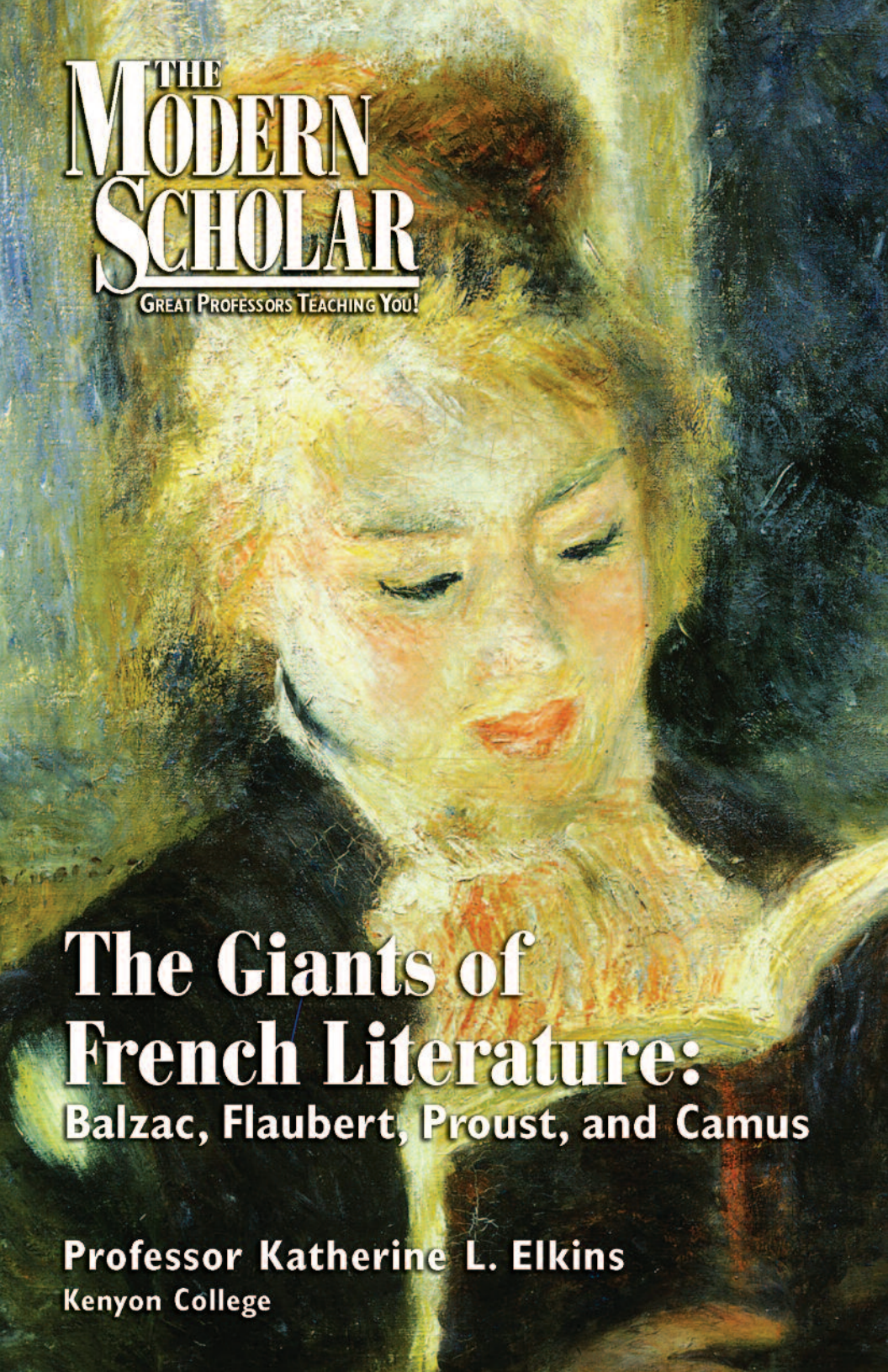
THE MODERN SCHOLAR
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The Giants of French Literature:
Balzac, Flaubert, Proust, and Camus
Professor Katherine L. Elkins
Kenyon College

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Executive Editor
Donna F. Carnahan

RECORDING
Producer - David Markowitz
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Editor - James Gallagher
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Course Syllabus

The Giants of French Literature:
Balzac, Flaubert, Proust, and Camus

Photo courtesy of Katherine L. Elkins

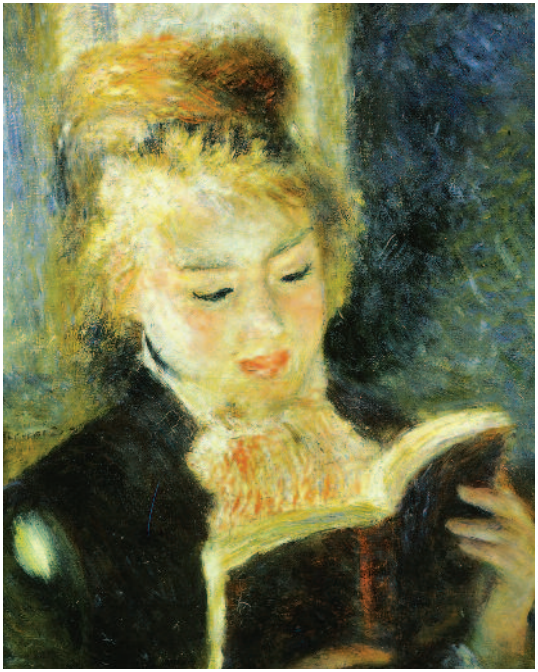
About Your Professor

Katherine L. Elkins

Katherine L. Elkins was educated at Yale University and the University of California, Berkeley. She has won a number of teaching awards at both Berkeley and Kenyon College, where she is now an associate professor of humanities. She teaches *Odyssey of the West* to Kenyon undergraduates, and intellectual and cultural history from the mid-nineteenth century to the present. Her writing has appeared in journals such as *Comparative Literature Studies*, *Modernism/Modernity*, *Modern Language Quarterly*, and *Discourse*, and she has just completed a book on Marcel Proust.

Introduction

Honoré de Balzac, Gustave Flaubert, Marcel Proust, and Albert Camus are four of the greatest writers of all time. These French giants have helped shape the modern novel as we know it—both the kinds of stories that we tell and the way we tell them.



Girl Reading
by Pierre-Auguste Renoir, 1874

They have also meditated deeply on what it means to be human in a modern age. In doing so, they have influenced many of our ideas about what it means to be human. Can one be both idealistic and successful? Can reading make one unhappy with one's lot? Can we truly know ourselves? Can we be happy while others around us suffer? These are just a few of the questions they both ask and answer.

Professor Katherine Elkins introduces you to these authors by exploring key biographical, historical, and cultural influences, and then guides you through an in-depth study of some of their most influential works.

The course starts with Honoré de Balzac and treats the greatest novels of his *Human Comedy*: *Père Goriot*, *Eugénie Grandet*, *Lost Illusions*, and *Cousin Bette*. The next three lectures consider Gustave Flaubert's contribution to the craft of writing in *Madame Bovary* and *Sentimental Education*. Then Professor Elkins explores Proust's masterpiece, *In Search of Lost Time*. The final lectures discuss Albert Camus's novellas—*The Stranger*, *The Plague*, and *The Fall*—against the backdrop of his philosophical writings.

Throughout the course, Professor Elkins shows how these authors are both innovators of the novel and philosophers of the human condition. She also helps us appreciate how they are masters of the tradition, influencing generations of writers and thinkers to follow.

Lecture 1

Themes and Influence

The Suggested Reading for this lecture is Gordon Wright's *France in Modern Times: From the Enlightenment to the Present*.

The writers we will be exploring in this lecture series—Balzac, Flaubert, Proust, and Camus—are four of the greatest writers of all time. Honoré de Balzac turned away from poetry and theater—still the most prestigious genres in the early part of the nineteenth century—and made the novel the dominant genre for the rest of the century. Flaubert, Proust, and Camus followed in his footsteps, expanding the possibilities for the novel by writing about modern life.

Balzac is one of the first writers to develop what we call the realist novel. He takes seriously the concerns of the middle and lower classes, embedding them within a historical framework and in a narrative of tightly woven cause and effect. He also invents naturalism by suggesting that environment and heredity are serious determinants of character. He creates an entire world populated with recurring characters that one could spend years exploring.

Flaubert creates experiential realism, a realism that allows us to get inside the heads of his characters. He delves further into what Balzac first explores—the gap between our ideals and reality. He also writes of the disparity between art and life, a disparity at the heart of Emma Bovary's predicament. A writer's writer, Flaubert crafts his works by carefully choosing both objects and words.

Marcel Proust, perhaps the least read of the classics, is undoubtedly one of the greatest writers of the twentieth century. Lectures on Proust will explore the major themes of his monumental work, *In Search of Lost Time*. Proust is responsible for a profound cognitive revision of the world, and he explores the ways in which time and memory deepen our sense of it. The final writer in our series, Albert Camus, is one of the last great humanists of the twentieth century. His articulation of the absurd and a human-centered morality to counter it are still relevant today.

Because our time frame extends from 1799—Balzac's birth—to 1960—Camus's death—these lectures will touch on a number of different cultural and aesthetic movements. Romanticism, realism, symbolism, naturalism, modernism, and existentialism—all of these "isms" are important for understanding the cultural milieu into which these writers were born. These artists' unique perspectives also helped found the movements that followed. Each writer is profoundly original and creates new possibilities for the novel in both subject matter and formalistic technique.

One of the most important traits that all four writers share is a concern with the role of the artist, a concern that may be an outcome of the acute historical sensibility that typified a modern, post-Revolutionary France. If art no longer portrays universal and eternal truths, what is its goal? Each artist will answer this question in a different way. For Balzac, the novel will document his present as though it will soon become history. For Flaubert, it will create a world apart that, unlike the real world, is truly beautiful. For Proust, art will reinvigorate life, showing how beautiful the world can be if only we could learn to perceive its modern beauty. For Camus, literature will fill a metaphysical need, a human desire for unity and closure that an indifferent world fails to offer us.

All four writers also focus on a central question that remains relevant today: Who am I and what should I do with my life? This question is especially apt for a modern world in which social mobility is the norm. Before the French Revolution, how one answered this question depended on where and to whom one was born. With the modern novel—written both by and for a bourgeois audience—identity became a central preoccupation. Balzac will create a world in which status, money, profession, and marriage partner are all up for grabs. Flaubert will show how difficult it is to choose any one path in this new world of flux and change. Proust will reassert the role of the artist, because the artist is uniquely situated to make sense of a world that changes so quickly. Camus will abandon the middle-class values of hard work, profession, and marriage, since they fail to provide any stability in our absurd world.

These authors are more than just the giants of French literature. They are giants of world literature, and they have influenced some of the greatest writers that the world has known. They are also giants because they offer us an experience of reading that still speaks to us, that remains fresh and modern with the passage of time. The themes that Balzac first explored—the role of money and the importance of "stuff," our tendency to seek social status and the way that status and money affect love—still resonate. As we will see in the next lecture, he creates a modern novel that investigates what it means to be human in a modern world.

