lost all your sheep, which you brought from the good country of El Dorado, you would not have been here to eat preserved citro

ns and pistachio nuts."

"Excellently observed," answered Candide; "but let us cultivate our garden."

Reading

Voltaire, Candide http://books.google.com (entire book) 150 pages

Questions

Theme: Philosophy in Literature
Eighteenth century thinkers were concerned with "justifying the ways of God to man," that is making sense to man of the way the world plays out. Voltaire, in *Candide*, gives classic expression to man's concern with this "justification." What is Voltaire's view of God's place in the universe? Does Voltaire look at mankind with a comic or a tragic eye?

Theme: Science and Free Speculation
We have touched down at a few landmarks of French literature: some early texts from Christian chivalry and history; some Renaissance work which reflected new but still "traditional" modes of thought—Montaigne and Rabelais; some sophisticated drama engaging with the new social world of the 17th century, as well as with the universal reflected in the classical literary tradition; and now we come, with Rousseau and Voltaire, on minds determined to question, to mock, to reveal all, with an openness unexplored in earlier centuries. What is the relation of this latter development to the growth of "scientific knowledge?" What new perspectives onto man and society was "science" bringing?

Theme: What is the Relation of the Scientific Spirit to the Perspective of the Enlightenment?
What is the significance of the growth of material science for the development of literature and the other arts? Are the arts dependent, for their advancement, on precise knowledge of the natural world, and of us in it?

Comparative Literature : The Ways of God and Man
Voltaire, Candide
Job
Milton, Paradise Lost
You might want to look into the tradition of what is called Theodicy, the justification of the ways of God to man. This theological theme takes up the question of whether the evil that happens to human beings makes sense, or is random. From the Book of Job, in the Old Testament, to John Milton's Paradise Lost deep thought has been devoted to this thorny question. Is Voltaire mocking this tradition of inquiry into theodicy, or is he simply mocking the simplified positive attitude of "people" to disasters which don't directly affect them?

Diderot, *Encyclopedie*

Introduction

The Window Opens onto the world of Compendious Knowledge. The Renaissance--which to us has been Montaigne and Rabelais—is considered a period of new awakening—to the wonders of ancient literature, to the natural world around us. The 18th century, in that perspective, might be considered a new Renaissance, for in this time of what we call "Enlightenment," there is an explosion of discoveries—in science, adventure, commerce—which open up the human world to absolutely free investigation. Diderot masterminded the construction of the *Encyclopedie*, a vast compendium of the state of knowledge in his time, and a meeting point for the finest minds of his time.

Comparative Literature: Classifying the Word
Diderot, Encyclopedia - Isidore of Seville, Etymologies
What kind of view of the world is required for the creation of a broad general Encylopedia? You may want to think this out by reviewing the history of encyclopedias, which have a 2000 year history and have appeared in every civilization on the globe. With Diderot the explicit impulse to making an Encyclopedie is positive, to preserve what humanity has learned, for the following generations, and to aid them in their quest to make the world a better place to live. This is true Enlightenment thinking. Do you find the same perspective in Isidore of Seville's Etymologies, the vastest Mediaeval Encylopedia?

Diderot, *Rameau's Nephew*

Sensibility Wired to the Max. This portrait of a natural genius belongs to a century in which the individual is for the first time, in French literature, making his paradoxical flights of fancy conspicuous. By the time of the Romantic Movement, in the last decades of the century, genius and extravagant behaviors will be regularly admired as outward signs of the creative artist. You will note that Rameau's Nephew himself boils with that curiosity for knowing the whole world, that will be the leitmotif of Diderot's own *Encyclopedia*.

Reading

Diderot *Rameau's Nephew (*60 pages)

Questions

Theme : The Scientific Spirit
The Enlightenment is a period of new discoveries in both applied and theoretical science, as well as in the development of social science. How does this new atmosphere express itself in this "portrait" by Diderot?

Theme : The Scientific Spirit
The Enlightenment is a period of new discoveries in both applied and theoretical science, as well as in the development of social science in such as Condorcet. How does this new atmosphere express itself in the work of Diderot?

Theme : Eccentricity with a Point
You will have noticed, in reading *Les Liaisons Dangereuses*, the fully drawn traits of the characters in the texts. We are in the era of the novel, and all elements of the abstract or allegoric are been drained away from the fictional portrayal. But does Rameau's Nephew strike you as a piece that could be written today? If not, what is the reason?

Comparative Literature : The Quicksilver Personality
Diderot, Rameau's Nephew
Dostoyevsky, The Underground Man
Shakespeare, Hamlet
Contemporary Television
The theme of the paradoxical and quicksilver personality flickers in and out through literature, and you might like to track it. In Greek mythology we find characters like Heracles, who are given to faking madness, or otherwise playing with others' expectations; Hamlet, in Shakespeare's play, feigns madness in order to scope out the true feelings of the King, his step father; Dostoyevsky's Underground Man is as elusive and insightful as Rameau's Nephew, but more dangerous. The theme is extensive, and appears in fantastic guises on contemporary commercial TV, as in Kramer on Seinfeld, or Klinger on M*A*S*H*.

Rousseau, Confessions

Introduction

The opening out of the soul. You are now in a century many would consider close to our own: friendly toward science, nation-centered, socially mobile; buoyed up by an increasingly prosperous middle class. Does Rousseau seem to you to probe the self in a modern way? How does he compare to Montaigne in that regard? How about Larochefoucault? Has Rousseau much use for a pessimistic view of human nature? Does he think mankind "naturally good"?

Overview: Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712-1778) was born in Geneva, of a Genevan watchmaker and descended from a long Huguenot line, with its strong Calvinist morality. Put out of the house by his Father at an early age, the young boy 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 l744 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. In his *Discours sur les Sciences et les Arts* (1750) 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 in strengthening ideas embedded 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.

Sample*:: But if there is a state where the soul can find a resting-place secure enough to establish itself and concentrate its entire being there, with no need to remember the past or reach into the future, where time is nothing to it, where the present runs on indefinitely but this duration goes unnoticed, with no sign of the passing of time, and no other feeling of deprivation or enjoyment, pleasure or pain, desire or fear than the simple feeling of existence, a feeling that fills our soul entirely, as long as this state lasts, we can call ourselves happy, not with a poor, incomplete and relative happiness such as we find in the pleasures of life, but with a sufficient, complete and perfect happiness which leaves no emptiness to be filled in the soul.*

Reading

Rousseau: *Confessions* (Book I) 75 pages

Questions

Comparison
Rousseau and Montaigne both inquire into the human personality. They are psychologists before psychology became a routine element in social analysis. What major differences do you see, between the ways these two writers open themselves to inspection? If you were ignorant of the men's dates, what would lead you to think Rousseau lived closer to our time than did Montaigne?

Comparative Literature : Confession and Self-Examination in Literature
Augustine, *Confession*
Rousseau*, Confessions*

Montaigne, *Essais*

It is hard to avoid Augustine, *The Confessions*, (400 CE), when looking for the spiritual connections of Rousseau. Both writers, though separate at a distance of a millennium and a half from one another, attempted to look deeply into their humanity, and to see what was there. Both found much evil there, and though Augustine explained that discovery in terms of separation from God, for Rousseau evil was innate selfishness, secular human nature. Discerning the broad differences between these two minds is easy, but fine tuning their complex relation is a challenge. You might also want to consider the difference between these investigators of selfhood and Montaigne, whose *Essais* you know, and who differs greatly from them in method of approach.

Laclos, *Les Liaisons Dangereuses*

Introduction

Life in the Fast Lane: Late 18th century style. It seemed right to choose this late in the century example as our sole literary text, properly speaking, for the 18th century segment of our course. The fact is that the 18th century, in France, is at its best a period of cultural growth, scientific discovery, and the firming up of monarchical power. Laclos, however, gives us a literary insight into the evolving new perception of the human and social; a perception of the structure and invidiousness of high societal relations, a perception of the fallen in humanity, as well as of the delight in the erotic. All of these insights are fruits of a newly awakened realism about human existence, and about the forces that drive it.

Overview: Choderlos de Laclos (1741-1803) 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, and saw sporadic battle action during the early stages of the Napoleonic Wars. During an extensive career in the military he 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.

The novel, Les Liaisons, was the subject of much moral reprobation during its time, for the text, highlighting the last corrupt years of an *ancien régime* which is soon to give way to the Napoleonic era, and after that to a new l9th century world in which the intricacies of court corruption were no longer fashionable.

The novel itself involves two separate but intertwined themes in which figures of aristocratic background, the Viscomte de Valmont and the Marquise de Merteuil, conspire to seduce and corrupt two relative innocents at court. The drama plays out across 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.

Sample: the words of the marquise, *Les Liaisons Dangereuses (1782)* :

When I came out into society I was 15. I already knew then that the role I was condemned to, namely to keep quiet and do what I was told, gave me the perfect opportunity to listen and observe. Not to what people told me, which naturally was of no interest to me, but to whatever it was they were trying to hide. I practiced detachment. I learn how to look cheerful while under the table I stuck a fork onto the back of my hand. I became a virtuoso of deceit. I consulted the strictest moralists to learn how to appear, philosophers to find out what to think, and novelists to see what I could get away with, and in the end it all came down to one wonderfully simple principle: win or die.

Reading

Laclos *Les Laisons Dangereuses* (Letters 1-39) 60 pages

Questions

Idea : The rich complexity of the human social sphere
Laclos enters the tangle of sexual pleasures, voluptuary psychology, and false innocence, in this intrigue- filled panorama of high society. You may begin to notice a "French sensibility" in questions of the fine points of human relationships. Think of Montaigne, Pascal, and Racine. Any spiritual precursors of Laclos there?

Theme : Rationality. Is Human Social Behavior Rational?
In many ways the thinkers of the 18th century wished to form a rational picture of the human universe—in distinction from the "mythical" world pictures inherited, as they saw it, from previous centuries of supernatural belief. Laclos plunges us into a social world where machinations, seductions, personal interest struggles, and malice predominate. Is Laclos saying that the human person is not "good" or "reasonable," as the 18th century wanted human beings to be?

Comparative Literature : Fiction Makes Its Way into the Mainstream
Laclos, Les Liaisons Dangereuses
Staiger, Basic Concepts of Poetics
Literature is one, as a human production, but it expresses itself in different ways; (lyric, dramatic, epic/fictional. Each of these genres has its own relation to cultural history, and comes into existence in coordination with the conditions of its time. In Western traditions the epic came first, then the lyric, then the dramatic. The epic-fictional came to birth with Homer, but the novel/fictional waited long, until post-Renaissance times, for its full development. You might want to look at the book Basic Concepts of Poetics, by Emil Staiger, for a deep discussion of the issues involved in the division of literature into genes.

Beaumarchais, Marriage of Figaro

Introduction

The Growth of Social Consciousness. The social world of Laclos is viewed through a different lens by Beaumarchais, whose Marriage so shocked his society that for a time it was banned, until it became an overnight success. How does Figaro himself come to represent the common man, and how does he triumph over aristocratic corruption? Can you see why this play was considered a forerunner of the French revolution?

Overview: Pierre-Augustin de Beaumarchais (1732-1799) was the son of a watchmaker, and also a skilled musician, and using the latter ability he managed to get himself employed as harp instructor for the daughters of King Louis XV. Having proven himself witty, vitriolic, and articulate, Beaumarchais, who wrote a number of better forgotten plays, found his way into the creation of the two plays which made his fame, to this day: *Le Barbier de Seville* (1775) and *Le Mariage de Figaro* (1784). Both of these plays revolve around the mischief of Figaro, a man of all trades, educated and quick, who ends up as a Barber. In the first of these plays he acts out the role of a witty partner in a love triangle, but in the second play, *Le Mariage de Figaro*, Figaro takes on the role of a critic of the aristocracy, an embittered victim of a privileged society with no respect for the common man; and he expresses these feelings with an incendiary vigor which, in looking back, we may feel part of the spirit that was soon to lead into the French Revolution.

From Act V of *Le Mariage de Figaro*:

Figaro

"I even saw her laugh with Delight, while he read her Billet!—They think themselves secure, but perhaps they yet may be deceived."—No, my very worthy Lord and Master, you have not got her yet—What! Because you are a great Man, you fancy yourself a great Genius.—"Which way?—How came you to be the rich and mighty Count Almaviva? Why truly, you gave yourself the Trouble to be born! While the obscurity in which I have been cast demanded more Abilities to gain a mere Subsistence than are requisite to govern Empires. And what, most noble Count, are your Claims to Distinction, to pompous Titles, and immense Wealth, of which you are so proud, and which, by Accident, you possess? For which of your Virtues? Your Wisdom? Your Generosity? Your Justice?—The Wisdom you have acquired consists in vile Arts, to gratify vile Passions; your Generosity is lavished on your hireling Instruments, but whose Necessities make them far less Contemptible than yourself; and your Justice is the inveterate Persecution of those who have the Will and the Wit to resist your Depredations." But this has ever been the Practice of the *little* Great; those they cannot degrade, they endeavour to crush.

Reading

Beaumarchais: *The Marriage of Figaro*, http://oll.libertyfund.org entire play 50 pages

Lafayette, *The Princess of Cleves*

Question

Idea : Social Intricacy and Human Nature
Within the strict confines of the French aristocracy, conditions were ripe for intrigue, both political and romantic. This elegant novel places us in the center of a virtuous woman's testing ground, torn between fidelity/propriety and passion. You may want to compare this fine work to that of Laclos, *Les Liaisons Dangereuses*. In the end, do the two texts make the same point?

Reading

Lafayette, Madame de, The Princess of Cleves, http://www.gutenberg.org
(*The Princess of Cleves*) 150 pages

Review

We have read excerpts from some leading figures in "Enlightenment" thought. Diderot, Voltaire, and Rousseau, you might say, occupy a view of man and nature which could be comfortable for a "secular humanist" in our day. Can you see how this perspective distances these figures from Montaigne, say, who was a sceptic, but basically a shrewd realist, without an ideological agendum, when it came to the analysis of human nature? Or is this correct?

19th Century French literature

Zola, *Therese Raquin, Emile*

Introduction

The Novel as a Photograph. We see in Flaubert the drive of the novel form to provide a close up image of society. Flaubert's major novels, like *Madame Bovary*, are carried out with meticulous research and scrupulous observation of the details of daily life. Zola goes considerably farther. He and his colleagues the Goncourt Brothers, go to work-sites and take notes on conversations among workers, make sketches of scenes so that they can recall details. And so on. Zola's impulse, in fiction, is both to reproduce society precisely, and to reproduce those sectors of society in which the underprivileged labor and struggle. In other words, this work contains both an artistic and a social agendum.

Overview: Emile Zola (1840-1902), who was to become known as the Father of French Naturalism, began his literary career, as did Balzac, by writing popular horror and mystery stories. 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 Débacle* (1892) a study of politics and war.

Preface to first volume of the Rougon-Macquart series (1871):

I wish to explain how a family, a small group of human beings, conducts itself in a given social system after blossoming forth and giving birth to ten or twenty members, who, though they may appear, at the first glance, profoundly dissimilar one from the other, are, as analysis demonstrates, most closely linked together from the point of view of affinity. Heredity, like gravity, has its laws.

Reading

Zola, Emile, Therese Raquin, www.online-literature. com
(Chapters 16-19) 50 pages

Questions

Theme : Fictional Realism

With Zola and Flaubert we enter the space of the "realistic" novel, a form developed already in the Renaissance—remember Rabelais--but coming into maturity in the 19th century. What changes in social and economic culture do you think were responsible for the rapid 19th century evolution of this art form? What trademark insights have Zola and Flaubert into the reality of society? Are they more "realistic" than the 17th century dramatists, who were also astute observers of society?

Comparative Literature : Literature and the Photographic
You might be interested in the role photography plays in the aesthetics of the novel during the l9th century. Any history of photography will take you into both the broad issues involved here, in relating novel to photography, and into the precise uses certain fiction writers made of photographic techniques. The broad relation in question is deep but obvious; the socially descriptive new form of the novel, in l9th century Europe, is challenged to compete with the ostensibly more exact squeeze of reality given by the photo. As for the precise relations of film technique to novel writing, consider the common Victorian photographic technique of combing body parts from several different individuals in the same picture, and the comparable fictional technique—much used by Dickens—of presenting distorted bodies, heads, and limbs as parts of a single body.

Balzac, The Magic Skin

The Human Comedy. The closeness of literature to philosophy asserts itself in this work. Balzac teaches, as well as depicts, and his message in this text is that knowledge is preferable to the exercise of will power, which leave us dissatisfied. Would Montaigne have agreed?

Overview: Honoré de Balzac (1799-1850) was born in Tours, but then moved with his family to Paris in 1814. The young man had from early on a passionate interest in writing, and after having been apprenticed out as a lawyer's assistant, at the insistence of his parents, Balzac reinforced the feeling that only the writing life would do. He had a go at playwriting, then at writing popular horror penny dreadfuls, then finally after many failures, and schemes for financial success as a publisher, he published his first successful novel (*Les Chouans*, 1829) and was thereby launched on the activity that would preoccupy him for the remaining twenty two years of his life. The sequence of novels on which Balzac then launched, and which were to keep him at his desk for the rest of his life, living on black coffee, he eventually came to call *La Comédie Humaine*, taking Dante's text title as his foil, and aspiring to address the whole panorama of human life.

The Material of La Comédie Humaine: Balzac is the first 'realistic' French novelist, which is to say both that he attempted to portray all classes and types of society, and that he always strove to interpret his characters—there are several thousand of them—in terms of their physical and environmental settings, which are described as keenly as are the people's characters. As for those 'characters,' Balzac's most powerful interest was in the middle-class, which under the First Empire (Napoleon), the Restoration, and the July Monarch, with its 'roi bourgeois,' entered its early modern phase, as the main stay of social/political life. Balzac was accordingly far less interested in either the aristocracy or the peasants.

First lines of *The Country Doctor (1833)*:

On a lovely spring morning in the year 1829, a man of fifty or thereabouts was wending his way on horseback along the mountain road that leads to a large village near the Grande Chartreuse. This village is the market town of a populous canton that lies within the limits of a valley of some considerable length. The melting of the snows had filled the boulder-strewn bed of the torrent (often dry) that flows through this valley, which is closely shut in between two parallel mountain barriers, above which the peaks of Savoy and of Dauphine tower on every side.

Reading

Balzac, Honore de ,The Magic Skin, http://www.readprint.com *Skin* (Part 1) 80 pages

Chateaubriand, *Memoires d'outre tombe*

Introduction

Travel and the Exotic. With the advent of the 19th century, came new facilities for transportation, exploration, and commercial development of the world. Intellectually adventurous French writers inevitably turned their attentions to "the exotic," to new experiences of North Africa or the Middle East, where they could enrich their imaginations, and flee the growing stranglehold of bourgeois France, the cultural milieu long before satirized by Moliere in *Le Bourgeois Gentilhomme.* Chateaubriand, as you can see, was at the center of this taste development, his eye on the "exotic," and on the human drama as it played out there.

Overview: Francois-René de Chateaubriand (1768-1848) was born in Saint-Malo in the same year as Napoleon. Brought up strictly, and with a stern education against which he chafed, Chateaubriand was ever restive for freedom and independence, though at the same time, as a person solitary by nature, his only real confidant was his sister Lucile. The Revolution broke out just as Chateaubriand enlisted in the Army, and as the son of a conservative family he had no sympathy with the new developments, and in 1791 made his way to America, where he was to spend eight months traveling in the wilder parts of North America, and making many observations of Native American tribes; experiences which became the base of his two short tales, *Atala* and *Rene*. There followed seven years in England, during which Chateaubriand eked out a meager living, and worked on the text of *Le Genie du Christianisme*, which was published in l802, just at the right moment to bring him fame, and to recommend him to Napoleon Bonaparte, who had just at that moment worked out a deal with the Papacy, once again to promote the public worship of Catholicism in France. For some time after this publication, Chateaubriand traveled in North Africa and the Middle East, seeking new material for texts like *Les Martyrs* (1809). In the subsequent decades Chateaubriand was largely active in politics, though he was constantly at work on his vast *Memoires d'outre Tombe* autobiography (1848-50), in which he gives thorough expression to the dominant themes of his oeuvre. In brief terms, the work of this prolific writer, who can be called the Father of French Romanticism, circles around the power of imagination, of his own hypersensitive poetic nature, and the enormous beauty of nature. His impassioned, and consistent love of Christianity drew on the ways in which that religious, in its historical development, and especially in the Middle Ages, promoted the imaginative freedom of the individual.

Reading

Chateaubriand, Book XXXIX of *Memoires d'outre tombe* 40 pages
http://www. tkline.pgcc.net

Questions

Idea: Travel and Romance
Many factors—growth of commerce, developing Colonialism, tastes in the arts—contribute to the growth of travel writing and an accompanying "exoticism" in nineteenth century French literature. Chateaubriand is in the forefront of this new writing theme, which he exploits in his forty-two volume autobiography, from which you are reading.

Theme : Finding Yourself by Seeking the New

You may remember Montaigne's ruminations, in "On Cannibals," about open mindedness toward new cultures. His own references were to the New World of the Americas, from which explorers were just bringing back the first reports. By the time of Chateaubriand, however, trade, military adventure, and individual curiosity were yielding an increasingly clear picture of the formerly little explored regions of the world. To these, artists and writers flocked, as to new sources of inspiration. Does anything like that international stimulation occur today? In tourism?

Comparative Literature : A New Discovery of the World
Chateaubriand, *Memoires d'outre tombe*
Polanyi, *The Great Transformation*
The development of European economies, during the 19th century, was rapid, and touched all sectors of society. Industrialization, the growth of the middle class, the development of a financial sector with more than national reach; all these factors played into a shrinking of the inhabitable globe. In Chateaubriand's world intellectuals and artists were beginning to travel, and to incorporate the world at large in their work. One great book to consult, for a wider understanding of this issue, is Karl Polanyi's *The Great Transformation,* 1944. This book reviews the economic factors leading to the industrialization of what had once been an agricultural Europe.

Flaubert, *Un Coeur Simple*

Introduction

Drawing Literature Directly from Life. With the Revolutions (French, American) which marked the end of the 18th century, the importance of man's social setting became of intense interest. We have seen that already, in the 18th century, there was a marked speculative interest in the place of the social in man's life—Diderot, Voltaire, Rousseau—and in the 19th century this interest spread widely in literature, coinciding, as it happened, with the continued growth of the novel form. From this brew of cultural developments emerged the emphasis on imaginative prose as a direct replica/account of life in society. Hence "Realism."

Overview: Gustave Flaubert (1821-1880) the son of a Norman surgeon, was born and educated in Rouen. From early in life he was sketching a life-plan, a series of novels (to which he gave titles), reading voraciously, doing badly in school, and trying in every way possible to avoid going into the law as a profession—his father's desire. Around l840 Flaubert was back in Normandy, living with his mother, who died shortly after, then with himself, for he never married, and, except for one occasion, hardly traveled. His closest friend was Maxine du Camp, with whom he traveled to Greece and the Near East in 1849. He was a devoted worker in his own home, and in the course of his life wrote a few works which have set lasting standards for the French novel: *Madame Bovary* (1857), *Salammbo* (1869), and the *Trois Contes* (1877). His great contribution to French literature was customarily called 'realism,' and in fact Flaubert was forever concerned with fictional detail, with precision of observation, like Balzac, but at the same time his sense of form and structure set a new standard for French fiction. He was a tireless worker, not rarely spending hours remodeling a single phrase, or weeks on a particular page of a text like *Madame Bovary*.

From the beginning of Chapter 4, Madame Bovary (1856):

When the first cold days set in Emma left her bedroom for the sitting-room, a long apartment with a low ceiling, in which there was on the mantelpiece a large bunch of coral spread out against the looking-glass. Seated in her arm chair near the window, she could see the villagers pass along the pavement.

Twice a day Leon went from his office to the Lion d'Or. Emma could hear him coming from afar; she leant forward listening, and the young man glided past the curtain, always dressed in the same way, and without turning his head. But in the twilight, when, her chin resting on her left hand, she let the embroidery she had begun fall on her knees, she often shuddered at the apparition of this shadow suddenly gliding past. She would get up and order the table to be laid.

Reading

Flaubert, Gustave,http://book.google.com *Un Coeur Simple (entire)*80 pages

Questions

Theme : The Growth of the Novel
With Flaubert we enter the space of the novel, a form developed already in the Renaissance,

but coming into maturity in the l9th century. What changes in social and economic culture do you think were responsible for the rapid l9th century evolution of this art form?

Comparative Literature : Literary Realism
The Song of Roland
Perceval - Auerbach, Mimesis
You will reflect that the "realistic" novel, with its ambitions to remain close to the actual character of social and personal life, differs sharply from the kinds of literary texts you have been reading earlier in this class. What kind of realism do you find when you think back to The Song of Roland or the Perceval? The question may seem odd, even silly, but as you try to answer you see that the meaning of "realism" differs according to time and place. You can probably imagine the author of The Song of Roland maintaining that his work is a 'realistic' depiction of his culture, its values and aesthetic concepts. For the large issue raised here, you should try reading in a fascinating book of scholarship, a classic now more than 75 years old: Erich Auerbach, Mimesis, (1953). This book takes essay sized soundings of the conception of "realism" and "reality" in literature at diverse epochs.

Mallarme, Rimbaud, Baudelaire, Selected Lyrics

Introduction

The New Freedoms of the Lyric. The social turn given literature by the Revolutions of the end of the 18th century—and by the new social perceptions of 18th century thinkers—converged to give "man in society" a fresh sense of the possibilities of personal expression. From the Romantic Movement on—the great stimulus given European literature by such as Coleridge and Wordsworth in England—the poet became a central figure of artistic creativity, often celebrated as much for the idiosyncratic style of his life and attitudes, as for the originality of his imagination.

