

**Department:** Modern and Classical Languages

**Course No:** 234

**Credits:** 3

**Title:** Romanticism, Realism, Fin de Siecle: 19th-Century French

**Contact:** Roger Travis

**ContentArea:** CA1-Arts and Humanities

**CatalogCopy:** FREN 234 Romanticism, Realism. Fin de Siecle: 19th-Century French Literature. Either semester. Three credits.

Recommended preparation: Fren 261 or 262 or instructor consent. The literary and artistic innovations that made France the center of

19th-century culture. The Fantastic, Realism, Naturalism, and Decadence.

**Course Information:** A. Description. The aim of this course is to enable students to read important 19th-century literary texts in French for style as well as for content. We examine and interpret the psychological development of characters, the cultural context for each period, and themes and genres that are specific to the period. The goal is to make students aware of cultural differences within the era studied, and the way in which changes in French society were represented in literature. They also acquire an awareness of historical and cultural differences between those studied and their own. b. Requirements. Weekly reading assignments range from 40 to 80 pages, depending on whether the text studied is poetry, short fiction, or the novel. A short writing assignment is given for each text; this involves some textual analysis, but emphasizes comprehension. Both the midterm exam and the Final exams are comprised of several short essay questions and one long essay question. c. Major themes, topics, etc : The major themes within the genre of the fantastic tale are: the unknown, perceptual ambiguities, madness, and the supernatural. Themes connected to romanticism include the imagination, genius, the heroic self, the Double, the Sublime, and death. Realist and Naturalist texts introduce the themes of social class, political revolt, and marginal groups in society, including medical cases of hysteria. The importance of medical science is a theme that continues to the end of the century, and makes students aware of the role played by scientific knowledge in the writing of 19th-century literature

**Meets Goals of Gen Ed:** Students learn to appreciate moral dilemmas and intellectual problems that confront us as human beings, and that have been forcefully portrayed in literature. They experience the emotional intensity of the fictional characters in a way that allows them to make connections with their own lives. They are able to engage with these problems in a new way because they have been taught to see nuances of meaning and psychological depth through critical, textual analysis. Further, they acquire intellectual breadth by being able to situate the forms that universal human characteristics took on in a place (France) different from theirs, and at specific historical, cultural moments in time. At the same time as

they are able to understand an historical period, and appreciate the diversity of human culture, they become conscious of the similarities with and differences from their own place in history.

**CA1 Criteria:** 19th-century French literature is justly recognized as among the richest of any period or country, and that is because it portrays the fermentation of social change immediately after the French Revolution and continuing to the end of the century. The dynamics of social, political and economic power are the subject of Balzac's *Comedie humaine*, just as they are of Hugo's *Les Miserables* and of many of Zola's novels (*L'Argent*, *La Curee*, *Au Bonheur des dames*). In addition, the century's extraordinary discoveries in psychology immediately became part of the writer's arsenal of material. Literature became a window into the mind, into the deepest and most intimate regions of the self. Thus, 19th-century literature introduces the student to a broad spectrum of human experience, of changes in perception, of the growth of the city, of a new culture based on speed, money, and the media (hence, very like today's culture). Yet, the diverse social groups represented clearly belong to an unfamiliar place and a past that looks very different from our present. Through the readings and discussions in this course, the unfamiliar becomes more and more familiar to the student. At the same time as students are able to understand an historical period, and appreciate the diversity of human culture, they become conscious of the similarities with and differences from their own place in history.