Detail from *Ville d'Avray* by Jean-Baptiste-Camille Corot, ca. 1867.

FOR GREATER UNDERSTANDING

Questions

1. What question do all four writers ask?
2. What makes this question so important in modern France?

Suggested Reading

Wright, Gordon. *France in Modern Times: From the Enlightenment to the Present*. New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1995.

Other Books of Interest

Barzun, Jacques. "The Work of Mind and Heart" and "Cross Section: The View from Paris Around 1830." *From Dawn to Decadence*. New York: Perennial, 2000.

Robb, Graham. *The Discovery of France: A Historical Geography*. New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 2007.

Websites of Interest

1. The Yale University Library provides French language and literature resources and selected reference materials. — http://www.library.yale.edu/Internet/frenchlit.html
2. The *Digital Librarian* website by Margaret Vail Anderson, a librarian in Cortland, NY, has an extensive listing of French literature resources. — http://www.digital-librarian.com/frenchlit.html
3. Jean-Michel Maulpoix & Co.'s *Modern French Literature* website features modern and contemporary French literature maintained by French poet Jean-Michel Maulpoix. — http://www.maulpoix.net/US/indexa.html

Lecture 2

Honoré de Balzac: Life and Early Work

The Suggested Readings for this lecture are Honoré de Balzac's *The Chouans*, translated by Marion Ayton Crawford, and Graham Robb's *Balzac: A Life*.

Honoré de Balzac may have influenced more modern novelists than any other. A consummate storyteller, his influence is so great that Émile Zola once quipped that his challenge was how *not* to be Balzac. Balzac has often been compared to Shakespeare because he creates an entire, complex world with a vast array of characters. He also reuses plots while making them distinctly his own. He reinvigorates a French language that was streamlined during the eighteenth century. Perhaps most importantly, his Shakespearean vitality represents a turn away from the earlier eighteenth-century neoclassical values of restraint and decorum.

Romanticism was a reaction against these same neo-classical values, and Balzac was steeped in Romanticism. His work, however, moves in the new direction of realism. Comparison with his near contemporary Stendhal (the pen name of Marie-Henri Beyle, 1783–1842) is helpful for highlighting this change. In *The Red and the Black*, Stendhal shows how intelligence, birth, and self-cultivation give his characters distinction in a post-Revolutionary world. They still want to be heroes, even if it seems difficult in a post-Napoleonic world. In Balzac's novels, by contrast, his heroes, if they are heroes at all, are no longer heroic in any traditional sense. Birth, self-cultivation, and intelligence play a limited role. In fact, his characters confront a modern world in which being good and being successful are incompatible goals.

Public Domain

Honoré de Balzac
(1799–1850)
by Maxime Dastugue, 1886
(after Louis Boulanger, 1837)

Born in Tours, Balzac did not start life as an aristocrat, despite his name.

His father had changed the family name from Balsaa—an Italian peasant name—to Balzac, and Balzac later played up his false connection to a French aristocratic family, adopting the noble "de" and creating his own herald. In post-Revolutionary France, one's birth no longer determined who one could become and Balzac, true to his age, loved self-invention even when it enlisted fiction as its aid. Having arrived in Paris to study law, he soon abandoned his studies to become a writer. With a small stipend from his family, he lived in a garret and wrote full time. For the generation before him, theater and poetry had been the only great genres. Like his character Lucien in *Lost Illusions*, however, Balzac quickly realized that only the novel was profitable.

Balzac's early works showed very little promise, but he finally achieved success when, at the age of thirty, he signed his name to *Les Chouans*. As Thomas Carlyle wrote, Sir Walter Scott taught Europe history by showing that it was more than just the lives of queens and kings. Balzac's innovation was to show history as it profoundly affected his characters. *Les Chouans* is the story of a royalist anti-revolutionary uprising. It might surprise readers that Balzac had royalist leanings, but people, he believed, were ruled by instincts, passion, and self-interest. Even when they have a propensity for good, ideals usually give way to reality. Only church, family, and state, he believed, were strong enough to keep conflict and chaos at bay.

After *Les Chouans,* Balzac became what one French critic would term the first industrial writer. Wearing his famous monk's habit, he often worked twelve to sixteen hours at a stretch with the aid of prodigious amounts of coffee. Revising up until the last moment, he sent drafts to the printers and then edited and revised the first printings, a practice that exasperated his typesetters. In this fashion, he was able to write five or six novels a year and almost one hundred works, including novels, journal articles, and plays.

In addition to writing, Balzac involved himself in numerous get-rich-quick schemes ranging from publishing and printing to timber and slag mines. Each enterprise, like his novels, had a bit of the fantastic and a bit of the prosaic about it, but unlike his writing, none was successful. Always in debt, he wrote to make money, and some scholars have speculated that his output would have been much reduced had he been independently wealthy.

Balzac's indeterminate social status gave him both the drive and the vantage point from which to document all the walks of life in nineteenth-century France. Balzac's most memorable characters are filled with the same intense desire for success that Balzac himself exhibited. A mobility of social position is at the heart of many of his plots, and his characters are usually either striving to ascend the social ladder or working to prevent an imminent downward plummet.

FOR GREATER UNDERSTANDING

Questions

1. What was Balzac's social status, and how does it influence his novels?
2. Why are his novels often called realist?

Suggested Reading

Balzac, Honoré de. *The Chouans*. Trans. Marion Ayton Crawford. New York: Penguin, 1972.

Robb, Graham. *Balzac: A Life*. New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1994.

Other Books of Interest

Auerbach, Erich. Chapter 18. "In the Hotel de la Mole." *Mimesis*: *The Representation of Reality in Western Literature*. Trans. Willard Trask. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1953.

Becker, George J. Chapter 1. "The Climate of Realism." *Realism in Modern Literature*. New York: Frederick Ungar, 1980.

Hemmings, F.W.J. Chapter 2. "Realism in the Age of Romanticism." *The Age of Realism*. Middlesex: Penguin, 1974.

Websites of Interest

1. An article entitled "Balzac as Anthropologist" by Scott Sprenger (Brigham Young University) appeared in *Anthropoetics*, vol. 6, no. 1, Spring/Summer, 2000. — http://www.anthropoetics.ucla.edu/ap0601/balzac.htm
2. An article entitled "Famous Affinities of History: Honoré de Balzac and Evelina Hanska" by Lyndon Orr provides a look into Balzac's private life. — http://www.authorama.com/famous-affinities-of-history-iv-8.html

Lecture 3

Honoré de Balzac: *The Wild Ass's Skin* and *Père Goriot*

The Suggested Readings for this lecture are Honoré de Balzac's *The Wild Ass's Skin*, translated by Herbert J. Hunt, and Honoré de Balzac's *Père Goriot*, translated by Burton Raffel.

The Wild Ass's Skin

Balzac's early work *The Wild Ass's Skin* serves as a perfect introduction to many of his main themes. A young man named Raphaël, despondent that he has gambled away his last coin, considers suicide. French eighteenth-century novels focused on an aristocracy whose lives centered on the idle pleasures of seduction and gambling. Balzac's Raphaël responds to this earlier tradition by posing the question of whether life is worth living when sensual pleasures and the money that fuels them are gone.

Raphaël is diverted from his plan of self-destruction by a chance visit to an antique shop in which he discovers a wild ass's skin. The skin has magical powers, granting him every wish, but at a cost: with every desire fulfilled, the skin shrinks and with it, his life force. The result is that he grows prematurely old. Death threatens him with the upsurge of every desire.

This tale is often understood as Balzac's condemnation of a hedonistic, material society that, always in pursuit of new pleasures and desires, can only end in self-destruction. It also shows Balzac's rare blend of the material and the spiritual. The wild ass's skin materially reflects the shrinking of Raphaël's life force. It also has something of the supernatural about it. Balzac believed, and the story makes manifest, that every person has a vital force that can be contained or expended. Although he could not have known it at the time, Balzac himself would die relatively young after living exuberantly.

An illustration by Adrien Moreau from *The Wild Ass's Skin*, published in 1897 by George Barrie & Son.

Many claim Balzac as the inventor of the modern novel, a claim that

may seem puzzling since he was by no means the first writer of the genre. Earlier novels were usually episodic, without the tight plotting of cause and effect. They were also less historical in nature, and they did not treat seriously the same variety of people and classes. For these reasons, Balzac is considered the inventor of the realist novel. At the same time, however, he is more than a realist, for he envisions a world imbued with mysterious forces and correspondences.

Historians suspect that the modern novel first emerged in France because of the dramatic effect of the French Revolution. Novels written in German remained for the most part pastoral, reflecting a very different lived reality. Russia did not have the same large and influential bourgeois, nor had it abandoned religion quite so precipitously. And in England, where the proto-realist novel had had its early start in the eighteenth century, the nineteenth century provided a far more static historical backdrop. Traditional ethical and religious beliefs also created a more stable counterbalance.

In France, by contrast, the political upheaval of a whole series of revolutions had destroyed earlier political, religious, and social structures without replacing them. In Balzac's very human comedy, there is a separation of the ethical from any spiritual foundation, and Balzac's world is a world of economic expansion coupled with moral unease. In a world in which ugliness and vice are rampant, Balzac did not indulge a Romantic desire to escape reality in a flight to the exotic, to nature, or to the inward realm of feelings. Instead, he documented the present as though it was already history, detailing a world that would soon vanish. Like Balzac himself, his characters struggle for success and money. When their ideals confront the real, the real inevitably wins out. The portrayal of his world is so successful that Oscar Wilde famously observed that Balzac's world makes our own seem but a shadow. This, more than any other, is his greatest achievement.

Père Goriot

Published in 1835 and set in 1819, Balzac's *Père Goriot* makes Paris one of its principal characters. The city was subject to mass migration from the countryside such that its population doubled between 1800 and 1830. Set in the midst of this rapid change, the novel opens in one of the Parisian boarding houses that arose to accommodate the influx. Boarding houses provided a unique social environment because people of many different classes and backgrounds were forced to live in close proximity. Residents cut off from their origins could invent new identities such that even the savvy, like Balzac's proprietress of the boarding house, Mme. Vauquer, could be duped.

We first encounter Mme. Vauquer through Balzac's masterful use of thick description. As the inventor of naturalism, Balzac placed great emphasis on environment's role in determining character. His description of the boarding house and its owner mirror each other and are mutually informative. Because of the mystery surrounding many of those encountered in new urban settings

like these, we readers are invited to interpret characters by paying great attention to their surroundings. Our own apprenticeship mirrors that of the young Rastignac, who, newly arrived from the provinces, must decode the rules of the city by learning to make sense of its inhabitants.

If people can deceive others so easily by appearing to be what they are not, then appearance is everything. Rastignac's first task is to outfit himself as the man of the world he hopes to become. He quickly abandons his studies and, under the tutelage of his cousin, decides to attach himself to a wealthy woman in order to climb the social ladder. His mother, sending much-needed money from home, warns of the dangers of living a life in which he will always desire to be what he has not yet become. And yet, this proves to be the modern Parisian mode of being.

