

## Literature Institute

# Study Guide

## LIT 515 Nineteenth Century Literature

**Instructions for the Study Guide:** Please use the questions to develop a deeper understanding of the text and to review the concepts. As you read, consider the questions. Keeping careful notes or a journal will help you prepare to write the essays at the end of each section as well as the final essay. Your required and supplemental readings can be found in the "Readings" file.

**Instructions for Essays:** Please write a 1,250 – 1,500 word essay that responds to the essay questions. Then, send your essay to your professor. You may send an outline and drafts to your instructor for feedback and guidance before you send your finished essay.

**Instructions for Final Essay:** Please write a 5,000 word essay that responds to the essay questions. Then, send your essay to your professor. You may send an outline and drafts to your instructor for feedback and guidance before you send your finished essay.

### COURSE OBJECTIVES

O1. Identify and describe the core attributes of Romanticism, and discuss examples in nineteenth century drama, poetry, and prose.

O2. Explain the emergence of such divergent aesthetics as the gothic, psychological realism, naturalism, and symbolism in the Nineteenth century and explain how each proposed a unique and innovative approach to representation.

O3. Analyze the roles of female characters in nineteenth-century prose and discuss how they reflected often contradictory attitudes about women.

O4. Describe how literature was viewed as a way to illustrate political points and form a tableau to support social change and reform.

O5. Describe the flowering of the novel, and discuss the ways in which the form addressed ideas about reality, nature, humanity, causality, and the social order.

O6. Relate the readings, themes, and ideas of nineteenth century literature to one's own contemporary life, and discuss the persistence and influence of certain basic, paradigm-shifting notions and how they maintain a place in the literary imagination, even today. Examples could be evolution, Marxism, and social science.

UNIT	WEEKS	TOPICS
I	1-3	<b>Romanticism</b> William Wordsworth (1770-1850)
	Overview	Poetry and the Self Discovered in Nature
	Introduction	What strikes you as new, when you pick up your text of Wordsworth? How does his

poetry differ from the poetry you have read: Sappho, the Near Eastern love poets, The Courtly Love poets, Petrarch, Pope? The range of these poets is vast, and no single tone joins them, but have any of them the rich sensitivity to Nature that marks Wordsworth? Do any of them philosophize in a hidden dialogue with nature? (Perhaps they do. My question is rhetorical, and up to you to deal with.) What fascinates Wordsworth about nature, after all? Is it the sense of lost innocence in us, which leads us to feel the poignant beauty of the moment in Nature? What does it mean that 'the child is father of the man'?

Question	Q1. Does such a perspective, in Wordsworth's poetry, seem to you akin to the sensibility of the Enlightenment creators who immediately preceded him? Do you get some sense of what Romanticism may mean, by contrast with the Enlightenment sensibility? Of particular interest, in this last query, is the issue of imagination. For the Romantic movement the importance of imagination is high. Can you explore this Romantic concept of imagination, and see how it bears on Wordsworth's poetry?
Question Theme: Nature	Q2. Discuss how Wordsworth's poems explore how a reference to nature expresses philosophical ideas.  Goethe (1749-1832) <i>Faust</i>
Overview	A Quest for Immortality Through Knowledge
Introduction	With the Faust legend we turn to one of the modern versions of the great mythical themes that empowered Ancient culture. Faust has long been a singular image of the modern quester for knowledge, driving ever father into the unknown, in order to satisfy his...his what? What was Marlowe's Doctor Faustus trying to satisfy? Was it his desire for power, along with knowledge? You will want to ask yourself what Goethe's Faust wants. Is it power, eternal youth, love? What drives this character, whose cultural roots are in mediaeval alchemy and magic, to press ever harder? Does Mephistopheles represent a diabolical counter force to Faust? By the way is the genre of this piece familiar to you? Is Goethe writing a play? An epic? A long novel?
Question	Q1. While you are digesting the modes of Wordsworth's and Goethe's poetries, you will want to ask yourself how <i>you</i> view the Enlightenment perspective. Is there any Faustian dimension in the Enlightenment writers and works we read? There is clearly a faith in mankind, but is it not rather a faith in 'reasonable mankind,' mankind that has taken a clear survey of itself, and well knows its limits and possibilities?
Question Theme: Quest	Q2. What is Faust seeking? Describe Faust's experiences. Which experience satisfies him most? How did the quest for knowledge become destructive? Describe an analogue in the literary world.  William Blake <i>Marriage of Heaven and Hell</i>
Overview	Lofty Visions in Tightly Crafted Language
Introduction	With Blake you move into a matured private mythology, a disciplined apostrophe to excess, a love of the spirit because of the fire of the body. In short, paradoxes and private moves, which would have appalled Franklin, Jefferson, Voltaire, roam freely in this powerful new universe. Even to cage this universe with a term like Romanticism is too academic. Or do I exaggerate, in an effort to do justice to this writer?
Question	Q1. Many questions deserve attention here. What do you think of the value of a private poetic universe, buttressed by private mythological figures? How does this kind of universe compare to the poetic/mythical universes of Homer, Hesiod, Virgil? Does Blake's poetry resemble that of Wordsworth, in any way that qualifies them as

