

### Romance vs. Science in Nineteenth-Century France



**Left:** *Wanderer above the Sea of Fog*, Caspar David Friedrich (1818). Oil on canvas

**Right:** *Place de Clichy*, Émile Zola (1900). Photograph.

“Today, around the world, demagogues appeal to our worst instincts. Conspiracy theories once confined to the fringe are going mainstream. It is as if the age of reason, the era of evidential argument is ending and now, knowledge is increasingly delegitimized and scientific consensus is dismissed. Democracy, which depends on shared truths, is in retreat; and autocracy, which depends on shared lies, is on the march.” (Sacha Baron Cohen, 2019)<sup>i</sup>

### **COURSE DESCRIPTION**

What does it mean to be “romantic”? Are we more rational than people of the nineteenth century, or are we more likely to see the world through rose-colored glasses? Today, scientific thinking is both prevalent and under attack, but this is not the first time that evidential reasoning has competed with intuition-based worldviews. The nineteenth-century—a time which shaped many of our current debates and institutions—is a perfect example of this ebb-and-flow, especially in France. In this advanced seminar course, we will read texts from French and Francophone authors from two fundamental schools of thought and aesthetics: romanticism vs. realism/naturalism.

Romanticism first emerged as a response to the cold rationalism of the Enlightenment. Romantics experienced the world with subjectivity and emotions, oftentimes looking at the past with nostalgia, at the colonies as spaces frozen in time and sheltered from the tumult of modern life, and at the inner world of the human psyche as a new frontier. These three movements (backwards in time, out “there” in space, and inwards into the self) characterize romanticism. In contrast, naturalism emerged in response to the dreamy idealism of romantics. Inspired by new scientific progress in the second half of the century like Darwin’s groundbreaking theories, naturalists hoped to diagnose society with a medical gaze. They saw people as products of social determinism. While Romantics believed in writing and poetry as “art for art’s sake,” realists and naturalists saw literature as a hard science with social utility.

### **COURSE OBJECTIVES & LEARNING OUTCOMES**

In this course, we will be reading and examining texts of fiction, essays, poetry as well as films. Other media like paintings and photography will also be examined in class. Our course themes will include gender, sex, race, imperialism, exoticism, and the city of Paris. We will analyze the works of romantic and naturalist/realist authors, asking ourselves how their worldviews have shaped and continue to impact current political issues. We will see for instance how sciences like archeology and ethnography can be weaponized for the sake of imperialist projects. We will explore how the division between romance and science is not only visible chronologically but also geographically across western Europe between the so-called Anglo-Germanic Protestant regions of the North and the Catholic, Latin South. We will also discuss how these two visions of society clash in terms of the place of the individual in a changing world.

This course will be held entirely in French, including its assignments. Students will get a chance to practice all core skills (reading, listening, speaking, and writing) at an ‘Advanced-Low’ level on the ACTFL proficiency scale. By the end of the semester, you should be able to (in French): discuss a work of literature according to theme and context; exchange thoughts with classmates comfortably and respectfully; present and articulate complex ideas with more ease; and write thoughtful essays of your own. Additionally, you will have a better understanding of the global systems and structures of power since the French Revolution. Perfect fluency in French is not required (nor is it expected!); the point of the course is to workshop ideas, thoughts, and language in a safe and friendly space.

### **TEXTS AND ACCESSIBILITY**

**Book to purchase:** Claire de Duras, *Ourika* (1823). Other texts will be provided on Moodle free of charge. You can expect to read on average 20 pages per class day (twice a week).

## ASSIGNMENTS

- 20%** Attendance + active participation
- 15%** Daily tweets
- 10%** One tweet thread (10 tweets) with visuals or media
- 25%** Midterm (6-min presentation or 800-word paper)
- 30%** Final (8-min presentation or 1,000-word paper)

**Attendance + active participation:** You are allowed two free absences during the quarter. Tardiness or excessive use of English will count against your attendance grade. Active participation includes you engaging with and asking questions to your peers after their presentations on our midterm and final “Conference” classes.

**Daily tweets:** Before each class, after you are done reading, you will synthesize your impressions of the text in one 280-character response in French. You may also raise a question or topic you want to discuss further in class. You can either start a new thread or respond to somebody else’s thread from the class. You are allowed to miss two tweets during the quarter. You may use a real or a pseudonymous Twitter account.

**One tweet thread:** The deadline for your tweet thread is based on which theme or topic you choose to work on. The tweet thread will be about a writer, text, or movement from the perspective of a cultural historian. You are expected to include visuals and media to your tweet thread and follow a line of argument with different pieces of evidence. You are encouraged to tag scholarly accounts like @UK\_SDN (“The Society of Dix-Neuviémistes”), @NCFS\_journal (“Nineteenth-Century French Studies”), and @TheSiecle (history podcast).