One thread of the narrative follows Rastignac's trajectory as he apprentices himself to a world in which things are not what they seem. Lone figures rarely succeed in Balzac's world, and Rastignac's case is no different. In addition to his cousin, he soon acquires two other mentors, Vautrin and Père Goriot.

Vautrin is the truth-teller of the novel. More than any other character he seems able to penetrate every mystery and see into every ruse. Most importantly, he is able to identify people while himself remaining cloaked in mystery. Vautrin tries to plot his future by relying on this penetrating insight, which is key to his survival. His words of advice to Rastignac unveil the truth behind appearances, dispelling the young man's illusions. Still, he represents his own brand of morality grounded in the personal friendships of men. He offers Rastignac a fortune, if only Rastignac will allow others to act unethically. Rastignac's emotions provide few guideposts for helping him to decide whether to accept this offer. Instead, Rastignac suspects that emotions, rather than grounding morality, mask self-interest and a struggle for self-advancement.

Rastignac also has a father figure in Père Goriot. Old Goriot is a perfect example of the way Balzac embeds his characters in historical events. The father made his money as a pasta maker during the revolution by speculating on grain shortages. Suddenly wealthy, he was able to make good marriages for his daughters during the post-Revolutionary period in which class restrictions were temporarily lifted. One daughter married a newly minted aristocrat whose increasing wealth

Engraving from an 1897 edition of *Le Père Goriot* by an unknown artist, published by George Barrie & Son in Philadelphia.

depended on shady financial speculations. The other daughter married into an old aristocratic family in need of new wealth to maintain its position. With the Bourbon restoration, the daughters grew increasingly embarrassed by their father while still dependent on his financial largesse.

Balzac's Goriot is the story of King Lear without the faithful, loving Cordelia to counterbalance the greed of the others. Like Lear, Goriot transfers his kingdom—in this case his wealth—to his daughters all too soon. Like Lear, he also tries to exert a control over his daughters in exchange for this wealth. Both Lear and Goriot misunderstand both their daughters and human nature more generally.

Père Goriot is a brilliant work of storytelling and is therefore a wonderful introduction to Balzac's *Human Comedy*. In the intense realism of Balzac's world, a gap appears between ideals and reality. It is also a world in which older forms of distinction—whether of hard work, noble sentiment, or cultural capital—fail to ensure success. Instead, if Vautrin is any indication, the key is an ability to manipulate others based on a realistic understanding of both individuals and human nature. Goodness does not usually lead to success, and blind sentiment can lead to ruin unless tempered by self-interest. In a world of unbridled desire for wealth and status, family and marriages are often destroyed. In short, Balzac complicates a simple coming-of-age story by showing how difficult it is to succeed in a modern world without the sacrifice of our most cherished ideals.

FOR GREATER UNDERSTANDING

Questions

1. Why does Balzac engage in such long and detailed descriptions?
2. What is his view of family? Why are there so many parent-like figures in his novels?
3. What are the keys to survival and success in Balzac's world?

Suggested Reading

Balzac, Honoré de. *Père Goriot*. Trans. Burton Raffel. New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1994.

———. *The Wild Ass's Skin*. Trans. Herbert J. Hunt. New York: Penguin, 1977.

Other Books of Interest

Kanes, Martin. *Père Goriot: Anatomy of a Troubled World*. New York: Twayne, 1993.

Websites of Interest

The Association of Young Journalists and Writers provides an appealing article entitled "A Pair of Trousers Result in Matches of 20,000 Francs a Year: Virtue and Materialism in Pére Goriot" by Vanessa Lauber. — http://ayjw.org/print_articles.php?id=761615

Lecture 4

Honoré de Balzac: *The Human Comedy*

The Suggested Readings for this lecture are Honoré de Balzac's *Cousin Bette*, translated by James Waring, *Eugénie Grandet*, translated by Sylvia Raphael, and *Lost Illusions*, translated by Richard Howard.

Several other novels in Balzac's *Human Comedy* are readily available in translation. *Eugénie Grandet* is one of his most widely read. Published in 1833, it is in some ways the photographic negative of *Père Goriot*. It centers on a daughter from a provincial family whose miserly father is Goriot's opposite.

We first learn of the Grandet family through a detailed description of their environment. The father's miserly nature shows clearly in the family's daily habits and surroundings. This description turns the stock figure of a miser into something far more nuanced, since the father's character profoundly influences both his home and his family. The Grandet family's wealth is also historically based, because the father made his fortune by buying up government property after the revolution. Economics greatly influences the daily life of the family, even the friends they entertain and the marriage proposals the daughter receives.

The novel shows how complicated life is for a young woman of the provinces whose options, even though she has great wealth, are limited by environment, family, and friends. A marriage based on feeling seems a romantic fantasy. Her attempt to exert control over her own money divides father from daughter. Even inaction is not an option. She is told that she must marry or enter a convent. The environment in which she is raised also influences her long after her father's death.

An illustration from *Eugénie Grandet* published in 1897 by George Barrie & Son.

Lost Illusions, published in two volumes in 1837 and 1839, shows how poets' ideals are always illusions. The first narrative centers on Lucien Chardon, who travels to Paris hoping to find success as a poet. He

quickly learns that poetry doesn't sell and that journalism and courtesans can provide him with a luxurious life more quickly than hard work. Much of the story details the ugliness behind the Parisian worlds of publishing and journalism, courtesans and the theater. Lucien also finds that immediate gratification usually leads to bankruptcy and destitution.

His friend David Séchard remains in the provinces. A poet of the sciences, he hopes to invent a cheaper way of making paper. Refusing to sacrifice his ideals, he falls victim to the machinations of his father, his friend, and the owners of a rival printing shop. In Balzac's world, those whose self-interested actions are uninfluenced by sentiment can destroy the pure of heart. While the novel is about lost illusions, it is also about the necessity of illusions for life and vitality. For Balzac's most sympathetic characters the struggle is to replace lost illusions with new ones, however briefly they endure.

Cousin Bette, published in 1846, is one of Balzac's last and darkest novels. He wrote it as a challenge to Eugène Sue, then the most popular serial novelist. In the other novels we saw that Charles Grandet and Père Goriot behave badly because they are blinded by their monomania. Vautrin had his own code of fraternal loyalty. But Cousin Bette shows a different, more psychological portrait of evil. Bette, the poor and unattractive relation of the Hulot family, is fueled by jealousy and resentment. Perhaps most disturbingly, she is able to inflict the greatest damage by manipulating illusions and pretending to be loyal and loving when she is anything but.

Ink drawing of Lisbeth Fischer, the title character of Honoré de Balzac's novel *La Cousine Bette*, from a 1914 French edition.

Lisbeth Fischer (Cousin Bette) is described as "maigre, brune . . . les sourcils épais et réunis par un bouquet . . . quelques verrues dans sa face longue et simiesque" ("lean, brown, with . . . thick eyebrows joining in a tuft . . . and some moles on her narrow simian face").

The novel opens with a scene that evidences Balzac's historical realism. The financial success of a tradesman, Crevel, grants him the power to offer help to the aristocratic Hulot family, whose wealth is quickly vanishing. The family member, Cousin Bette, however, conspires to ruin the family by preying on Baron Hulot's weakness for women. In Balzac's world, those who are the least subject to idealism are the most able to understand human nature and thereby manipulate others. Bette, through her ally Valérie, is able to profit from men's desires by controlling them. Like Vautrin, Bette benefits from moving between different worlds and understanding the distinct rules for each. Unlike Vautrin, Bette is fueled not only by self-interest but also by a desire for revenge.

The vast corpus of Balzac's magnificent *Human Comedy* reveals some of his most deep-seated preoccupations. Balzac tells of fathers who fail to be fathers because their monomania blinds them to reality. He relates the way that familial relations are often destroyed by concerns over money. And he highlights the impossibility of acting autonomously in a world in which money, environment, and interpersonal relations are crucial to success. Some critics have claimed that in Balzac's world, all one needs to be happy are wealth, illusions, and family. But it is rare that we see this kind of happiness in his novels, so it is possible that he means to suggest that even this is nothing but an illusion.

FOR GREATER UNDERSTANDING

Questions

1. How does Eugénie Grandet's narrative highlight the challenges facing women in nineteenth-century France?
2. What role do illusions and ideals play in Balzac's novels?
3. Does Cousin Bette's motivation evidence a change in Balzac's portrayal of human nature?

Suggested Reading

Balzac, Honoré de. *Cousin Bette*. Trans. James Waring. Scotts Valley, CA: IAP, 2009.

———. *Eugénie Grandet*. Trans. Sylvia Raphael. New York: Oxford University Press, USA, 2003.

———. *Lost Illusions*. Trans. Richard Howard. New York: Random House, 1997.

Other Books of Interest

Balzac, Honoré de. *The Human Comedy*. 3 vols. New York: P.F. Collier, 1893.

Kanes, Martin, ed. *Critical Essays on Balzac*. Boston: G.K. Hall & Co., 1990.

Websites of Interest

1. Project Gutenberg provides an ebook entitled *Repertory of the Comedie Humaine, Complete, A–Z* by Anatole Cerfberr and Jules François Christophe, translated by Joseph Walker McSpadden. The book is an extensive reference of characters appearing in Balzac's *La Comédie humaine*. — http://www.gutenberg.org/files/17635/17635-h/17635-h.htm
2. Victor Hugo's eulogy for Balzac provided by *Victor Hugo Central*. — http://www.gavroche.org/vhugo/balzaceulogy.shtml

Lecture 5

Flaubert: Life and Times

The Suggested Reading for this lecture is Frederick Brown's *Flaubert: A Biography*.

Gustave Flaubert was born in Normandy and grew up in the hospital in Rouen that his father directed. Although he did not become a doctor like his father or brother, the influence of his childhood was profound. His goal, Flaubert later asserted, was to make art scientific.

As a young man, Flaubert went to Paris to study law. In one of the most momentous events of his life, however, he suffered his first of many attacks that critics now think was epilepsy. His family granted him a reprieve from pursuing a traditional career. Instead, he was allowed to retire to the family estate, Croisset, where he wrote his most famous novels.

Flaubert is often considered the first novelist's novelist. He turned novel writing into a craft that required painstaking labor. Balzac wore a monk's robes to inspire him, but Flaubert lived closer to the monk's life. Although he made journeys into town to see his lover Louise Colet, he did so only as a respite from self-imposed deadlines. Balzac, Flaubert claimed, wrote too quickly to be any good. By contrast, it is estimated that, given the time taken to complete *Madame Bovary*, Flaubert averaged only five words a day. He reworked his pages meticulously, ever in search of the perfect word or image.

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Gustave Flaubert, 1856
(1821–1880)
by Eugène Giraud

In contrast to a storyteller like Balzac, Flaubert excelled, as Henry James famously noted, at showing rather than telling. Ezra Pound claimed that Flaubert performed a great deal of fundamental brainwork for nearly all narrative writers after him, and Joyce cited Flaubert as one

of the few writers whose every line he had read. Flaubert's careful shaping of his stories granted a newfound freedom to both his characters and his readers.

