

English 272 (W): Culture and Literature—Paris and France in Literature

Credit Hours: 3 credits, 45 contact hours

Course Description and Appropriateness of the Course to its setting in Paris and France:

This course will focus primarily on prose fiction as both an aesthetic and a reflector of cultural values and historical events. We will also ask how its authors transform cultural events into fiction for their own purposes. The works chosen are set in Paris, wholly or in part. They include *A Tale of Two Cities* (1859) by Charles Dickens, *Les Miserables* (1862) by Victor Hugo, *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas* (1933) by Gertrude Stein, *The Sun Also Rises* (1926) & *A Moveable Feast* (1964) by Ernest Hemingway, and *The Da Vinci Code* (2003) by Dan Brown. Dickens transforms the settings and events of Paris and London during the French Revolution and Reign of Terror into a Dickensian tale of corruption, love, guilt, and redemption. Hugo transforms the historical events of the Napoleonic Wars, the Bourbon Monarchy, and the July 1830 Revolution into a melodramatic story steeped in his moral and romantic ideals of sacrifice and compassion. Stein transforms the materials of her Parisian life and friendship with Alice B. Toklas into a fictional autobiography. Hemingway spoke for a lost generation of artists who, after WWI, found in Europe fertile ground for expressing their sense of uprootedness, alienation, and amorality; in his own fiction, Hemingway would develop a code to live by to counteract the cynicism and pessimism that followed in the wake of WWI. And Dan Brown utilizes the contemporary settings of Paris and London, especially their museum culture—art, architecture, and traditional western myths to fashion both a crime thriller and an effective example of touristic literature.

These works will stimulate field trips to sites in and around Paris, and it will also stimulate research topics into the social and political conditions of 18th and 19th Century France that we find in the fiction of Dickens and Hugo; of those of the 1920s and 30s Paris and Europe of the lost generation of Stein and Hemingway, as well as of the artists and intellectuals who attached themselves to Stein and her circle. Dan Brown's work will stimulate visits to the Louvre and St. Sulpice and research into the art of Da Vinci, religious sects and beliefs of Christianity, and myths of the Holy Grail.

Texts

Handout of three short stories to cover basic narrative elements and their function

Dan Brown, *The Da Vinci Code*

Charles Dickens, *A Tale of Two Cities*

Ernest Hemingway, *The Sun Also Rises*, *A Moveable Feast*

Victor Hugo, *Les Miserables*

Gertrude Stein, *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas*

Criteria for Student Evaluation: Two Papers (40%); Mid-term Exam (20%); Final Exam (20%); Journal of Homework Assignments and Field Trips and Their Relevance to the Literature (20%).
A=91-100; B=81-90; C=71-80; D=61-70.