

Nineteenth-Century Paris Underworlds

Course Description

This course will take as its focus the urban underworld of nineteenth-century Paris, in both the literal and figurative meanings of “under world.” Divided into three units—crime, prostitution, and public works—this class will explore literary and sociological representations of nineteenth-century France’s urban underbelly. Using a literary and cultural studies approach to the topic, we will examine canonical and popular works of fiction alongside nineteenth-century social studies, as well as visual representations of the underground. In the first unit, we will read Balzac’s 1833 novel *Ferragus, chef des Dévorants*, the first of his trilogy dedicated to the underground crime ring *Les Treize*, as well as excerpts from Eugène Sue’s wildly popular serial novel *Les Mystères de Paris*; we will couple this with contemporary sociological studies on criminality, prison reform, and the study of physiognomy. In the second unit, we will read literary accounts of nineteenth-century prostitution—Alexandre Dumas fils’s bestselling *La Dame aux Camélias*, excerpts from Zola’s *Nana* (1880), selections from Baudelaire’s *Fleurs du mal*, and Colette’s *Chéri*—as well as Parent du Châtelet’s contemporary study *De la prostitution dans la ville de Paris*. We will also take into account the regulation of prostitution under and after Napoléon, concepts like the *maison de tolerance*, the *maison close*, and the “demi-monde,” and visual representations of prostitution (Manet, Toulouse-Lautrec, Degas). Finally, in the third unit, we will explore the development of the physical space beneath the city of Paris throughout the nineteenth century: the Catacombs, the sewers, the Metro. We will read literary representations of these underground spaces, including Victor Hugo’s iconic passage on the *égouts* in *Les Misérables* and excerpts from the bestselling 1854 thriller *Les Catacombes de Paris*, and examine sociological studies on nineteenth-century hygiene, the physical plans of these areas, and political debates surrounding their construction. In short, through both literary and non-literary sources, we will learn how the public works projects below Paris shaped the city and its inhabitants above. On occasion these primary readings will be supplemented with twentieth- and twenty-first-century historical and literary criticism on relevant topics.

Learning Goals

This is a discussion-based, writing-intensive course that will focus on the development of critical thinking and advanced oral and written proficiency.

Learning Outcomes

By the end of the course, students will

- have learned to integrate literary, cultural, and sociological approaches to their study of a body of written and visual texts (novels, photographs, essays, social studies, and contemporary criticism)
- have produced analytical and critical essays that demonstrate their advanced linguistic proficiency in academic writing in French through the competent use of textual construction, complex sentence building, stylistic and rhetorical strategies
- have achieved a nuanced understanding of the literature, visual culture, and history of nineteenth-century France

Required Texts / Materials

Primary Texts:

Literary works:

Balzac, Honoré de. *Ferragus*
Baudelaire, Charles. *Les Fleurs du Mal* (selected poems)
Berthet, Élie. *Les Catacombes de Paris*
Colette. *Chéri*
Dumas fils, Alexandre. *La Dame aux camélias*.
Hugo, Victor. *Les Misérables* (excerpts)
Sue, Eugène. *Les Mystères de Paris* (excerpts)

Enquêtes sociales:

Chevalier, Louis. *Classes Laborieuses et Classes Dangereuses à Paris pendant la première moitié du XIXe siècle* (excerpts)
Gastinel, Adrien. *Études d'hygiène urbaine* (1895)
Lucas, Charles. *De la réforme des prisons ou de la théorie de l'emprisonnement* (1836-1838)
Parent-DuChatelet. *De la prostitution dans la ville de Paris* (excerpts)

Further Secondary Reading

Bernheimer, Charles. *Figures of Ill Repute*
Kalifa, Dominique. *Les Bas-fonds. Histoire d'un imaginaire*.
Katsaros, Laure. *Un nouveau monde amoureux: célibataires et prostituées au XIXe siècle*.
Matlock, Jann. *Scenes of Seduction: Prostitution, Hysteria, and Reading Difference in Nineteenth-Century France*
Pike, David. *Subterranean Cities*

Class Preparation and Participation

Students are expected to read and prepare closely the assigned readings for class analysis and discussion. There will be short assessments at the beginning of each class to confirm preparation. Additionally, students will be asked to create weekly postings to the course site before class, responding in a written or video post to specific texts or questions suggested by the instructor. Written postings should be approximately one paragraph in length (4-6 sentences double-spaced). Students are exempt from posting during the week of their oral exposé, and there are no postings during weeks where other written assignments are due. Participation grades will be assessed based on attentive listening and responsiveness to the teacher and your peers.