Part of Flaubert's scientific approach was to show the world through the filter of a nonhuman observer. His goal was to avoid authorial self-disclosure. Art, he believed, should never reveal the personal feelings of the author. The effect is that his characters have an aura of free will. The narrator rarely explains them to us, and sometimes seems not to understand them himself. We are forced to interpret by being privy to the characters' own experiences. Flaubert achieves this through free indirect discourse, a method that he perfected. His realism is experiential in nature for the first time, and his objectivist impersonality later influenced writers like Émile Zola and Ernest Hemingway.

When he died, Flaubert was working on a novel called *Bouvard and Pecuchet*. The story follows the path of two clerks who, in their attempt to understand the world, discover that all forms of knowledge are equally bankrupt. Balzac's characters wear themselves out through action, whereas Flaubert's characters wear themselves out waiting for something to happen. His treatment of boredom and metaphysical fatigue prefigured the work of Samuel Beckett.

Milan Kundera claims that Flaubert's greatest feat was the discovery of stupidity in a century so proud of its scientific thought. Flaubert's obsession with clichés shows how they can promise simple and eternal truths while in actuality revealing nothing but inanity. Beneath all of Flaubert's painstaking labor on his novels lies this fear that neither language nor art is able to capture reality. Jean-Paul Sartre's long, unfinished work on Flaubert investigates how and why one of the greatest writers of all time can hate language so intensely.

When Flaubert began work on his first great masterpiece, *Madame Bovary*, he was almost thirty and had produced nothing that others could acclaim. What he felt was a masterpiece—*The Temptation of Saint Anthony*—his friends labeled a disaster. They urged him to choose a down-to-earth subject, something along the lines of Balzac's *Cousin Bette*.

He did so, but *Madame Bovary* would prove much harder to write. Flaubert had a romantic side that he forcibly suppressed in order to achieve his art of impersonality. His famous quote (*à propos* of *Madame Bovary*) that he wished to write a book about nothing reflects his desire to write about a subject that would foreclose outpourings of lyrical excess. His goal was to pick a vulgar subject and make it beautiful, thereby demonstrating that all subjects are equally good or bad, depending on the way they are represented. Truly a modern writer, he showed little concern for bourgeois morality.

Flaubert loved finding himself in all aspects of his novel instead of in moments of emotional self-identification or authorial judgment. When he wrote the riding scene in *Madame Bovary*, he explained, he was the horses and the wind and the leaves. This impersonality of writing was a major revelation for authors that followed.

FOR GREATER UNDERSTANDING

Questions

1. How does Flaubert's realism differ from Balzac's?
2. Why is Flaubert more pessimistic about knowledge, language, and art?
3. How is Flaubert's approach more "scientific"?

Suggested Reading

Brown, Frederick. *Flaubert: A Biography*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007.

Other Books of Interest

Flaubert, Gustave. *Bouvard and Pecuchet* with *The Dictionary of Received Ideas*. Trans. A.J. Krailsheimer. New York: Penguin, 1976.

———. *The Temptation of Saint Anthony*. Trans. Lafcadio Hearn. New York: Modern Library, 2002.

Websites of Interest

1. *The Johns Hopkins Guide to Literary Theory and Criticism* is an indispensable resource for scholars and students of literary theory and discourse (use the search function by author's name). — http://litguide.press.jhu.edu/cgi-bin/search.cgi
2. The *Famous Dyslexics* website provides an article on Gustave Flaubert, relating his writing peculiarities to dyslexia-related problems. — http://www.dyslexiamentor.com/famous/famousdyslexics_016.php

Lecture 6

Flaubert's *Madame Bovary*

The Suggested Reading for this lecture is Gustave Flaubert's *Madame Bovary*, translated by Lowell Blair.

"Madame Bovary, c'est moi," Flaubert was reported to have said about Emma. Scholars now suspect the quote to be apocryphal, but there is no doubt that he shared Emma's disgust with bourgeois life and experienced many of her emotions as he wrote the novel. Still, he did not identify with her completely, nor are we meant to. She is a woman of false poetry and false sentiments, he said, and his was the first novel to make fun of its leading lady.

Emma suffers from what, thanks to Flaubert, we now call *bovarism*—an unreal conception of the self and a desire to be what one is not. Emma believes herself worthy of a life more interesting than the small-town one she is granted. While Flaubert may make fun of her, he still takes seriously the dilemma of growing up female in mid-century France. Marriage is the beginning of Emma's growing disillusionment with the world. Believing marriage will introduce her to experiences of bliss and happiness, she finds it leads only to the banality of daily life with all its ensuing boredom. Even as she strives to be the perfect wife, she secretly seethes with frustration.

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This illustration by Alfred Richemont from chapter 12 of a 1905 French edition of *Madame Bovary* is titled "Emma Wants to Run Away."

Her loss of illusions is partially to blame on her youthful novel reading, which gives her unreal expectations of life. One of Flaubert's major preoccupations is the way in which novels not only fail to prepare her for reality, but also make her dissatisfied with the life she finds. Taking literature too seriously—believing that it reflects a life she might lead, is one of Emma's most tragic mistakes. We readers are also implicitly cautioned against believing art to be an exact mirror of life.

While Emma dreams of the castles and knights of her novels, Charles dreams of Emma and finds, unlike Emma, that his dreams do become his reality. He marries Emma and takes pleasure in the thought that his daughter's life might repeat his wife's, that the daughter might grow up to resemble Emma. For Emma, however, nothing dismays her more than the thought that life is an endless series of repetitions without difference.

What Emma really longs for is a life of distinction. She wants to be unique, not another Madame Bovary in a long line of mothers and wives who bear the same name. Her world is that of mid-century France, in which there was an expansion of women's desires and, perhaps as a result, the tightening of bourgeois restrictions on the ability to fulfill those desires.

Her attempt at a respectable, bourgeois solution is to support Charles in his bid for fame, a bid that ends tragically in a botched surgery. Emma also tries novelistic solutions that end disastrously. Balzac's male characters, for example, find success by dressing the part and aligning themselves with powerful lovers. Dressing the part does not transform Emma into a different person, however, and taking on a lover of distinction—whether the distinction is aristocratic like Rodolphe's or cultural like Leon's—also fails to propel her out of her

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Another Alfred Richemont illustration, from chapter 14 of the 1905 French edition of *Madame Bovary*, is titled "Emma is Re-established (the Trip to Rouen)."

bourgeois existence and into a more exalted one. Ironically, the only man who loves her is her husband, Charles, but his love does not resemble the love of novels, so she fails to recognize it as such.

While Flaubert does not tell us what to think of his characters, he gives us many clues. Charles's name, Bovary, hints at his bovine, complacent character, and his muttering of his name when we first encounter him sounds like *charivari*—the community censure of an individual who has made a bad match. Emma, meanwhile, is represented as waiting beside windows for some outside force to free her and transform her life. Various details also reveal the sensual nature that motivates her actions.

Flaubert's brilliant use of free indirect discourse allows us to move between characters and prevents us from identifying too strongly with any one character. We see Rodolphe from Emma's perspective, as she admires a nobility she incorrectly believes applies to his character. At the same time, we see Emma from Rodolphe's point of view, as he assesses that she is ripe for seduction but worries how he will rid himself of her afterwards. One of their most tragic misunderstandings is about the language of love. Emma believes it describes them uniquely. Rodolphe sees it as a repetition of stock phrases that he has used in the past and will use long after her. The most brilliant scene in the novel is the seduction scene at the fair, during which Rodolphe's lovemaking is undercut by an ironic juxtaposition with scenes below.

Flaubert first published the novel in serial form in *La Revue de Paris*. The *Revue* was perceived to be anti-government, and Flaubert was an easy target for prosecution for indecency. For his part, he refused to delete scenes that even the editors of the *Revue* found shocking. The legal defense relied on Emma's tragic fate to argue for an authorial, albeit unstated, condemnation of her behavior. The prosecutor may have been closer to the truth in observing that there was no clear authorial judgment evident in the novel. More recent critics have argued that the novel was really on trial for this absence of clear moral judgment. What is certain is that the trial instantly brought the fame and readership for which Flaubert so longed.

FOR GREATER UNDERSTANDING

Questions

1. What makes an identification with Emma complicated?
2. How is Flaubert's skepticism about language and art evident in the plot?
3. How does Flaubert give interpretive clues while maintaining his impersonal style?

Suggested Reading

Flaubert, Gustave. *Madame Bovary*. Trans. Lowell Bair. New York: Bantam, 1982.

Other Books of Interest

Heath, Stephen. *Flaubert: Madame Bovary.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992.

LaCapra, Dominick. *Madame Bovary on Trial*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1982.

Llosa, Mario Vargas. *The Perpetual Orgy: Flaubert and Madame Bovary*. Trans. Helen Lane. New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1986.

Websites of Interest

1. The *Madame Bovary* website is dedicated to the novel and provides information on Flaubert's life, the controversies surrounding the publication of the book, and other resources. — http://www.madamebovary.com/default.htm
2. The *Complete Review* website provides a critique of *Madame Bovary* and links to other sites about Flaubert's major work. — http://www.complete-review.com/reviews/flaubert/mbovary.htm

Lecture 7

Flaubert's *Sentimental Education*

The Suggested Reading for this lecture is Gustave Flaubert's *Sentimental Education*, translated by Robert Baldick.

Many believe *Sentimental Education* to be the greatest novel of the nineteenth century. It might seem just another young man's coming-of-age story set in Paris, but Flaubert makes groundbreaking changes. The novel centers on Frédéric Moreau, one of the first modern anti-heroes to appear in literature. Frédéric is an ineffectual character, a man, as Flaubert wrote, in all his inconsequence. The novel also has little plot, leading one critic to note that it is brilliantly lifelike—nothing happens most of the time. Both innovations mark a radical departure from Balzac's form of storytelling and make Flaubert one of the first modern novelists. That Flaubert could write such a novel and make it a pleasure to read is testament to his craft.

Flaubert claimed that he wanted to write a moral history of his generation that documented a modern, inactive passion. In this he succeeded, with the consequence that the plot no longer serves to forefront the typical hero as he acts to control his fate. Frédéric's inaction lies at the heart of the novel. The most significant moments are those when he refuses to act or does not say how he feels. His life is one of missed opportunities, of goals subverted by the randomness of life.

His dreams, rather than his actions, guide his life, but he cannot or will not make those dreams a reality. Although he finds true love, he never consummates the relationship. Like his other life goals, his love remains unrealized. Its imagined greatness also makes his real relationships pale by comparison. Imagination trumps reality, but Frédéric, unlike Emma Bovary, is content to maintain the gap between the two.

Flaubert gives us key details about Frédéric's character when we first encounter him. Frédéric is drifting along the river on a boat just as he drifts through life. Although he aspires to be an artist, his sketchbook is blank; becoming an artist will prove just one more of his many unrealized dreams.

The story also has certain autobiographical elements and is based loosely on Flaubert's youthful life in Paris. It draws on Flaubert's love for an older, married woman named Élisa Schlésinger. On the boat Frédéric also meets an older, married woman—Madame Arnoux, the woman he will love for the rest of his life. His only action, however, is to save her shawl from falling overboard. For much of the rest of the novel he will continue to try to save her belongings, and his fascination with her things will become a powerful substitute for his fascination with her being.