**Midterm/Final:** If you choose the paper for your midterm, you must choose the presentation for your final (and vice versa). The paper will be a close reading of a text from the course schedule but should not repeat points made in class. In your essay, you will analyze the interplay of *le fond* and *la forme*. The presentation will look more broadly at an author, a text as a cultural object, or a movement. The topic of your presentation must be different than the topic of your tweet thread, but both should be based on the course themes up to this point of the quarter. Connections with present issues are encouraged. While presenting in front of the class is recommended, you also have the option of recording your presentation ahead of time if video production is your medium of choice.

## COURSE PLAN

### **Week 1: Modernity and the Role of Literature**

Class 1: Extract from Victor Hugo's *Préface to Cromwell* (1827)

Class 2: Extract from Émile Zola's *Le roman expérimental* (1880)

### **Week 2: Depicting Women, part I: Corinne vs. Nana**

Class 1: Extract from Germaine de Staël's *Corinne, ou l'Italie* (1807): First scene in Rome

Class 2: Extract from Germaine de Staël's *Corinne, ou l'Italie* (1807): First scene in Rome

### **Week 3: Depicting Women, part II: Corinne vs. Nana**

Class 1: Extract from Émile Zola's *Nana* (1880): chapter I of the novel

Class 2: Extract from Émile Zola's *Nana* (1880): chapter I of the novel

### **Week 4: Depicting Women, part III: Carmen vs. Emma**

Class 1: Extract from Prosper Mérimée's *Carmen* (1846)

Class 2: Extract from Gustave Flaubert's *Madame Bovary* (1865)

### **Week 5: Politics and Social Unrest: The Self vs. The Collective, part I**

Class 1: Extract from Victor Hugo's *Le dernier jour d'un condamné* (1829), part I

Class 2: Extract from Victor Hugo's *Le dernier jour d'un condamné* (1829), part II

### **Week 6: Politics and Social Unrest: The Self vs. The Collective, part II**

Class 1: Film, *Germinal* by Émile Zola, part I (original novel from 1885, film from 1991)

Class 2: Film, *Germinal* by Émile Zola, part II (original novel from 1885, film from 1991)

### **Week 7: Representing Paris: Capital of the Nineteenth Century**

Class 1: Extract from *La Fille aux yeux d'or* (1835) by Honoré de Balzac: Opening panorama

Class 2: Poems by Charles Baudelaire: "Le Cygne", "À une passante" & "Rêve parisien" (1857)

### **Week 8: Midterm Week**

Class 1: Midterm Conference Presentations

Class 2: More Presentations, Paper Peer-Review/Writing Workshop

*Midterm Break*

### **Week 9: Representing Blackness as Otherness**

Class 1: Claire de Duras's *Ourika*, part I (1823)

Class 2: Claire de Duras's *Ourika*, part II (1823)

**Week 10: Orientalism and Imperialism in Algeria, part I**

Class 1: Extract from Eugène Fromentin's *Une année au Sahel* (1858) + paintings

Class 2: Extract from Eugène Fromentin's *Une année au Sahel* (1858)

**Week 11: Orientalism and Imperialism in Algeria, part II**

Class 1: Extract from Guy de Maupassant's *Au soleil* (1884)

Class 2: Extract from Guy de Maupassant's *Au soleil* (1884)

**Week 12: Orientalism and Imperialism in Algeria, part III**

Class 1: What/Where is « l'Afrique latine »?

Class 2: Extract from Louis Bertrand's *Le sang des races* (1899): Opening description

**Week 13: Orientalism and Imperialism in Algeria, part IV**

Class 1: Who was Isabelle Eberhardt?

Class 2: Extract from Isabelle Eberhardt's *Yasmina* (1903): Opening description

**Week 14: Final Week, part I**

Class 1: Final Conference Presentations

Class 2: More Presentations, Paper Peer-Review/Writing Workshop

**Week 15: Final Week, part II**

Class 1: More Presentations, Paper Peer-Review/Writing Workshop

Class 2: Final Conference Presentations

*Bonnes vacances!*

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**Official Resources:****[University of Texas Honor Code](#)**

The core values of The University of Texas at Austin are learning, discovery, freedom, leadership, individual opportunity, and responsibility. Each member of the university is expected to uphold these values through integrity, honesty, trust, fairness, and respect toward peers and community. Any work submitted by a student in this course for academic credit will be the *student's own work*. Should plagiarism, i.e. appropriation of another's work without proper attribution, be deemed to have occurred, the student will automatically receive a zero for the assignment. Penalty for violation of this Code can also be extended to include failure of the course and University disciplinary action.