Overview: Stéphane Mallarmé (1842-1898) was born in Paris, and spent his career life teaching English in diverse parts of France. His was not a dramatic life of journeys or love affairs; he exceeds Flaubert in duty to the page and the careful writing on it.

We have dealt with Baudelaire as symbolist poet, and Mallarmé picks up the thread inventively. He was both a theorist of poetry and a poet, and he was wont to develop his aesthetic ideas at a series of evening meetings he hosted, on Tuesday nights from nine to midnight. Those ideas, which he elaborated in his *Divagations (1897),* emphasized the music of poetry, but also the allusiveness of the language which went into creating the music. The result, typically, is poetry which does not yield to logic, but only to an intuitive and close reading, as well as to delicate listening. He added a new sense, also, of the layout of text and spaces on the open field of the page; a kind of visual experiment that underlies his late work, *Un coup de des n'abolira jamais le hazard (1897),* notoriously resistant to paraphrase. That work enshrines Mallarmé's dictum that beyond reality there is nothing, but that nothing is the home of forms, ideas that dictate the poem behind the poem. One of the famous applications of Mallarmé's work and aesthetic is Debussy's *L'après midi d'un faune*, music which is drawn from Mallarmé's poem of the same name (1876).

Sample, *A Negress* (1899):

Possessed by some demon now a negress
Would taste a girl-child saddened by strange fruits
Forbidden ones too under the ragged dress,
This glutton's ready to try a trick or two:

To her belly she twins two fortunate tits
And, so high that no hand knows how to seize her,
Thrusts the dark shock of her booted legs
Just like a tongue unskilled in pleasure.

Facing the timorous nakedness of the gazelle
That trembles, on her back like an elephant gone wild,
Waiting upside down, she keenly admires herself,
Laughing with her bared teeth at the child:

And, between her legs where the victim's couched,

Raising the black flesh split beneath its mane,
Advances the palate of that alien mouth
Pale, rosy as a shell from the Spanish Main.

Overview: Arthur Rimbaud (1854-1891) was a close friend of the older poet, Paul Verlaine, and from him had a passionate sense of the importance of poetry. But Rimbaud, whose finest works of poetry—*Le bateau ivre* (1871), *Une saison en enfer* (1873)—were powerful and visionary texts, was nonetheless writing documents of a world he lived adventurously, and not armchair poetic testaments. Rimbaud's praise of a life in which the senses are totally disordered—in which there is a 'dérèglement complet de tous les sens,'—is congruent with the life he himself lived: teacher of French in London and Stuttgart, a wanderer begging his way on foot among the Italian Alps, a dockhand working in Marseilles, a mercenary soldier with Dutch troops headed for Indonesia, and far more, leading him ultimately through Egypt into Aden, and from there into Ethiopia, where, in the city of Harar, he established himself as a very successful trader/businessmen, and was well known for his honesty and justice in business. In l891 a tumor on his knee forced Rimbaud to return to Marseille for treatment, which was amputation of his leg. The autopsy revealed that he was suffering from cancer.

Sample: *Morning of Drunkenness, from The Illuminations* (1873*):*

O my Good! O my Beautiful! Appalling fanfare where I do not falter! rack of enchantmants! Hurrah for the wonderful work and for the marvelous body, for the first time! It began in the midst of children's laughter, with their laughter will it end. This poison will remain in all our veins even when, the fanfare turning, we shall be given back to the old disharmony. O now may we, so worthy of these tortures! fervently take up the superhuman promise made to our created body and soul: that promise, that madness! Elegance, science, violence! They promised to bury in darkness the tree of good and evil, to deport tyrannic respectability so that we might bring hither our very pure love. It began with a certain disgust and it ends--unable to grasp this eternity--it ends in a riot of perfumes.

Laughter of children, discretion of slaves, austerity of virgins, loathing of faces and objects here, holy be all of you in memory of this vigil. It began with every sort of boorishness, behold it ends with angels of flame and ice.

Overview: Charles Baudelaire (1821-1868), whom some have called the father of all subsequent modern poetry in France, was born in Paris, given a conventional education, and soon able to acquire, among his teen age-mates, a reputation as a dandy and a womanizer. (He specialized in syphilis and gonorrhea, which he picked up before he was twenty, and which, added in to what was going to be a life filled with laudanum and excess alcohol, contributed to his early death, and to the massive stroke which left him aphasic for the last years of his life.) His greatest work, which sums up his lifetime of writing, is *Les Fleurs du Mal*, *The Flowers of Evil* (1857), in which he fully develops his basic themes—the essential power of symbols to move the soul, the richness of combined sense impressions as we take them in from nature, and ultimately the boredom, or 'ennui' resident in the human condition, which links to our susceptibility to evil—sexual carelessness, addictions, a taste for the darkness of the occult. All of these basic themes

echo out in other works: *L'Art romantique* (1868), *Petits Poèmes en prose* (1868) in which he creates the new genre of the prose poem, and a brilliant translation of Poe's short stories.

A translation of 'Spleen,' from The Flowers of Evil, translated by the English poet, Roy Campbell, 1952:

I'm like the King of some damp, rainy clime,
Grown impotent and old before my time,
Who scorns the bows and scrapings of his teachers
And bores himself with hounds and all such creatures.
Naught can amuse him, falcon, steed, or chase:
No, not the mortal plight of his whole race
Dying before his balcony. The tune,
Sung to this tyrant by his pet buffoon,
Irks him. His couch seems far more like a grave.
Even the girls, for whom all kings seem brave,
Can think no toilet up, nor shameless rig,
To draw a smirk from this funereal prig.
The sage who makes him gold, could never find
The baser element that rots his mind.
Even those blood-baths the old Romans knew
And later thugs have imitated too,
Can't warm this skeleton to deeds of slaughter,
Whose only blood is Lethe's cold, green water.

Readings

Mallarmé, Rimbaud,Baudelaire(Lyrics from the respective websites)50 pages
Mallarmé, Stephane, http://www.poetryintranslation.com
Rimbaud, Arthur, Lyrics, http://www. mag4.net
Baudelaire, Charles, Les Fleurs du Mal, http://books.google.com

Questions

Theme : New Freedoms in Poetry
To this point we have examined poetry both in its epic form—*The Song of Roland*—and in drama—in all three of the classical dramatists. There was great lyric poetry in the French Renaissance, but the highest achievements of the genre appear in the 19th century. What kinds of experiments in language can you see in the poets we are reading here? Why did the poet, in his role as the marginalized victim of society, the painfully oversensitive observer of the world, replace the robust older tradition—Roland; the 17th century dramatists—in which the poet was a central culture bearing figure at the heart of society?

Comparative Literature : The Lyric Breaks New Ground
Arthur Rimbaud, Poems
Charles Baudelaire, Poems
Stephane Nallarme, Poems
Hamburger, The Truth of Poetry
With the Romantic Movement, at the turn of the l8th into the l9th centuries, literature

began to free itself from many of the strictures of “older works”: pre-set verse forms, strict narrative conventions, stable authors of both poems and fictional texts. Lyric poetry, after the model of such as Wordsworth, Lamartine, or Heine, picked up the idiosyncratic of its author’s tone, and challenged (say in the mid-l9th century) the still fairly conservative assumptions of the poetry reading public. You can see the very different domains in which Rimbaud, Baudelaire, and Mallarme would have challenged their readers. For a wide perspective on the “revolution of modern poetry” you would enjoy reading Michael Hamburger, The Truth of Poetry (1969).

***Stendhal**, De L'Amour*

Introduction

The Chemistry of Love. Already with Chretien de Troyes, and the Arthurian legends, you were familiarized with the notion of Romantic love. With Stendahl you encounter a blisteringly analytic interpretation of love. (Does this analysis help you understand something of the mindset of, say, Racine's Phedre?) Does the Realism you find in Flaubert and Zola appear also in this perspective of Stendahl? Can you see the inheritance of the 18th century—Rousseau, Diderot—behind the kind of view of love Stendahl develops?

Overview: Henri Beyle, later Stendahl (1783-1842) was born in Grenoble and served as a soldier under Napoleon through to the end of the Russian campaign (1812). He was a great admirer of Bonaparte, and of Italy, as well, which he considered the home of passion and intensity. (From 1814-1821 he lived in Milan; from 1830-1841 he was consul, first in Trieste, then in Civitavecchia.) His earliest writings were on music, then, in *Racine et Shakespeare* (1823-25), on what he saw as the deep Romanticism of the great playwrights of the French seventeenth century. His two great novels, to follow, were *Le Rouge et le Noir* (1831) and the *Chartreuse de Parme* (1839). The former is a brilliant portrait of a young man who excels as a soldier under Napoleon, then, however, finds himself of limited power under the Restoration Government; in the end, after disguises and adventures, he is condemned to the scaffold for murder. *The Chartreuse de Parme*, like its predecessor, reviews the psychology of individuals living in a no longer militarily dramatic social environment, in this case a small provincial court in Italy, but in a social world so finely and subtly portrayed, that Stendahl can properly be considered the forerunner of the more recent psychological novels of our time.

Excerpt from *Le Rouge et le Noir (1831)*:

With the lively and graceful demeanour which came naturally to her when she was not in company, Mme de Rênal was coming out into the garden through the French window of the drawing-room when she noticed the figure of a young peasant standing by the front door. He was scarcely more than a boy, and his pale face showed signs of recent tears. He was wearing a spotless white shirt and carrying a very clean jacket of thick mauve wool under his arm.
*The peasant boy had so fair a complexion and such gentle eyes that Mme de Rênal's romantically inclined nature led her to imagine at first that he might be a girl in disguise, coming to ask some favour of the mayor. She felt a surge of pity for the poor soul standing there at the front door and obviously not daring to raise a hand to the bell. She went over to him, distracted for a moment from the deep distress whi*ch the prospect of a tutor in the house was causing her.

Reading

Stendahl, De l"Amour, http://books. google.com

(Book I) 100 pages

Questions

Theme : Love
What conception of romantic love did you find in earlier French literature? Was there a germ of the romantic in the chivalric world of Chretien's Percival? What about Montaigne and Rabelais? Did they feel sensitive to the romantic? And the great dramatists of the 17th century? Is there any "romance" in the French literature we have been reading, Stendahl included? Aren't the French supposed to be the "great lovers"? Are the French the nation of "great lovers" or of "cynical observers of love"?

Theme : Continuity
You now have a brief survey of the major literary forms of the French 19th century. Can you still discern the continuity with earlier French culture? At first glance it might seem that this period of French culture generates new concepts of prose fiction and lyric poetry; formal and substantial changes in perspective. Do developments in these two genres seem to you sharply new, or rooted in earlier French culture?

Comparative Literature : The Literature of Love
Stendahl, De l'Amour
Plato, Phaedo, Phaedrus, Symposium
Ovid, Ars Amatoria
Cicero, De Amicitia
There is a long history of literary works not only reflecting the experience of love, but concerning the theme of love. Among the Ancient Western Classics are numerous profound texts relating their project to that of Stendahl. Recommended reading: Plato's dialogues on love--the Phaedo, the Symposium, Phaedrus—in which there is a constant distinction between corporeal love and various levels of "spiritual love"; Ovid's Ars Amatoria—a witty verse handbook for lovers, written for young Romans; Cicero's De Amicitia, a Roman thinker's reflections on love's near neighbor, friendship.

Review

Literature can turn in different directions: outward to the world to portray, inward to the self. What examples of these extremes have you encountered so far? (Consider Montaigne and Rousseau; then turn to Zola.) Does French literature as a whole, from your perspective, seem introspective or turned outward? Does your answer apply to poetry, too. Notice that for the first time, in this 19th century section, with these past weeks, we concentrate on lyric poetry. There was much great lyric work in France (Ronsard, DuBellay, Lamartine) prior to the poetry we are reading now, but the Romantic Movement, from which our three present poets "derive," was a powerful new impulse to lyric imagination.

20th Century French Literature

Proust, Swann's Way

Introduction

Introspection. Literature can turn in different directions: outward to the world to portray, inward to the self. What examples of these extremes have you encountered so far? (Consider Montaigne and Rousseau; then turn to Zola.) What do you make of Proust's introspective fiction? Is he able to construct a story out of his inner life and its memories? Does he remind you in any way of Montaigne?

Overview: Marcel Proust (1871-1922) was born into a cultivated Parisian family, his Father a prominent physician and medical researcher, who had contributed greatly to the fight against cholera in his time. The young Proust was born at the end 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; in other words 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.

Overture to Swann's Way (1913): *For a long time I used to go to bed early. Sometimes, when I had put out my candle, my eyes would close so quickly that I had not even time to say "I'm going to sleep." And half an hour later the thought that it was time to go to sleep would awaken me; I would try to put away the book which, I imagined, was still in my hands, and to blow out the light; I had been thinking all the time, while I was asleep, of what I had just been reading, but my thoughts had run into a channel of their own, until I myself seemed actually to have become the subject of my book: a church, a quartet, the rivalry between François I and Charles V. This impression would persist for some moments after I was awake; it did not disturb my mind, but it lay like scales upon my eyes and prevented them from registering the fact that the candle was no longer burning.*

Reading

Proust, Marcel, www.gutenberg.org/etext (*Combray*; from *Swann's Way*) 75 pages

Gide, The Immoralist

Introduction

Overview: André Gide (1869-1951) was one of the most influential figures in early twentieth century French literature. While his earliest work, a novel written when he was barely twenty, still flourished in the ambience of the Symbolist movement, his later in life works, reaching far into the last century, saw him involved with the break up of the European Colonialist colonies in Africa; thus with the full realignment of old political assumptions which dominated the world in which Gide grew up, as the scion of a middle class nineteenth century Protestant home.

Sample: interlocked quotes from Gide:

When one has begun to write, the hardest thing is to be sincere. Essential to mull over that idea and to define artistic sincerity. Meanwhile, I hit upon this: the word must never precede the idea. Or else: the word must always be necessitated by the idea. It must be irresistible and inevitable; and the same is true of the sentence, of the whole work of art. And for the artist's whole life, for his vocation must be irresistible. -- *Journals*, 31 Dec 1891

That a germ of Michel (the immoralist) exists in me goes without saying. How many buds we bear in us, Scheffer, that will never blossom save in our books! They are 'dormant eyes' as the botanists call them. But if intentionally you suppress all of them but one how it grows at once! How it enlarges, immediately monopolizing all the sap! My recipe for creating a fictional hero is very simple: take one of these buds and put it in a pot all alone; you soon achieve a wonderful individual. Advice: choose preferably (if it is true
you can choose) the bud that bothers you the most. You get rid of it at the same time. This is perhaps what Aristotle called the purging of passions. *Letter of l916*

Camus, The Stranger

Introduction

Paths of Fictional Salvation. With the advent of the novel, in the 18th century and even earlier—didn't Rabelais write in part as a novelist?--creators put great stress on this new form, which reaches far into the human condition, and was able to attract a rapidly growing reading public. While in the past, epic poetry or drama had been the leading force in literary arts, it began now to seem as though the novel could become the supreme vehicle for working out the meanings of life. How did Gide, Bernanos, and Camus view the power of the novel, to explain the meaning of the human experience? Did each novelist reach for a new conception of human being? Were their protagonists, in the texts we are reading, socially marginalized in similar ways?

Overview: Albert Camus (1913-1960) 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. Educated both in Algeria and France, Camus' deep involvement with Paris culture began with his engagement in the French Resistance, during WWII. There he founded the journal, *Combat*, which was devoted to the Free French cause, and in the subsequent years he carried out the mandatory flirtation with Communism, which eventually he broke from, as he discovered the tyrannical side of a movement initially intended to liberate the people. (That break with Communism was also Camus' break with Sartre, who felt Camus 'went 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. His finest work is *The Stranger* (1942, *The Plague* (1947), and *The Rebel* (1951). He was an ardent and lifelong opponent of capital punishment.

Sample: opening of the *The Stranger* (1942):

MOTHER died today. Or, maybe, yesterday; I can't be sure. The telegram from the Home says: YOUR MOTHER PASSED AWAY. FUNERAL TOMORROW. DEEP SYMPATHY. Which leaves the matter doubtful; it could have been yesterday.

The Home for Aged Persons is at Marengo, some fifty miles from Algiers. With the two o'clock bus I should get there well before nightfall. Then I can spend the night there, keeping the usual vigil beside the body, and be back here by tomorrow evening. I have fixed up with my employer for two days' leave; obviously, under the circumstances, he couldn't refuse. Still, I had an idea he looked annoyed, and I said, without thinking: "Sorry, sir, but it's not my fault, you know."

Afterwards it struck me I needn't have said that. I had no reason to excuse myself; it was up to him to express his sympathy and so forth. Probably he will do so the day after tomorrow, when he sees me in black. For the present, it's almost as if Mother weren't really.

Reading

Gide, Andre, http://books.google.com The Immoralist 115 pages
Camus, Albert, The Stranger, http://books.google.com, 130 pages

Questions

Theme : The Interface of the Novel with Religious Thought
We have seen that Zola and Flaubert, for instance, kept the attention of the novel close to the details of society. With our three 20 th century French novelists, however, we are dealing with the individual up front in society, and querying the nature and fate of the individual. Do you see the connection between the immoralist and the stranger, for example, as figures trying to discover their identities in a society which is not prepared to understand them?

Comparative Literature: The Immoral of Fiction
Andre Gide, The Immoralist; The Journals
In The Immoralist, Andre Gide portrays an individual for whom moral value has been drained from the world. Suggested reading: The Journals of Andrew Gide, (1889-1949), a stunningly rich diary, kept by this brilliant Frenchman during most of his mature life, on a day by day basis. In the several volumes of this work you will see what the world looks like from inside a keen thinker who adopts a civil but clinical lens onto the social world around him.

Drama (Claudel, Beckett, Anouilh)

Introduction

Drama as Wrestling Match. Drama is traditionally built around conflict; for the interplay of forces can often best be illustrated by moving bodies on stage. The three playwrights we are reading for this assignment present profoundly differing conflicts. Which writer seems to you to wrestle with the most pressing contemporary issues? Does Claudel convince you, with his wrestling matches with the spirit of faith? Has Beckett's bleakness a lasting relevance to our time? How about Anouilh's conflict between the oppressive tyranny and the independent resister, Antigone? Do you find effective conflict in the tragic atheism of Beckett and Sartre?

Overview: Samuel Beckett (1906-1989) was born in a suburb of Dublin, son of a Civil Engineer and a nurse. Beckett was drawn to the study of languages, from early on, and at Trinity College, Dublin, he majored in French, English, and Italian. He was also a talented cricket player. graduating in 1927.

After graduation he went to Paris for a year of teaching English at the Ecole Normale Superieure, then returned to Ireland, and finally again to France; in the course of which years he was busy writing essays, learning and working with the expatriate community in Paris—especially with James Joyce, who was his great inspiration, and finally joining the French Resistance. At the end of the war he was honored with the *Croix de guerre*; a fitting tribute to an expatriate who had made French culture and the French language his own. (Most of Beckett's work was written in French, and most of it translated subsequently into English, by him. Beckett chose French for his writing, because it enabled him to write 'without style,' a goal for this writer whose creations were devoted to the bleakness and meaningless of contemporary life.) Beckett's plays *Waiting for Godot* (1955), *Endgame*, and *Krapps' Last Tape* epitomize the grim world he sees humanity occupying—today or perhaps always. The décor is minimal, the themes pervaded by death and indifference, the characters stripped of all human richness. The miracle is that Becket works with these ingredients to create of mood of anticipation and impending doom

From Samuel Beckett's poem, 'Cascando' (1961):
why not merely the despaired of
occasion of
wordshed
is it not better abort than be barren

the hours after you are gone are so leaden
they will always start dragging too soon
the grapples clawing blindly the bed of want
bringing up the bones the old loves
sockets filled once with eyes like yours
all always is it better too soon than never
the black want splashing their faces
saying again nine days never floated the loved
nor nine months
nor nine lives

Overview: Jean Anouilh (1910-1987) was a prolific French playwright, who incorporates many themes and styles in his extensive opus: domestic comedy, dark family dramas, historical canvases—like plays devoted to British history or Joan of Arc—and universal allegories, like *Antigone* (1945) his best known work today. For his dramatic talent Anouilh thanked both his Father, a meticulous tailor who taught his son the virtues of precision, and his Mother, a violinist who played in a nearby Casino theater, and through whom Anouilh had his first exposure to the life of directors and playwrights. His own earlier career also prepared Anouilh for craftsmanship and detail; that was the job of copyeditor at a Parisian publishing house, shortly before Anouilh made the fruitful acquaintance of Jean Giraudoux, who was at the time the senior figure of French theater. From that time on, Anouilh remained immersed in the excitement of the French theater, staying apart from the huge political/military issues of the Occupation. Late in life he said: 'I do not have a biography and I am happy about it.'

Sample, from Anouilh's Preface to *The Lark (1952)*, his play about Joan of Arc;

The play that follows makes no attempt to explain the mystery of Joan.

The persistent effort of so-called modern minds to explain mysteries is, in any case, one of the most naive and foolish activities indulged in by the puny human brain since it became overstocked with shallow political and scientific notions, and can yield nothing, in the long run, but the nostalgic satisfaction of the small boy who discovers at last that his mechanical duck was made up of two wheels, three springs and a screw. The little boy holds in his hands three springs, two wheels and a screw, objects which are doubtless reassuring, but he has lost his mechanical duck, and he has usually not found an explanation.

For my own part I always refuse to tell children how things work, even when I know; and in the case of Joan I must confess that I did not know.

Some nights, when I am feeling depressed, I try to be rational and I say: the situation- social, political and military-was ripe for the phenomenon of Joan; a little shepherdess, one of the countless little shepherdesses who had seen the Virgin or heard voices, and who happened to be called Joan, came to fill a gap in the works, and then everything began turning. If it hadn't been this one, another would have been found-there were candidates before and after her. When she was burnt, her place was taken by a little shepherd from the Landes, who led his countrymen to a few incomplete victories and was in his turn taken prisoner and burnt, without anyone thinking of making him into a hero or a saint.

Reading

Claudel, *The Hostage*; Beckett, *Waiting for Godot*; Sartre, *No Exit*
50-65 pages per play

Questions

Theme : Dilemma and Conflict
Drama is traditionally built around conflict; for the interplay of conflicting attitudes can often best be illustrated by moving bodies on stage. The three playwrights we are reading for this assignment present profoundly differing conflicts. Which writer seems to you to wrestle with

the most pressing contemporary issues? Does Claudel convince you, with his wrestling matches with the spirit of faith? Do you find effective conflict in the tragic atheism of Beckett and Sartre?

Comparative Literature : The Evolution of the Theatre
Anouilh, Antigone
Will (editor), Hereditas
We are reading drama from only two periods of French culture. Our first selections were from the classical French dramatists of the l7th century, our second, now, from the mid-20th century, three hundred years later. You are invited to consider the difference between these two clusters of texts. In reflecting on that difference, consider the contribution of the Greek myths to the classical drama, then look at the use of Greek myth in Anouilh's Antigone. Is the mythical element continuing to serve the same purpose in the modern play? A general issue is thus raised: what is the value of ancient myth for the creation of modern literature? You might be interested in the book Hereditas (Univ. Of Texas, 1964) which addresses precisely this question in a series of essays.

Sartre, Nausea

Introduction

Drama at the Interface between Metaphysics and Fiction. The Second World War, and the spiritual atmosphere around it, provoked some of France's finest drama. The extremes of siege mentality brought out such as Jean Paul Sartre, who was a novelist as well as playwright and philosopher. *Nausea* represents the Existential thinking for which Sartre was considered a founder: a philosophy built on the idea that the human being exists plunged into a situation he cannot understand, and that does in fact not make sense; a godless universe in which human beings must create their own meaning.

Overview: Jean Paul Sartre (1905-1980) was the only child of a French naval officer, who died when the youngster was five months old, leaving Jean Paul to be raised by his Mother. Sartre grew up bookish, as he explains in his late memoir, *Les Mots* (The Words), and immersed himself both in classical language and literature, and in the philosophy of his moment, his first inspiration being that of Henri Bergson. As a student at the Ecole Normale, the most prestigious Parisian seed bed of leading intellectuals, Sartre proved himself to be both a fiery ideologue and a prankster. His dissident inclinations met a fine match in Simone de Beauvoir, his lifetime lover, whom he first met in 1929. Their first mutual attraction was all about resistance to the French War in Algeria, which both lovers thought unpardonably evil. In 1943 Sartre published his first major philosophical work, *L'Etre et le Néant,* a manifesto of Exisrtentialism. In 1939 Sartre joined the French army, where he worked as a meteorologist, until taken prisoner by the Germans. In l941 he returned again to Paris. Perhaps his finest writing was enshrined in the trilogy *Les Chemins de la Liberté*, 1945-49.

From *The Wal*l (1959):

They pushed us into a big white room and I began to blink because the light hurt my eyes. Then I saw a table and four men behind the table, civilians, looking over the papers. They had bunched another group of prisoners in the back and we had to cross the whole room to join them. There were several I knew and some others who must have been foreigners. The two in front of me were blond with round skulls: they looked alike. I supposed they were French. The smaller one kept hitching up his pants: nerves.

It lasted about three hours: I was dizzy and my head was empty; but the room was well heated and I found that pleasant enough: for the past 24 hours we hadn't stopped shivering. The guards brought the prisoners up to the table, one after the other. The four men asked each one his name and occupation.

Reading

Sartre, Jean Paul, Nausea, No Exit http://books.google.com *(*140 pages)

Questions

Issue : Existentialism and Literature
In the case of Sartre, philosophy forms an essential part of the study of literature. Nausea analyzes the human situation with the imaginative insight we expect of poetry, yet with an

architecture of rigorous thought surrounding it. Can you see the relation between the underlying argument of Sartre's philosophic novel, and some of the texts we have already read?