One of the dilemmas Flaubert encountered in portraying his inactive hero was the degree to which the historical events threatened to swallow his characters. Frédéric is so absorbed by his dreams that he often fails to register the outside world. Preoccupied by his plans for a rendezvous with Mme. Arnoux, for example, he barely notices the revolution of 1848 happening around him. This representation of history is as innovative as Flaubert's modern antihero and plotless narrative. Flaubert highlights the way in which we can live through historical events while experiencing them only tangentially because our minds are preoccupied with other matters.

Flaubert also portrays historical events from an experiential perspective—we perceive events from individual viewpoints, without the usual interpretation. Gunfire sounds like material ripping, for example, and the storming of the royal palace has the quality of a prank until it turns ugly. Most importantly, the revolution of 1848 does not appear coherent, but like a jumble of scattered events.

Flaubert also portrays many of the revolutionaries as antiheroes who long for destruction. Frédéric's foray into politics fails because he cannot endorse such wholesale destruction. He fails in revolutionary love with Rosanette, and the affair has been read as an allegory of the temporary alliance between the bourgeois and lower classes during and shortly after the events of 1848.

Flaubert's preoccupation with clichéd language is evident in the novel. The language of love serves Frédéric only in those relationships in which his interest is fleeting or superficial. When Frédéric feels strongly, language is inadequate. One of the greatest love scenes in the novel is the chance meeting between Frédéric and Mme. Arnoux in which they talk of banalities. In another brilliant scene, Mme. Arnoux finally offers herself, but Frédéric turns away and rolls a cigarette. This gesture, although superficially like Rodolphe's fixing the rein in *Madame Bovary*, indicates its exact opposite.

In contrast to Frédéric, his friend Deslauriers continually acts in order to succeed, but his actions are no more successful than Frédéric's failure to act. Their memory of the brothel demonstrates that happiness occurs only when dreams are not subject to a reality test. In contrast to *Madame Bovary*, *Sentimental Education* depicts a hero who no longer fights against the discrepancy between dreams and reality. Frédéric never consummates his relationship with Mme. Arnoux, and this refusal to fulfill desire is the very source of his happiness. Frédéric's life, however, is out of sync, and he's always remembering the past or dreaming of the future.

Portrait de l'artiste
by Léon Bonnat, 1855

This image is often used as a likeness for Flaubert's Frédéric.

FOR GREATER UNDERSTANDING

Questions

1. How does Flaubert portray Frédéric, and how is he different from earlier novelistic heroes?
2. What role does history play in the novel?
3. What are we to make of the fact that neither Frédéric nor Deslauriers lives the life they imagined?

Suggested Reading

Flaubert, Gustave. *Sentimental Education*. Trans. Robert Baldick. New York: Penguin, 1964.

Other Books of Interest

Brombert, Victor. *The Novels of Flaubert: A Study of Themes and Techniques*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1966.

Unwin, Timothy, ed. *The Cambridge Companion to Flaubert*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004.

Wright, Gordon. "The Orleanist Experiment, 1830–1848" and "The Republican Experiment, 1848–1852." *France in Modern Times*. New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1995.

Websites of Interest

Marshall C. Olds (University of Nebraska, Lincoln) provides a downloadable PDF of his paper "Value and Social Mobility in Flaubert." — http://digitalcommons.unl.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1001&context=modlangfrench

Lecture 8

Proust: Life and Work

The Suggested Readings for this lecture are Marcel Proust's *Swann's Way: In Search of Lost Time*, vol. 1, edited and translated by Lydia Davis, and *In the Shadow of Young Girls in Flower: In Search of Lost Time*, vol. 2, edited by James Grieve and Christopher Prendergast and translated by James Grieve.

Marcel Proust was born in Auteil in 1871. His mother was from a wealthy Jewish family and his father was a well-respected physician. Although he studied law and literature, Proust never pursued a traditional career. Instead, he became a frequenter of aristocratic salons in the Faubourg Saint-Germain. While he wrote some in his youth, he was considered a dilettante by most until he began publishing his masterpiece, *A la recherche du temps perdu*, or *In Search of Lost Time*.

Because of a lifelong battle with asthma that worsened as he grew older, Proust gradually spent less time socializing and more time ensconced in his cork-lined room. Writing by night and sleeping by day, he wrote the first draft of the novel from 1909 until 1912, but spent the next ten years editing and expanding it. Letters suggest that he conceived the beginning and the end of the work simultaneously, expanding the middle afterwards. *In Search of Lost Time* was initially published as seven novels that appeared over many years, the last few published only after his death. The first volume attracted little notice, but the second volume, published in 1919, brought him acclaim. He was still revising the final volumes when he died of pneumonia in 1922.

There are two excellent translations available. The classic Moncrieff and Kilmartin edition is beautiful in its own right, although it strays at times from the original. A more recent edition edited by Christopher Prendergast stays closer to the original. The first four volumes are available and more will appear as copyrights expire.

André Gide famously turned Proust down for publication, claiming that Proust could not write. It is true that his long sentences pushed the boundaries of acceptable French. Proust can also be difficult to read thanks to his

Marcel Proust posing ca. 1916.

complicated narrative structure. Because moments in time often remind the narrator of other moments, the story jumps frequently between time periods. Still, it is a pleasure to read and not as difficult as many imagine.

Proust was writing in the wake of both the symbolists and the decadents. The symbolists emphasized the importance of dreams and imagination, and suggested that unlike the realists, more essential truths and correspondences underlay reality. As a modernist, Proust believed this, but also thought these correspondences could only be discovered individually. They could be communicated and shared through art, however. The task of the artist is therefore to translate the beauty and meaning of the world.

Although influenced by the decadents in his worship of art, Proust diverged from their belief in art for art's sake. Instead, he believed in art for life's sake. Art alone had the power to reenchant a modern world that often failed to offer up its beauty, at least initially.

A comparison with Flaubert, whom Proust so admired, is illuminating. Flaubert believed that literature was a lure, promising a life of beauty and meaning that was an illusion. Proust, on the other hand, felt that life is filled with beauty and meaning, if only we could uncover it. Epiphanies like the famous *petite madeleine*—the scalloped cookie dunked in tea that resuscitates the Combray of childhood—are no illusion. Instead, the *madeleine* makes manifest an intensity of beauty and meaning that connects separated times in life to reveal their underlying correspondence.

Not surprisingly, Proust critiqued Flaubert's lack of metaphor. For Proust, metaphors are an important method of showing the similarity of seemingly unconnected things. Proust did admire Flaubert's representation of time, however, especially his lapses of time in *Sentimental Education*. Gaps in time are also crucial to Proust's artistic project, since they make possible the rediscovery of sensations and moments that, precisely because rediscovered after a lapse, are able to connect moments greatly separated in time and space.

For Proust art—and indeed culture in general—is responsible for reminding us of these hidden connections. Proust's interest in cultural codes thus sets him apart from the naturalists. While Émile Zola explored sexuality, his representations linked it to our animal nature. Proust's representation of sexuality, including homosexuality, is far more culturally complex.

One of the most vexing issues for critics is the autobiographical nature of the novel. The narrative, although loosely based on Proust's life and world, is fictional. While Proust was homosexual and Jewish, the narrator is heterosexual and Catholic, and Proust's treatment of Jews and homosexuals continues to disturb readers. Proust is coy in never naming the narrator, although he suggests his name might be Marcel. Nevertheless, he warns against reading the novel as a *roman à clef*. Each character, he insisted, was based on a composite of many people he had known. What is more, his female characters cannot always be read simply as male characters in drag.

FOR GREATER UNDERSTANDING

Questions

1. How does Proust's view of art differ from Flaubert's?
2. In Proust's view, what is art's purpose?
3. Is the novel autobiographical?

Suggested Reading

Proust, Marcel. *In the Shadow of Young Girls in Flower: In Search of Lost Time*. Vol. 2. Eds. James Grieve and Christopher Prendergast. Trans. James Grieve. New York: Penguin Classics, 2005.

———. *Swann's Way: In Search of Lost Time*. Vol. 1. Ed. and trans. Lydia Davis. New York: Penguin Classics, 2004.

Other Books of Interest

White, Edmund. *Marcel Proust: A Life*. New York: Penguin Lives, 2009.

Websites of Interest

1. University Library at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign provides the *Kolb-Proust Archive for Research*, an extensive website dedicated to the study of Marcel Proust and his works. — http://www.library.illinois.edu/kolbp
2. *Marcel Proust: Ephemera Site* is an informal website by Chris Taylor (United Kingdom) dedicated to the writings of Marcel Proust that are mostly unavailable elsewhere in English translation. — http://www.yorktaylors.free-online.co.uk

Lecture 9

Proust: *In Search of Lost Time*, Part One

The Suggested Readings for this lecture are Marcel Proust's *The Guermantes Way: In Search of Lost Time*, vol. 3, translated by Mark Treharne, and *Sodom and Gomorrah: In Search of Lost Time*, vol. 4, translated by Mark Treharne.

Proust's opening description of falling asleep signals his interest in the mysteries of consciousness. The young narrator is fascinated that his sleeping and waking selves seem entirely disconnected. Try as he might, he misses the moment when he passes from one state to another. The narrator is also unable to remember much of the past while awake, yet he revisits it effortlessly in dreams. Finally, the narrator becomes the very subject matter of the book he had been reading before falling asleep, an experience that allows him to live art, rather than view it as though a spectator from the outside.

The rest of the novel will document the narrator's search for ways to re-encounter these experiences in waking life, and his impressions, also called involuntary memories, prove key. These involuntary memories will be triggered by sensory experiences that bypass the narrator's usual, rational conception of the world. The first involuntary memory—the *petite madeleine*, will bring the narrator's past back with a vitality he had not thought possible. It will also show that his past and present self are intimately connected. Another involuntary memory—a vision of the trees near Balbec, will give him the sensation that he has found himself in

"Art Nouveau Interior, 1900"
by Georges de Feure (1868–1943)

De Feure created this illustration for Marcel Proust's novel *A La recherche du temps perdu* (*In Search of Lost Time*).

a work of art, only this time it is in his own waking life and the art is the real world around him.

Before the *madeleine* helps the narrator to remember Combray, however, he remembers only isolated moments as though they were black-and-white photographs. An important exception to the rule is a traumatic event that remains seared in his memory. It is the famous *drame de coucher*, or bedtime drama, during which the narrator foregoes his mother's bedtime kiss because she is busy entertaining company.

The company is Charles Swann, and the first volume of the novel will follow Swann's story as he falls in love with the courtesan Odette. This is odd because the narrator could not possibly know Swann's story firsthand. Yet there is a reason that the narrator starts with Swann's story—it serves as a template for his own life to come, albeit with minor variations. Swann falls in love with a woman that is not his type out of jealousy. While he had been successful in aristocratic circles, this love affair distances Swann from the world he had frequented. The narrator's path will follow a similar trajectory, only his ending will be different.

