

William Mitchell

2811 NE 65th St.
Seattle, WA 98115
206-390-2751
wcmitch@u.washington.edu
www.wc-mitchell.com

Sous les pavés: Paris

Qui regarde au fond de Paris a le vertige.—Victor Hugo

France underwent profound political and social transformations in the nineteenth century, transitioning from a society of orders to a society of citizens, from Republic to Empire and back again, and experiencing the shocks of both revolution and war. At the heart of it all was Paris. But the capital itself was also in a period of rapid change as the demography of an urbanizing nation put new pressures on the already strained infrastructure and social cohesion of the city. In many ways the story of nineteenth century France lies within the story of Paris. The same anxieties and hopes that were current in the provinces were amplified and distilled in the public and private spaces of Paris. The same problems that required the massive reconstruction of the capital under Baron von Haussmann also demanded a rethinking of French society in general.

This course will examine the evolution of Paris from the late eighteenth century until the inauguration of Garnier's opera house in 1875 and will use the city as a key to understanding the troubled and yet exciting passage of France into modernity. We will examine the modern incarnation of the city haunted by the lingering memories of its past. We will read texts from a variety of important figures – Balzac, Hugo, Baudelaire, and Zola – as our guide to the city. From describing new spheres of social interaction to plumbing the depths of the city's less fortunate, from reinventing a life in the anonymity of the bustling masses to detailing the rise of novel forms of commercial culture, our readings expose and meditate upon the central issues confronting France and its population during the period. Treating topics as diverse as salon culture, criminality, urbanization, patterns of consumption, poverty, redemption, decay in the face of progress, gender issues, and many others, these texts offer a sweeping reflection of a city and an age that witnessed two empires, two republics and two revolutions.

This is an interdisciplinary course, and students will be asked to bridge their study of literary texts with a variety of materials drawn from sources outside of traditional studies of literature. Our time will be split between close readings of the text and in-depth discussions of the city of Paris and the issues it faced in the nineteenth century. For instance, what were the problems surrounding an increasingly mobile population when it came to monitoring individuals and disciplining crime? Or how did successive revolutions impact Napoleon III's plan to modernize Paris? Our look at the city will encompass readings from disciplines including history, anthropology, architecture and urban development, as well as writings from cultural critics such as Baudelaire and Walter Benjamin.

This course is intended to give students a broad perspective of several major trends that transformed France in the nineteenth century. Using Paris as the focal point of our inquiry serves two purposes. First, it grounds the more theoretical readings in a physical environment that provides a tangible structure for students; and secondly, it is intended to enhance the experience of majors in the department who will study at Middlebury Paris. Students in this course will be expected to write one page response papers to each week's readings.

In addition, students will also create a research dossier that focuses on one of the major units of the course. Working in collaboration with either myself or a faculty member of another pertinent division, students will choose a specific feature or artifact of nineteenth century Paris as a research focus—the serialization of novels, Bertillon's criminal profiles or the commercial galleries, for example. They will be tasked with creating an extensive bibliography, a brief rationale which explains their choice, a written

outline for an in-class presentation of their topic, and a paper that situates their artifact within the context of the course. This research project is designed to give individual students freedom to explore their own interests in the context of nineteenth century France. It is also intended to introduce them to a more complete body of scholarship than can be made available in a wide ranging seminar. Finally, by requiring students to examine a specific artifact and explain its significance, this project exposes students to the ways that material practices shape culture and our understanding of history.

***Sous les pavés* readings will include:**

- Balzac, *Le Cousin Pons*
- Baudelaire, *Le Spleen de Paris*
- Hugo, *Les Misérables*
- Zola, *Au Bonheur des dames*
- Alain Corbin, *Les Filles de nocces* and *Le Miasme et la jonquille*
- Philippe Perrot, *Fashioning the Bourgeoisie: A History of Clothing in the Nineteenth Century*
- Graham Robb, *The Discovery of France: A Historical Geography from the Revolution to the First World War.*
- Marx, *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Napoleon*
- Patrice Higonnet, *Paris: Capital of the World*
- Walter Benjamin, "Paris, Capital of the Nineteenth Century"
- Alan Sekula, "The Body and the Archive"