Theme : The Heroism of Extreme Experience
The existential hero—such as Roquentin in Sartre's *Nausea*—lives out the human condition to the fullest. He/she does not "live life to the fullest" in the manner of a 'Renaissance man,' someone with the perspectives of Montaigne, but rather 'lives out his "full existential potential."

Comparative Literature: Sartre and Greek Drama
Sartre, *The Flies*
Aeschylus, *Oresteia*
Highet, *The Classical Tradition*
Sartre's play, *The Flies*, picks up closely on Aeschylus's *Oresteia.* The basic connection is between the pollution of Mycenae (Agamemnon's home city) through the returning hero's wife's behavior, and the pollution of France under the German occupation by the Vichy Government. In both cases—that of Aeschylus, that of Sartre—some kind of purification is awaited. The corruption has to be cleansed by some kind of violent purge. In Aeschylus's thinking, as far as we can reconstruct it, the thinking is religious—a catharsis of evil is needed; in Sartre's case a headstrong political intervention is required. Why do you think a "modern playwright" chooses an ancient theme to make his point? Suggestion: have a look at Gilbert Highet, *The Classical Tradition*, (1985), for a readable and thoughtful survey of the development of the "modern" uses of the classical.

Poetry (Apollinaire, Valery, Guilevic, Selected Lyrics)

Introduction

Language Takes over the Poem. Both Valery and Apollinaire, in different ways, turn language in on itself, and put the poetic line to experimental uses. (Already in Mallarme and Rimbaud, in the preceding century, we had seen poetry moving away from conventional statement; from this point on the lyric will be part of the self-discovery frontier in modern literature.) What happens to the narrative, or theme of poetry, in Valery and Apollinaire? Is theme absorbed into the language through which the theme is presented? In what ways to these works explore poetry and the extremes of the human condition?

Overview: Paul Valéry (1871-1945) was born in Sete on the Mediterranean coast of France, and throughout his life remained drawn to the warm culture of that area. (His father was Corsican, his mother Italian.) He was educated in the nearby city of Montpellier, where he received a solid Classical education, and then for twenty years, while writing some of his best work, like the long poem *La Jeune Parque* (1917), he worked for his living at a news agency. By l920 Valery had become a full time writer, and entered the 'highest levels' of French literary culture. In 1925 he was elected to the *Académie francaise*, and in subsequent years he entered into an increasingly public phase of his career, representing his country in international diplomatic venues like the League of Nations. His poetry spoke from the Symbolist perspective, and at its finest, as in 'Le Cimetière Marin, ' he wrote some of the strictest and most powerful French poetry of the twentieth century. His *Cahiers (Notebooks*), not published until 1960, were a compendium of a lifetime's observations of the culture of his nation. One of his finest moments came in 1932, when he spoke on the one hundreth anniversary of the death of Goethe. On that occasion Valéry proved his powerful status, deeply penetrating the thought of that master. And with typical precision Valéry highlighted his special interest in Goethe's views of biology and optics.

From *Le Cimetière Marin* (*The Graveyard by the Sea*) (1920):

This quiet roof, where dove-sails saunter by,
Between the pines, the tombs, throbs visibly.
Impartial noon patterns the sea in flame --
That sea forever starting and re-starting.
When thought has had its hour, oh how rewarding
Are the long vistas of celestial calm!
What grace of light, what pure toil goes to form
The manifold diamond of the elusive foam!
What peace I feel begotten at that source!
When sunlight rests upon a profound sea,
Time's air is sparkling, dream is certainty --
Pure artifice both of an eternal Cause.
Sure treasure, simple shrine to intelligence,
Palpable calm, visible reticence,
Proud-lidded water, Eye wherein there wells
Under a film of fire such depth of sleep --

O silence! . . . Mansion in my soul, you slope
Of gold, roof of a myriad golden tiles.

Reading

Apollinaire, Guillaume, Lyrics, http://www.poetryintranslation.com
Apollinaire, Valéry (*selected lyrics from the sites included for this course*) 50 pages

Review

The 20th century is a warring ground of conflicting values: religious reawakenings, dark cynicism, global cultural conflict, threats of nuclear disaster. Both novelists and playwrights, in France, struggled with these vast forces. Sartre and Camus leaned to the idea that mankind makes its own values and gods, while Claudel, for example, argues for the lasting order given by the Christian revelation. As so often happens, the lyric poets measure turbulence by finer tuned measures than the prose writers. Through Apollinaire and Valery you feel the pulse of the living creature for whom the 20th century is home.

HUMANITIES INSTITUTE

FRENCH LITERATURE

An Online Guide to French Literature

Guide Description

Designed for English-speaking students, the online guide will cover the literary history of France. The topics reflect and mirror general aesthetic trends, including Romanticism, Nationalism, and Postmodernism, and the narratives themselves explore various modes of self-expression.

Instructor

This guide was prepared by Frederick Will, Ph.D., professor emeritus of the University of Iowa.

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Mediaeval Literature

1. Chanson de Roland

*Overview :*The *Chanson* (composed around 1100) is one of a series of some 120 poems that constitute the *Chansons de Gestes*. This assortment of sung epic poems, handed down by professional singers in regional courts, celebrates the exploits and historical importance of the court of Cbarlemagne, the King from whom French mediaeval culture takes many of its shaping impulses. These poems are immersed in two cultures, and there is dispute about the axis of their inspiration: Charlemagne's court itself, which thrived in the 8th century, or the Crusades, during which many of the Chansons were composed. In either case all agree that the works are saturated in reverence for the figure of the holy King, and in chivalric Christian values.

Summary: The epic—composed in decasyllabics, often accompanied by musical notation—concerns a rear guard action historically fought—but profoundly reimagined by the poet--between a cohort of men under the leadership of Count Roland, a major retainer of Charlemagne himself, and a band of so-called Saracens, probably Basques, in the mountains of the Pyrenees. The line of chivalric horsemen are ambushed by the wiles of Ganelon, a disgruntled traitor to the king, furious that Roland has designed him as messenger to the enemy camp, who has urged the Basques to attack the line of horse. and to a nearly sure death. The tale brings together crisp language, sharp portrayals of chivalric aristocrats, and a seething treachery, which in a further stage of the epic leads to the trial and execution of Ganelon.

The Puzzle: as with an equally ancient British epic, *Beowulf,* there is dispute whether the *Chanson de Roland* was the product of an individualistic creator or of a group project from within the anonymous body of oral epic creators of mediaeval France. In either case a further central question is raised by the historicity of the text. The Saracens are cast as pagans, and out and out foils for the God and King honoring chivalric warriors in Roland's train. Is this sharpening of religious conflict, within the poem, a reflection of a specific moment in French history, or part of the religious imagination of the author?

2. Chrétien de Troyes

Overview: Chretien de Troyes lived in the second half of the l2 th century, in the province of Champagne, but beyond that we know little of his life. He was the foremost author of courtly romances, and a major concern of his work was the Arthurian legends of the Round Table. The best of his work is devoted to reconciling the chivalresque traditions of the *Chansons de Geste*—see above, *Chanson de Roland*—with the growing cult of devotion to women, inspired by worship of the Virgin Mary. Characters like Lancelot and Queen Guinevere were prominent in shaping the narratives of his verse.

Principal work: *Perceval, or the Story of the Grail* was written between ll80 and ll90. This work consisted of 9,234 octosyllabic lines, and is notable for the grail quest which motivates the characters' actions, though we note that the theological hunger driving Perceval is also an expression of the interest the author takes in the rhetorical adventure through which he puts the hero questing for the most holy relic of Christ's passion. The ensuing quest of Lancelot takes him to a lifeless water presided over by a mysterious Fisher King, who eventually yields to Lancelot a presence to the grail itself, the chalice allegedly taken by Joseph of Arimatheia at the Crucifixion: 'the grail…was made of fine, pure gold; and in it were set precious stones of many kinds, the richest and most precious in the earth or the sea…' The theological quest, the subtle language of exposition, and the collateral theme of linguistic inquiry make of this poem a sophisticated end product of the long developing Arthurian tradition.
Literary distinctiveness: Chrétien deals in the *Lancelot* with a profoundly Christian theme, the longing mediaeval quest for the final relics of Jesus Christ. Just as Roland and his cohort, on sortie to protect the nation of France and its kind, Lancelot goes questing to rediscover the holy relics of his faith. The archetypal profundity of the grail quest, with the Castle in the background, the half dead waters before the Holy Castle, and the chivalric persistence of the hero—this powerful mythography waited 900 years, til T.S. Eliot's *The Wasteland*, to receive a twist as mystical as Chrètien gave it.

3. *Roman de la Ros:*

Overview: A lengthy allegorical work composed in the thirteenth century in two parts, the first part (a 4000 line series of octosyllabic verses) composed in the first half of the thirteenth century, the second part (consisting of 17,500 verses) in the second half of the century. The overall theme is Love, and the attempt of the lover to woo and win his beloved, which at the end of the second part he richly accomplishes. (The Rose is both the Virgin Mary, of course, and secular woman, and the interplay of the two loved objects enriches the entire work.) The first half of the work plays out as a manual of courtly love, taking its cues and its urbane twists and turns from a sophisticated knowledge of Ovid's *Art of Love*, the model-setting example for the amorous of Republican Rome. The second half of the poem, the longer section which is build onto the first part, is different in style and ambition, and results—though just why we don't know—from Jean de Meun's desire to appropriate an earlier manual of love. Jean de Meun gives a secularized, often bawdy, and clearly misogynistic twist to the *ars amatoria* theme.

The Material: there is scholarly debate over whether Jean de Meun succeeded in welding his poem onto that of his predecessor, Guillaume de Lorris. The first part charts the lover's efforts to woe and win the beloved, efforts thwarted by anti-love forces like Refusal, Evil Tongue, Fear and Shame. In the second part of the poem the efforts of the lover are largely a framework on which Jean de Meung can hang his fascinating, often irreverent views of morals, philosophy, and nature. The tenor of this second half is decidedly secular and turns especially thoughtful in its observations on nature itself, which takes on force as the source of beauty, the virtues, and the moral life. This secular turn foreshadows the great tradition of humanized nature, the teacher of mankind, which is highlighted in subsequent great creators of French literature like Montaigne, Voltaire, and Molière.

Excerpt, from Jean de Meun's profile (1275) of the worries of the typical husband:

Soon as I sally forth to work,
Away you start, with smile and smirk,

Ready-for some wild prank or game, |
Whereat your cheeks should burn for shame,

Singing aloud like siren sleek --
God curse you with an evil week!

When business drags me far from home
To Frisia's shores, or e'en to Rome,

At once you mount coquettish dress,
That leaves but little room to guess

4. Froissart

Overview: Froissart (1337-1410) was above all a chronicler, the French term for an early stage of what we might call the 'scientific historian.' His *Chronicles* (1369-1400) of French (and British and Scottish) culture in the waning stages of that chivalry which is highlighted in the *Roman de la Rose*, and even more profoundly in the *Perceval* of Chrétien de Troyes, where love of the lady links to theology, mark a moment of cultural transition, from the truly mediaeval in France to the pre modern. The time of Froissart, of course, is the Hundred Years War, which was a time of national suffering and hardship, and with it of a growing development of that pre-capital urbanization which would make the period of chivalry a nostalgic memory. Froissart stands at a crossroads, as we see it in retrospect, though to him the Chivalric was still alive, though waning.

Main themes: The dominant of the *Chronicles* is given in the Prologue, where Froissart calls on all young gentlemen of worth—which to him meant either the clergy or the nobility—to become 'preux chivaliers,' 'proud knightly gentlemen, a concept fully in place in the times of earlier historians, like Villehardouin two centuries earlier, but already 'old fashioned' in Froissart's time. In the following pages Froissart colorfully depicts a world, of knights and ladies, jousts and impregnable castles, manly devotion to the Virgin, a world which perhaps English language readers find in the similarly nostalgic fictions of a writer like Sir Walter Scott, in the l9th century. We need only return to the *Chanson de Roland,* with its 'true epic spirit,' to realize how sophisticatedly far Froissart has come from that tone.

The Tone (in the also archaizing English of an early 20th century translation): *Thus they set forth as they were ordained, and they that went by the sea took all the ships that they found in their ways: and so long they went forth, what by sea and what by land, that they came to a good port and to a good town called Barfleur, the which incontinent was won, for they within gave up for fear of death. Howbeit, for all that, the town was robbed, and much gold and silver there found, and rich jewels: there was found so much riches, that the boys and villains of the host set nothing by good furred gowns...*

5. Christine de Pisan

Overview: Christine de Pisan (1364-1433) was born in Italy, but at an early age, fifteen, married a Frenchman, who died when she was only twenty five, leaving her a widow with three small children. It was her decision—and we have to pause, in awe—at what a statement like that means, for a woman at that time, to make her living by writing. (This makes her the first professional woman writer in French literature.) She had already been active with the pen, and soon, in her *Livre des Trois Vertus* (*Book of the Three Virtues*) (1405) she addressed the world with an active response to the Jean de Meun, whose sequel of the *Roman de la Rose* had proven to be the world view setter for French literary creation in the waning years of chivalry. In the course of defending her own sex and its virtues, Christine de Pisan gives a fascinating sweep of insights into the culture of polite society at her time, a society which, as we saw in discussing Froissart, was itself in transition toward (still not to) the *bourgeois* condition. Her defence of her own gender strikes a fascinating contrarian note, in a largely male-viewpoint literary culture.

How the Livre des Trois Vertus sounds:

Like the mourning dove I'm now all alone,
And like a shepherdless sheep gone astray,
For death has long ago taken away
My loved one whom I constantly mourn.
It's now seven years that he's gone, alas
Better I'd been buried that same day,
Like a mourning dove I'm all forlorn.
For since I have such sorrow borne,
And grievous trouble and disarray,
For while I live I've not even one ray
Of hope of comfort, night or mourn.
Like the mourning dove I'm now all forlorn

Translations, as we know, are as dated at what we translate, and language every hour adopting a new standpoint from which to view the past, yet even in this version, a century old in English, we pierce to the spirited loneliness of the young woman whom Simone de Beauvoir, herself one of the leading women writers of our time, thought of as the first feminist.

6. Francois Villon

Overview: Francois Villon (1431-1480) was born in the year when Joan of Arc went to the stake. He was a man of the streets, born in a poverty of which we know no details, and when not studying at the University of Paris he was a thief and fugitive, often in flight from the law, frequently imprisoned, and twice close to death by hanging. He was also a poet known to us today by a slim selection, notably by two *Testaments* (Wills), one large the other brief, in which he verbally bequeaths his few worldly goods to friend real or imaginary whom he conjures up into his poetry. (Attempts to identify the people and places he describes ultimately fail, for the mixture of crazy fantasy with authenticity defeats the project, and attests to Villon's native genius, which belies all efforts to turn him into that kind of representative of literary history that scholars treasure.) In many ways Villon speaks intensely to us in the fashion of Christopher Marlowe, a similar 'brilliant rascal' who lit up the sky of Elizabethan England fifty years after Villon. Villon's *Testaments* are full of turbulent emotions—*hatred, scorn, vulnerability to the transitoriness of life, the horror of death*—and thanks to his brilliance, sense of humor, and superb ear he comes down to us as the first powerful and individual voice in French literature. Yet at the same time, as you can see at every point in his poetry, he lives soaked in the world values of the mediaeval writers we have sampled to this point, wrapped up in the Virgin Mary, true to the Christian senses of order, transitoriness, grace, and despair which we can find in all the works sampled here.

How it sounds: a stanza from the *Ballad of the Hanged (1461)*

The rain has soaked us, washed us: skies
Of hot suns blacken us, scorch us: crows
And magpies have gouged out our eyes,
Plucked at our beards, and our eyebrows.
There's never a moment's rest allowed:
Now here, now there, the changing breeze
Swings us, as it wishes, ceaselessly,
Beaks pricking us more than a cobbler's awl.
So don't you join our fraternity,
But pray that God absolves us all.

16th Century

7. Clément Marot

Overview: Clement Marot (1497-1544) was born into a well placed family—unlike Villon, and unlike Villon created a literature of artifice and elegance. It was this poet's luck to be born into the court of Francois 1, the first modern monarch of France, and a towering figure drawn into the culture world by his creative sister, Margaret de Navarre. Destined to the study of law, Marot was well educated, but while at University preferred skirts to cesurae, and set a tone of aristocratic frivolity which he was never fully to outgrow. His first volume of poetry was dedicated to King Francois, and in consequence he found himself hired as valet de chamber by Margaret de Navarre herself. This was the beginning of a life at court, at least when he was not in either exile or prison, which was often the case, and for causes as specific as his translation of the Psalms, which brought down the wrath of a zealously orthodox Sorbonne establishment. While profoundly different in spirit from Villon—whose life and death stakes were foreign to the witty and elegant work before us—Marot was also writing from that last breath of truly mediaeval culture, within shouting distance of Christine de Pisan, or even of the first part of the *Roman de la Rose*, with its stylized protocols for the art of love, and its background of Virgin worship.

How 'To an Ailing Maiden' (1537) sounds:

Sweet Jeannou,
I bid you
A good day.
Though your stay
Is like gaol,
You'll be hale,
Hearty too!
Then go through
Your room's door
To some poor
Restaurant;
For Clément
Does insist:
Don't resist
Your sweet tooth.
It's the truth
That you'd fast
Scoff their last
Cheese, frog, snail,
Partridge, quail
And jam bun!
Have sweet fun,
Lest your cheeks
—thin, for weeks—
Lose more wealth.
God give health

Back to you,
Sweet Jeannou

8.Calvin

Overview: Jean Calvin (1509-1564) was born in Picardy, and received a thorough traditional education, studying theology (at the Sorbonne) and law, as well as beginning the study of Greek. Quickly persuaded of the values of Protestantism, at this historically rich moment of change and tension in Christianity, the 'Protestant Reformation,' Calvin was forced (in l534) to flee to Switzerland. There he threw himself into the study of Hebrew, wrote an important preface for a French translation of the Bible, and before long began the publication (1541) of his master work, *L'institution chrétienne (1536/1541)*. The last twenty five years of his life were spent in Geneva, which by his powerful influence he transformed into an ardent Protestant stronghold, and a reliable sanctuary for Protestant refugees from unfriendly Catholic regimes like France.

Calvin's *Institutes*, as we call them, developed a theological perspective inherently repugnant to the French thinkers of the Renaissance. Calvin's central belief was in the power of original sin, which enjoined on humans humility—in view of their weakness—and a turning away from the joys of this world, which is an image of the Fall. This whole perspective put Calvin at odds with Renaissance thought, with its celebration of life, its questioning of theological tradition, and its love of art. But the *Institute*s can fascinate us on many levels, even if we have trouble with its theology. It has been observed that Calvin's book is the first French book written according to a definite plan; in this case by a plan conforming strictly to the four stages of the Athanasian creed—God as Father, Son, Holy Ghost, and Church militant on earth. Calvin's clarity of thought, and exact use of French contributed greatly to the development of his native language, as Luther's Bible translation did at the same time for the German language. Calvin's experience of translating his own text into Latin, of thinking his text in two languages, surely added to his consciousness of the inherent gifts of French.

9. Rabelais

Overview: Francois Rabelais (1495-1553) was born in the province of Touraine, and by an uninterrupted progression passed through a 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 the Clément Marot of our previous entry, 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 voudra,' 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.

10. Margaret of Navarre

Overview: Margaret of Navarre (1492-1549) was married into royalty and in addition was the sister of the dominant King Francois 1. From early childhood, in a certain precocious mode not unknown among Renaissance French women, Margaret showed great desire for learning, and by her teens was in good control of Latin, Italian, Spanish, and a bit later of Greek and Hebrew. (Examples like this, or that of Rabelais, flesh out the cliché that the Renaissance was a time of passionate rediscovery of the Ancients.)

Margaret went on to devote the best of her life to her writings. The *Heptameron* (1546), a prose imitation of the widely famed *Decameron* (1351) of Boccaccio, is a series of tales told by wayfarers, each participant's contribution going the preceding one better. Marguerite was also a prolific poet, and in her long narrative works she far outdid in depth a lyricist like Marot, though her style was widely thought clumsy and infelicitous.

Margaret's Philosophy: Margaret de Navarre was one of the first French writers to express her philosophical ideas in poetry. As a serious Christian, and a student of Classical culture, she deepened herself in Neoplatonism, that blend of mystical Christianity, with Platonic idealism, which was a hallmark of Renaissance speculative thought, especially in France and Italy. Her intellectual forefather, in this turn of thought, was the 15 th century German Cardinal, Nicholas of Cusa.

Margaret in her own voice*: From the Mirror of the Sinful Life (1523)*. She responds here to three ladies who have been disputing about the best way to conduct their love lives:

...[T]hey would like you to decide for them
Which one can show she feels the greatest love,
And in her heart the greatest pain and grief.
Is it the one who, faithful but unsure
About one love, always repels another?
Or is it she, alone, her lover gone,
Who suffers an unbearable distress?
Or lastly, she who leaves a perfect man
To be like her two friends, no different
In word or deed, and keep the unity
Which loyal love has made of their three hearts?

11. Ronsard

Overview: Pierre de Ronsard (1524-1585), called in his day the 'Prince of Poets,' was born in the Valley of the Loire, into an illustrious family. At the age of twelve he became a page of the Duke of Orleans; from that portal his way was opened into an early life of travel and sophisticated exposure, including extensive stays in Scotland and England, and shortly later Germany and Italy. He was by age twenty fluent in English, German, and Italian, no small part of his qualifications for poetic eminence. At this fulcrum point in his brilliant youth he was struck by deafness, a handicap challenging his strongest powers; and it is the power of his personality that led him to a life of extraordinary literary creativity. His self-deepening took over with several years of intense study of Greek and Latin literatures—one might think of the studious preoccupations of Rabelais or Margaret of Navarre—and before long a meeting with a kindred spirit, Joachim du Bellay, who was to be a significant partner in his literary career. It was the point at which Ronsard was nearly ready to retire to his country home, to take advantage of many kinds of royal privilege, and to create the works that have made his famous: works touching every literary genre except drama, and paying constant close tribute to the poetries of Latin authors like Ovid and Horace.

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

When you are very old, at evening, by the fire,
spinning wool by candlelight and winding it in skeins,
you will say in wonderment as you recite my lines:
"Ronsard admired me in the days when I was fair."

Then not one of your servants dozing gently there
hearing my name's cadence break through your low repines
but will start into wakefulness out of her dreams
and bless your name — immortalised by my desire.

12. Du Bellay

Overview: Joachim du Bellay (1525-1580) was one of Renaissance France's strongest voices, though until the young man met Pierre de Ronsard this fate would hardly have seemed possible. Not long after meeting Ronsard, in l548, Du Bellay saw a remarkable outpouring of publications—including two volumes of verse and his long influential *Défense et Illustration de la Langue Francaise (1549)* –but during the same period was struck deaf by the same viral illness that had attacked Ronsard. Shortly after this eventful year Du Bellay accompanied one of his distinguished relatives on a trip to Rome, where he remained for four years, and wrote memoirs and portraits which would be published in 1558 as the *Antiquités de Rome*. In l580 Du Bellay died of a stroke, at the age of thirty five.

The Défense et Illustration de la langue francaise: this proclamation of the dignity and power of the vernacular French language was, though in considerable part borrowed from an Italian text concerning the Italian language, a powerful statement of the new French culture of the Renaissance. In this tractatus Du Bellay advances the idea, which was fundamental among contemporaries like Ronsard and his circle, that the French path to its own literary integrity went by way of the ancient, chiefly Latin, classics; but that, given obeisance to that particular swathe of antiquity, the French language was ready to perform as a vigorous independent language—independent of Latin, that is—and thus to serve as the appropriate organ for the modern new French monarchy of the Renaissance. Du Bellay's passionate break with Latin, and assertion of the modernity of French, was of great importance to the culture of his time.
A Sample: From Du Bellay's sonnet collection, *L'Olive* (1549):

The night cold and sombre
With dark shadows covers
The earth and the sky,
Like honey, as sweet,
On heavenly feet,
Comes sleep to the eye.

Then day, renewing,
Its labour pursuing,
Discloses the light,
And with glow diverse
Weaves this universe,
A vast poem bright.

13. Montaigne

Overview: Michel de Montaigne (1533-1592) was born of an old merchant family, in the year that saw the publication of the first book of Rabelais' *Pantagruel*. It was the particular good luck of Montaigne, that his father had firm and original ideas of childhood education, and brought up his son on Latin, which the young man learned and loved as the result of imaginative pedagogy. After an intense period of education, Montaigne retired from public life at the age of thirty-seven. In the tower of his family chateau Montaigne entered into the life of a country gentleman, and began to write the first of his essays, probably around 1571. A period of travels then ensued, especially in Italy, until Montaigne was called back to be Mayor of Bordeaux, and after four more years he retired once more, this time more permanently, and began devoting himself to writing the *Essais* for which we primarily know him.

The Essais of Montaigne (1580): Montaigne writes of himself with a directness we would never have imagined from, say, the works of Rabelais or Ronsard, two of the most personal of Renaissance French writers. Montaigne takes us right into his life, and doing so becomes one of the first truly modern voices, telling us his tastes, his weaknesses, his attitudes toward life and death, his view of friendship—which was immensely important to him, of married wives—which was much less important to him, and of ethical responsibility. We awaken from reading him with huge respect for his civility, his good sense, his basically secular perspective, and his dignity.