If the narrator hopes to repeat Swann's story with a difference, it is because Swann never achieves his potential as a writer. A lover of great art, Swann, much like Flaubert's Emma, can only recognize beauty when it resembles works of art. As a young boy, the narrator also expects real life to imitate art. But he quickly learns that looking for art's beauty in the real world is a flawed method. His grandmother, a Romantic at heart, provides him with artistic representations of sites that, when he encounters them through travel, hold little of the mystery art had lent them. His friendship with the painter Elstir will change the way he views art, however, for Elstir's paintings bypass rational conceptions of the world and reveal hidden connections between seemingly separated entities.

Proust's own artistic project will go one further. One of the best metaphors for Proust's modern aesthetic is the magic lantern that so fascinated the narrator as a young boy. As it projects images of a story onto the walls of the narrator's room, it transforms the familiar into the magical. This art is not Romantic—it is not about travel to exotic places or the discovery of the magical in the unusual or extreme. Instead, it reveals enchantment in the seemingly mundane and familiar.

The narrator often initially misses this beauty in his daily life thanks to the work of habit. Habit, for Proust, has both positive and negative aspects. On the one hand, it covers over change, making the narrator unaware of time passing and allowing him to live in the present without grieving over a past that has largely disappeared. On the other hand, it makes him miss things and is therefore responsible for the moments that pass unnoticed while his mind is occupied elsewhere. For this reason, art has an important role. It defamiliarizes the world, showing us what habit might make us overlook or miss. This defamiliarization, while destabilizing, is also part of the reenchantment process.

The search for lost time is also the search for this seemingly wasted time, another connotation of the French expression *temps perdu*. Involuntary memories will show that time was not truly wasted, however, since these lost moments will reveal their beauty and significance later in time, when they are reencountered.

Proust's narrator is different from both Emma Bovary and Swann, for he looks to real-life stories around him—Swann's is just one example—to predict patterns of meaning in his own life. Swann's experiences—both social and amatory—will help the narrator make more sense of his own experiences. Ultimately, however, the narrator will distinguish himself from Swann's story by finding his own untranslated patterns. He must translate his own unique impressions into a work of art.

> At Combray, as every afternoon ended, long before the time when I should have to go up to bed, and to lie there, unsleeping, far from my mother and grandmother, my bedroom became the fixed point on which my melancholy and anxious thoughts were centred. Some one had had the happy idea of giving me, to distract me on evenings when I seemed abnormally wretched, a magic lantern, which used to be set on top of my lamp while we waited for dinner-time to come: in the manner of the master-builders and glass-painters of gothic days it substituted for the opaqueness of my walls an impalpable iridescence, super-natural phenomena of many colours, in which legends were depicted, as on a shifting and transitory window. But my sorrows were only increased, because this change of lighting destroyed, as nothing else could have done, the customary impression I had formed of my room, thanks to which the room itself, but for the torture of having to go to bed in it, had become quite endurable. For now I no longer recognised it, and I became uneasy, as though I were in a room in some hotel or furnished lodging, in a place where I had just arrived, by train, for the first time.
>
> ~Marcel Proust
> Overture, *Swann's Way*, Vol. 1, *Remembrance of Things Past*
> Trans. C.K. Scott Moncrieff

A Medaillon Lantern with polychrome decoration made in Lapierre, France, ca. 1890s, is shown with an image from a children's version of *Robinson Crusoe* on a slide from the era.

FOR GREATER UNDERSTANDING

Questions

1. Why does the novel open with a description of falling asleep?
2. What is a magic lantern, and why is it significant?
3. Why does Proust begin the novel with Swann's story?

Suggested Reading

Proust, Marcel. *The Guermantes Way: In Search of Lost Time*. Vol. 3. Trans. Mark Treharne. New York: Penguin Classics, 2005.

———. *Sodom and Gomorrah: In Search of Lost Time*. Vol. 4. Trans. Mark Treharne. New York: Penguin Classics, 2005.

Other Books of Interest

Bowie, Malcolm. *Proust Among the Stars*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1998.

Karpeles, Eric. *Paintings in Proust: A Visual Companion to* In Search of Lost Time. London: Thames & Hudson, 2008.

Shattuck, Roger. *Proust's Way: A Field Guide to* In Search of Lost Time. New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 2000.

Websites to Visit

1. The Magic Lantern Society (Ripon, North Yorkshire, UK) provides an extensive website for an in-depth exploration of "magic lanterns" as described by Proust in his writing. — http://www.magiclantern.org.uk
2. T*empsPerdu.com* is a website devoted to Marcel Proust's novel *À la recherche du temps perdu* for an audience of general readers. — http://tempsperdu.com

Lecture 10

Proust: *In Search of Lost Time*, Part Two

The Suggested Reading for this lecture is Marcel Proust's *The Captive*, *The Fugitive*, and *Time Regained*, edited by D.J. Enright, translated by Terence Kilmartin and C.K. Scott Moncrieff.

In Search of Lost Time tells the story of an individual's search for truths that would hold true in spite of the immense changes wrought by time. The *petite madeleine* allows the narrator to connect with an earlier self that he had feared lost forever. For the most part, however, Proust's world is one of constant and irrevocable change.

Most people, places, and things change over time, and the narrator worries that there is little that withstands time's transformative powers. Even seemingly fixed elements like the identity of the Guermantes family is subject to time's work. By the end of the novel, Madame Verdurin, the bourgeois hostess of a middling salon, has remarried and become a Guermantes. The narrator's goal is to find some truth in spite of this radical change.

Temporal flux, like so many other essential elements in the novel, is both a blessing and curse. The curse lies in the total disappearance of so much that is good and beautiful in the world. The blessing, however, is the disappearance of much that is uncomfortable or painful. The narrator can start out as a stalker

"She sent out for one of those short, plump little cakes called *petites madeleines*, which look as though they had been moulded in the fluted scallop of a pilgrim's shell. And soon, mechanically, weary after a dull day with the prospect of a depressing morrow, I raised to my lips a spoonful of the tea in which I had soaked a morsel of the cake. No sooner had the warm liquid, and the crumbs with it, touched my palate than a shudder ran through my whole body, and I stopped, intent upon the extraordinary changes that were taking place . . . at once the vicissitudes of life had become indifferent to me, its disasters innocuous, its brevity illusory. . . ."

~Marcel Proust
Swann's Way, Vol. 1,
Remembrance of Things Past
Trans. C.K. Scott Moncrieff

Tea and *petite madeleine*.

of the Duchesse de Guermantes, but the passage of time allows him to become a frequenter of her salon and an intimate friend. The narrator may find Albertine's departure painful, but he finds consolation in the knowledge that time will allow him to forget her.

Many truths that the mind may acknowledge take time to be understood emotionally. The narrator only truly understands his grandmother's death years afterwards, when a sensory memory brings back to him a past self for whom she was alive. Mourning is neither continuous nor continual, and yet the world would be far more painful if it were. Instead, forgetting allows the narrator to adapt to a changed world. We see this adaptive forgetting set in quickly for Swann senior, who, in spite of his overwhelming love, suddenly forgets his wife's death.

The downside of this forgetfulness is that the narrator cannot be faithful to himself, as he gradually forgets previous selves and loves. This infidelity makes love a fraught enterprise and renders jealousy inevitable. If one cannot be faithful to one's earlier selves, how can one be faithful to another? True possession of a loved one is also impossible. Although the narrator tries to capture his beloved Albertine by confining her to his apartment, he still cannot know her past infidelities. His jealousy is fueled by his imagination, which replaces gaps in his knowledge with countless fictions that may or may not be true.

Imagination, then, is also double. On the one hand, the narrator realizes that his love for women is often a product of an imaginative projection that imbues them with beauty. But imagination has another side, for fueled by jealousy, it can churn out fictions that transform this beauty into ugliness.

If time means that eternal truths about the self and others do not always hold, it also means that understanding must take place over time. Many gestures that are quite baffling become comprehensible over time. Gilberte Swann's initial gesture makes little sense until her explanation years later. The Baron de Charlus's actions are similarly inexplicable until the narrator learns of Charlus's passion for young men. These social cues beg translation and prepare the narrator to translate the world into a work of art.

The narrator must learn to translate signs, but often those making these signs are ignorant of their meaning. The family friend Legrandin, for example, protests that he hates snobs. But his overzealous bow reveals a snobbery of which he himself is unaware. His mind refuses to know, but his body betrays him. For this reason, Proust writes, we can only come to know ourselves through knowing others and seeing elements of our own character reflected in them.

Because we often betray truths about ourselves of which we are unaware, intimate talk with friends is a waste of time. The narrator realizes that although he cares deeply for his friend Saint-Loup, he learns more about him from his actions than from conversation. Charles Swann's friendship with the

Duchesse of Guermantes also exhibits the difficulty of true communication. The Guermantes are at a loss for words when he tells them he is dying. The narrator's conclusion will be that true communication can only take place through reading, and this is why the narrator finally comes to see his vocation as that of the writer.

After a long absence from the world of the salons, the narrator returns in the final volume of *Time Regained*. In this last episode, he re-finds time in two distinct ways. The first is the repetition of experiences like the *madeleine*, when he is suddenly made aware of time made *invisible*. In these brief moments, past and present reveal deep correspondences that affirm a continuity of self in spite of time's flow. The second vision, however, is of time made *visible*. Gazing on the faces of those he barely recognizes, he is able to imagine the time that has elapsed since he last saw them. Both experiences suggest to the narrator a new modern beauty that has yet to be translated, and the novel ends with the conclusion that he is finally ready to write his masterpiece.

Marcel Proust at Évian-les-bains, Hôtel Splendide, on Lac Lémans, 1905.

FOR GREATER UNDERSTANDING

Questions

1. Why is time so important in the novel?
2. Why is it difficult to know oneself?
3. Why are love and friendship so flawed?

Suggested Reading

Proust, Marcel. *The Captive, The Fugitive*, and *Time Regained*. Ed. D.J. Enright. Trans. Terence Kilmartin and C.K. Scott Moncrieff. New York: Modern Library, 2003.

Other Books of Interest

Tadié, Jean-Yves. *Marcel Proust: A Life*. Trans. Euan Cameron. New York: Viking, 2000.

Websites to Visit

1. The *Reading Proust* website by Dan Ford provides extensive commentary on the new translations of *In Search of Lost Time* published by Penguin. Also included are lengthy articles on critics, alternative media sources of Proust's works, and other interesting facts about Proust. — http://www.readingproust.com
2. A downloadable PDF in English entitled "Marcel Proust and Paul Sollier: The Involuntary Memory Connection" by J. Bogousslavsky and O. Walusinski of the Department of Neurology, Genolier Swiss Medical Network, Valmont-Genolier, Glion-sur-Montreux (Switzerland). Paul Sollier (1861–1933) was a French doctor and psychologist who treated Marcel Proust using cognitive-behavioral therapies. — http://baillement.com/lettres/sollier_involontary.pdf

Lecture 11

Camus: Life and Work

The Suggested Reading for this lecture is Albert Camus's *The Rebel: An Essay on Man in Revolt*, translated by Anthony Bower.

Albert Camus was born in Mondovi, Algeria, in 1913. When he was only eight months old, his father, an itinerant vineyard worker, left for France to fight in World War I and died of wounds sustained at the Battle of Marne. His mother, who was illiterate, moved the family to Algiers, where they lived with their grandmother in poverty.

