French Writers: Transformations in French & Francophone Society from 1945 to the Present through the Eyes of Novelists

COURSE DETAILS

Course Designator and Number: MONT XXXX
Number of Credits: 3
Language of Instruction: English
Contact Hours: 45
Instructor: Paul Rogers, PhD

COURSE DESCRIPTION

Through the lens of literature, this course explores the changes in French society from the period of the Second World War to the present day. Beginning with the trauma of the Nazi occupation, students will look at how French literature over the years has served as a mirror on society, reflecting cultural, social, and political evolutions. Students will examine key moments in France’s history that have left a mark: the period of Nazi occupation and the conflict between collaborators and resistance fighters (as portrayed in Tatiana de Rosnay’s Sarah’s Key), France in Indochina and the underpinnings of its postcolonial legacy (Marguerite Duras’s Sea Wall), the cultural revolution of May 1968 (Annie Ernaux’s The Years), evolving family models and changing visions of the world in the 1980s (Tahar Ben Jelloun’s The Sand Child), social upheaval and exclusion from the 1990s to the present day (Edouard Louis’s Ending Eddy, Michel Houellebecq’s Platform, Mounia Meddour’s Papicha). Recent texts and film will engage with an exploration of contemporary France around issues such as francophone multiculturalism, societal unrest (the yellow-jacket movement) and the terror attacks (Marie N’Diaye’s Ladivine, Jacques’s Audiard’s Un Prophète, Ladj Ly’s Les Misérables,
Emmanuel Leconte’s *Humour à mort*—the Charlie Hebdo attacks), but also France’s continuing mission to promote literature through the *Prix Goncourt*. The course aims to provide students with tools for understanding a culture through an exploration of its creative artifacts.

**Course Objectives**

The goal of the course is to provide students with tools for analyzing literature as a cultural product or reflection of French and Francophone society from a variety of perspectives (cultural studies, sociological, historical, etc.). In their examination of these works, students will learn how to develop a critical and nuanced analytical approach that takes into account the multiplicity of contexts in which these literary works emerged. Developing an awareness of a writer’s artistic and stylistic choices will also be essential. Finally, by studying these works, students will acquire an understanding of the culture of the country and the specific community in which they are immersed.

**Methodology**

- Students will be expected to engage with readings before each class meeting and prepare regular presentations and written assignments. Deploying critical thinking skills and structured reasoning will be of paramount importance in these assignments.
- Students will be asked to read novels, excerpts of novels, and short stories outside of class in preparation for in-class discussion and analysis. Learning to examine the stylistic choices of a writer and compose structured argumentative essays will be a key component of the methodology.
- During each class session, interactive lectures will provide students with essential historical, sociological, and cultural context for studying these works.
- This course is writing intensive. It is paramount that students acquire strong writing skills to effectively analyze cultural artifacts/documents within the framework of a liberal arts curriculum. Writing is at the core of the academic experience and is the responsibility of every member of the academic community. By participating in the production and interrogation of the discourse in the field of French studies, students progress in their understanding of the discipline. Over the course of the semester, students will complete a variety of writing assignments, including: four or five 2-page reaction essays, and one 8–10 page final research/analysis paper/dossier. The instructor will provide the students with regular feedback, focusing on essay structure, grammar, and stylistics. Students must correct at least two of their assignments, taking into account the instructor's feedback on their first version, and hand in corrected versions to thereby improve their grade. The student's initial version will include commentary and suggestions for structural/analytical changes as well as indicate grammatical and stylistic errors.