A Sample from the Essay on Age:
Of all the great human actions I ever heard or read of, of what sort soever, I have observed, both in former ages and our own, more were performed before the age of thirty than after; and this ofttimes in the very lives of the same men. May I not confidently instance in those of Hannibal and his great concurrent Scipio? The better half of their lives they lived upon the glory they had acquired in their youth; great men after, 'tis true, in comparison of others; but by no means in comparison of themselves. As to my own particular, I do certainly believe that since that age, both my understanding and my constitution have rather decayed than improved, and retired rather than advanced.

14. Jodelle

Overview: Etienne Jodelle (1532-1572) is reputed to have written, in a single year (1552) the first properly speaking tragedy, and the first comedy, in the French language. (Whether or not the claim is disputable, it suffices to remind us how little time separated the earliest French drama from the superb classical dramas that would flourish not a century later.) Jodelle's tragedy, *Cléopatre (1552),* covers the same literary material as Act V of Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra,* but differs profoundly from Shakespeare's work, and in a way which indicates the growth process required for the development of the tragic genre in France.

French tragedy grew essentially from the Mystery plays of the late Middle Ages; a source of vivid scenes, but in which there was little forward moving dynamism. That dynamism problem hangs like a weight around Jodelle's work. In Act I of his tragedy, Antony appears on stage as a ghost of himself, and recounts his suicide, while predicting the suicide of Cleopatra. In the second scene, Cleopatra appears to her attendants, telling them of the appearance of Antony to her, in a dream, and announcing her own plan to commit suicide. The Act ends, as does every Act, with a choral song, dealing with a general theme like the inconstancy of fortune, or the advantages of keeping a low profile in life. The subsequent acts remain similarly static, only slowly unfolding the plot: the decision of Octavian and Agrippa that Cleopatra should not be allowed to kill herself, Cleopatra's urgent request that her life should be spared, Cleopatra's trip to the tomb of Antony—the only scene change in the play, and, in the last Act, Cleopatra's suicide, followed by the wails of her attendants. Except for the excursion to Antony's tomb, in Act four, the entire play remains static and lyric/operatic, without any of the energies that would mark classical French drama, but with the impulse of great drama implicit in it.

15. Garnier

Overview: Robert Garnier (1545-1590) was a dramatist contemporary of Jodelle, and deserves our attention for his place in the developing momentum of French tragic drama, which within less than a century later than Garnier was to achieve, in Corneille and Racine, the highest world level of maturity. We will see that Garnier moves the game forward from Jodelle, and thus helps to build the pattern of growing capability in French drama.

Garnier wrote eight tragedies, among which a fascinating development is observable. His first four plays are far more sophisticated than the very static drama of Jodelle—which we anatomized above, but still in a rigid mode as far as dramatic action is concerned. (These plays are full of declamatory passages, operatic immobilities that square badly with drama itself.) In the following three dramas there is a visible evolution, more characters on stage, and more action among them, with plots involving more complexity than in earlier drama, and finally, with the lessening of the static operatic manner, an enrichment of psychology; all of these developments en route toward the mastery of a Racine. The most effective play of Garnier is his *Bradamante (1582)*, a tragi-comedy, that is effectively a tragedy except that its conclusion is upbeat. In this play the excessively long speeches of *Porcie* (1568) are replaced by dialogue, conflict begins to enter in the relations among the characters, and action is employed to bring our people's emotions and character. The same points apply to Garnier's last play, *Les Juives*, which like Jodelle's *Cleopatra* is a kind of extended lament, but which promotes some action on stage, and brings the cborus into relation to the action. The outlines of a significant dramatic tradition are on the horizon, but would not be fully sketched in until playwrights of genius took over the tradition.

17th Century

16. Saint Francois de Sales

Overview: Saint Francois (1587-1622) was Bishop of Geneva, and played at active role in the defense of Catholicism immediately after the Wars of Religion. In 1603 King Henry IV had restored the Jesuit order to France, and Saint Francois, who had received a Jesuit education, began enthusiastically to preach the revived Catholic doctrines which were emerging on the far side of the Protestant Rebellion. Greatly successful as a preacher to the new middle/upper class of France, those individuals who were finding their individual citizen voices as had Montaigne—on a vastly complex level, St. Francois entered into 'spiritual correspondence with a variety of dignified ladies concerned with spiritual issues. St. Francois' corre'spondence with many of these women, and his own preaching in Paris, converged into his major work of writing, his *Introduction to the Devout Life* (1609). In that work he delineates a practical Christian way for people involved in the secular world—the new middle class world of which to this point we have seen nothing—but eager to stay orthodoxly right with their God. The departure in theological instruction is remarkable, for with the growth of a new social milieu in the l7th century a new kind of Christian need is felt. The need for such a book, and the welcome reception for it, are proven in fact: forty editions were published during the author's lifetime, and, along with two other treatises of his on the practical demands of the spiritual life, these texts of St. Francois became among the most popular writings of l7th century France. With his insistence of spiritual self-examination in daily life, the author clearly contributed to an inward turning not only of his own social moment but of future generations of French writers.

Sample of the *Introduction à la vie dévote (1609):* One man sets great value on fasting, and believes himself to be leading a very devout life, so long as he fasts rigorously, although the while his heart is full of bitterness;--and while he will not moisten his lips with wine, perhaps not even with water, in his great abstinence, he does not scruple to steep them in his neighbour's blood, through slander and detraction. Another man reckons himself as devout because he repeats many prayers daily, although at the same time he does not refrain from all manner of angry, irritating, conceited or insulting speeches among his family and neighbours.

17. D'Urfe

Overview: Honoré d'Urfé (1568-1625) was the youngest son in a distinguished family, and was brought up in an atmosphere of books and learning. A great admirer of Henri IV, who had been instrumental in bring to a close the religious wars, which were tearing France apart in the early years of the century, d'Urfé dedicated the first part of his one great work, *l'Astrée*, to that monarch. Such a dedication was meaningful, for the dedicated work was a great success in its time.

L'Astrée is a huge pastoral romance, with over five thousand pages. There is a central story—around which are grouped eighty episodes, in many genres—letters, verse, pastoral descriptions, conversations, tales. The whole work was published in five installments; each installment was divided into twelve books; the installments were published in 1601, 1610,1619, 1627, and 1628.

Prior to d'Urfé's work, there had been, during the preceding century, a rage for pastoral romances. The granddaddy of these efforts was Montalvo's *Amadis de Gaule*, printed in Spain at the beginning of the sixteenth century. (The hyperbolic romance/chivalric tone was pilloried by Cervantes in *Don Quijote*.) Of all the breed, however, the work of d'Urfé had the longest public afterlife, because of its influence on the art, politics and style of his own day.

And what is the central theme? Céladon and his beloved Astrée struggle through every imaginable obstacle in their effort to be united in married love: only in the twelfth volume, after Céladon has tried to drown himself, and the pair have been separated by misunderstandings, jealousies, quarrels, and local obstacles, is the marriage consummated. But that is not all, in this tale which is essentially about love, love thwarted and love realized; the subtext is the alliance between physical and spiritual love, for a strong Platonic current traverses the text, baptizing love with every kind of transcendent importance. It is the longest running soap opera in town; perhaps it speaks also to the religious, transcendent aspirations of the audience.

18. D'Aubigné

Overview: Agrippa d'Aubigne (1558-1630) was brought up at the heart of Protestant-Catholic conflicts that dominated Renaissance Europe, in the wake of the Protestant Reformation and the Catholic Counter Reformation. Unlike Montaigne, who watched these conflicts from the sidelines, and ruminated over them, the staunchly Protestant Agrippa entered the fray. Already as a child, Agrippa was drawn into a formal commitment to the Huguenot cause. Throughout his maturing life he continued to struggle for the Protestant cause, and in 1577, during a serious illness, he began to dictate what would be his most influential work, *Les Tragiques*. That work, inspired in parts, boring in others, was to be the ripest achievement of a long life in literature. The text is basically concerned with the religious wars which were tearing the nation apart, and with the validity of the Protestant cause, which the King was no longer willing to support.

Inside Les Tragiques: This poem has been called the Protestant epic, and its admirers have wished to compare it to Milton's epic poetry, written two generations later. However the similarities are few, as the following 'plot' indication may suggest. The first of the six sections of the epic concerns the wretchedness of town and country during the destructive religious wars of the century; the second section concerns heavy satire of the court of the Catholic kings whom the Protestants wished to replace; the third section is an extended allegory/satire, depicting every kind of perversion of human justice; the fourth section, and the one which most strains the patience of the contemporary reader, is a lengthy cataloguing of Protestant martyrs who have died at the stake; the fifth part is an account of persecution by the sword in the Religious Wars, and of the brutal treatment of the Protestants during the Saint Bartholomew's assault; while the final two sections concern prophesies of eventual punishment for religious persecutors, the Catholics.

Like all heavily one sided tract epics, this one falls flat, for its lack of intrinsic drama. Yet throughout the poem there are traces of poetic genius. More of this quality can be found in the author's *Sa Vie a ses Enfants*, in which he gives to his children an account of his full and adventurous life.

19 Malherbe

Overview: Francois de Malherbe (1555-1628) was a mediocre poet but by force of insistence made himself into a Csar of poetic taste, with huge influence on the style setting of French poetry in the l7th century. The actual poetry of this critic was limited to some hundred or so poems largely created as vehicles of thought, of explicit argument, for instance advice to King Henri IV on the principles of good governance. (Malherbe was eager to combat the frivolous ornamental poetry dominant in the work of such as DuBartas and Desportes, who were reigning at the time that Malherbe took wing.) Though Malherbe left behind no specific *Art Poétique,* his views on proper poetic procedure are embedded in many places, such as his own annotated copy of Desportes' *Premières Ouevres*, and are on the whole negative and combative, expressive of Malherbe's inclination toward poetic dictatorship. Put bluntly, his three criteria for value in poetry were purity, precision, and clarity—virtues which he achieved in his own verse, but entirely at the expense of what the Romantic poets would call imagination. (The only difference between good poetry and good prose, according to Malherbe, was rhyme and meter, and those two technical skills were of central, indeed unique, importance to the poet.) Romanticism, however, was far from the poetic doctrine of interest to Malherbe, whose desire for the strictly clear was to be a forerunner for the classical style of the great French tragedians, who were already active on the Parisian scene before Malherbe died. Such traits of l7th century tragedy, as its respect for the so-called three unities of time, space, and action, derived directly from the Malherbian perspective on literature. There is no better source to consult than Malherbe, for understanding the rebellion of Romantic poets, in the early nineteenth century, against what *they* considered the sterility of the preceding century's poetics.

20. Corneille

Overview: Pierre de Corneille (1606-1684) grew up into a Jesuit education, and early convinced himself that the stage was his destiny. In 1634 he produced his first tragic drama, *Médée*, and in the next year his tragedy, *Le Cid*, brought him fame and attention after the successes of a single night's performance. *Le Cid*, a fruit of Corneille's long time preoccupation with Spanish drama, and chiefly with the stage of Calderon (1600-1681), deals like its predecessors with those questions of honor, fate, and destiny which belonged to the Spanish tradition. For several reasons, among which was the tribute to the Spanish tradition—the Spaniards being the greatest foreign rivals of France at the time—*Le Cid* aroused huge controversy, and though the newly formed Académie Francaise objected strongly to many violations of the Aristotelian unities, and its 'primitive' addictions to dueling and honor, the play won enormous approval from the French public, and Corneille was from then on the principal father of French classical drama.

Corneille went on from there to a prolific dramatic career, comedies as well as tragedies, and it is generally felt that the four tragedies he created between l636 and 1643—*Le Cid, Horace, Cinna, Polyeucte*—were not only his finest work but one of the triumphs of the French tragic drama, which was establishing the l7th century as one of the world's more fertile, in skilled and wise portrayals of human fate. The general themes of these works turn repeatedly around issues of honor and the dignity with which the tragic hero, representing a summit of human mirror, can survive the most dreadful traits with his tragic endurance. Many of his finest plays were based on ancient Roman history, though not with a desire to be historically accurate, rather, to use the Roman event as background for staging eternally valid truths about human nature and its destiny. It is worth noting that for Corneille it was essential at least broadly to follow the dramatic rules of the three unities, which were at that time enshrined in the value system of the French Academy. The unities of place, time, and action, as Aristotle was interpreted to have meant them, in his *Poetics*, held firm sway over French dramatic creation throughout the l7th century.

21. Descartes

Overview: René Descartes (1596-1650) , like Corneille, was educated by the Jesuits; he subsequently went on to take part in three campaigns of the Thirty Years War, which was ravaging Europe through the Catholic Protestant conflict, the intensity of which we sampled earlier in discussing Agrippa d'Aubigné. It was in winter quarters during his first campaign (1619) that Descartes conceived the ideas for his best known work, *A Discourse on Method*, which would finally be published eighteen years later. After his military period Descartes returned to the social scene of Paris, but not for long, as his growing preoccupation with philosophy and mathematics drew him toward the congenial intellectual atmosphere of Holland again. There he remained until l649, when Queen Christina of Sweden invited him to teach her philosophy in Stockholm. It was there that he died, having left a large body of groundlaying philosophical work, which would constitute a turning point for the foundations of modern thought as a whole.

The Bent of Descartes' Work: Descartes' philosophical work—at its most developed in what we call the *Meditations*—got its lasting imprint from the reflections that first besieged him in the *Discourse*. As a mathematician, Descartes was from the outset disposed to doubt—mathematics, living from hypotheses, demands proof at every stage. As he surveyed the propositions on which he depended, for the view he had of the world itself, he concluded that only one proposition could not be doubted, namely that he was thinking as he surveyed. That he was capable of thought—*je pense, donc je suis*—was the one thing Descartes felt he could be certain of. On the rock of this conviction he constructed a philosophical perspective which gave priority to ideas, and consequently prioritized mind over matter, the immortality of the soul—which was immaterial, and the existence of that God whose infinite and perfect existence could only have entered our thinking if indeed he existed, as he does. In another influential work, *A Treatise on the Passions of the Soul* (1649), Descartes asserts that the passions are good, and that only our misuse of them is dangerous and evil; a perspective that Corneille embraced and exemplified in many of his dramas.

22. Boileau

Overview: Nicolas Boileau (1636-1711) is of great importance for his rigor as a literary legislator; he it was who codified the classical tendencies of the French literature of his own time, the tendencies we have discussed in connection with Corneille and the three dramatic unities. But that achievement was part of a life long accomplishment and began in a conventional upper class fashion. Boileau's family was involved in legal professions, and though they destined him to the Church, he was later urged into the law, which ultimately, thanks to a small inheritance, he abandoned for literature. And so there he was, a contemporary of the finest cultural talents of his century—Racine, Molière, Corneille. A success of furthering events helped him to move, quickly, toward the center of his culture: he gained the vigorous favoritism of Louis XIV, and in 1684 he was elected to the Académie Francaise, where he soon found himself a spokesperson for the literary values of the classical age.

For the rest of his life Boileau remained a mandarin of literary values and taste, dominating the scene of French culture. He was prolific in satires and verse epistles, and himself a talented scion of ancient Roman verse techniques, but the *Art Poétique* (1674) was the ripest expression of his critical genius. The key terms of his critical thinking were reason and nature—as understood in the perspective of the l8th century. Reason and Nature were the source of value in writing, or in any art. What were these notions? Nature, in Boileau, was basic, average human nature stripped of its animal affiliations and of the peculiarities of the individual embodying it. Nature, in this sense, is the home base of reason, which is the common sense of mankind. Reason working through nature would inevitably make its way to truth, the third element in Boileau's trio of reigning values. Among the resulting conclusions, in this aesthetic, was that anything grotesque or abnornal—not natural—was unacceptable in literature. It also followed that, in order to write in accordance with the trio of central values, the writer needed to emulate the great authors of Greece and Rome, for they were, as was widely believed in Boileau's time, uniquely capable of following the deepest human rules of art.

23. Mme. De Sévigné

Overview: Mme. de Sévigné (1626-1696) was of ancient Burgundian stock. At eighteen she was married to a handsome and dissipated nobleman, and at his death she was left a widow of twenty-five, with a son and daughter to bring up. In 1669 her daughter married a nobleman who was soon made the Governor of the Province of Languedoc, which meant a separation between mother and daughter. This separation lay at the root of Mme. de Sévigné's devotion to letter writing; nor was her daughter the sole recipient of these wonderful letters, for there were several others, family members and daughter, who benefitted from the flow and sociability of this woman's correspondence. In total, l500 letters remain, illuminating many social and high culture aspects of the court and world of Louis XIV. But there are innumerable other letters--dealing with nature, country life, gossip and scandal at court, and personal morality—which are unique in their power to summon up a personality and a time.

Excerpts from a letter of Mme. de Sévigné (1670):

You do not know, I believe, that my son has gone to Candia.... He consulted M. de Turenne, Cardinal de Retz, and M. de La Rochefoucauld upon this: most important personages! and they all approved it so highly, that it was fixed upon, and rumoured abroad, before I knew anything of the matter. In short, he is gone. I have wept bitterly, for it is a source of great grief to me. I shall not have a moment's rest during his voyage. I see all its dangers, and terrify myself to death: but, alas, I am wholly out of the question; for, in things of this nature, mothers have no voice.]

I am glad you approve of M. de Grignan: he is a good man, and very gentlemanly; has wealth, rank, a high office, and is much esteemed and respected by the world. What more is necessary?

...[B]e assured, my dear cousin, that if it depended on me, you should be first at the entertainment. How admirably well you would act your part! Since you left us, I have heard no wit equal to yours, and I have said to myself a thousand times, "Good heavens, what a difference!"

24. Pascal

Overview: Blaise Pascal (1623-1662) was born in the Auvergne, of a good and responsible family. With his two sisters, Pascal was a genius from the start, and when the mother died early Pascal's dad, who was himself passionately interested in mathematics, moved the family to Paris, where they would have more contact with the intellectual currents of the day. Before he was twelve, Pascal had mastered the elements of Euclid. Not much later, the family moved to Rouen, where Blaise aided his father, employed in administrative calculations, by inventing a calculating machine which would be the forerunner of the first cash register. In the subsequent years both Pascal and his sister moved to Paris again, and became acquainted both with Descartes, whom we visited in an earlier entry, and with the Jansenist movement—a religious movement, within Catholicism, which flourished in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, and which stressed human depravity and the need for divine grace—with its religious center at Port Royal. Both Pascal and his elder sister committed themselves to the movement, which was to play a sharp role in Pascal's later development. In defence of the Jansenist leader, Arnauld, Pascal composed a brilliant series of *Provincial Letters*, designed to defend Jansenism and Arnauld, and though the success of this work was powerful Pascal eventually turned to writing a defence of Christianity in general. Incomplete at his death, the remains of this large work, now called the *Pensées (1669)*, were to become Pascal's most famous legacy—in addition to his incomparably important work in mathematics, especially in advanced calculus.

From *Les Pensées*:

Montaigne's faults are great. Lewd words; this is bad, notwithstanding Mademoiselle de Gournay. His opinions on suicide, on death. He suggests an indifference about salvation, without fear and without repentance. *As his book was not written with a religious purpose, he was not bound to mention religion; but it is always our duty not to turn men from it. One can excuse his rather free and licentious opinions on some relations of life; but one cannot excuse his thoroughly pagan views on death, for a man must renounce piety altogether, if he does not at least wish to die like a Christian. Now, through the whole of his book his only conception of death is a cowardly and effeminate one.*

25.Moliere

Overview: Jean Baptiste Poquelin Molière (1622-1673) was raised in the heart of Paris, son of an upholsterer, and educated by the Jesuits, in whose College he became active in Latin learning and in acting of Roman comedy. The following years found Moliere gradually making his way into the active world of street theaters, private enterprise wandering theater shows, and getting a sense of the whole dramatic territory. His confidence at last well established, after the favorable reception of certain of his youthful efforts, he returned to Paris in l658, and had the perfect luck to catch the favorable attention of King Louis XIV. The final fifteen years of his life were spent in a high creative mode, and he created nineteen plays during this period, many of them among the highest achievements of French literature.

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

A sample: from the opening of Act 1 of The Imaginary Invalid: SCENE I.--ARGAN (sitting at a table, adding up his apothecary's bill with counters).

ARG. Three and two make five, and five make ten, and ten make twenty. "Item, on the 24th, a small, insinuative clyster, preparative and gentle, to soften, moisten, and refresh the bowels of Mr. Argan." What I like about Mr. Fleurant, my apothecary, is that his bills are always civil. "The bowels of Mr. Argan." All the same, Mr. Fleurant, it is not enough to be civil, you must also be reasonable, and not plunder sick people. Thirty sous for a clyster! I have already told you, with all due respect to you, that elsewhere you have only charged me twenty sous; and twenty sous, in the language of apothecaries, means only ten sous. Here they are, these ten sous.

***26*. Racine**

Overview: Jean Racine (1639-1699) Brought up, like Molière, in the center of Paris, Racine however was of high middle class background, and at an early age, in the schools of Port Royal, he received the most thorough classical education available, coming especially into a mastery of Greek, which was to be a major source of inspiration throughout his dramatic career. After an unsuccessful attempt to study theology, which did not interest him, Racine returned from seminary to Paris, and once more embraced the excitement of urban life, making influential and agreeable friendships, with the fable writer La Fontaine, and soon with Molière and Boileau. Racine's first tragedy was published in l664. There followed a period of pain and growth for Racine, as his masters of religious instruction, from whom he had learned so much at seminary, published their strong disapproval of Racine's devotion to the stage, a slur which brought sharp response from Racine, and a firm new decision to commit his life to the theater. With the superb play *Andromaque* (1667) Racine initiated a series of masterpieces—B*ritannicus, Iphigénie, Phèdre—*which would establish for French tragedy, as Molière did for comedy, a world wide pre eminence. It comes to us as a shock that at the height of his powers and fame, with *Phèdre* in l677, Racine virtually abandons the theater, marries a woman who has never read a line of his work, reconciles with his Port Royal masters, and devotes himself henceforth to God, king, and family.

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

Sample, from Phèdre:

This malady of mine is from far back.
Only just married to Aegeus' son,
My peace, my happiness seemed safe at last,
When Athens showed me my proud enemy.
I saw him. First I blushed and then grew pale;
At sight of him my troubled soul was lost.
My eyes no longer saw, I could not speak;
I felt my blood run icy and then burn;
I recognized Her! Venus! Dreaded fires,
Inevitable torments for that blood
Which she pursues.

27. Lafontaine

Overview: Jean de la Fontaine (1621-1695) was not aggressvely educated in the schools, but rather in nature, which he came to know on long walks through the countryside with his father, who was a district commissioner of Waters and Forests. After his father's retirement he briefly succeeded his dad in his job, but proved as untalented for that activity as for marriage, which he abandoned after ten years, in order to return to the cosmopolitan life of Paris. (This 'return to Paris' is clearly a leitmotif of the present ebook.) Lafontaine became a close friend of Racine, Boileau, and Molière, and while tracing different literary ambitions than theirs, and though writing a good deal of traditional verse and verse letters, Lafontaine found his unique genius in the fable, the models for which he largely took from Eastern or classical literatures, but the charming and perceptive turn of these small masterpieces took him to a place all his own.

A Sample:

The Grasshopper and the Ant (1668) The Grasshopper having sung All the summer long, Found herself lacking food When the North Wind began its song. Not a single little piece Of fly or grub did she have to eat. She went complaining of hunger To the Ant's home, her neighbour, Begging there for a loan Of some grain to keep herself alive Til the next season did arrive, "I shall pay you," she said "Before next August, on my word as an animal. I'll pay both interest and principal." The Ant was not so inclined: this not being one of her faults. "What did you do all summer? Said she to the grasshopper. "Night and day I sang, I hope that does not displease you." "You sang? I will not look askance. But now my neighbour it's time to dance."

28. Mme. de Lafayette

Overview: Mme. de Lafayette (1634-1693) was born into a wealthy family with limited status in the noble Parisian world, but marriage to a well connected gentleman, nearly twenty years her senior, was a stepping stone into ever higher society. The marriage broke. Drifting back toward the sophisticated world of Paris, Mme. de Lafayette formed her own literary salon, the social move most expected of the female literata, and there found herself in the friendly company of such as Molière and Boileau. (The reader of these notes is probably thinking, rightly, that 'everybody of importance knew everybody of importance,' in the literary world of l7th century Paris. Not far from the truth!) From her Parisian milieu, Mme. de Lafayette wrote four novels, of which one, *La Princesse de Cleves* (1678), is arguably the first and one of the best true novels written in French. Even to rehearse the plot is to see the clean lines, and innovatively realistic, spirit of this book.

The plot of the Princesse de Clèves: the story is set at the court of Henri II (1519-1559), thus acquires a historical setting, as well as a social environment bathed in aristocracy. That is as far as this slim novel goes, to dwell on issues of romance and chivalry. The plot could be transposed into contemporary western terms, without any loss of vigor. The female protagonist of the book is married to a man who loves her greatly but for whom she feels nothing more nor less than 'estime.' Not surprisingly, for she is attractive, the lady attracts the attentions of a nobleman with whom she too gradually falls in love. It is here that the dignity and power of the story accelerates. The Princesse feels it incumbent on her to confess, to her husband, her passionate feelings; while her husband, with equal dignity, deals with it, forgives her, and yet in the end is plagued by lingering jealousy. This jealousy undoes him; he grows ill and dies, prematurely, upon which the Princess, now sure that she and her 'lover' were the cause of her husband's death, retires to a convent, and soon dies as did her husband. The power of the story lies in the simplicity with which Mme. de Lafayette develops a down to earth tragic plot, as psychologically fine as the dramas of Corneille or Racine, but as contemporary to us, today, as the most devastating narrative of urban social reality.