The young Camus excelled at school and might have become a schoolteacher had he not suffered from tuberculosis. He began his writing career as a journalist, and his first investigative work revealed the injustices suffered by the local population of Kabylia. This made him one of the first French intellectuals to openly criticize the French colonial project. A youthful member of the Algerian communist party, he stayed true to his principles and left when the party stopped working for indigenous rights.

In spite of this, his position on Algeria made him very unpopular with prominent intellectuals in France. Although Camus condemned the repression of the FLN—the National Liberation Front—he was opposed to the idea of an independent Arab nation because he worried the underprivileged Europeans of Algeria would suffer. He also believed that working-class European Algerians

A street in Algiers during "barricade week," January 1960.

were not necessarily implicated in colonialist oppression. At his acceptance of the Nobel Peace Prize, he pointedly refused to condone the violence that killed innocent victims in the streets of Algiers, a position that brought him untold criticism.

© Library of Congress

Albert Camus in 1957.

Although he refused to take sides in the war in Algeria, his silence haunted him until the end of his life. After his death, critics labeled him a "good will" colonist. Only recently have Algerian writers like Assia Djébar reclaimed him as an Algerian writer and written openly about the price paid by imposing a single language and a single religion.

Camus's early writing explored the Absurd. His world is Proust's world, but stripped of habit and without the comforts of time regained and redemptive art. Man's true state, he believed, is that of an alien or stranger in an indifferent world. The Absurd is located in the clash of these two distinct realities—the human desire to explain everything rationally and a world that is irrational and inexplicable.

Although Camus was often labeled an existentialist, he took issue with existentialists in his essay *The Myth of Sisyphus* (1942). Søren Kierkegaard, he wrote, suggested the inexplicability of the world lay in our limited ability to understand God's ways. For Camus, this position deified the Absurd and justified our passive acceptance of it. Jean-Paul Sartre, he argued, also made the Absurd the end point of his philosophy by suggesting that nothingness and radical freedom were supreme values.

Camus counters what he views as Sartre's nihilism with revolt. We must never settle for the Absurd, but must struggle against it. He exalts the pagan hero, Sisyphus, who refuses to give up on earthly existence even as he is engaged in the absurd task of repeatedly rolling the rock up the hill.

The Myth of Sisyphus asks, Why not suicide? Camus's next work, *The Rebel*, asks, Why not murder? This difference marks Camus's shift from the individual to the collective. If nothing is true, as Fyodor Dostoevsky's character Karamazov notes, then everything—even murder—is permitted. But Camus argues that Karamazov's response is an individual's attempt to impose meaning on the world through crime. It is a Romantic choice, since the self is dedicated to a radical individualism even at the cost to others. Camus therefore concludes that Karamazov's rebellion is in the line of Cain, whose crime was against both God and man. Prometheus's theft of fire, he counters, is a nobler rebellion, since it affirms human values—the value of fire for human life—and rebels only against God.

Although he privileged solidarity, Camus openly criticized the collective movements of Fascism and Communism. The Fascists, he argued, responded to the meaninglessness of the world by deifying irrationality and imposing brute force. The Communists justified violence in favor of a better future. Both Totalitarianism and Communism accepted injustice for the goal of absolute justice.

At the time he was writing, however, most intellectuals in France were committed Communists, and Camus's position hastened his final rift with Sartre. Camus turned away from Communism once the existence of the gulags became known. The bloodshed of revolution was intolerable, he felt, even in the service of a better world. For Sartre, Camus's position smacked of political quietism. Sartre's philosophy emphasized the need to take action, even in the face of uncertainty. In spite of these differences, both Camus and Sartre responded to the absurdity of modern existence. While Sartre may have been the greater philosopher, Camus was the greater writer. His works have brought him a vast readership and have had an enormous impact on modern culture.

FOR GREATER UNDERSTANDING

Questions

1. What was Camus's position on Algerian independence?
2. What is the Absurd?
3. Why did Camus feel rebellion was necessary? What kind of rebellion?

Suggested Reading

Camus, Albert. *The Rebel: An Essay on Man in Revolt.* Trans. Anthony Bower. New York: Vintage, 1991.

Other Books of Interest

Camus, Albert. "The Myth of Sisyphus." *The Plague, The Fall, Exile and the Kingdom, and Selected Essays*. New York: Everyman's Library, 2004.

———. *Resistance, Rebellion, and Death: Essays*. New York: Vintage, 1995.

Djébar, Assia. *Children of the New World: A Novel of the Algerian War*. Trans. Marjolijn De Jager. New York: The Feminist Press at CUNY, 2005.

Websites of Interest

1. An article from *The Nation* magazine (March 18, 2004), entitled "Accidental Friends" by Russell Jacoby, discusses the friendship between Albert Camus and Jean-Paul Sartre and their public breakup. — http://www.thenation.com/doc/20040405/jacoby
2. *3:AM Magazine* provides an interview with Albert Camus's daughter Catherine, from 2003, in which she discusses her father, the impact of his writing, and his legacy. — http://www.3ammagazine.com/litarchives/2003/jan/interview_catherine_camus.html

Lecture 12

Camus's *The Stranger* and *The Myth of Sisyphus*

The Suggested Readings for this lecture are Albert Camus's *Camus at* Combat*: Writing 1944–1947*, edited by Jaqueline Levi-Valensi, translated by Arthur Goldhammer, and *The Stranger*, translated by Matthew Ward.

During the war, Camus wrote for the resistance journal *Combat*. Following liberation, he quickly distanced himself from the call to execute traitors by writing against execution in the same journal. The title of the series of essays, *Neither Victims Nor Executioners*, is a nod to Balzac's Mme. de Beauséant, who insisted one must be one or the other. Camus outlines the possibility of a third way. While he felt that violence was inevitable, he also felt it was unjustifiable and that its use should be recognized as such.

Camus's stance against the death penalty was already present in his first literary work, *The Stranger* (1942), also sometimes translated as *The Outsider*. Camus did not call any of his works novels, preferring to call them long short stories or tales. His first tale asks how one can move beyond the Absurd, a question he also addressed in *The Myth of Sisyphus*.

The Stranger is clearly indebted to Victor Hugo's *Last Day of a Condemned Man*, a passionate plea against the death penalty. In Camus's tale, Meursault is not condemned for killing an Arab—indeed, readers of the day would have recognized how unlikely the trial of a European Algerian would have been. Instead, Meursault is condemned for not displaying the appropriate grief at his mother's death—for not crying at her funeral.

The novel opens with an extremely spare style that one critic has termed the degree zero of writing. Meursault, notified of his mother's death, acknowledges the event without comment or emotional display. This silence marks his refusal to engage in false descriptions or explanations. Camus

A depiction of M. Meursault from the cover of the paperback edition of *The Stranger* published in France, 1962.

also resists explaining Meursault. Readers are left looking at events from the outside. We are tempted as readers to put Meursault on trial, but we would be wrong to do so, for Camus indicts the tendency to infer motives and character without sufficient evidence.

Meursault is a *petit colon*, a working-class Algerian of European descent. He is also an everyman who refuses to follow the rules of bourgeois decorum. When asked if he loved his mother, he notes that anyone who said he didn't sometimes wish the death of a loved one was lying. Often, Meursault seems not to understand his actions—why he returned to the site of the original brawl, for example, or why he pulled the trigger. All he can acknowledge is the physical, almost instinctual response to the sun pressing down on him and glancing off the Arab's knife.

While those around him implore him to explain his actions, he refuses to say what is not true. When the magistrate begs Meursault to express repentance and affirm a belief in God, he again refuses. His truth-telling is deeply disturbing for those around him, for it challenges others to confront their own hypocrisy. Others may explain away the Absurd with facile psychologizing. Meursault, confronted with a meaningless world, mirrors the world's indifference.

Still, to understand Meursault merely as a truth teller would be inadequate, for he can also be indifferent to truth. His indifference shows that he has not moved beyond the Absurd by finding meaning in life. As he reflects back on his life while in prison, however, he begins to make sense of things. He recognizes that human connection and physical pleasure both give value to the world, and he longs to hold Marie and to return to the beach. He doesn't want to kill himself, but instead wants only to live again. This love of the world is what gives value and meaning to his life.

Although his literature was philosophical in nature, Camus always prized the complexity of life and literature over the abstraction of philosophy. For Camus, art's function was to help us move beyond the Absurd. It therefore addressed a deep metaphysical need by engaging in mythmaking, a willful creation of human values in an age of unbelief.

The Stranger has often been credited with introducing the Algerian school to a larger public. The story represents a new mode of being in the world, one in which sand, sex, and the physical pleasures of the body are given primary value. Meursault's absence of ambition and his desire to get through the week for the pleasures of the weekend informed the 60s beach culture in America. The tale also popularized the idea that outsiders to the bourgeois lifestyle speak the truth to society's hypocrisy.

The most disturbing aspect of the work may be Camus's representation of Arabs as anonymous and silent. At best one can say that his literature represents how difficult it would have been to create an Algerian multiethnic society based on communication and mutual understanding.

FOR GREATER UNDERSTANDING

Questions

1. How does Meursault change over the course of the story?
2. Why are his words and actions threatening to others?
3. What meaning does Meursault find in the world?

Suggested Reading

Camus, Albert. *Camus at* Combat*: Writing 1944–1947*. Ed. Jaqueline Levi-Valensi. Trans. Arthur Goldhammer. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007.

———. *The Stranger*. Trans. Matthew Ward. New York: Vintage, 1989.

Other Books of Interest

Hugo, Victor. *Last Day of a Condemned Man*. Trans. Christopher Moncrieff. Richmond, Surrey, UK: Oneworld Classics, 2009.

Thody, Philip. *Albert Camus*. London: Macmillan, 1989.

Websites of Interest

1. Nobel Prize website entry about Albert Camus and his Nobel Prize for Literature in 1957. — http://nobelprize.org/nobel_prizes/literature/laureates/1957/camus-bio.html
2. Swarthmore College's *Albert Camus Critical Interpretation* website provides critical and general essays on the life and works of Albert Camus. — http://www.sccs.swarthmore.edu/users/00/pwillen1/lit/indexa.htm

Lecture 13

Camus's *The Plague*, *The Fall*, and *The First Man*

The Suggested Readings for this lecture are Albert Camus's *The Plague, The Fall, Exile and the Kingdom and Selected Essays* and *The First Man*.

Camus's *The Plague* signals his shift from a focus on the individual to a concern with community. The story is set in the Algerian town of Oran and narrates the various human reactions to the plague and a quarantine that limits the town's communications with the outside world.

The tale is loosely autobiographical, reflecting Camus's own experience of being trapped in France after the outbreak of World War II. The plague (*peste*) is also a loose allegory of the Nazi occupation—the Nazis were commonly referred to as the brown plague (*la peste brune*) in France. Camus's allegory is translated onto the metaphysical level, however, since the plague is inhuman. Critics found fault with it for this reason, but Camus believed the struggle against evil was a continual fight against abstraction in the name of all that is human and particular.

It is not by accident that the protagonist of the novel, Rieux, is a doctor. He struggles daily to alleviate physical human suffering. Other characters represent other possible responses. Rambert, the journalist, spends most of his time trying to escape to rejoin his lover. Near the end, however, he questions whether it is acceptable to desire happiness while others suffer. Here we see Camus's representation of individual happiness as inseparable from the happiness of others.