**[Services for Students with Disabilities \(SSD\)](#)**

SSD ensures students with disabilities have equal access to their academic experiences at the University of Texas at Austin by determining eligibility and approving reasonable accommodations.

### **Use of E-Mail for Official Correspondence to Students**

E-mail is recognized as an official mode of university correspondence; therefore, you are responsible for reading your e-mail for university and course-related information and announcements. You are responsible to keep the university informed about changes to your e-mail address. You should check your e-mail regularly and frequently—I recommend daily, but at minimum twice a week—to stay current with university-related communications, some of which may be time-critical.

**Thrive** is a free iPhone app designed to enhance UT Austin student well-being and help better manage the ups and downs of campus life. Students will find short videos of actual UT Austin students sharing their own stories as well as interactive activities designed to help them apply these concepts to their own unique experience.

### **Behavior Concerns Advice Line (BCAL)**

If you are worried about someone who is acting differently, you may use the Behavior Concerns Advice Line to discuss by phone your concerns about another individual's behavior. This service is provided through a partnership among the Office of the Dean of Students, the Counseling and Mental Health Center (CMHC), the Employee Assistance Program (EAP), and The University of Texas Police Department (UTPD). Call 512-232-5050.

### **Counselors in Academic Residence Program (CARE)**

CARE is a program of the Counseling and Mental Health Center that was created in collaboration with the Office of the Provost. CARE counselors are located within the colleges they serve. They are licensed mental health professionals and work with students who have been referred by faculty and staff. CARE's primary mission is to provide access to mental health support for students who are struggling emotionally and/or academically. Cassy Moreno, LPC, is the CARE counselor for Liberal Arts and is available to meet with COLA students in need of mental health assistance.

### **Counseling and Mental Health Center (CMHC)**

In addition to CARE, students can visit the Counseling and Mental Health Center (CMHC) for counseling services: Counseling and Mental Health Center Crisis Line 512-471-CALL (2255). (UT Students Only - available every day of the year including holidays). CMHC Crisis Line is a confidential service of CMHC that offers an opportunity for UT-Austin students to talk with trained counselors about urgent concerns. A counselor is available every day of the year, including holidays. You can call us when you want, at your convenience. Our telephone counselors will spend time addressing your immediate concerns. Our telephone counselors also have specific training in responding to crisis situations. Counseling and Mental Health Center offers several discussion groups students may attend that cover various topics. Some groups are drop-in groups while other groups topics range from identity-based groups, Voices Against Violence, Mindfulness groups, and other support groups. A list of all the group options are available at [this link](#).

### **Student Emergency Services (SES)**

Student Emergency Services provides assistance, intervention, and referrals to support students navigating challenging or unexpected issues that impact their well-being and academic success. SES can be reached at 512-471-5017 (Mon – Fri from 8 a.m. - 4:30 p.m.). Emergency situations include but are

not limited to: Missing Student; Family Emergency; Fire or Natural Disaster; Student Death (current or former); Medical or Mental Health Concern; Academic difficulties due to crisis or emergency situations; Interpersonal Violence (stalking, harassment, physical and/or sexual assault).

### **UT Outpost**

UT Outpost will help battle hunger and food insecurities of our students, as well as giving students access to professional attire for job and internship interviews. The service is located in the UA9 Building (2609 University Avenue) which is behind the Student Services Building (SSB).

### **Center for Students in Recovery (CSR)**

The Center for Students in Recovery (CSR) provides a safe space and supportive community for students in recovery or seeking recovery from addiction. Participation at CSR is completely voluntary and there is no barrier to entry. Students at any stage of recovery and at any point in their academic journeys are welcome.

### **Sanger Learning Center**

The Sanger Learning Center is UT Austin's main resource for academic support. Some of the services offered at the Sanger Learning Center include but aren't limited to: 1-on-1 tutoring or drop in tutoring; improving your study skills with a learning specialist; weekly meetings with a Peer Academic Coach; and help with public speaking assignment.

### **Gender and Sexuality Center (GSC)**

The mission of the Gender and Sexuality Center (GSC) is to provide opportunities for all members of the UT Austin community to explore, organize, and promote learning around issues of gender and sexuality. The center also facilitates a greater responsiveness to the needs of women and the LGBTQIA+ communities through education, outreach, and advocacy.

### **Religious Holy Days**

By UT Austin policy, you must notify me of your pending absence at least fourteen days prior to the date of observance of a religious holy day. If you must miss a class, an examination, a work assignment, or a project in order to observe a religious holy day, I will give you an opportunity to complete the missed work within a reasonable time after the absence.

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<sup>1</sup> Acceptance speech after receiving the Anti-Defamation League's International Leadership Award on November 21, 2019. <https://youtu.be/ymaWq5yZIYM>. 3:00.