Writing Assignments

Students will write **three** essays of varying length. These papers will include two 3-page papers on topics assigned by the instructor, and one short “guide book” entry related to the public works projects (1-2 pages). Papers may be revised and resubmitted according to the instructions indicated below, but revisions are not mandatory. Revised versions are due **one week** after the return of the original composition. The original essay must be handed in with the revised copy so that the two versions can be compared.

Students are encouraged to consult a good grammar book, a French-English dictionary, and a French dictionary (for example, the Petit Robert). Students are also encouraged to use the French spellcheck program on Microsoft Word. Evaluation of the essays will be based on the following three elements: correctness of grammatical structure and attention to detail (spelling, accents, etc.), clarity of organization and expression, and the quality of the argument and analysis. In the final averaging, consideration may be given to students who demonstrate systematic and ongoing improvement throughout the semester.

Oral Exposé

Each student will be required to present an oral exposé on a passage from a literary or sociological text we are studying or on some aspect of nineteenth-century history or culture related to the text in question: (for example, while reading Eugène Sue, a student could choose to analyze a passage from *Les Mystères de Paris* or to present on the phenomenon of philanthropy in prisons in the early nineteenth century). Students must develop their exposés in consultation with the professor.

Final Exam

Students will have a **final exam** covering the texts, historical period, and themes studied throughout the semester. They will complete short- and long-answer essay questions and will be allowed to consult books, notes, and our course site during the exam, but not Google (or other Internet sites). I will distribute the exam 48 hours before it is due, and students will spend a two-hour period of their choosing completing the exam and will submit exams via email.

Mapping Project / Projet cartographique

Students will work in small groups to use a tool such as Google Maps to map out and annotate plot points from a novel we have read. Students will situate the streets/addresses/neighborhoods mentioned in one of the texts read up until this point in the semester on a virtual map and add context about each of these spaces. Finally, each group will write a paragraph that describes what has been ascertained about the role of this Parisian space in the chosen text.

Programme du cours

1. Introduction au cours

La criminalité parisienne

2. Balzac, *Ferragus*

3. Balzac, *Ferragus*

4. Balzac, *Ferragus*

5. Balzac, *Ferragus*

6. Eugène Sue, *Les Mystères de Paris*

7. Eugène Sue, *Les Mystères de Paris*
8. Eugène Sue, *Les Mystères de Paris*
9. « Classes Laborieuses, Classes Dangereuses » / Le système pénal

La prostitution

10. Charles Baudelaire, « Les Fleurs du Mal »

Devoir écrit #1 à rendre

11. Parent Du Chatelet, « De la prostitution »
12. « Physiologie de la Grisette »
13. Dumas fils, *La Dame aux Camélias*
14. Dumas fils, *La Dame aux Camélias*
15. Dumas fils, *La Dame aux Camélias*
16. Dumas fils, *La Dame aux Camélias*
17. Dumas fils, *La Dame aux Camélias*
18. Emile Zola, *Nana* (excerpts/overview)

Project cartographique

19. Colette, *Chéri*
20. Colette, *Chéri*
21. Colette, *Chéri*

Paris souterrain

22. Les Catacombes: Adrien Gastinel, *Études d'hygiène urbaine*

Devoir écrit #2

23. Élie Berthet, *Les Catacombes de Paris*
24. Les Egouts

25. Les Egouts: Victor Hugo, *Les Misérables*

26. Le Metro

27. Le Metro

28. Conclusions: **Guide touristique à rendre**

Examen final