In a talk given to Catholics, Camus admitted that he was like their Saint Augustine before the conversion. He was debating the problem of evil but not getting past it. This is also the crux of Rieux's disagreement with Paneloux, the local priest. Paneloux sees the plague as a punishment for sin. Rieux insists that children who are suffering cannot possibly have sinned—they must be innocent, and their deaths are therefore inexplicable. Paneloux accepts what he cannot understand, while Rieux cannot. Still, Rieux questions the priest's faith, since the priest must not fully accept suffering if he struggles to alleviate it. This communal struggle also reflects Camus's own experience working alongside priests during the Resistance.

The most disturbing character is Cottard, for whom the plague brings personal advantages. Here Camus is unequivocal—one must struggle against the suffering of others even if it benefits one's own well-being. Joseph Grand, the writer in the novel, provides some insight into Camus's ideas about literature.

Grand has spent years struggling to create the perfect sentence—a struggle that evokes Flaubert's belief in an art so beautiful that fame could rest on a single sentence. Grand's other writing project is the daily documentation of deaths. Camus suggests that this writing as testimony and documentation is more noble than any perfectly crafted art for art's sake.

The Plague was a huge popular success. Critics, however, complained that it didn't provide a solution for fighting Nazism. They also complained that Rambert, who arrived in Oran to document the conditions of the Arab population, abandons his goal, and there are no Arab characters in the story. While it is true that Oran was very Europeanized, Camus's evocation of a humanism based on documentation and witnessing is made problematic by the omission.

Camus indirectly responds to many of his critics in his most autobiographical work, *La chute* or *The Fall* (1956). Although it was never as popular as *The Plague*, many critics believe it to be his best work. The tale narrates the realization of the protagonist, Clamence, as he comes to understand how self-centered his virtue is. None of his great humanitarian work had required him to choose between the lesser of two evils. He is also haunted by a moment when he failed to act. This failure evokes Camus's own guilt over his wife, Francine, during her struggle with depression. Again, Camus raises the question of whether it is acceptable to be happy when those around one suffer.

Clamence's confessions—perhaps not unlike those of real-life predecessors like Rousseau's—are not aimed at forgiveness but are instead self-aggrandizing. Clamence's pride in self-awareness only increases his sense of superiority over others. The language of the story is anything but spare. Instead, the verbal proliferation of Clamence's justifications and explanations are mirrored on the stylistic level of the tale.

In 1957, Camus published short stories under the title *Exile and the Kingdom*. These stories depict interaction between European and Arab Algerians in more complex terms than his earlier work. One of the most beautiful stories, "The Host," replicates this complexity in its title. The story centers on a European schoolteacher who must house an Arab accused of murder. But who is the host and who the guest in colonial Algeria? The two experience brief moments of communion, but the story ends in misunderstanding.

In 1960, Camus died in a car crash. At the time of his death, he was working on *The First Man*, which was published posthumously. The novel documents the lives of those Camus believed to be forgotten—the poor and working class Algerians of European descent who would soon be displaced by the Algerian war for independence.

FOR GREATER UNDERSTANDING

Questions

1. What are some of the responses to the plague, and which are closest to Camus's rebellion?
2. How might Clamence's neutrality and inaction reflect Camus's unease with his own political positions?
3. Does literature's role change in Camus's later works?

Suggested Reading

Camus, Albert. *The First Man*. Trans. David Hapgood. New York: Vintage, 1996.

———. *The Plague, The Fall, Exile and the Kingdom, and Selected Essays*. New York: Everyman's Library, 2004.

Other Books of Interest

Hughes, Edward J., ed. *The Cambridge Companion to Camus*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007.

Todd, Olivier. *Albert Camus: A Life*. Trans. Benjamin Ivry. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1997.

Websites of Interest

1. The *Albert Camus Society of the UK* website provides resources on Albert Camus, his life and work, and critical reaction to his philosophy. — http://www.camus-society.com
2. An audio interview about Albert Camus with Professor Jean-Marie Apostolidès (who served as chair of the Department of French and Italian at Stanford and as executive editor of the *Stanford French Review* and the *Stanford Literature Review*) on the Stanford University show "Entitled Opinions," recorded in December 2005. — http://www.stanford.edu/dept/fren-ital/opinions/apostolides.html

Lecture 14

Legacy and Questions Raised

The Suggested Reading for this lecture is Assia Djébar's *Children of the New War: A Novel of the Algerian War*, translated by Marjolijn de Jager.

The impact of these four giants of French literature on the evolution of the modern novel is enormous. Balzac's beautiful plots of tightly constructed cause and effect and his intricate descriptions still shape our expectations for the novel today. Flaubert, the writer's writer, has taught novelists how to show, not tell, and how to get inside a character's head while maintaining a critical distance. He has also made it noble to write about the ugly and the banal. Proust has done more than any other writer to return the novel to its origins as a creative mode of life-writing. Camus influenced a generation of writers in the sixties that pitted an individual's honesty against a hypocritical and less-than-truthful society.

These writers have also profoundly affected the evolution of literature written in French. Balzac's proto-detective novels have influenced the Belgian novelist, Georges Simenon. Flaubert's stress on a literature of impersonality inspired a group of novelists committed to *le nouveau roman*. The new novel abandons the causal relationships of more traditional plots while avoiding any psychological interiority that would explain human motivations too simply. Proust's influence is most clearly visible in the Nobel Laureate Claude Simon, whose investigations of time are at the core of his literary project. Camus, long pilloried in France, has been reappropriated by female Algerian writers, such as Assia Djébar, who caution against violence, especially when justified by some ideal end in the future. Camus's late work, *The Fall*, has also inspired critics whose work has been labeled anti-humanist because they argue that the concern for others is nothing but disguised egotism and paternalism.

This legacy of anti-humanism reminds us of the contemporary controversy surrounding great Western writers. Many critics have argued that authors like these are not worth reading since they no longer reflect the truths of our more global and multicultural world. Conservatives have responded by arguing that a shared canon gives us a common language and edifies the soul.

Implicit in these lectures is a third possibility. These authors present different world views that still influence the way many of us view our own. Balzac's is a world in which mysterious forces are at work. Proust's is one in which life is at times as rich and as beautiful as a work of art. Flaubert's is a world that in no way replicates the beauty of art. Camus's is opaque or indifferent and fails to respond to our desire for meaning. Which of these writers you prefer may depend on which world view is closest to your own.

They have also influenced many of our beliefs about the role of literature. Storytelling serves primarily to entertain for Balzac, whereas its beauty is an escape from the tedium of modern bourgeois life for Flaubert. For Proust, art shows us philosophical truths grounded in a concrete world always in flux. For Camus, it serves as testimony, documenting a lived experience that complicates any abstractions or ideals.

These four giants of French literature ask questions about what it means to be human that still demand reflection. Balzac asks what it means to live in a world in which money and consumption shape all goals and value. He suggests that in such a world our passions and interests will always bring us into conflict with others. While he implies that we must sacrifice our ideals for success, he also maintains that illusions are important to happiness.

Flaubert alerts us to the possibility that art can make us unsatisfied with our own lives, because our lives fail to mirror art's novelty and beauty. He also suggests that most lives derail rather than follow the tight trajectory of a novel's plot. Finally, he reminds us that a knowledge of others' lives can actually serve to make us less happy with our own. Can we be happy with the tedium and repetition of most of daily life if we lack the bovine complacency of Charles Bovary?

Proust answers in the affirmative, finding beauty in the mundane. Although his novel is often thought of as navel-gazing, he makes the argument that introspection is not the best method for self-understanding. Finally, he calls on us to consider the distressing possibility that love and friendship are illusory and imperfect pleasures.

For Camus, friendship and love, along with the physical pleasures of the sand and sea, are all there is. And yet, are they sufficient to give life value? And is it okay to be happy while others suffer? Can we really be neither victim nor executioner?

When we read a novel or see a film about the temptation to define ourselves through things and to achieve success at the risk of our ideals, we have not strayed far from Balzac's first articulation of a new world dominated by economics and absent of firm moral foundations. When we read about bored suburban housewives waiting for something—anything—to change their world of tedium and repetition, it is hard not to view their predicament through the lens of Emma Bovary. Proust has taught us to be attuned to moments when an indifferent world suddenly becomes full of clarity and meaning. And Camus's contribution to the debate on torture and terrorist violence still resonates today.

FOR GREATER UNDERSTANDING

Questions

1. How do these writers influence the evolution of the novel?
2. What are their different views on art?
3. What are some of the larger existential questions they raise?

Suggested Reading

Djébar, Assia. *Children of the New War: A Novel of the Algerian War*. Trans. Marjolijn De Jager. New York: The Feminist Press at CUNY, 2005.

Other Books of Interest

Professor Note: Many of Georges Simenon's books featuring Inspector Maigret have been published by Penguin. A sample from the series appears below.

Simenon, Georges. *Lock 14*. Inspector Maigret Mysteries. New York: Penguin, 2007.

———. *Maigret and the Man on the Boulevard*. Inspector Maigret Mysteries. New York: Penguin, 2007.

———. *My Friend Maigret*. Inspector Maigret Mysteries. New York: Penguin, 2007.

Simon, Claude. *The Flanders Road*. Trans. Richard Howard. New York: Riverrun Press, 1985.

Films of Interest

Last Year at Marienbad. Directed by Alain Resnais. Screenplay by Alain Robbe-Grillet. Criterion Collection, 1961.

COURSE MATERIALS

Suggested Readings:

Balzac, Honoré de. *The Chouans*. Trans. Marion Ayton Crawford. New York: Penguin, 1972.

———. *Cousin Bette*. Trans. James Waring. Scotts Valley, CA: IAP, 2009.

———. *Eugénie Grandet*. Trans. Sylvia Raphael. New York: Oxford University Press, USA, 2003.

———. *Lost Illusions*. Trans. Richard Howard. New York: Random House, 1997.

———. *Père Goriot*. Trans. Burton Raffel. New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1994.

———. *The Wild Ass's Skin*. Trans. Herbert J. Hunt. New York: Penguin, 1977.

Brown, Frederick. *Flaubert: A Biography*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007.

Camus, Albert. *Camus at* Combat: *Writing 1944–1947*. Ed. Jaqueline Levi-Valensi. Trans. Arthur Goldhammer. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007.

———. *The Plague, The Fall, Exile and the Kingdom, and Selected Essays*. New York: Everyman's Library, 2004.

———. *The Rebel: An Essay on Man in Revolt*. Trans. Anthony Bower. New York: Vintage, 1991.

———. *The Stranger*. Trans. Matthew Ward. New York: Vintage, 1989.

Djébar, Assia. *Children of the New War: A Novel of the Algerian War*. Trans. Marjolijn De Jager. New York: The Feminist Press at CUNY, 2005.

Flaubert, Gustave. *Madame Bovary*. Trans. Lowell Bair. New York: Bantam, 1982.

———. *Sentimental Education*. Trans. Robert Baldick. New York: Penguin, 1964.

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