

Unit I Project

Fantasizing the Identity: Gustave Flaubert's *Madame Bovary*

Gustave Flaubert's *Madame Bovary* is extraordinary for its blend of realism and fantasy. On the one hand, Flaubert fully engages with the senses in his explorations of the physical body, natural environment, and social gatherings. On the other hand, he fully engages with the imagination—that which is not present to the human senses—in his explorations of romantic fairy tales, social and carnal desires, and vivid memories. When you write about Flaubert, pay special attention to the density of his descriptions and endeavor to extract multiple layers of meaning from single images. Keep these elements in mind and choose one of the following prompts as the foundation for your essay:

- 1) Perform a figurative reading of the novel. Identify a specific symbol or trope in which to couch your analysis. You should be as specific in your selection as Flaubert is specific in his use of figurative language. Categories from which you might make your selection include: landscape, food and drink, animals, or weather conditions. Rather than simply cataloguing representative examples, draw a strong connection between the symbolism and major themes in the novel, such as class, desire, or science.
- 2) The figure of the crowd becomes more commonplace in nineteenth-century literature. It offers a way of bringing together characters from disparate socioeconomic backgrounds and of representing Society as a material object in contrast to its imagined properties. In your essay, use the “crowd” as the starting point for your discussion on societies: material and imagined. Narrow your focus to the analysis of one scene or the comparison of one issue you see reverberating throughout several scenes of crowds. However you decide to approach your discussion of the crowd, consider: For what dramatic or critical purpose does Flaubert assemble this crowd? Who is being represented? What is Flaubert saying about human societies?
- 3) Write an essay that deconstructs the dichotomy of the Real and the Imagined. What third alternative can you create based on your reading of *Madame Bovary*? To avoid being overly abstract in your essay, ground it in concrete and specific themes from the novel, whether it be about social class, carnal desire, or education.

Evaluation & Deadlines

Generally, your work will be evaluated based on the strength, development, and organization of your ideas, the finesse of your style, the rigor of your writing process, and the quality of your revision. In addition, you may wish to refer to the general grading rubric (available on E-Learning). Please refer to the **General Writing Submission Guidelines** for detailed descriptions of where, how, and what needs to be submitted.

- Jan 31: First Draft
- Feb 7: Second Draft
- Feb 8: Peer reviews
- Feb 12: Final Revision

Unit II Project

Inventing the Society: Honoré Balzac's *Père Goriot*

(1) Morality & Ambition: In “Moral Complexity in *Le Père Goriot*: Balzac between Kant and Nietzsche,” David R. Ellison suggests that the novel is a “story about families and family relationships, in which the simplicity and solidly grounded moral foundations of the provinces contrast sharply with the fragmented social bonds and decadence of the capital.” He raises the following questions, any of which you may respond to in your essay:

- a) What is the moral status of ambition, the driving force that propels the hero along his way? Is it possible to be ambitious and also a good person, or do ambition per se and goodness constitute an insuperable contradiction in terms?
- b) Will it be possible for Rastignac, while making use of his family's scant financial resources, to retain the simple virtues of his home as he navigates the disorienting maze of Parisian corruption, greed, and power worship?
- c) In nineteenth-century Paris, is it possible to disentangle the desire for success from the snares of money (of value in the material sense of that word)? Or are values in the moral sense of the term antithetical to the constant compromises one has to make along the road to an influential position and social inclusion?

(2) Family & Society: In “Kinship, Economics, and Queer Sexuality in Balzac's *Old Goriot*,” Michael Lucey suggests that Balzac “produces a multifaceted and complex view of what family might be. His novels portray a world in which a family has no clear form, where the concept of family is itself a contested space.” He asks the reader to consider the following ideas, any of which you may analyze in your essay:

- a) Read the novel's protagonist, Eugène de Rastignac, as positioned at the charged crossing of many visions of family structure and interest and as having difficulty choosing among them.
- b) Instead of imagining Vautrin, for whatever reason, as somehow exterior to a system linking in various ways the reproduction, kinship, and the transmission of wealth across generations, imagine him as trying to shift the parameters of that same system to suit his own ends, financial and sentimental, as well as reproductive.
- c) Read in Goriot's affective volatility a critique of the contradictions internal to a family in which the affective and economic components of paternal interest in daughters dwell in such uneasy proximity.

Evaluation & Deadlines

Generally, your work will be evaluated based on the strength, development, and organization of your ideas, the finesse of your style, the rigor of your writing process, and the quality of your revision. In addition, you may wish to refer to the general grading rubric (available on E-Learning). Please refer to the **General Writing Submission Guidelines** for detailed descriptions of where, how, and what needs to be submitted.

- Mar 6: First Draft
- Mar 20: Second Draft
- Mar 21: Peer reviews
- Mar 25: Final Revision

Unit III Project

Degenerating the Body: Thomas Mann's *Death in Venice* (and others)

Essay Requirements

The final essay will represent your cumulative knowledge of the material we have read and discussed this semester. Use this opportunity to demonstrate your mastery of the ideas we have worked out this semester. Keep in mind the course title “Imagined Societies: Narratives of Social Captivity and Mobility” as you develop your conclusions.

(1) The first requirement for your final paper is that you incorporate three different texts we have read this semester. One of those texts must come from the final unit. Your goal should be to identify a common thread running through the texts; note, however, that you might have to be creative in making comparisons and contrasts that span three unique texts. Use the differences between the texts to your advantage, to make your essay more interesting.

(2) The second requirement is that your essay have a theoretical component. You may choose any of the following theoretical approaches for your final paper: existentialism, phenomenology, Marxism, psychoanalysis, reader-response, gender criticism, cultural criticism, new historicism.

(3) The final requirement is simply that your essay have a clear thematic focus. Here are some general topic areas from which to begin narrowing your subject: family dynamics, degeneration & decay, money & work, disease & desire, imagined societies, social gatherings, social mobility & captivity.

Evaluation

Generally, your work will be evaluated based on the strength, development, and organization of your ideas, the finesse of your style, the rigor of your writing process, and the quality of your revision. In addition, you may wish to refer to the general grading rubric (available on E-Learning). Note that the general grading rubric emphasizes the following four areas: **thesis, style, organization, and development.**

Deadlines

Please refer to the **General Writing Submission Guidelines** for detailed descriptions of where, how, and what needs to be submitted.

- (T) April 15: First Draft
- (T) April 22: Second Draft
- (R) Apr 24: Peer reviews
- (T) April 29: Final Revision