**Required Readings/Materials**


**Core Works**
• *Submission.* Farrar, Strauss and Giroux, 2015.

**Supplemental Materials**
• Journal: *French Politics, Culture, and Society*
• Joseph Losey, *Mr. Klein*
• Rithy Panh, *The Sea Wall*
• Gilles Paquet-Brenner, *Sarah’s Key*
• Mounia Meddour, *Papicha*
• Jacques Audiard, *Un Prophète*
• Ladj Ly, *Les Misérables*
• Emmanuel Leconte, *Humour à mort*
• Euronews Special documentary on France's ‘gilets jaunes’ movement
# Grading

## Grading Rubric

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Letter grade</th>
<th>Score or percentage</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>93–100</td>
<td>Achievement that is outstanding relative to the level necessary to meet course requirements.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A-</td>
<td>90–92</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B+</td>
<td>87–89</td>
<td>Achievement that is significantly above the level necessary to meet course requirements.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>83–86</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B-</td>
<td>80–82</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C+</td>
<td>77–79</td>
<td>Achievement that meets the course requirements in every respect.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>73–76</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C-</td>
<td>70–72</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D+</td>
<td>67–69</td>
<td>Achievement that is worthy of credit even though it fails to meet fully the course requirements.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>60–66</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>0–59</td>
<td>Represents failure (or no credit) and signifies that the work was either (1) completed but at a level of achievement that is not worthy of credit or (2) was not completed and there was no agreement between the instructor and the student that the student would be awarded an I.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Summary of How Grades Are Weighted

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assignments</th>
<th>Percentage of grade</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Participation in class</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Essays/homework/mini-presentations/quizzes</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Final oral presentation</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Final research paper</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Overall grade</strong></td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
COURSE CONTENT

Unit 1

Course Introduction: French society, permanence, & change
- Introductory lecture—course objectives; presentation of the syllabus
- In-class, diagnostic writing assignment
- Reading: Reynolds, Siân. “How the French present is shaped by the past: the last hundred years in historical perspective.” Contemporary French Cultural Studies, Chapter 3.
- Introduction to the novel: Sarah’s Key

Unit 2

France during WWII
- The Nazi occupation of France profoundly altered French society, leaving deep wounds that can still be felt to the present day. The conflict between those who collaborated and those who resisted the occupation remains a source of conflict and tension.
- Lecture
- Novel: Tatiana de Rosnay’s Sarah’s Key and Analytical essay

Unit 3

France during & after WWII
- How does France remember the second world war and the horror of events such as the Vel d’Hiv Roundup in July 1942? This session will explore memory and different authors’ attempts to come to terms with suffering and comprehend inhumanity.
- Lecture
- Novel: Tatiana de Rosnay’s Sarah’s Key
- Discussion and film excerpts from Joseph Losey’s Mr. Klein

Unit 4

The End of the Colonies: Indochina, Algeria
- How does contemporary France remember the colonial period? Marguerite Duras’s Sea Wall depicts the contradictions and fragility of postcolonial memory. What were the socio-cultural effects of Indochina or Algeria’s independence wars on mainland France? Long considered a
taboo subject, literature and the arts have persistently led the way in seeking to come to terms with the deep wounds left over by these wars.

- Lecture
- Novel: Duras, Marguerite. *The Sea Wall* ; Analytical essay
- Analytical essay

**Unit 5**

**What happened in May 1968?**

- Political crisis, De Gaulle, and youth revolutions—from the Quartier latin to the countryside, the advent of strikes, occupations, and *assemblées générales*. Annie Ernaux’s autobiographical novel, *The Years*, takes the reader on a captivating, cinematic, journey through her formative years and provides a unique vision of the disruptive time period of late 1960s France.

- Lecture
- Novel: *The Sea Wall* and introduction to Annie Ernaux’s *The Years*

**Unit 6**

**France in the 1970-1980s**

- Economic Crisis, France’s suburbs, *La Marche pour l'égalité et contre le racisme*. The emerging question of religion in French society. Change and revolution in the home: New social constructs.

- Lecture
- Novel: Annie Ernaux’s *The Years*

- Analytical essay

**Unit 7**

**France in the 1990s**

- *Blocages* in the high schools, le Pacs (le Pacte civil de solidarité), the end of the Cold War. Societal shifts depicted in *The Years*.