29. Bayle

Overview: Pierre Bayle (1647-1707) belongs chronologically to the l7th century, but on the whole mirrors the thought of the mid 18th century, progressive, rational, skeptical—his gift, he said, was 'to create doubts.' (On the whole, because Bayle did not accept the common l8th century conviction of the innate goodness of the human being.) Bayle's biography is not where the power of his personality is. He came of Protestant stock, his father being a Calvinist minister in the south of France. Proof of his capacity for self critique lies in the way he dealt with his own religious life. For a year and a half, early in his manhood, he converted to Catholicism, but upon self-reflection he thought himself back into his original Calvinist faith. In l681 he settled in Holland—the refuge par excellence, since the time of Descartes, for French intellectuals seeking a liberal social climate—and took over a Chair of Philosophy which had been prepared for him. From the outset, in his lectures and writings, he assaulted the traditional, whether in religion, social assumptions, or politics: his banner being "errors, even if they are ancient, are not for that reason to be valued." The major work of Bayle, in his influential new position, was his *Dictionnaire historique et critique* (1697). This constantly developing dictionary project became a source, in the eighteenth century, for every free thinker of the times, in their quest for rational arguments against the power of tradition.

Samples from Bayle's thought:

I am a good Protestant, and in the full sense of the term, for from the bottom of my soul, I protest against everything that is said, and everything that is done.

I know too much to be a sceptic and too little to be a dogmatist.

It is pure illusion to think that an opinion that passes down from century to century, from generation to generation, may not be entirely false.

It is thus tolerance that is the source of peace, and intolerance that is the source of disorder and squabbling.
The antiquity and general acceptance of an opinion is not assurance of its truth.

There is no less invention in aptly applying a thought found in a book, than in being the first author of the thought.

30. Fontenelle

Overview: Bernard le Bouvier de Fontenelle (1657-1757) was first permanent secretary to the French Académie des Sciences, and a major popularizer of scientific ideas. This scientific popularizer lived to one hundred years of age, and to the end remained faithful to the rationalist perspective of the Enlightenment, and to the scientific ideals of his time. Famed for his intelligence and rationality, Fontenelle had a try at the arts—tragedy, comedy, poetry—but was unsuccessful, and came to terms with himself as one of the first popularizers, and defenders of, the new scientific knowledge of his time. Much of his intellectual life was spent in a succession of salons, where he was able to enjoy the presence of the 'grand ladies,' and to disseminate his views of the rational life.

Fontenelle's chief popularizing work was his *Entretiens sur la pluralité des mondes* (1686.) In this work an astronomer takes on the task of explaining the nature of the Galilean heavens to a distinguished (and attractive) marquise, and in a gallant give and take, epigrammatic and suggestive, manages to give her a view of the new views of science. (His scholarly replies are fascinatingly interspersed with epigrams and gallant witticisms.) In his *Histoire des Oracles* (1687) Fontenelle undertakes that in fact ancient oracles were fakes, based on deception, but in the course of carrying through this scholarly demonstration he manages suggestively to argue against the whole foundation of religious belief, in general. In a short work, *Digressions sur les Anciens et les Modernes* (1688), Fontenelle went on to display his sense that the world of thought is progressive, and that the moderns, as they were called at his time, had—by standing on the shoulders of the Ancients—brought understanding and knowledge to an unprecedented new level of insight. For forty years, in his position as permanent Secretary, Fontenelle succeeded in popularizing his progressivist scientific platform, and in his fashion opening the way to such free thinkers of the following century as Diderot and Voltaire.

31 La Bruyère

Overview: Jean de la Bruyère (1645-1696), born of a middle class Parisian family, led a quiet life in the city. In 1684 he accepted a job as tutor to the Duke of Bourbon, grandson of the famed Condé. In l688 he completed the publication of the first edition of his one renowned book, *Les Caractères*: in 1693 he was elected to the French Academy. Surprisingly little is known about the first forty years of his life, except that the tutoring post he accepted was so nearly servitude that many have wondered why La Bruyere put up with it. Put up with he did, though, until the end of his life, having for his entire adult life remained a higher servant of the Duke, though as time went by La Bruyère acquired an apartment of his own in the Duke's mansion and at Versailles, the King's court. He also acquired an unparalleled eye for life around the court and city, the raw material of *Les Caractères.*

A translation of the work of Theophrastus, an ancient Greek satirist and caricaturist of morals around town, formed the basis of La Bruyere's work. Basis is the operative word here. La Bruyère took off from his Greek predecessor's ironic eye, to cast his own amused eye over the society of his own moment, and the character portraits he created were of vast delight to his fellow citizens.

Sample, from La Bruyère's remarks on women:

Some women have an artificial nobility, due to the way they turn their eyes or hold their heads, or their manner of walking, and which goes no deeper; a dazzling wit that is deceptive, and which we admire only because we don't look below the surface. In others we find a simple, natural nobility, independent of their gestures and gait, which springs from the heart and is, as it were, a consequence of their noble birth; a quiet but substantial goodness, enriched with a thousand virtues which all their modesty cannot conceal, and which shine out for all who have eyes to see.

I have heard the wish expressed that one could be a girl, and a goodlooking girl, between the ages of thirteen and twenty-two, and after that become a man.

18th century

32. Montesquieu

Overview: The Baron de Montesquieu (1689-1755) was, like Montaigne, born in Gascony, and like Montaigne was in adulthood to play the role of a country gentleman. Having completed studies of the law, he was made a counselor of the city of Bordeaux, and shortly after Vice President of the Parliament of Bordeaux. These duties appear to have left the young public figure with considerable leisure, much of which he devoted to on the spot studies of social behavior and human nature. *The Persian Letters* (1721), his first book, heralded a great career for this shrewd observer of the human scene, whose kinship with Montaigne, his fellow Gascon a century before, declared itself. There followed a period during which the still young Montesquieu traveled widely through much of Europe, eventually, using his acquaintance with Lord Chesterfield, finding his way to England, where he lived for nearly two years, while preparing his notes and thoughts for a major work on the societies he had been visiting: that work was the *Esprit des Lois* (1734).

The ideas in The Persian Letters and the Esprit des Lois. *The Persian Letters* purport to be the creation of three Persian travelers who visit France in the last years of the reign of Louis XIV. The literary device adopted here enables Montesquieu to level any number of criticisms, of his own society, which would otherwise have been more than unwelcome at home. (He pokes fun at the type of the 'grand seigneur' and the 'retired general'; at the Académie Francaise, crammed with elderly wool gatherers; at the Pope and the King, whom one of the travellers calls great magicians. In the course of this self-critique Montesquieu is showing the French how easily their own sense of superiority can be turned upside down.) *L'Esprit des Lois* is the first serious work of political and legal analysis, and although Montesquieu writes the text with literary humor and class, aiming at a general audience—and finding huge reader response—he directs his attention to fundamental new zones of inquiry, in particular the role natural environment and historical antecedents play in shaping the legal practices peculiar to each different society.

33. Voltaire

Overview: Francois Marie Arouet (Voltaire) (1694-1778) was educated by the Jesuits, at the renowned Collège de Clermont, and at an early age launched into his literary career—having abandoned the law for art, to the horror of his father. Satires, an early drama, a couple of light comedies; Voltaire was already launched on an aggressive career which would send him to the Bastille for wounding aristocratic sensibilities. Freed from prison a second time he was exiled to England, where he made 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.) In l734 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.

Sample: from the conclusion of Voltaire's tale, *Candide* (1759):

Pangloss used now and then to say to Candide:

"There is a concatenation of all events in the best of possible worlds; for, in short, had you not been kicked out of a fine castle for the love of Miss Cunegund; had you not been put into the Inquisition; had you not traveled over America on foot; had you not run the Baron through the body; and had you not lost all your sheep, which you brought from the good country of El Dorado, you would not have been here to eat preserved citro

ns and pistachio nuts."

"Excellently observed," answered Candide; "but let us cultivate our garden."

***34.* Marivaux**

Overview: Pierre Carlet de Marivaux (1688-1763) takes us into the fiction and drama of the middle class, working psychological and moral issues with great finesse, translating some of the concerns of Mme. de Lafayette, say, into the mind interiors of eighteenth century bourgeois, especially bourgeoises. Like many other French luminaries of his own and the previous century, Marivaux learned feminine psychology in the salons of aristocratic ladies, in which venues subtle and empty ingenuities of conversation were the order of business. It was Marivaux' special ability to see the human implications of such chatter—perhaps like Jane Austen, later, or the creators of the sitcom Seinfeld—and what he turned into stage drama, from his social experiences, made *marivaudage* a household descriptor, and turned his plays, at the *Comédie Italienne,* into city wide raves. Echoes of Racine are to be heard in such work as *Le Jeu de l'amour et du hasard* (1730) *where* the romantic passion that in Racine or Corneille leads to downfall and disaster is converted into wedding bells and marriage ceremonies. (Marivaux says of himself, in regard to these comedies: 'I ransacked the human heart for all the various hiding places where love hides when it is afraid of letting itself be seen, and each of my comedies aims at making love emerge from one of these hiding places.' Marivaux's best known novel, *Le Paysan parvenu* (1735-36), addresses the same socialization processes. His characters, Jacob and Marianne, are country folk who have reached the big city, Paris, and by virtue of good looks and polite behavior have ascended both in social rank, and in susceptibility to subtle affairs of the heart. All is emotion, amour first frivolous then fraught then touching, and everywhere are tears, the middle class tears which are Marivaux' version of a Racinian suicide.

35. Rousseau

Overview: Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712-1778) was born in Geneva, of a Genevan watchmaker and descended from a long Huguenot line, with its strong Calvinist morality. Put out of the house by his Father at an early age, the young boy 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 l744 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. In his *Discours sur les Sciences et les Arts* (1750) 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 in strengthening ideas embedded 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.

Sample*:: But if there is a state where the soul can find a resting-place secure enough to establish itself and concentrate its entire being there, with no need to remember the past or reach into the future, where time is nothing to it, where the present runs on indefinitely but this duration goes unnoticed, with no sign of the passing of time, and no other feeling of deprivation or enjoyment, pleasure or pain, desire or fear than the simple feeling of existence, a feeling that fills our soul entirely, as long as this state lasts, we can call ourselves happy, not with a poor, incomplete and relative happiness such as we find in the pleasures of life, but with a sufficient, complete and perfect happiness which leaves no emptiness to be filled in the soul.*

36. Diderot

Overview: Denis Diderot (1713-1784) was educated by the Jesuits, in Paris, but to his father's great disgust refused to follow the law, the Church, or a medical career, and at the age of 22 found himself thrown out of the family home. He became a barely employed young intellectual around Paris, and published his first work, *Les Pensé*es Philsophiques (1746), in which he applies critical reasoning to the concept of God, for which boldness he earned himself a session in prison. In the same year he began his greatest life project, *L'Encyclopé*die, a twenty year effort, with the assistance of many of the finest French minds of the time, to create a scientifically exact account of knowledge as it stood at the time. The perspective of the entries, in this massive effort, was anti religious, and anti traditional, but the eminence of the contributors guaranteed the huge success of the venture. All in all, the achievement of the *Encyclopé*die was so vast, and made itself so widely influential, that it has been said, without exaggeration, that events like the French Revolution, which involved a radical rethink of social values, had their roots in Diderot's vast undertaking. Upon completing this huge work, Diderot turned to a lesser assignment, *Les Salons* (1759-81), in which he began to review the painting exhibits which took place in Paris every two years. In those reports, Diderot exercises hitherto unknown delicacy, in giving expression to visual finesse, and he goes on, within his discussions, to elaborate on the unique relation which painters and poets should feel for one another.

Sample, from the *Encyclopédie)*: Christianity is the religion that recognizes Jesus Christ as its author. Let us not confuse it here with the various sects of Philosophy. The Gospel, that contains its dogma, its moral doctrine, its promises, is not one of these ingenious systems to which the spirit of the Philosophers gives birth by dint of thought. Most of them, little caring about being useful to men, are more occupied with satisfying their vanity by the discovery of some truth, always sterile for the reformation of morals and most often useless to humankind. But Jesus Christ, by bringing his religion to the world, offered a more noble purpose, which is to instruct men and to make them better.

37. Buffon

Overview: The Comte de Buffon (1707-1788) was born in Burgundy, his father being a *conseiller du parlement* of the province. Buffon was educated at the Jesuit College of Dijon, where he showed a marked interest in mathematics and science. In l730 he set off on a journey with a young English friend, whose tutor infected Buffon with an avid interest in natural history. The three men visited Italy, Switzerland, and finally England, where Buffon, like Montesquieu, greatly admired English culture. On his return to France, in 1739, Buffon was appointed curator of the Jardin des Plantes, the Royal botanical garden; he spent the remaining half century of his life between the botanical garden, and his private Chateau at Monbard, working in his own gardens and writing his vast *Histoire Naturelle (1749-1788).*

At the time of his curatorship, Buffon found the gardens still in use as a source of medicinal plants for the royal family, but under Buffon the location was turned into an extensive botanical garden, which botanists from around the world visited, and to which they contributed rare species. In his *Histoire Naturelle*, Buffon opened by saying that the kind of intelligence required, for the work before him, was of two sorts: precise in the observation of minute details; grand in theoretical overviews. Buffon's own attention gradually drifted to the second of these concerns, and it was there that he anticipated many subsequent scientific discoveries. He was the first thinker to elaborate the theory of the geological ages which preceded the present state of our planet; he was a pioneering student of the influence of environment on the individual creature; and he had some understanding even of such refined sciences as microbiology. It was his peculiarly eighteenth century observation, that all of nature leads up to the human being. (It was equally of his time that he thought grandeur of size a distinguishing mark of what was most awesome in nature.) In his *Discours de Réception a l'Académie francaise* (1753) Buffon elaborated a theory of style---"le style c'est l'homme"—in which he developed a perspective applicable to his own writing life, that to write well is to think well.

38. Bea*umarchais*

Overview: Pierre-Augustin de Beaumarchais (1732-1799) was the son of a watchmaker, and also a skilled musician, and using the latter ability he managed to get himself employed as harp instructor for the daughters of King Louis XV. Having proven himself witty, vitriolic, and articulate, Beaumarchais, who wrote a number of better forgotten plays, found his way into the creation of the two plays which made his fame, to this day: *Le Barbier de Seville* (1775) and *Le Mariage de Figaro* (1784). Both of these plays revolve around the mischief of Figaro, a man of all trades, educated and quick, who ends up as a Barber. In the first of these plays he acts out the role of a witty partner in a love triangle, but in the second play, *Le Mariage de Figaro*, Figaro takes on the role of a critic of the aristocracy, an embittered victim of a privileged society with no respect for the common man; and he expresses these feelings with an incendiary vigor which, in looking back, we may feel part of the spirit that was soon to lead into the French Revolution.

From Act V of *Le Mariage de Figaro*:

Figaro

"I even saw her laugh with Delight, while he read her Billet!—They think themselves secure, but perhaps they yet may be deceived."—No, my very worthy Lord and Master, you have not got her yet—What! Because you are a great Man, you fancy yourself a great Genius.—"Which way?—How came you to be the rich and mighty Count Almaviva? Why truly, you gave yourself the Trouble to be born! While the obscurity in which I have been cast demanded more Abilities to gain a mere Subsistence than are requisite to govern Empires. And what, most noble Count, are your Claims to Distinction, to pompous Titles, and immense Wealth, of which you are so proud, and which, by Accident, you possess? For which of your Virtues? Your Wisdom? Your Generosity? Your Justice?—The Wisdom you have acquired consists in vile Arts, to gratify vile Passions; your Generosity is lavished on your hireling Instruments, but whose Necessities make them far less Contemptible than yourself; and your Justice is the inveterate Persecution of those who have the Will and the Wit to resist your Depredations." But this has ever been the Practice of the *little* Great; those they cannot degrade, they endeavour to crush.

39. Choderlos de Laclos

Overview: Choderlos de Laclos (1741-1803) 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, and saw sporadic battle action during the early stages of the Napoleonic Wars. During an extensive career in the military he 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.

The novel, Les Liaisons, was the subject of much moral reprobation during its time, for the text, highlighting the last corrupt years of an *ancien régime* which is soon to give way to the Napoleonic era, and after that to a new l9th century world in which the intricacies of court corruption were no longer fashionable.

The novel itself involves two separate but intertwined themes in which figures of aristocratic background, the Viscomte de Valmont and the Marquise de Merteuil, conspire to seduce and corrupt two relative innocents at court. The drama plays out across 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.

Sample: the words of the marquise, *Les Liaisons Dangereuses (1782)* :

When I came out into society I was 15. I already knew then that the role I was condemned to, namely to keep quiet and do what I was told, gave me the perfect opportunity to listen and observe. Not to what people told me, which naturally was of no interest to me, but to whatever it was they were trying to hide. I practiced detachment. I learn how to look cheerful while under the table I stuck a fork onto the back of my hand. I became a virtuoso of deceit. I consulted the strictest moralists to learn how to appear, philosophers to find out what to think, and novelists to see what I could get away with, and in the end it all came down to one wonderfully simple principle: win or die.

40. Bernardin de Saint Pierre

Overview: Bernardin de Saint Pierre (1737-1814) was born in Rouen, where he spent a happy childhood playing by the seashore and reading *La Vie des Saints*, from which he learned that God always cares for those who love him. The youngster also read, until he had almost memorized it by heart, Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe*, which enflamed his appetite for travel. As a young man he satisfied that appetite, taking a long trip to Madagascar and Maurititus, upon return from which, in 1771, he made the acquaintance of Rousseau, whom he admired hugely for his individualism and his passion for nature. It was Rousseau's wish that Saint-Pierre should write a continuation of Emile, Rousseau's tract on education, but Saint-Pierre decided instead to complete his own *Le Voyage a l'Ile de France* (Mauritius), an epistolary account of his own experiences in tropical lands. This work was a huge success, and was followed in 1784 by the first three volumes of Saint-Pierre's *Etudes de la Nature*, which quickly ensured its author's reputation. In l787 appeared a fourth volume of the *Etudes*, the idyl tale of *Paul et Virginie*, which became a huge popular favorite. Bernardin de Saint-Pierre's ideas, in *Paul et Virginie*, were not original, but hewed closely to Rousseau, beginning with a rather unqualified view that God created the universe for the convenience of mankind: and that mankind, in return, would be wise to live far from urban life in the wilds of nature, living a natural and, accordingly virtuous life. While Saint-Pierre excels in his depiction of the wild untouched beauty of tropical nature, his understanding of nature, and its relation to mankind, remains sentimental and naïve. This author was in effect the discoverer of exoticism for French literature, and by the same stroke the precursor of the Romantic movement.

From *Paul et Virginie (1787)*:

Desert as was the island, and the ground left to the choice of the settler, she avoided those spots which were most fertile and most favorable to commerce: seeking some nook of the mountain, some secret asylum where she might live solitary and unknown, she bent her way from the town towards these rocks, where she might conceal herself from observation. All sensitive and suffering creatures, from a sort of common instinct, fly for refuge amidst their pains to haunts the most wild and desolate…

41. Marquis de Sade

Overview: The Marquis de Sade (1740-1814) was born of a prominent family, given a formal education, and found his way early into a military career. He fought actively in the Seven Years War. From early in that career, however, he drifted into a notably libertine lifestyle, and began his involvement in a series of sexual scandals, outrages to public morality, and episodes which led to his incarceration both in prisons and in mental asylums. (In all he spent thirty two years of his life incarcerated, much of that time, however, preoccupied with writing.) The value of that work has been generally scorned, both by critics and by moralists, for its perversity of behaviors but also for its general artlessness of construction.

Sample, from *Justine (1787)*:

At this period crucial to the virtue of the two maidens, they were in one day made bereft of everything: a frightful bankruptcy precipitated their father into circumstances so cruel that he perished of grief. One month later, his wife followed him into the grave. Two distant and heartless relatives deliberated what should be done with the young orphans; a hundred crowns apiece was their share of a legacy mostly swallowed up by creditors. No one caring to be burdened with them, the convent's door was opened, their dowry was put into their hands, and they were left at liberty to become what they wished.

Madame de Lorsange, at the time called Juliette, whose mind and character were to all intents and purposes as completely formed then as at thirty, the age she had attained at the opening of the tale we are about to relate, seemed nothing but overjoyed to be put at large; she gave not a moment's thought to the cruel events which had broken her chains. As for Justine, aged as we have remarked, twelve, hers was of a pensive and melancholy character, which made her far more keenly appreciate all the horrors of her situation. Full of tenderness, endowed with a surprising sensibility instead of with her sister's art and finesse, she was ruled by an ingenuousness, a candor that were to cause her to tumble into not a few pitfalls.

Early l9th Century

42. Chateaubriand

Overview: Francois-René de Chateaubriand (1768-1848) was born in Saint-Malo in the same year as Napoleon. Brought up strictly, and with a stern education against which he chafed, Chateaubriand was ever restive for freedom and independence, though at the same time, as a person solitary by nature, his only real confidant was his sister Lucile. The Revolution broke out just as Chateaubriand enlisted in the Army, and as the son of a conservative family he had no sympathy with the new developments, and in 1791 made his way to America, where he was to spend eight months traveling in the wilder parts of North America, and making many observations of Native American tribes; experiences which became the base of his two short tales, *Atala* and *Rene*. There followed seven years in England, during which Chateaubriand eked out a meager living, and worked on the text of *Le Genie du Christianisme*, which was published in l802, just at the right moment to bring him fame, and to recommend him to Napoleon Bonaparte, who had just at that moment worked out a deal with the Papacy, once again to promote the public worship of Catholicism in France. For some time after this publication, Chateaubriand traveled in North Africa and the Middle East, seeking new material for texts like *Les Martyrs* (1809). In the subsequent decades Chateaubriand was largely active in politics, though he was constantly at work on his vast *Memoires d'outre Tombe* autobiography (1848-50), in which he gives thorough expression to the dominant themes of his oeuvre. In brief terms, the work of this prolific writer, who can be called the Father of French Romanticism, circles around the power of imagination, of his own hypersensitive poetic nature, and the enormous beauty of nature. His impassioned, and consistent love of Christianity drew on the ways in which that religious, in its historical development, and especially in the Middle Ages, promoted the imaginative freedom of the individual.

43. Mme. de Stael

Overview: Anne Marie Germaine Necker (1722-1817) was brought up in her mother's distinguished literary salon, and in the ambience of her powerful father, who was Prime Minister of France just before the Revolution. At the age of twenty she was married to the Swedish Ambassador to France, Baron de Stael; as their marriage was unhappy, Mme. de Stael was able to throw herself into the worlds of literature and politics, and though she was forced to flee for five years, she returned to Paris in 1797 to establish her own salon, which included writers like Benjamin Constant. In 1803, having made her opposition to Napoleon boldly clear, Mme. de Stael again went into exile, banished, separated from the Paris she needed to live. In subsequent years she made two extensive trips to Germany—where she became close friends with Goethe, Schlegel, and Schiller; and in continuation, with her second husband, traveled to Russia, finally making her way back to England, where her masterpiece, *De l'Allemagne,* was published (1813). The last two years of her life were spent back in Paris, where her salon once again became the talk of the town.

De l'Allemagne was the strongest achievement of Mme. de Stael's writing life, and is pervaded with her characteristic largeness of soul. Reaching toward the thought of a world literature, believing firmly in human progress, ready always to speak out for justice, she embraces the quite foreign culture of Germany as a valuable addition to world culture, and an incomparable source of new inspiration for French culture. The fact is that throughout her many writings, these same forceful personal qualities are evident. Mention might thus be made of her two autobiographical novels, *Delphine* (1802) and *Corinne* (1807), in which she portrays herself in two phases of self-understanding: as the woman of great talent who submits graciously to the demands of social convention; or as the bold woman in rebellion, who defies the demands of her society. In neither case does the woman in question find happiness.

44. Benjamin Constant

Overview: Benjamin Constant (1787-1830) was a contemporary and close friend of Mme. de Stael, with whom he shared both a generous sympathy for humanity, and a deep suspicion about the French Revolution. It was in Constant's blood to feel a sympathy for that Revolution, as he descended from liberty loving Swiss Huguenots, and he was active in politics, striving to put the new Revolutionary Government on a liberal course. Liberal politician Constant was, deeply impressed by the example of English government, with its respect for individual privacy, and often present in the National Assembly as a brilliant orator fighting for Liberal policies. As with Mme. de Stael, whose views resembled his own, Constant wrote a small body of fiction—see the sample below—in which the romantic sensibility of the time is plain to see.

Sample Quotes from *Adolphe (1816)* :

"The great question in life is the suffering we cause, and the most ingenious metaphysics do not justify the man who has broken the heart that loved him." "Art for art's sake, with no purpose, for any purpose perverts art. But art achieves a purpose which is not its own." "Woe to the man who in the first moments of a love-affair does not believe that it will last forever! Woe to him who even in the arms of some mistress who has just yielded to him maintains an awareness of trouble to come and foresees that he may later tear himself away!" "Nearly always, so as to live at peace with ourselves, we disguise our own impotence and weakness as calculation and policy; it is our way of placating that half of our being which is in a sense a spectator of the other."

45. Amiel

Overview: Henri Frédéric Amiel (1821-1881), was a Swiss born philosopher and traveler, who left one remarkéle testimony to his spirit and his time. This work, of which an example follows, was the posthumously published distillation of a life of travel, in which Amiel became acquainted with the finest of European thought, and showed his kinship with other intimate students of the heart, like Benjamin Constant.

