

DEPARTMENT OF FRENCH AND SPANISH

FRE 902

A Lower or Upper-Level Liberal Study

GENDER AND DECADENCE IN FRENCH LITERATURE (1850-1920)

Gender revolutions are not only a 20th century phenomenon. Feminism, “correct” images of masculinity and femininity, the status of female and male homosexuality, all of these issues were hotly debated in late 19th century France, and all were depicted, in one way or another, in the literature of the period. This course is designed to introduce students to some of the major French authors of the 1850-1920 period, to explore the historical and cultural bases for the intense debates about gender we witness in society today, and to investigate the notion of decadence, that is, the late 19th century feeling that there was a connection between changing gender roles and social degeneration.

Students will read *Sarrasine*, a famous short story by Balzac dealing with androgyny, and extracts of Flaubert’s classic novel about female individuality and adultery, *Madame Bovary*. They will examine how a female author, Rachilde, reacted explosively to the stereotyping of female roles in her novel *La Marquise de Sade*. Also part of the course are some fictional excerpts by one of the greatest French novelists, Marcel Proust, author of *A la recherche du temps perdu*. His portraits of Belle-Époque women and men have become classics. The course will end with the study of some short fiction by Colette, whose Parisian heroines marked the literature of the early 20th century.

The course will be taught through lectures and class discussion, and preparation for and participation in those discussions is an important aspect of the course. As well as writing an essay analyzing works studied, students will be required to keep a reading journal, giving detailed personal impressions of texts taught in the course. Each student will also give an oral presentation.

REQUIRED TEXTS

Balzac, *Sarrasine*, *L’Hermaphrodite* de Michel Serres (Garnier-Flammarion); Flaubert, *Madame Bovary* (extraits, Classiques Bordas); Rachilde, *La Marquise de Sade* (Gallimard, Collection L’Imaginaire) 1996; Colette, short stories (to be announced by instructor); Proust (extracts, to be distributed).

DISTRIBUTION OF GRADES

Essay	20%	Participation	10%
Oral presentation	15%	Mid-term test	15%
Reading journal	10%	Final exam	30%

PREREQUISITES

FRE 031 or permission of Department.

MODIFICATIONS TO THIS OUTLINE WILL BE DISCUSSED IN CLASS PRIOR TO IMPLEMENTATION, AND A WRITTEN STATEMENT OF REVISION WILL BE PROVIDED TO STUDENTS.

ALL ASSIGNMENTS ARE DUE AS THE INSTRUCTOR SPECIFIES. AEGROTAT AND INCOMPLETE GRADES ARE AWARDED ONLY ON PETITION BY STUDENTS TO THE CHAIR OF THE DEPARTMENT OF FRENCH AND SPANISH.