- Lecture
- Novel: *The Years*
Unit 8

France in the 1990s
- Forgotten France: disenchanted youth, multiculturalism, pluriculturalism, and the French social model. Ben Jelloun's work, *The Sand Child*, explores the specific tension that can emerge at the intersection of culture, religion, and language.
- Lecture
- Novel: Tahar Ben Jelloun's *The Sand Child*
- Analytical essay

Unit 9

France in the 2000s
- This session will explore French and Francophone regional identity and aspects of the culture including minority languages and cuisine (UNESCO has recognized la *gastromonie* as a world intangible heritage). Students will learn how former French colonies such as Morocco or Algeria interface with the culture of contemporary France.
- Lecture
- Novel: Tahar Ben Jelloun's *The Sand Child*

Unit 10

France in the 2000s: Social unrest & the rise of the far right/the crisis
- Understanding France's *banlieues*: segregation, ethnicity, identity. Persistent rifts in French society. Michel Houellebecq, simultaneously lauded and excoriated, presents a disturbing and controversial vision of society in his writing- examples from *Platform* and *Submission*.
- Lecture
- Novel: Excerpts from Houellebecq's *Platform* and *Submission* and introduction to Marie N'Diaye's *La Divine: A Novel*

Unit 11

France in the 2010s: Terror & « Etats d’urgence »
- Understanding the lead-up to the terror attacks; the cultural phenomenon of *Charlie Hebdo*. Marie N'Diaye's mysterious work, *Ladivine*, adventures into the poetic spaces between identity and memory and recounts the challenges that some cultural groups face in
present-day France. Exploring the rise of Islamic fundamentalism in 1990s Francophone Algeria, Mounia Meddour's film *Papicha*, provides a unique perspective on the origins of a movement that subsequently took hold in parts of mainland France.

- **Lecture**
- **Novel**: Marie N'Diaye's *Ladivine: A Novel*
- **Film**: *Papicha*, time permitting (excerpts)

**Unit 12**

**France in the 2010s: Economic strife & insurrection**

- As France struggles to recover from 2008's Great Recession, public outcries against social inequality are growing in strength. Persistent, haunting visions of police brutality on news sites have been burned into the French collective consciousness. N'Diaye's *Ladivine* provides an insistent voice for the forgotten while Ladj Ly's recent film (2019) *Les Misérables*, seeks to depict the tensions between police and inhabitants of the *banlieues*. Parallels and divergences with the current social strife and the “yellow jackets” movement will be explored.
- **Novel**: Marie N'Diaye's *Ladivine: A Novel*
- **Euronews documentary** on the Gilets Jaunes from December 17, 2018.
- **Film**: *Les Misérables*; excerpts and discussion

**Unit 13**

**France in the 2010s: Hope & future prospects**

- Where does France stand in the 2020s? What can literature teach us about the current social climate?
- **Lecture**
- **Oral presentations and discussion**
- **Course conclusion**
POLICIES

Attendance Policy

Students are expected to be on time and attend all classes while abroad. Many instructors assess both attendance and participation when assigning a final course grade. Attendance alone does not guarantee a positive participation grade; the student should be prepared for class and engage in class discussion. See the on-site syllabus for specific class requirements.

University of Minnesota Policies & Procedures

Academic integrity is essential to a positive teaching and learning environment. All students enrolled in University courses are expected to complete coursework responsibilities with fairness and honesty. Failure to do so by seeking unfair advantage over others or misrepresenting someone else's work as your own can result in disciplinary action. The University Student Conduct Code defines scholastic dishonesty as follows:

Scholastic Dishonesty

Scholastic dishonesty means plagiarizing; cheating on assignments or examinations; engaging in unauthorized collaboration on academic work; taking, acquiring, or using test materials without faculty permission; submitting false or incomplete records of academic achievement; acting alone or in cooperation with another to falsify records or to obtain dishonestly grades, honors, awards, or professional endorsement; altering forging, or misusing a University academic record; or fabricating or falsifying data, research procedures, or data analysis.

Within this course, a student responsible for scholastic dishonesty can be assigned a penalty up to and including an “F” or “N” for the course. If you have any questions regarding the expectations for a specific assignment or exam, ask.

Student Conduct

The University of Minnesota has specific policies concerning student conduct. This information can be found on the Learning Abroad Center website.