Sample from the *Journal Intime* (1883-1884):

March 3, 1852.—Opinion has its value and even its power: to have it against us is painful when we are among friends, and harmful in the case of the outer world. We should neither flatter opinion nor court it; but it is better, if we can help it, not to throw it on to a false scent. The first error is a meanness; the second an imprudence. We should be ashamed of the one; we may regret the other. Look to yourself; you are much given to this last fault, and it has already done you great harm. Be ready to bend your pride; abase yourself even so far as to show yourself ready and clever like others. This world of skillful egotisms and active ambitions, this world of men, in which one must deceive by smiles, conduct, and silence as much as by actual words, a world revolting to the proud and upright soul, it is our business to learn to live in it! Success is required in it: succeed. Only force is recognized there: be strong. Opinion seeks to impose her law upon all, instead of setting her at defiance, it would be better to struggle with her and conquer.... I understand the indignation of contempt, and the wish to crush, roused irresistibly by all that creeps, all that is tortuous, oblique, ignoble.... But I cannot maintain such a mood, which is a mood of vengeance, for long. This world is a world of men, and these men are our brothers.

46. Cousin

Overview: Victor Cousin (1792-1867) was, as philosopher, as opposed to the rationalist Enlightenment view of reality as were the Romantic poets, for whom *Le Siècle des Lumières* seemed a wasteland for the imagination. At an early age, twenty three, Cousin was appointed assistant to Royer Collard, the Professor of Philosophy at the Sorbonne, and with that mentor Cousin went on to a most influential career as spokesman for idealism and 'spiritualisme' in philosophy. After mastering the perspective of the Scottish school of thought, especially of Thomas Reid, Cousin traveled to Germany, in l817-18, where he made the acquaintance of Fichte and Hegel, and, having taught himself German, brought the essences of their thought back to his University teaching at the Sorbonne.

The thought perspective of Cousin was eclectic. He believed that all the major philosophies contained an element of the truth, and that the job of his own philosophy was to extract and rejoin the truth elements in other people's thought. With this viewpoint he naturally directed his attention to the history of philosophy, to which—especially to Platonism—he devoted much thought. His most influential work, based on his Sorbonne lectures, was *Du Vrai, Du Beau, et Du Bien* (1853), a basically idealist case for the embededness of truth, beauty, and goodness at the center of reality. In the later l820's, under the Restoration Government, Cousin was thought suspect of liberalism, and was forced to resign, but in l828 he resumed his Sorbonne lectures, and attracted fervent student attention. It was during these years, in full command of his eloquent lecture style, that Cousin became a prominent 'spiritualist' figure on the Parisian scene. His idealism was of a soft kind, which recommended it to the enthusiasms of the Romantic period, and caught fire in the feelings of poets, leaders, and politicians.

47. Lamartine

Overview: Alphone Louis-Marie de Lamartine (1790-1869) was born in Burgundy, where he enjoyed a delightful childhood with his sisters, at his family's hill surrounded home. For the first twenty years of his life he remained close to home, reading, delighting in nature, and absorbing a strong Jesuit education. In 1811 he was sent on a tour to Italy, to cure him of a bad case of *amour*, and after a number of affairs of the heart he completed his first book of poetry, *Les Meditations Poétiques* (1820, which was a huge success, and made him famous overnight. The following decades saw Lamartine involved both with poetry and, even more conspicuously, with politics. His prominence as a national figure—a superb orator, a dramatic thinker—brought him for a time in l848, as a member of the Provisional Government, virtually to the summit of French politics, but not long after he was cast down by the waves of political sentiment, and spent his last years struggling to make a living.

The Work of Lamartine: Lamartine introduced into the French lyric a rare insight into psychological states as the poet experiences them in nature. With a faultless ear, and a readiness for lofty experiences—one might compare him to Victor Cousin in this, as well as to Wordsworth, whose nature poetry breathes the same innocent perfection as Lamartine's—he led the artistic Romantic movement which was sweeping France after the Revolution. Cf. the following, from "The Lake" (1816):

…suspend your trek O Time! Suspend your flights
O favoring hours, and stay!
Let us pause, savoring the quick delights
That fill the dearest day.

Unhappy crowds cry out to you in prayers.
Flow, Time, and set them free.
Run through their days and through their ravening cares!
But leave the happy be.

In vain I ask for hours to linger on
And Time slips into flight.
I tell this night: "Be slower!" and the dawn
Undoes the raveled night.

Let's love, then! Love, and feel while feel we can
The moment on its run.
There is no shore of Time, no port of Man.
It flows, and we go on..

48. Hugo

Overview: Victor Hugo (1802-1885) was born in Bésancon, in the year when Chateaubriand's *Genie du Christianisme* was published. Hugo's father was a military man in the army of Napoleon, and as a child Victor was something of an army brat, transported from base to base, but when his father was appointed provincial Governor, Victor went with his Mom and brother to Paris, where he enjoyed the pleasures of a big yard and, before long, a good Parisian education, admiration for his early verses, and in 1821 marriage to a former playmate. From that time on, except for a decade in mid life, Hugo remained a prolific poet, a faithful and subtle echo, as he put it, of the political and social events of his time, and a fervent apostle of the poet's role; the poet, as both Hugo and Shelley felt, was the true master of his age, and the most sensitive barometer of the meaning of the age. While developing these ideas on poetry and in poetry, Hugo was supremely active both as dramatist and as novelist/epic writer. His plays are as expansive and passionately global as his poetry, and in every way violate the strict unities of the seventeenth century drama of French classicism. (Hugo remarked that the theory of the unities was the scissors by which the French cut off the wings of their greatest dramatists.) Hugo's greatest impact derived from his two vast novels: *Notre-Dame de Paris* (1831) and *Les Misérables* (1862), both of which epic efforts dug deeply into the pathos and dynamism of Paris society, as it developed the ills of an overgrown and undeveloped modern metropolis, rather like the London depicted by Dickens.

Sample, from Chapter 1 of *Les Miserables (1862)*:

After the brilliant failure of his first theatrical venture, he dared not return to the lodging which he occupied in the Rue Grenier-sur-l'Eau, opposite to the Port-au-Foin, having depended upon receiving from Monsieur the provost for his epithalamium, the wherewithal to pay Master Guillaume Doulx-Sire, farmer of the taxes on cloven-footed animals in Paris, the rent which he owed him, that is to say, twelve sols parisian; twelve times the value of all that he possessed in the world, including his trunk-hose, his shirt, and his cap.

49 Alfred de Vigny

Overview: Alfred Victor, Comte de Vigny (1797-1863) was born in Touraine of a many generations military family. Alfred himself joined the army in his teens, but retired from it in 1827, amply discouraged by the conflicts between the profession and his own contemplative nature. By this point de Vigny's literary tastes had blossomed, and in l822 he published his first book of poetry, entitled *Poèmes*. In l828 he married, but was soon to see that union break apart, as did others of his love affairs. This defeat was mirrored by his failed efforts to win election to the National Assembly, and at the turn of the century he retired to his Chateau in Angouleme, from where he continued to write, but far less profusely than Victor Hugo. By temperament aristocratic, pessimistic, and fiercely honest, de Vigny did not easily commit himself to his own poems, but worked and limned them carefully, bringing to fruition a variety of lyrics—like 'The Death of the Wolf' "The Bottle in the Ocean,' or "Moise''—which were of the highest quality, as was his incomplete long poem, 'Les Destinées.' Throughout this steeply maturing body of poetry, de Vigny enriches his pessimistic view of nature, our heartless mother, of social relations, which offer little but deception, and of God himself, the indifferent force into which the human has entered, by no choice of his own. In the end de Vigny, who differs from his fellow Romantics in philosophy and aesthetic values, turns to the realm of ideas as the domain where meaning and value accumulate for mortals.

From 'The Death of the Wolf' (1846):
The sire-wolf forward stepped, his forelegs tensed,
Digging with his claws for purchase in the dirt.
He judged himself lost, overtaken he was,
Encircled, with every escape cut off;
Then by the throat seized our bravest hound
In his fiery maw with one fatal snatch
And would not forfeit his toothy grip
No matter our bullets burned his flesh
And our sharp knives, like talons,
Plunged and tore among his guts,
Keeping his strangle hold
Until at last he dropped the dead assailant at his feet.

50 Alfred de Musset

Overview: Alfred de Musset (1810-1857) was born in Paris, son of a high level administrator in the War Ministry, who was also a student and biographer of the works of Rousseau. At twenty de Musset published his first volume of poetry, which was not much appreciated either by the professional critics, who found his poetic technique too casual, or by de Musset's younger contemporaries, who rightly thought he mocked their sentimentality in his poetry. The decisive event in his life was his love affair with Georges Sand, novelist and poet much his senior, with whom he traveled to Italy, but whom he could not find peace with. The passion and pain of that relationship marked the poet for life.

Alfred de Musset's poetry: The main themes of de Musset's poetry derive from his disastrous love affair with Georges Sand, which left him cynical and bitter: those themes are lost love, the supreme eloquence of youthful love, and the role of poetry as ennobler of love. In other words, de Musset sails a tight poetic ship, largely avoiding the vast emotional outpouring of Hugo or the philosophical gloominess of de Vigny.

Juana (1831)

Again I see you, ah my queen,
Of all my old loves that have been,
The first love, and the tenderest;
Do you remember or forget -
Ah me, for I remember yet -
How the last summer days were blest?

Ah lady, when we think of this,
The foolish hours of youth and bliss,
How fleet, how sweet, how hard to hold!
How old we are, ere spring be green!
You touch the limit of eighteen
And I am twenty winters old.

My rose, that mid the red roses,
Was brightest, ah, how pale she is!
Yet keeps the beauty of her prime;
Child, never Spanish lady's face
Was lovely with so wild a grace;
Remember the dead summer time

Think of our loves, our feuds of old,
And how you gave your chain of gold
To me for a peace offering;
And how all night I lay awake

To touch and kiss it for your sake, -
To touch and kiss the lifeless thing.

51. Balzac

Overview: Honoré de Balzac (1799-1850) was born in Tours, but then moved with his family to Paris in 1814. The young man had from early on a passionate interest in writing, and after having been apprenticed out as a lawyer's assistant, at the insistence of his parents, Balzac reinforced the feeling that only the writing life would do. He had a go at playwriting, then at writing popular horror penny dreadfuls, then finally after many failures, and schemes for financial success as a publisher, he published his first successful novel (*Les Chouans*, 1829) and was thereby launched on the activity that would preoccupy him for the remaining twenty two years of his life. The sequence of novels on which Balzac then launched, and which were to keep him at his desk for the rest of his life, living on black coffee, he eventually came to call *La Comédie Humaine*, taking Dante's text title as his foil, and aspiring to address the whole panorama of human life.

The Material of La Comédie Humaine: Balzac is the first 'realistic' French novelist, which is to say both that he attempted to portray all classes and types of society, and that he always strove to interpret his characters—there are several thousand of them—in terms of their physical and environmental settings, which are described as keenly as are the people's characters. As for those 'characters,' Balzac's most powerful interest was in the middle-class, which under the First Empire (Napoleon), the Restoration, and the July Monarch, with its 'roi bourgeois,' entered its early modern phase, as the main stay of social/political life. Balzac was accordingly far less interested in either the aristocracy or the peasants.

First lines of *The Country Doctor (1833)*:

On a lovely spring morning in the year 1829, a man of fifty or thereabouts was wending his way on horseback along the mountain road that leads to a large village near the Grande Chartreuse. This village is the market town of a populous canton that lies within the limits of a valley of some considerable length. The melting of the snows had filled the boulder-strewn bed of the torrent (often dry) that flows through this valley, which is closely shut in between two parallel mountain barriers, above which the peaks of Savoy and of Dauphine tower on every side.

52. Saint-Simon

Overview: Henri de Saint Simon (1760-1825) was a descendant of the prominent l8th century memoirist of the same name, and was indeed a thinker who took his calling seriously. Already at age fifteen he ordered his valet de chamber to wake him every morning with the command: 'Levez-vous, Monsieur le Comte, vous avez de grandes choses a faire aujourd'hui,' 'Get up, Monsieur le Comte, you have great things to accomplish today.' The career of the Count did indeed begin on a grand note, as he volunteered to serve under George Washington in the American War of Independence. From that point on, Saint Simon was a man of grand schemes and plans. He plunged into society, as a man of fashion, as a businessman speculating in land, and at the same time as a student of the social, a political economist, and founder even of a social religion.

Saint-Simon as Social Reformer: It was typical of Saint-Simon's forward striving social plans that early on he conceived a plan to join the Atlantic and Pacific by cutting a canal through the Isthmus of Panama. (Long after his death this plan was realized as the Panama Canal.) As his thoughts on societal improvement matured he read Mme. de Stael's *De la Litérature*, and concluded—Mme.'s husband having just died—that he would like to marry the lady. Discovering the lady's disinterest, Saint-Simon settled in Geneva, where he conceived his first large scale social scheme; it was to conscript an international council of intellectuals and artists, who could take the place of the Catholic Church, as the planet's most directive spiritual body. This kind of idea was part of Saint-Simon's most energetic contribution to the social theory of this time, a contribution most fully developed in his *Le Nouveau Christianisme* (1825). In that work Saint-Simon looked to the establishment of a new society, in which the Feudal heritage of Europe would give way to a society in which power was vested in a coalition of intellectual/artistic persons complemented by a huge cohort of merchants, bankers, and captains of industry. Unlike most of the Romantics, but not unlike Balzac, Saint-Simon thought of the world of business as a key driver to a new and valuable humanity.

53. Fourier

Overview: Charles Fourier (1772-1837) was a contemporary of Saint-Simon, and like him a utopian social reformer. (The post Revolutionary period, in France, was a time when society was being broadly reinvisaged, and experiments in societal renovation were common—and would find one of their strongest backers in Karl Marx, a few generations later.) He believed that once the individuals in society were given free play to do what they liked and believed in, and were liberated from the strictures normally imposed by society, on human freedom, harmony and significant mutual achievement would follow. (His text, *Théorie des quatre Mouvements*, 1808) was his most developed statement of this position.) Working from the assumption that human beings are basically co- operative, he developed the idea that individualism and greed can be overcome if humans are given freedom in a society that is natural to them. In subsequent texts, Fourier developed these basic ideas into the form of a utopian socialism, in which, by the way, women were understood to be fully equal players. Fourier it was, who coined the term 'feminism.'

From Fourier's *Théorie des Quatre Mouvements* (1841):

The learned world is wholly imbued with a doctrine termed MORALITY, which is a mortal enemy of passional attraction.

Morality teaches man to be at war with himself, to resist his passions, to repress them, to believe that God was incapable of organizing our souls, our passions wisely; that he needed the teachings of Plato and Seneca in order to know how to distribute characteristics and instincts. Imbued with these prejudices regarding the impotence of God, the learned world was not qualified to estimate the natural impulses or passional attractions, which morality proscribes and relegates to the rank of vices.

It is true that these impulses entice us only to evil, if we yield to them individually; but we must calculate their effect upon a body of about two thousand persons socially combined, and not upon families or isolated individuals: this is what the learned world has not thought of; in studying it, it would have recognized that as soon as the number of associates (*societaires*) has reached 1600, the natural impulses, termed attractions, tend to form series of contrasting groups, in which everything incites to industry, become attractive, and to virtue, become lucrative.

54. Stendahl

Overview: Henri Beyle, later Stendahl (1783-1842) was born in Grenoble and served as a soldier under Napoleon through to the end of the Russian campaign (1812). He was a great admirer of Bonaparte, and of Italy, as well, which he considered the home of passion and intensity. (From 1814-1821 he lived in Milan; from 1830-1841 he was consul, first in Trieste, then in Civitavecchia.) His earliest writings were on music, then, in *Racine et Shakespeare* (1823-25), on what he saw as the deep Romanticism of the great playwrights of the French seventeenth century. His two great novels, to follow, were *Le Rouge et le Noir* (1831) and the *Chartreuse de Parme* (1839). The former is a brilliant portrait of a young man who excels as a soldier under Napoleon, then, however, finds himself of limited power under the Restoration Government; in the end, after disguises and adventures, he is condemned to the scaffold for murder. *The Chartreuse de Parme*, like its predecessor, reviews the psychology of individuals living in a no longer militarily dramatic social environment, in this case a small provincial court in Italy, but in a social world so finely and subtly portrayed, that Stendahl can properly be considered the forerunner of the more recent psychological novels of our time.

Excerpt from *Le Rouge et le Noir (1831)*:

With the lively and graceful demeanour which came naturally to her when she was not in company, Mme de Rênal was coming out into the garden through the French window of the drawing-room when she noticed the figure of a young peasant standing by the front door. He was scarcely more than a boy, and his pale face showed signs of recent tears. He was wearing a spotless white shirt and carrying a very clean jacket of thick mauve wool under his arm.
*The peasant boy had so fair a complexion and such gentle eyes that Mme de Rênal's romantically inclined nature led her to imagine at first that he might be a girl in disguise, coming to ask some favour of the mayor. She felt a surge of pity for the poor soul standing there at the front door and obviously not daring to raise a hand to the bell. She went over to him, distracted for a moment from the deep distress whi*ch the prospect of a tutor in the house was causing her.

Late l9th Century

55. Gautier

Overview: Théophile Gautier (1811-1872)
Poet, painter, and short story writer, Theophile Gautier is best known for his remark that 'I am a man for whom the visible world exists.' Most of his tales—the best of which are included in his *Romans et Contes* (1857)—deal with supernatural or fantastic issues. In addition to 'contes,' Gautier wrote fascinating novels—*Mademoiselle de Maupin* (1835) and *Le Capitaine Fracasse* (1863)—and excellent volumes of travel account and art and literary criticism. Gautier's poetry, also abundant, marks the transition from the Romantic to the next phase—Parnassian? Objectivist?—in which the poem is 'about things.' Gautier's early poetry is still about the 'fantastic' and 'mysterious,' but by the time of *Emaux et Camées* (*Emeralds and Cameos*) (1852), he is turning toward 'hard' verse in which object centered depictions are the rule. In this phase Gautier excels, depicting detailed and often minute objects with a clarity intentionally lacking in Romantic poetry.

From *The Mummy's Foot (1840)*:

It was a singular face, that of the merchant; an immense skull, polished like a knee, and surrounded by a thin aureole of white hair, which brought out the clear salmon tint of his complexion all the more strikingly, lent him a false aspect of patriarchal *bonhomie*, counteracted, however, by the scintillation of two little yellow eyes which trembled in their orbits like two louis-d'or upon quicksilver. The curve of his nose presented an aquiline silhouette, which suggested the Oriental or Jewish type. His hands—thin, slender, full of nerves which projected like strings upon the finger-board of a violin, and armed with claws like those on the terminations of bats' wings—shook with senile trembling; but those convulsively agitated hands became firmer than steel pincers or lobsters' claws when they lifted any precious article—an onyx cup, a Venetian glass, or a dish of Bohemian crystal. This strange old man had an aspect so thoroughly rabbinical and cabalistic that he would have been burnt on the mere testimony of his face three centuries ago.

56. France

Overview: Anatole France (1844-1924) was a novelist and critic incarnating what ius sometimes called the Gallic *esprit critique*, skeptical verging toward cynical. (Already with Descartes we noticed the germ of this deeply Gallic critical and negative spirit; and we saw a further development of it in Henri Beyle.) It marks Anatole France's whole body of work that he believes above all in art, and not in morality, which as he sees it fluctuates with the ages. The complex tone of his work is implicit in a short story like 'The Procurator of Judea,' that is Pontius Pilate, in which he imagines the thoughts of Pontius as he thinks back onto certain episodes in Judaea—the crucifixion of Jesus Christ—and on the now fading memory of those events, which in retrospect seem to him like small scale, but fascinating blips in the memory of a provincial administrator.

Sample from *Thais (1848)*:

In those days there were many hermits living in the desert. On both banks of the Nile numerous huts, built by these solitary dwellers, of branches held together by clay, were scattered at a little distance from each other, so that the inhabitants could live alone, and yet help one another in case of need. Churches, each surmounted by a cross, stood here and there amongst the huts, and the monks flocked to them at each festival to celebrate the services or to partake of the Communion. There were also, here and there on the banks of the river, monasteries, where the cenobites lived in separate cells, and only met together that they might the better enjoy their solitude.

Both hermits and cenobites led abstemious lives, taking no food till after sunset, and eating nothing but bread with a little salt and hyssop. Some retired into the desert, and led a still more strange life in some cave or tomb.

57. Nerval

Overview: Gérard de Nerval (1809-1855) was a prodigy, who made his first literary mark with a translation of Goethe's *Faust*, completed when the young Frenchman was still a student at the Lycée Charlemagne, in Paris. (Goethe is said to have commented, on seeing this work, that prior to reading the translation he had never fully understood his own poem.) A natural for the inner circle of Romantic creators, Nerval nonetheless remained apart, frequently on the edge of dreams and fantasy, throughout his writing life. (Much of his adult life was in fact spent in mental asylums.) When he was sane and strong, Nerval traveled extensively, in Germany, France, and the Middle East. He has left splendid travel works—*De Paris à Cythère* (1848) and *Voyage en Orient* (1851)—and haunting short stories, pervaded with the occult and with musicality. He died by hanging in 1855, either a suicide or a victim of a gang attack.

Nerval's self portrait in poem:

El Desdichado (1853)

I am the man of gloom - widowed - unconsoled
The prince of Aquitaine, his tower in ruin:
My sole star is dead - and my constellated lute
Bears the Black Sun of Melancholia.

In the night of the tomb, you, my consolation,
Give me back Posillipo and the Italian sea,
The flower that so eased my heart's desolation,
And the trellis that twines the rose into the vine.

Am I Eros or Phoebus? Lusignan or Biron?
My brow is still red with the kiss of the queen;
I have dreamt in the grotto where the siren swims. . .

And, twice victorious, I have crossed Acheron:
My Orphic lyre in turn modulating the strains
Of the sighs of the saint and the cries of the fay.

58. Baudelaire

Overview: Charles Baudelaire (1821-1868), whom some have called the father of all subsequent modern poetry in France, was born in Paris, given a conventional education, and soon able to acquire, among his teen age-mates, a reputation as a dandy and a womanizer. (He specialized in syphilis and gonorrhea, which he picked up before he was twenty, and which, added in to what was going to be a life filled with laudanum and excess alcohol, contributed to his early death, and to the massive stroke which left him aphasic for the last years of his life.) His greatest work, which sums up his lifetime of writing, is *Les Fleurs du Mal*, *The Flowers of Evil* (1857), in which he fully develops his basic themes—the essential power of symbols to move the soul, the richness of combined sense impressions as we take them in from nature, and ultimately the boredom, or 'ennui' resident in the human condition, which links to our susceptibility to evil—sexual carelessness, addictions, a taste for the darkness of the occult. All of these basic themes echo out in other works: *L'Art romantique* (1868), *Petits Poèmes en prose* (1868) in which he creates the new genre of the prose poem, and a brilliant translation of Poe's short stories.

A translation of 'Spleen,' from The Flowers of Evil, translated by the English poet, Roy Campbell, 1952:

I'm like the King of some damp, rainy clime,
Grown impotent and old before my time,
Who scorns the bows and scrapings of his teachers
And bores himself with hounds and all such creatures.
Naught can amuse him, falcon, steed, or chase:
No, not the mortal plight of his whole race
Dying before his balcony. The tune,
Sung to this tyrant by his pet buffoon,
Irks him. His couch seems far more like a grave.
Even the girls, for whom all kings seem brave,
Can think no toilet up, nor shameless rig,
To draw a smirk from this funereal prig.
The sage who makes him gold, could never find
The baser element that rots his mind.
Even those blood-baths the old Romans knew
And later thugs have imitated too,
Can't warm this skeleton to deeds of slaughter,
Whose only blood is Lethe's cold, green water.

59. Zola

Overview: Emile Zola (1840-1902), who was to become known as the Father of French Naturalism, began his literary career, as did Balzac, by writing popular horror and mystery stories. 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 Débacle* (1892) a study of politics and war.

Preface to first volume of the Rougon-Macquart series (1871):

I wish to explain how a family, a small group of human beings, conducts itself in a given social system after blossoming forth and giving birth to ten or twenty members, who, though they may appear, at the first glance, profoundly dissimilar one from the other, are, as analysis demonstrates, most closely linked together from the point of view of affinity. Heredity, like gravity, has its laws.

60. Maupassant

Overview: Guy de Maupassant (1850-1893) was born near Paris, to prosperous middle class parents, and was especially close to his well read and thoughtful mother, an important influence on de Maupassant as he developed his literary skills and tastes. It was the work of Gustave Flaubert, author of *Madame Bovary* (1857), which first caught de Maupassant's deep attention, speaking to him with the classical notion that the great artist should remain personally withdrawn from his artistry, and should above all be attentive to form and structure. In the body of his fictions and short stories he is consistently careful about this cool aesthetic, which appears perfectly natural to him, and about his major premise in world-view:

He writes that 'the mediocrity of the universe astonishes and revolts me, the smallness of all things fills me with disgust, the poverty of human beings makes me sick.' Despite the strength of these feelings, de Maupassant is careful to keep those feelings out of the texts of his many prose works, and to remain behind the scenes.

From the beginning of de Maupassant's short tale, Boule de Suif (1880):

For several days in succession fragments of a defeated army had passed through the town. They were mere disorganized bands, not disciplined forces. The men wore long, dirty beards and tattered uniforms; they advanced in listless fashion, without a flag, without a leader. All seemed exhausted, worn out, incapable of thought or resolve, marching onward merely by force of habit, and dropping to the ground with fatigue the moment they halted. One saw, in particular, many enlisted men, peaceful citizens, men who lived quietly on their income, bending beneath the weight of their rifles; and little active volunteers, easily frightened but full of enthusiasm, as eager to attack as they were ready to take to flight; and amid these, a sprinkling of red-breeched soldiers, the pitiful remnant of a division cut down in a great battle; somber artillerymen, side by side with nondescript foot-soldiers; and, here and there, the gleaming helmet of a heavy-footed dragoon who had difficulty in keeping up with the quicker pace of the soldiers of the line.

61. Flaubert

Overview: Gustave Flaubert (1821-1880) the son of a Norman surgeon, was born and educated in Rouen. From early in life he was sketching a life-plan, a series of novels (to which he gave titles), reading voraciously, doing badly in school, and trying in every way possible to avoid going into the law as a profession—his father's desire. Around l840 Flaubert was back in Normandy, living with his mother, who died shortly after, then with himself, for he never married, and, except for one occasion, hardly traveled. His closest friend was Maxine du Camp, with whom he traveled to Greece and the Near East in 1849. He was a devoted worker in his own home, and in the course of his life wrote a few works which have set lasting standards for the French novel: *Madame Bovary* (1857), *Salammbo* (1869), and the *Trois Contes* (1877). His great contribution to French literature was customarily called 'realism,' and in fact Flaubert was forever concerned with fictional detail, with precision of observation, like Balzac, but at the same time his sense of form and structure set a new standard for French fiction. He was a tireless worker, not rarely spending hours remodeling a single phrase, or weeks on a particular page of a text like *Madame Bovary*.

From the beginning of Chapter 4, Madame Bovary (1856):

When the first cold days set in Emma left her bedroom for the sitting-room, a long apartment with a low ceiling, in which there was on the mantelpiece a large bunch of coral spread out against the looking-glass. Seated in her arm chair near the window, she could see the villagers pass along the pavement.

Twice a day Leon went from his office to the Lion d'Or. Emma could hear him coming from afar; she leant forward listening, and the young man glided past the curtain, always dressed in the same way, and without turning his head. But in the twilight, when, her chin resting on her left hand, she let the embroidery she had begun fall on her knees, she often shuddered at the apparition of this shadow suddenly gliding past. She would get up and order the table to be laid.

62. Goncourt Brothers

Overview: Edmond (1822-1896) and Jules (1830-1870) were a writing team, brothers who composed many 'naturalistic' novels together, who wrote a vast Journal of their observations in the streets, back alleys, law courts, prisons, and asylums of Paris. The most striking difference, of the Goncourts from Balzac and Zola, is their passion for the pathological and deranged in experience. The topics that formed the backbones of their stories were various: a study of hospital life and alcoholism—a topic Zola had treated; the pathologies of an underclass servant girl; seductions and tensions in the world of artists' studios. The outstanding work of the two brothers was their *Journal*, left to the world after their deaths. In this compendious series of notes, the brothers observed Paris life was great exactitude, often copying down conversations verbatim—and then including them directly in their novels, or taking exhaustive notes on work place sites, restaurants or cafés, or the street conversations of working men. The result is that much of this material, while assembled rather hit and miss in the brothers' structurally negligent novels, is of unique interest as a testimony to Parisian life in the second half of the nineteenth century. As it happens, the life they portrayed—and participated in—also included important salons, in which the Goncourt brothers came to know Renan, Taine, Gautier, and, slightly, Flaubert.

Journal excerpt in which the Goncourt brothers describe the death of their beloved family maid (1882):

Yesterday I learnt things about poor Rose, only lately dead and practically still warm, which astonished me more than anything else in the whole of my life; things which completely took away my appetite, filling me with a stupefaction from which I have not yet recovered and which has left me positively dazed. All of a sudden, within a matter of minutes, I was brought face to face with an unknown, dreadful, horrible side of the poor woman's life.

Those bills she signed, those debts she left with all the tradesmen, all had an unbelievable, horrifying explanation.. She had lovers whom she paid. One of them was the son of our dairywoman, who fleeced her and for whom she furnished a room. Another was given our wine and chickens. A secret life of dreadful orgies, nights out, sensual frenzies that prompted one of her lovers to say: 'It's going to kill one of us, me or her!'

63. Mallarmé

Overview: Stéphane Mallarmé (1842-1898) was born in Paris, and spent his career life teaching English in diverse parts of France. His was not a dramatic life of journeys or love affairs; he exceeds Flaubert in duty to the page and the careful writing on it.

We have dealt with Baudelaire as symbolist poet, and Mallarmé picks up the thread inventively. He was both a theorist of poetry and a poet, and he was wont to develop his aesthetic ideas at a series of evening meetings he hosted, on Tuesday nights from nine to midnight. Those ideas, which he elaborated in his *Divagations (1897),* emphasized the music of poetry, but also the allusiveness of the language which went into creating the music. The result, typically, is poetry which does not yield to logic, but only to an intuitive and close reading, as well as to delicate listening. He added a new sense, also, of the layout of text and spaces on the open field of the page; a kind of visual experiment that underlies his late work, *Un coup de des n'abolira jamais le hazard (1897),* notoriously resistant to paraphrase. That work enshrines Mallarmé's dictum that beyond reality there is nothing, but that nothing is the home of forms, ideas that dictate the poem behind the poem. One of the famous applications of Mallarmé's work and aesthetic is Debussy's *L'après midi d'un faune*, music which is drawn from Mallarmé's poem of the same name (1876).

Sample, *A Negress* (1899):

Possessed by some demon now a negress
Would taste a girl-child saddened by strange fruits
Forbidden ones too under the ragged dress,
This glutton's ready to try a trick or two:

To her belly she twins two fortunate tits
And, so high that no hand knows how to seize her,
Thrusts the dark shock of her booted legs
Just like a tongue unskilled in pleasure.

Facing the timorous nakedness of the gazelle
That trembles, on her back like an elephant gone wild,
Waiting upside down, she keenly admires herself,
Laughing with her bared teeth at the child:

And, between her legs where the victim's couched,
Raising the black flesh split beneath its mane,
Advances the palate of that alien mouth
Pale, rosy as a shell from the Spanish Main.

64. Péguy

Overview: Charles Péguy (1873-1914) was born in poverty, his mother a Parisian seat-mender. But the young man was diligent and won his way to a fine education, under one of the great French philosophers, Henri Bergson, at the Sorbonne. That philosopher underlined Péguy's intense early love of truth—the source of his strong passion for the case of Dreyfus, the *cause célèbre* of French culture at the time—and his patriotic nationalism, which he was to fuse with Socialism throughout his adult life. In 1900 Péguy founded the publishing venture *Cahiers de la quinzaine*, in which both he and his similar minded, and distinguished, friends—Romain Rolland, Julien Benda-- would publish in the next decades. Among the works of poetry and cultural critique Péguy published, in the following years, as he grew deeper into his Catholicism, were *Notre Jeunesse* (1910) and *Le Mystère de la Charité de Jeanne d'Arc* (1910). The latter of these texts was designed to honor the five hundredth anniversary of Joan's great sacrifice on behalf of her nation and her Church.

Sample: *Quotations from Péguy*

The sinner is at the very heart of Christianity. Nobody is so competent as the sinner in matters of Christianity. Nobody, except the saint.

It will never be known what acts of cowardice have been committed for fear of not looking sufficiently progressive.

Tyranny is always better organised than freedom.

It has never been given to a man to attain at once his happiness and his salvation.

Homer is new and fresh this morning, and nothing, perhaps, is so old and tired as today's newspaper.

Surrender is essentially an operation by means of which we set out explaining instead of acting.

He who does not bellow the truth when he knows the truth makes himself the accomplice of liars and forgers.

65. Taine

Overview: Hippolyte Taine (1828-1893) was born in the Ardennes, sent to the Collège de Bourbon, for his undergraduate learning, then to the Ecole Normale, where he was expected to succeed at the head of his class. But what a surprise! Taine failed, because he insisted on ideas which were at the time unorthodox, and alienated most of his professors. Ultimately, in order to get his doctor's degree, Taine had to write a dissertation on what he/ and his mentors thought was a harmless topic, the fables of La Fontaine. The decision to choose this topic assured Taine's academic success, and though he was to deal with many topics—especially the history of English literature—during the next decades, he was consistent in deploying the perspective he elucidated in his dissertation. The perspective in question is summed up in the following perspective, translated by this e book author:

Man is like an animal of a higher species, who produces philosophy and poems rather as do silkworms in creating their cocoons and bees their hives.

The perspective in question is best exemplified in Taine's *History of English Literature* (1864) in which he formulated most fully his doctrine of *race, moment, et milieu,* the three components to which he attributed the generation of each new literary period.

Sample from *The Introduction to the History of English Literature* (1869):

History, within a hundred years in Germany, and within sixty years in France, has undergone a transformation owing to a study of literatures. The discovery has been made that a literary work is not a mere play of the imagination, the isolated caprice of an excited brain, but a transcript of contemporary manners and customs and the sign of a particular state of intellect. The conclusion derived from this is that, through literary monuments, we can retrace the way in which men felt and thought many centuries ago. This method has been tried and found successful. We have meditated over these ways of feeling and thinking and have accepted them as facts of prime significance. We have found that they were dependent on most important events, that they explain these, and that these explain them, and that henceforth it was necessary to give them their place in history, and one of the highest.

66. Claudel

Overview: Paul Claudel (1868-1955) was from early on working for the French consular service. He reached high levels of governmental responsibility, eventually serving as French Ambassador to Japan, after having worked in China, South America, and diverse European posts. The essence of Claudel's art, as poet and especially in his eight plays, is found in a statement like this, in the translation of this e book composer: 'All of nature is vain without me; it is I who give it its meaning,' or 'For me, nothing out there remains alone, for in my heart I connect it to something else.' This stress on 'connections, ' endowed by the poet, leads Claudel to create literary works in which allusive connections between statement and statement gradually merge in literary wholes as hard to concretize as any of the work of Mallarmé or Rimbaud.

Scene: from Claudel's *The Satin Slipper* (1931):

DONA PROUHEZE. You turn away your head when you say that, so that I shall not see the jest upon your lips. DON CAMILLO. When I say that love is jealous you pretend that you don't understand. DONA PROUHEZE. What woman would not understand? DON CAMILLO. She that lov^s do not the poets say that she sighs at not being all in all to the being of her choice? He must have no more need but her alone. She carries death and the desert about with her, DONA PROUHEZE. Ah, not death but life would I bring to him whom I love, life, were it at the cost of my own. DON CAMILLO. But are not you yourself more than these kingdoms to seize, more than yon America to bring up out of the sea? DONA PROUHEZE. I am more. DON CAMILLO. And what is it to call up an America beside a soul that sinks? DONA PROUHEZE. Must I give my soul to save you? DON CAMILLO. There is no other way, DONA PROUHEZE. If I loved you, that would be easy for me. DON CAMILLO. If you love not me, love my misfortune, DONA PROUHEZE. What misfortune can be so great? DON CAMILLO. Save me from being alone. DONA PROUHEZE. But isn't it just that you have never left off working for?

67. Renan

Overview: Ernest Renan (1823-1892) was born in Brittany, of a Breton father and a Gascon mother. Ernest, who was to become an eminent philosopher, linguist, and historian, began early to absorb books, and in the course of a thorough education, largely in Catholic seminaries, he came to abandon the thought of the priesthood, and to reevaluate the Christian classical tradition upon which he had been weaned. Renan dumped the idea of the priesthood, and began also to embrace science as the religion of the future, a view he espoused in his text *L'Avenir de la science*, which he wrote in l849 but did not publish until l890—a text which survived as his most stable statement of view point. For Renan science, as a directive force in humanity, will be essentially a new religion, setting down the laws, teaching the people, and providing a meaning to life. Throughout his life Renan adopted both a critical and a longing attitude toward religion; when he was appointed to the Chair of Hebrew, at the Collège de France, his inaugural words were to speak of Jesus Christ as an 'incomparable man,' upon which he was dismissed from his position, until a regime change proved more accepting toward his religious views.

Renan's most attention getting work was published in connection with an archeological mission on which he was sent, to Phoenicia. There he became deeply aware of the cultural backgrounds in which Christianity had developed, and in 1863 published his *Vie de Jésus*, which caused a storm of reaction in France, for the clarity with which Renan characterized Jesus as a normal fully human man. There followed a number of lengthy volumes to which Renan gave the general title, *Les origines du christianisme,* and which included studies of The Apostles, Saint Paul, Marcus Aurelius, and others. All of these works are marked by extensive scholarship, and personal investigation, but everywhere the breath of poetry is striking, and in the end many sympathizers of Renan found that this great critic ended up falling in love with the very Catholicism he was trying to undermine.

68. Rimbaud

Overview: Arthur Rimbaud (1854-1891) was a close friend of the older poet, Paul Verlaine, and from him had a passionate sense of the importance of poetry. But Rimbaud, whose finest works of poetry—*Le bateau ivre* (1871), *Une saison en enfer* (1873)—were powerful and visionary texts, was nonetheless writing documents of a world he lived adventurously, and not armchair poetic testaments. Rimbaud's praise of a life in which the senses are totally disordered—in which there is a 'dérèglement complet de tous les sens,'—is congruent with the life he himself lived: teacher of French in London and Stuttgart, a wanderer begging his way on foot among the Italian Alps, a dockhand working in Marseilles, a mercenary soldier with Dutch troops headed for Indonesia, and far more, leading him ultimately through Egypt into Aden, and from there into Ethiopia, where, in the city of Harar, he established himself as a very successful trader/businessmen, and was well known for his honesty and justice in business. In l891 a tumor on his knee forced Rimbaud to return to Marseille for treatment, which was amputation of his leg. The autopsy revealed that he was suffering from cancer.

Sample: *Morning of Drunkenness, from The Illuminations* (1873*):*

O my *Good! O* my *Beautiful! Appalling fanfare where I do not falter! rack of enchantmants! Hurrah for the wonderful work and for the marvelous body, for the first time! It began in the midst of children's laughter, with their laughter will it end. This poison will remain in all our veins even when, the fanfare turning, we shall be given back to the old disharmony. O now may we, so worthy of these tortures! fervently take up the superhuman promise made to our created body and soul: that promise, that madness! Elegance, science, violence! They promised to bury in darkness the tree of good and evil, to deport tyrannic respectability so that we might bring hither our very pure love. It began with a certain disgust and it ends--unable to grasp this eternity--it ends in a riot of perfumes.*

Laughter of children, discretion of slaves, austerity of virgins, loathing of faces and objects here, holy be all of you in memory of this vigil. It began with every sort of boorishness, behold it ends with angels of flame and ice.

Early 20th century

69. Gide

Overview: André Gide (1869-1951) was one of the most influential figures in early twentieth century French literature. While his earliest work, a novel written when he was barely twenty, still flourished in the ambience of the Symbolist movement, his later in life works, reaching far into the last century, saw him involved with the break up of the European Colonialist colonies in Africa; thus with the full realignment of old political assumptions which dominated the world in which Gide grew up, as the scion of a middle class nineteenth century Protestant home.

Sample: interlocked quotes from Gide:

When one has begun to write, the hardest thing is to be sincere. Essential to mull over that idea and to define artistic sincerity. Meanwhile, I hit upon this: the word must never precede the idea. Or else: the word must always be necessitated by the idea. It must be irresistible and inevitable; and the same is true of the sentence, of the whole work of art. And for the artist's whole life, for his vocation must be irresistible. -- *Journals*, 31 Dec 1891

That a germ of Michel (the immoralist) exists in me goes without saying. How many buds we bear in us, Scheffer, that will never blossom save in our books! They are 'dormant eyes' as the botanists call them. But if intentionally you suppress all of them but one how it grows at once! How it enlarges, immediately monopolizing all the sap! My recipe for creating a fictional hero is very simple: take one of these buds and put it in a pot all alone; you soon achieve a wonderful individual. Advice: choose preferably (if it is true
you can choose) the bud that bothers you the most. You get rid of it at the same time. This is perhaps what Aristotle called the purging of passions. *Letter of l916*

70. Eluard

Overview: Paul Eluard (1895-1952) was born in St. Denis into a modest family: his father a bookkeeper, his mother a dressmaker; a social situation which contributed to Eluard's lifelong sympathy with the marginalized of society. The young man was profiting from a normal public education, when, in his mid teens, he was hit with tuberculosis, and had to be sent to a Swiss sanatorium. At the end of WW I Eluard published his first book of poetry, his key of entrance to the multiple salons the reigning in Paris. It was during these years, in the mid twenties and thirties of the past century, that Eluard (like many young French intellectuals in both France and the United States) joined the Communist Party. He was to remain a faithful follower, true in his lasting respect for such as Joseph Stalin. It was also in the thirties that Eluard joined the Dada movement in poetry and the arts. It was as a member of the Dadaists that Eluard joined fellow poets like Aragon and Breton, in creating the hugely influential Dadaist volume, *La Capitale de la Douleur* (1926).

Sample:

Absence (1929)

I speak to you over cities
I speak to you over plains
My mouth is against your ear
The two sides of the walls face
my voice which acknowledges you.
I speak to you of eternity.
O cities memories of cities
cities draped with our desires
cities early and late
cities strong cities intimate
stripped of all their makers
their thinkers their phantoms
Landscape ruled by emerald
live living ever-living
the wheat of the sky on our earth
nourishes my voice I dream and cry
I laugh and dream between the flames
between the clusters of sunlight
And over my body your body extends
the layer of its clear mirror.

71. Lautréamont

Overview: The Comte de Lautréamont (real name, Isidore Ducasse) (1846-1870) was born in Montevideo, Uruguay, son of a French consular official and his French wife. He was brought up speaking three languages—French, Spanish, and English—and from early in life showed great precocity. Shortly after moving to Paris, and proving at the Lycée that he had extraordinary intelligence for language and mathematics, and while still in his teens, Lautréamont moved into a hotel in the Quartier Latin, where he found himself surrounded by any number of counter cultural figures. He was to prove to be the rare long-hair who had genuine genius, and who spent his time playing intensely on his piano, writing poetry, and reading in the local libraries. (His passions were Racine, Corneille, Shelley, Poe, and Byron, and the works of those authors were to appear everywhere in his own work.) In 1868 he published his one real work, *Les Chants de Maldoror*, a hyperbolic tale of a great figure of evil, pervaded by the dressings of a fallen world, Gothic we might say today, in which, contrary to everything the bourgeoisie proclaimed, the extravagant foulness of life is taken as a delight. Victim of a plague-like epidenic, Llautreamont died at the age of 24, a rising star, who was to go on to influence the greatest writers of the Surrealist movement—Aragon, Breton—which was just around the corner. Lautréamont borrowed heavily from the past—'plagiarism is necessary; it is implied in the idea of progress,' he said—and gave fruitfully to the future.

From Stanza 6, *Les Chants de Maldoror (1868-1869):*
One should let one's nails grow for a fortnight. Oh! How sweet it is to brutally snatch from his bed a child with no hair yet on his upper lip, and, with eyes wide open, to pretend to suavely stroke his forehead, brushing back his beautiful locks! Then, suddenly, at the moment when he least expects it, to sink one's long nails into his tender breast, being careful, though, not to kill him; for if he died, there would be no later viewing of his misery. Then, one drinks the blood, licking the wounds; and, during the entire procedure, which ought to last no shorter than an aeon, the boy cries. Nothing could be better than his blood, warm and just freshly squeezed out as I have described, if it weren't for his tears, bitter as salt.

72. René Char

Overview: René Char (1907-1988) was born in the Department of Vaucluse to a middle class family, his dad a city manager and administrator. Young René, a tall powerful rugby player, fond of outdoor life, nevertheless came in to study, and proved a fast learner at the Ecole de Commerce in Marseilles, where he devoured Plutarch, Villon, Racine, de Vigny, and Gerard de Nerval. The success of his earliest poetry began to attract the interest of the Surrealists—such as Aragon and Breton—and led to the inclusion of Rene in wartime Parisian literary culture. In 1940, while still writing faithfully as a testimony to his daily life, and while opening his poetic work out into the prose poem—at which genre he was to become a master—Char joined the French Resistance. This was a developmental of his lifelong sense, that poetry springs from a total expression of values within life. It is no surprise, then, that Char was a major fighter, in the fifties, against the development of atomic weapons in France.

Despite the open window in the room of long absence, the odor of the rose is still linked with the breath that was there. Once again we are without previous experience, newcomers, in love. The rose! The field of its ways would dispel even the effrontery of death. No grating stands in the way.
Desire is alive, an ache in our vaporous foreheads.

One who walks the earth in its rains has nothing to fear from the thorn in places either finished or unfriendly. But if he stops to commune with himself, woe! Pierced to the quick, he suddenly flies to
ashes, an archer reclaimed by beauty.

The Lied of the Earth

So deep a freeze that milky branches
Damaged the saw and snapped in the hands.
Spring did not see the gracious ones turn green.

From the keeper of those who fall,
The fig tree asked for a new faith’s shrub.
But its prophet, the oriole—
Warm dawn of his flight home——
Alighting on this unfortunate ruin,
Instead of hunger, died of love.

Sample poem fragment from The Formal Share (1941-1943):

By intense physical work we keep even with the outer cold, and doing so, put down the risk of being taken over by it; likewise when we return to what is real –that is, not sustained by our desire—and the time has come to give over to its destiny the vessel of the poem, we find ourselves in an analogous situation. The wheels (junk!) of our petrified mill start turning, scooping deep and difficult waters. Our exertion learns again its proportion of sweat. And we go on, wrestlers downed but never dying, surrounded by exasperating spectators and indifferent virtues.

73. Aragon

Overview: Louis Aragon *(*1897-1982) lived the whole expanse of the twentieth century, and as a politically engaged writer, especially with the issues around Communism, he became a principal barometer of the tensions in Western ideology. Critics have noted the importance, in Aragon's developing thought, of the difficult relation between himself and his biological father. His father, a prominent Senator, had Louis out of wedlock, and refused ever to recognize his son; which left Louis in a mind-set of resistance and social dissidence, as he matured. From the post WW I moment on, Aragon embraced the socially radical platform of Soviet Communism, joining the Party with enthusiasm. Aragon's art and aesthetics developed parallel with his ideological positions. He affiliated himself with the Dadaist Movement in the five years between 1919-1924, and, along with Breton and Soupault, became a founding father of Surrealism, from 1924 on. (Political and aesthetic liberation seemed to him twinned.) In the course of his up and down relationship, with Soviet Communism, Aragon created a large and impressive body of prose poems, lyrics, and manifestos.

Sample:
I'll reinvent the rose for you
For you are that rose which cannot be described
These few words at least in the order proper to her ritual
That rose which only words distant from roses can describe
The way it is with the ecstatic cry and the terrible sadness which it translates
From the stars of pleasure above love's deep abyss
I will reinvent for youth the rose of adoring fingers
Which create a nave as they interlace but whose petals then suddenly fall away
I will reinvent for you the rose beneath the balconies
Of lovers whose only beds are their arms
The rose at the heart of sculpted stone figures dead without benefit of confession
The rose of a peasant blown to bits by a landmine in his field
The scarlet scent of a letter that has been "discovered"
In which nothing's addressed to me neither the insult nor the compliment
Some rendezvous to which no one has come
An entire army in flight on a very windy day
A maternal footstep before prison-gates
A man's song at siesta-time beneath the olive trees
A cock-fight in a mist-enshrouded countryside
The rose of a soldier cut off from his own home country
I'll reinvent for you my rose as many roses
As there are diamonds in the waters of the seas…

74. Valéry

Overview: Paul Valéry (1871-1945) was born in Sete on the Mediterranean coast of France, and throughout his life remained drawn to the warm culture of that area. (His father was Corsican, his mother Italian.) He was educated in the nearby city of Montpellier, where he received a solid Classical education, and then for twenty years, while writing some of his best work, like the long poem *La Jeune Parque* (1917), he worked for his living at a news agency. By l920 Valery had become a full time writer, and entered the 'highest levels' of French literary culture. In 1925 he was elected to the *Académie francaise*, and in subsequent years he entered into an increasingly public phase of his career, representing his country in international diplomatic venues like the League of Nations. His poetry spoke from the Symbolist perspective, and at its finest, as in 'Le Cimetière Marin, ' he wrote some of the strictest and most powerful French poetry of the twentieth century. His *Cahiers (Notebooks*), not published until 1960, were a compendium of a lifetime's observations of the culture of his nation. One of his finest moments came in 1932, when he spoke on the one hundreth anniversary of the death of Goethe. On that occasion Valéry proved his powerful status, deeply penetrating the thought of that master. And with typical precision Valéry highlighted his special interest in Goethe's views of biology and optics.

From *Le Cimetière Marin* (*The Graveyard by the Sea*) (1920):

This quiet roof, where dove-sails saunter by,
Between the pines, the tombs, throbs visibly.
Impartial noon patterns the sea in flame --
That sea forever starting and re-starting.
When thought has had its hour, oh how rewarding
Are the long vistas of celestial calm!
What grace of light, what pure toil goes to form
The manifold diamond of the elusive foam!
What peace I feel begotten at that source!
When sunlight rests upon a profound sea,
Time's air is sparkling, dream is certainty --
Pure artifice both of an eternal Cause.
Sure treasure, simple shrine to intelligence,
Palpable calm, visible reticence,
Proud-lidded water, Eye wherein there wells
Under a film of fire such depth of sleep --
O silence! . . . Mansion in my soul, you slope
Of gold, roof of a myriad golden tiles.

75. Proust

Overview: Marcel Proust (1871-1922) was born into a cultivated Parisian family, his Father a prominent physician and medical researcher, who had contributed greatly to the fight against cholera in his time. The young Proust was born at the end 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; in other words 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.

Overture to *Swann's Way (1913)*: For a long time I used to go to bed early. Sometimes, when I had put out my candle, my eyes would close so quickly that I had not even time to say "I'm going to sleep." And half an hour later the thought that it was time to go to sleep would awaken me; I would try to put away the book which, I imagined, was still in my hands, and to blow out the light; I had been thinking all the time, while I was asleep, of what I had just been reading, but my thoughts had run into a channel of their own, until I myself seemed actually to have become the subject of my book: a church, a quartet, the rivalry between François I and Charles V. This impression would persist for some moments after I was awake; it did not disturb my mind, but it lay like scales upon my eyes and prevented them from registering the fact that the candle was no longer burning.

76. Breton

Overview: André Breton (1879-1966) was born in Normandy and studied medicine and psychiatry in University, but soon found his career direction shifting to literature. Engaged with the culture of the budding Surrealists, whose 'father' he was later to become, along with Soupault and Aragon, Breton founded the review *Literature* with those two colleagues, in 1919. With these colleagues Breton created a strong new poetic sub-culture, indulged in arcane experiments like automatic writing, and, by 1924, was in a position to create the influential *Manifesto of Surrealism*. From l927-1933 Breton joined the Communist Party, which seemed to him for a while the hope of the world, but before long his particular anything goes aesthetic put him in sharp conflict with this rigid ideology, and he was expelled from the party. In l938 he visited Trotsky in Mexico, but ultimately fell, after the War, into a love affair with anarchism. Breton's own creative work remains powerful, in texts like *L'amour fou* (1937) and the novel *Nadja* (1928). Breton was also an avid art collector, especially of artifacts from the Pacific Northwest.

Sample: *Postman Cheval (1932)*

We are the birds always charmed by you from the top of these belvederes
And that each night form a blossoming branch between your shoulders and the arms of your well beloved wheelbarrow
Which we tear out swifter than sparks at your wrist
We are the sighs of the glass statue that raises itself on its elbow when man sleeps
And shining holes appear in his bed
Holes through which stags with coral antlers can be seen in a glade
And naked women at the bottom of a mine
You remembered then you got up you got out of the train
Without glancing at the locomotive attacked by immense barometric roots
Complaining about its murdered boilers in the virgin forest
Its funnels smoking jacinths and moulting blue snakes
Then we went on, plants subject to metamorphosis
Each night making signs that man may understand
While his house collapses and he stands amazed before the singular packing-cases
Sought after by his bed with the corridor and the staircase
The staircase goes on without end
It leads to a millstone door it enlarges suddenly in a public square…

77. Mauriac

Overview: Francois Mauriac (1885-1970) was one of the leading public Catholic figures of the first half of the 20th century in France. He was born in Bordeaux, as the eldest son of a wealthy businessman, and was destined for higher education and a social role. He did in fact begin studies at the prestigious Ecole des Chartes, but soon abandoned higher scholarship in order to devote himself to writing. His most successful novels, such as *Therese Desqueyroux (1928)* and *Le Noeud de Vipères (1933)*, portrayed tangled, bitter, and often evil family struggles, in which a darkly Catholic sense of sin was pervasive. (The Catholic Church, as well as the secular left, found many faults with this kind of fiction.) Mauriac was elected to the *Académie francaise* in 1933, and won the Nobel Prize in 1952. He was also deeply engaged with the political values of his time, and spoke out loudly for reconciliation after the War, as he did against French colonial policy in Algeria, especially against its readiness to torture

Sample: Holy Thursday (1931):

Holy Thursday is the day when only one hour is given the Christian to rejoice in an inestimable favor: The Lord Jesus, on the night in which He was betrayed, took bread, and giving thanks, broke it, and said, "This is my body which shall be given up for you; do this in remembrance of me." After He had supped, He took the chalice and said: "This cup is the new covenant in my blood; do this as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me."

The anniversary of that evening when the small Host arose on a world sleeping in darkness should fill us with joy. But that very night was the one when the Lord Jesus was delivered up. His best friends could still taste the Bread in their mouths and they were going to abandon Him, to deny Him, to betray Him. And we also, on Holy Thursday, can still taste in our mouths this Bread that is no longer bread; we have not finished adoring this Presence in our bodies, the inconceivable humility of the Son of God, when we have to rise hastily to follow Him to the garden of agony.

78. Malraux

Overview: André Malraux (1901-1976) was an adventurer, novelist, and man of state—in the French sense, an intellectual, an activist, and internationalist. He was born in a small town, son of a stockbroker—who committed suicide 1n 1930, after the market collapse—and a loving Mother. At the age of twenty one Malraux began the first of his extensive travels, this one to Cambodia, where he immersed himself in the relics of the Angkor culture. (And where he began to develop a strong distaste for French colonialism.) In 1933 he published what is arguably his finest of many novels, *La Condition Humaine*, which concerns the tragic struggles of the l927 Communist uprising in Shanghai, and reveals strong sympathy for the Communists. Malraux won the Prix Goncourt for this novel. In the l930's Malraux fought with the Popular Front against Franco, in Spain, and during this time wrote and published his novel, *Man's Hope* (1938), which concerned the anti-Fascist struggle in Spain. During WWII Malraux fought with the French Resistance, was several times captured by the Gestapo. After the War President Charles de Gaulle appointed Malraux Minister of Informmation (1945-48), a post in which he represented France world wide.

The Special Style of Malraux: somewhat like Paul Valery, Mauriac was a literary figure of great stature who occupied an important role in French culture. He was an adventurer and an activist scholar at the same time, forever analyzing the world's art treasures, and interviewing the differences between West and East.

Two Quotations:

"Humanism does not consist in saying: 'No animal could have done what I have done,' but in declaring: 'We have refused what the beast within us willed to do, and we seek to reclaim man wherever we find that which crushes him.'" *The Voices of Silence* (1951*)*

"The greatest mystery is not that we have been flung at random between this profusion of matter and the stars, but that within this prison we can draw from ourselves images powerful enough to deny our nothingness." *Les Noyers de l'Altenburg (*1948)

79. Bernanos

Overview: George Bernanos (1888-1948) was a major French author of the first half of the previous century, was held in respect by many of his most gifted colleagues, and yet in many ways he stood apart from the culture of his time. To put it in a nutshell, Bernanos was on the whole a Monarchist, in a time when that form of government was of little importance in Europe, a fervent Catholic—one thinks of Mauriac here—and a passionate despiser of the bourgeoisie and its values—like many French writers, perhaps even Proust, whose vast novel is in part a lament at the loss of true aristocracy. As the child of a family of craftsmen, Bernanos had from early on a taste for the well made and the humanly rich; hence, in part, his lifelong hatred of the technologically reproducible, of which he lived only long enough to see the beginning, and his despair at the materialism of consumer culture.

Bernanos saw life precisely, through his own lens, and participated actively in it. He was a front line soldier in WWI, where he was wounded. But although he knew the enemy, and fought it hard in the first World War, he grew increasingly ambiguous about national pride, as the second World War approached. Bernanos went to Spain during the Spanish Civil War, first out of sympathy with Franco, but after a few weeks, having seen the disaster on the ground, he turned to support the Popular Front. Though he loathed Nazism/Fascism, he was equally agonized by the loss of spirit and pride in his own country, and was a total opponent of the Vichy Regime puppetry under which France fell at the outset of the German Occupation. From 1938-1945, exiling himself from his country, and taking his three sons with him, Bernanos moved to Brazil, where he lived, writing and farming, during the second WW.

Bernanos' finest novels are *Under the Sun of Satan* (1925) and *the Journal of a Country Priest* (1936).

80. Sartre

Overview: Jean Paul Sartre (1905-1980) was the only child of a French naval officer, who died when the youngster was five months old, leaving Jean Paul to be raised by his Mother. Sartre grew up bookish, as he explains in his late memoir*, Les Mots* (The Words), and immersed himself both in classical language and literature, and in the philosophy of his moment, his first inspiration being that of Henri Bergson. As a student at the Ecole Normale, the most prestigious Parisian seed bed of leading intellectuals, Sartre proved himself to be both a fiery ideologue and a prankster. His dissident inclinations met a fine match in Simone de Beauvoir, his lifetime lover, whom he first met in 1929. Their first mutual attraction was all about resistance to the French War in Algeria, which both lovers thought unpardonably evil. In 1943 Sartre published his first major philosophical work, *L'Etre et le Néant,* a manifesto of Exisrtentialism. In 1939 Sartre joined the French army, where he worked as a meteorologist, until taken prisoner by the Germans. In l941 he returned again to Paris. Perhaps his finest writing was enshrined in the trilogy *Les Chemins de la Liberté*, 1945-49.

From *The Wal*l (1959):

They pushed us into a big white room and I began to blink because the light hurt my eyes. Then I saw a table and four men behind the table, civilians, looking over the papers. They had bunched another group of prisoners in the back and we had to cross the whole room to join them. There were several I knew and some others who must have been foreigners. The two in front of me were blond with round skulls: they looked alike. I supposed they were French. The smaller one kept hitching up his pants: nerves.

It lasted about three hours: I was dizzy and my head was empty; but the room was well heated and I found that pleasant enough: for the past 24 hours we hadn't stopped shivering. The guards brought the prisoners up to the table, one after the other. The four men asked each one his name and occupation.

81. Marcel

Overview: Gabriel Marcel (1889-1973) was a French philosopher, dramatist, and political activist in the sense that he was deeply concerned with the spiritual condition of 'modern man.' A brilliant student, he earned the distinguished *aggrégation* degree when he was only twenty one, and began soon after a writing career which would produce over thirty plays and any number of philosophical/meditative works. As the child of an agnostic, Marcel long struggled with the question of the meaning of human existence—knowing only that he was totally opposed to the 'meaninglessness philosophies' of Sartrean Existentialism. In 1929, however, he converted to Catholicism. The philosophical position he worked out was what we might call Personalism, putting the human person, which can never be reduced to an other, at the center of his ontology. Two of Marcel's best works turn around this issue of the 'personal.' One is *The Mystery of Being* (1951), another *Man Against Mass Society* (1955). In both of these works Marcel develops the Christian conception of the person as an image of Christ.

From *Awakenings*, Marcel's Autobiography (1971):

Sample: Holy Thursday (1931):

Holy Thursday is the day when only one hour is given the Christian to rejoice in an inestimable favor: The Lord Jesus, on the night in which He was betrayed, took bread, and giving thanks, broke it, and said, "This is my body which shall be given up for you; do this in remembrance of me." After He had supped, He took the chalice and said: "This cup is the new covenant in my blood; do this as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me."

The anniversary of that evening when the small Host arose on a world sleeping in darkness should fill us with joy. But that very night was the one when the Lord Jesus was delivered up. His best friends could still taste the Bread in their mouths and they were going to abandon Him, to deny Him, to betray Him. And we also, on Holy Thursday, can still taste in our mouths this Bread that is no longer bread; we have not finished adoring this Presence in our bodies, the inconceivable humility of the Son of God, when we have to rise hastily to follow Him to the garden of agony.

82. Camus

Overview: Albert Camus (1913-1960) 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. Educated both in Algeria and France, Camus' deep involvement with Paris culture began with his engagement in the French Resistance, during WWII. There he founded the journal, *Combat*, which was devoted to the Free French cause, and in the subsequent years he carried out the mandatory flirtation with Communism, which eventually he broke from, as he discovered the tyrannical side of a movement initially intended to liberate the people. (That break with Communism was also Camus' break with Sartre, who felt Camus 'went 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. His finest work is *The Stranger* (1942, *The Plague* (1947), and *The Rebel* (1951). He was an ardent and lifelong opponent of capital punishment.

Sample: opening of the *The Stranger* (1942):

MOTHER died today. Or, maybe, yesterday; I can't be sure. The telegram from the Home says: YOUR MOTHER PASSED AWAY. FUNERAL TOMORROW. DEEP SYMPATHY. Which leaves the matter doubtful; it could have been yesterday.

The Home for Aged Persons is at Marengo, some fifty miles from Algiers. With the two o'clock bus I should get there well before nightfall. Then I can spend the night there, keeping the usual vigil beside the body, and be back here by tomorrow evening. I have fixed up with my employer for two days' leave; obviously, under the circumstances, he couldn't refuse. Still, I had an idea he looked annoyed, and I said, without thinking: "Sorry, sir, but it's not my fault, you know."

Afterwards it struck me I needn't have said that. I had no reason to excuse myself; it was up to him to express his sympathy and so forth. Probably he will do so the day after tomorrow, when he sees me in black. For the present, it's almost as if Mother weren't really dead. The funeral will bring it home to me, put an official seal on it, so to speak. ...

83. Anouilh

Overview: Jean Anouilh (1910-1987) was a prolific French playwright, who incorporates many themes and styles in his extensive opus: domestic comedy, dark family dramas, historical canvases—like plays devoted to British history or Joan of Arc—and universal allegories, like *Antigone* (1945) his best known work today. For his dramatic talent Anouilh thanked both his Father, a meticulous tailor who taught his son the virtues of precision, and his Mother, a violinist who played in a nearby Casino theater, and through whom Anouilh had his first exposure to the life of directors and playwrights. His own earlier career also prepared Anouilh for craftsmanship and detail; that was the job of copyeditor at a Parisian publishing house, shortly before Anouilh made the fruitful acquaintance of Jean Giraudoux, who was at the time the senior figure of French theater. From that time on, Anouilh remained immersed in the excitement of the French theater, staying apart from the huge political/military issues of the Occupation. Late in life he said: 'I do not have a biography and I am happy about it.'

Sample, from Anouilh's Preface to *The Lark (1952)*, his play about Joan of Arc;

The play that follows makes no attempt to explain the mystery of Joan.

The persistent effort of so-called modern minds to explain mysteries is, in any case, one of the most naive and foolish activities indulged in by the puny human brain since it became overstocked with shallow political and scientific notions, and can yield nothing, in the long run, but the nostalgic satisfaction of the small boy who discovers at last that his mechanical duck was made up of two wheels, three springs and a screw. The little boy holds in his hands three springs, two wheels and a screw, objects which are doubtless reassuring, but he has lost his mechanical duck, and he has usually not found an explanation.

For my own part I always refuse to tell children how things work, even when I know; and in the case of Joan I must confess that I did not know.

Some nights, when I am feeling depressed, I try to be rational and I say: the situation- social, political and military-was ripe for the phenomenon of Joan; a little shepherdess, one of the countless little shepherdesses who had seen the Virgin or heard voices, and who happened to be called Joan, came to fill a gap in the works, and then everything began turning. If it hadn't been this one, another would have been found-there were candidates before and after her. When she was burnt, her place was taken by a little shepherd from the Landes, who led his countrymen to a few incomplete victories and was in his turn taken prisoner and burnt, without anyone thinking of making him into a hero or a saint.

84. Giraudoux

Overview: Jean Giraudoux (1892-1944) was born in the small village of Bellac, in Haute Vienne, where his father worked for the Ministry of Transport, but he found his way to studies in Paris, and from there to considerable international traveling throughout the western world. (He taught at Harvard for a year, 1906-1907). He fought with honor in WWI, and was the first writer to be awarded the *Légion d'honneur,* for bravery on the battlefield (1915). He was a prolific playwright, most famed for *Ampitryon 38* (1929), *The Trojan War Will Not take Place* (1935), and *The Mad Woman of Challot* (1945), all of them plays devoted, with supreme wit and sophistication, to the follies of war, sexual romance, or the imbecility of greedy businessmen in comparison with the good sense of ordinary eccentric citizens.

Quotations from Giraudoux:

A golf course is the epitome of all that is purely transitory in the universe; a space not to dwell in, but to get over as quickly as possible

A man has only one way of being immortal on earth: he has to forget he is a mortal.

As soon as war is declared it will be impossible to hold the poets back. Rhyme is still the most effective drumbeat.

Education makes us more stupid than the brutes. A thousand voices call to us on every hand, but our ears are stopped with wisdom. Everyone, when there's war in the air, learns to live in a new element: falsehood.

To win a woman in the first place one must please her, then undress her, and then somehow get her clothes back on her. Finally, so she will allow you to leave her, you've got to annoy her.

85. Beckett

Overview: Samuel Beckett (1906-1989) was born in a suburb of Dublin, son of a Civil Engineer and a nurse. Beckett was drawn to the study of languages, from early on, and at Trinity College, Dublin, he majored in French, English, and Italian. He was also a talented cricket player. graduating in 1927.

After graduation he went to Paris for a year of teaching English at the Ecole Normale Superieure, then returned to Ireland, and finally again to France; in the course of which years he was busy writing essays, learning and working with the expatriate community in Paris—especially with James Joyce, who was his great inspiration, and finally joining the French Resistance. At the end of the war he was honored with the *Croix de guerre*; a fitting tribute to an expatriate who had made French culture and the French language his own. (Most of Beckett's work was written in French, and most of it translated subsequently into English, by him. Beckett chose French for his writing, because it enabled him to write 'without style,' a goal for this writer whose creations were devoted to the bleakness and meaningless of contemporary life.) Beckett's plays *Waiting for Godot* (1955), *Endgame*, and *Krapps' Last Tape* epitomize the grim world he sees humanity occupying—today or perhaps always. The décor is minimal, the themes pervaded by death and indifference, the characters stripped of all human richness. The miracle is that Becket works with these ingredients to create of mood of anticipation and impending doom

From Samuel Beckett's poem, 'Cascando' (1961):
why not merely the despaired of
occasion of
wordshed
is it not better abort than be barren

the hours after you are gone are so leaden
they will always start dragging too soon
the grapples clawing blindly the bed of want
bringing up the bones the old loves
sockets filled once with eyes like yours
all always is it better too soon than never
the black want splashing their faces
saying again nine days never floated the loved
nor nine months
nor nine lives

86. Lévi-Strauss

Overview: Claude Levi-Strauss (1908-2009) was born in Belgium, and went on, in a remarkable long life, to open new worlds of inquiry to ethnographers, anthropologists, and to students of human cultures from what came to be known as a Structuralist point of view. Levi-Strauss did his University work in law and philosophy, taking the *aggrégation* in Philosophy, and then, after some years of teaching at the Lycée level he was invited to participate in a research trip to Brazil, where he and wife went; both of them worked as Professors of Ethnography at the University of Sao Paolo. During these years—1935-39—Levi Strauss spent some time living with Brazilian tribes, whose family and kinship relations became models for the structural perspective Levi-Strauss was to develop in his writings. During WWII Levi Strauss found himself out of a job—due to the Nazi Occupation's dismissal of all Jews in France--and in the nick of time escaped from France on a boat to Martinique, and eventually to the United States, where he spent the war, much of the time teaching at the New School for Social Research. Two of the most influential books, to emerge from this peripatetic ethnographic life, were *Tristes Tropiques* (1955) and *La Pensée Sauvage* (l962); in both of these works he probed into the structures of human kinship and interrelationship, and did so in prose so fresh and poetic that he created a unique genus of writing. His perspective brought him into conflict with Existentialists, like Sartre, for whom the Structuralist perspective was too static, and with the new forms of thought, like Postmodernism, which were moving in to dominate French culture by the end of the century.

87. Robbe-Grillet

Overview: Alain Robbe-Grillet (1922-2000) was born in Brest, the child of a family of engineers and scientists. He himself was trained as an agricultural engineer, and during his career life would work in Martinique and elsewhere in the Caribbean, on soil issues. During the war, Robbe-Grillet's career was interrupted when he was taken prisoner and sent to Nueremberg, to do compulsory mechanical labor—which turned out to give him much leisure for reading and the opera. After the war he began to attract literary attention with his New Novel (*Nouveau Roman)* texts, which culminated in his critical work *For a New Novel* (1963), in which he drew on his own fiction, and that of Michel Butor, to formulate a fresh direction for French fiction. His own novel, *Les Gommes* (1953) gives an idea of that new direction. The narration is fractured, the narrator shadowy and at times almost ignored by the text, and the sub text, an Oedipal account embedded in a mystery story, only allowed to appear occasionally, in patches of sudden clarity. *Le Voyeur* (1955) gives deeper insight into the challenge Robbe-Gillet presents, to conventional ideas of order and tale telling. The narrator's tale is periodically punctuated by a highlighting of certain perceived objects, which emerge from the texture of the novel and are inspected in precise detail. It is relevant that at the time of writing these two novels Robbe-Grillet was working as Professor of the Sociology of Literature at the Free University of Brussels.

Sample: First paragraph of *La Jalousie* (1957*)*:

This veranda is a wide, covered gallery surrounding the house on three sides. Since its width is the same for the central portion as for the sides, the line of shadow cast by the column extends precisely to the corner of the house; but it stops there, for only the veranda flagstones are reached by the sun, which is still too high in the sky. The wooden walls of the house — that is, front and west gable-end — are still protected from the sun by the roof (common to the house proper and the terrace). So at this moment the shadow of the outer edge of the roof coincides exactly with the right-angle formed by the terrace and the two vertical surfaces of the corner of the house.

88. Derrida

Overview: Jacques Derrida (1930-2004) was born in El Biar, Algeria, to a French speaking Jewish family. As a young man he was bookish—though with a frustrated desire to be a champion football player, and he was deeply pained to be dismissed from school during the Nazi/Vichy regime, which dominated Algeria during the War, and ordered to study in an alternative school for Jews. (Derrida's recourse was to stay at home and read Rousseau, Nietzsche and Gide, who represented effective rebellions against the status quo.) High academic achievement took Derrida in due time to the Ecole Normale Superieure in Paris, where, on his first day, he met the critic Louis Althusser, a brilliant fellow critic and friend through whom Derrida would find his way into the center of French cultural life. After succeeding with his *aggrégation*, with a dissertation on Husserl, Derrida taught for a year at Harvard (1956-57) where he spent his time reading through *Finnegans Wake*, then later taught at the Sorbonne (1960-1964) and the Ecole Normale Superieure (1964-1984). Throughout this time period Derrida was intensely writing. Three books from this time contain much of the heart of his thought: *Speech and Phenomena* (1973), *Of Grammatology* (1976), and *Writing and Difference* (1978). The philosophical position emerging from these texts supports the perspective of Deconstruction (as well as of Postmodernism in general), and take off from a view that the self has no substantiality, that, as Derrida put it, 'there is nothing outside the text,' that everything is 'context,' and that the 'metaphysics of presence,' by which Western philosophy has consistently anchored its thinking, is verbiage without special claims.

Needless to say there has been active resistance to Derrida's thought, which to many orthodox philosophers seems to undermine philosophy as a study, and which to many literary thinkers has seemed lacking in human subtlety.

89. Foucault

Overview: Michel Foucault (1926-1982) was born in Poitiers. His father was a distinguished surgeon, who wanted his son to follow in his tracks, but was disappointed by both the son's mediocre academic performance, and his evidently individualist turn of mind. At the Jesuit College, from which he graduated, Foucault began to demonstrate his brilliance, which continued to flower at the Ecole Normale Supérieure in Paris. During his work at the Collège, as it happened, Foucault fell prey to serious depression, through the treatment of which, perhaps, he initiated that intense interest in the history of societal institutions—medicine, psychiatry, the prison system—in which he saw coagulated the ancient history of power relations, and of the discourses they adopted in western culture. Foucault's *aggrégation* dissertation concerned the history of madness in western culture, and in later studies he joined sexuality to madness, in an effort to show the repressive desire for punishment that governs western culture,. Such books as the first volume of his *History of Sexuality* (1964), *The Order* of Things (1965), and *Discipline and Punish* (1977) went far to establish Foucault as a profound re evaluator of the major social institutions of the Western world. Extensive visits to Iran, in his later career, led him to great admiration for the heroes of the Iranian Revolutions, and to insights of lasting importance, for us today, into the nature of Islam.

Foucault on Iran and Islam (1978*)* : As an Islamic movement, it can set the entire region afire, overturn the most unstable regimes, and disturb the most solid. Islam which is not simply a religion, but an entire way of life, an adherence to a history and a civilization, has a good chance to become a gigantic powder keg, at the level of hundreds of millions of men. . . Indeed, it is also important to recognize that the demand for the 'legitimate rights of the Palestinian people' hardly stirred the Arab peoples. What it be if this cause encompassed the dynamism of an Islamic movement, something much stronger than those with a Marxist, Leninist, or Maoist character?

90. Lacan

Overview: Jacques Lacan (1901-1981) was an inventive and influential psychoanalyst, working in the tradition of Freud, and at the same time a major presence in the critical thinking of wartime France, interacting with literary and artistic circles, as did Foucault and Derrida.

Jacques Lacan was the son of a successful soap and oils salesman. His mothert was ardently Catholic, and his brother entered a monastery; Jacques himself was at first, during his Jesuit education, sensitive to the Catholic world view but gradually fought with it…and with his family. By l920 Lacan was in Paris, in Medical School, studying psychiatry, but also philosophy—under the instruction of Hegel's great interpreter, Alexandre Kojève. At this time Lacan himself underwent psychoanalysis, though his analyst later declared that Jacquies had been impossible to 'cure.' In l932 Lacan received the *Doctorat d'état*, and was at the threshold of the lecturing and writing career he wanted. The bulk of the writing that makes up his mature phase of revised Freudianism comes in the published *Serminars* which Lacan offered to the public, and which were the technical byproduct of his medical practice. In those *Seminars*, which are the basis of Lacan's fame in the west, he (to put it in very broad terms, celebrated madness, irrationality, and their workings out in language, which could not fail to delight the literary milieu in which Lacan was working.

From *The Seminar on the Purloined Letter (1953-1981)*:
Our inquiry has led us to the point of recognizing that the repetition automatism (*Wiederholangszwang*) finds its basis in what we have called the insistence of the signifying chain. We have elaborated that notion itself as a correlate of the ex-sistence (or: eccentric place) in which we must necessarily locate the subject of the unconscious if we are to take Freud's discovery seriously. As is known, it is in the realm of experience inaugurated by psychoanalysis that we may grasp along what imaginary lines the human organism, in the most intimate recesses of its being, manifests its capture in a symbolic dimension.

The lesson of this seminar is intended to maintain that these imaginary incidences, far from representing the essence of our experience, reveal only what in it remains inconsistent unless they are related to the symbolic chain which binds and orients them.