brothers in Romanticism? What is Romanticism beginning to mean for you? Does it bear the mark of a new cultural age, which accompanied the early nineteenth century? Does that cultural age correlate closely with contemporary developments in politics, the other arts, science?

Question Theme: Free Thinking  
 Q2. In the Marriage of Heaven and Hell, Blake creates a series of oppositions and inversions that promote ways of thinking, which include liberation, breaking bonds, and a new way of releasing energy. Identify locations in the narrative that illustrate the mechanisms by which Blake engenders his arguments. Discuss the implications of the new ways of thinking and the potentially destabilizing politics embodied there.

Alexander Pushkin (1799-1837)

Overview The Man or Woman on the Street and the Grand Ruler

Introduction Pushkin occupies the place in Russian Romanticism held in Europe by the authors we have just begun reading. Can you see some kinship between Pushkin and these other writers? How do you like the genre of the present piece? Have you ever read a little narrative play like this, in verse? And what seems to you the dominant theme here? Is Yevgeni an expression of the power of the people—an important theme in much Romantic literature—or is he just the little man, caught in the fate of his nation. Is the real dynamic power here lodged in the great ruler, Peter the Great, whose statue surmounts the assaults of the flood?

Question Q1. Are you asking yourself now and then, as you work through these readings, what role literature plays in society? What role does it play in your own life? Would you and your society be deprived if literature—and perhaps the other arts—no longer existed? These questions may seem too personal, even naïve, but unless you can answer them you are not taking the fullest advantage of an exploration of world literature.

Question Themes: Man vs. Nature; Individual vs. State  
 Q2. In “The Bronze Horseman,” where and when does the vision of a leader or a dictator start to run roughshod over the individuals? Why is it that building a city may be useful to the state but may be harmful to the individual, such as a poor clerk like Yevgeni who was devastated and gone mad after 1824 flood? What kind of confrontation takes place when Yevgeni talks to the statue of Peter the Great?

**Essay** E1: Romantic art is often connected with deeply passionate, subjective work that emphasizes the role of individual perception vis-à-vis the world. Please discuss the works that corresponded with Romanticism and explain the connections between the works and the world at large.

### III 7-9 Realism

Flaubert (1821-1880)  
 A Simple Heart

Overview Reducing the Size of the Hero, Finding the True Hero

Introduction In the traditions of classical mythology, the proper subject of imaginative literature is typically a person of dignity and high birth. While this tradition does not dominate subsequent writing—see Catullus, Boccaccio, Chaucer—it is not until the 19th century, in the West, that we see a conscious effort to write fiction about ‘ordinary people’—though of course as you and I know, nobody is ordinary. In both Wordsworth’s lyrics, and Pushkin’s ‘Bronze Horseman,’ for example, you found tributes to the voice of the little person, themes which were rarely promoted with such intimacy prior to our times, prior to the last two centuries. (To what do you attribute this growing attention to the ‘man or woman on the streets, or in the corner of the city’?) In any case, Felicite speaks for the saintly element in many lives of quiet fidelity, personal observation, and love of good people and good parrots.

Question Q1. Do you know the renowned novel, *Madame Bovary*? There, of course, Flaubert brings to full detail his interest in quiet lives which are pressed to the max. Do you also notice that the movement of Realism, to which Flaubert is here in the process of giving a name, coincides with great fastidiousness in art? Do the two go together—

realism and aesthetic preoccupation?

Question Theme: Love and Loss Q2: As opposed to Romanticism, Realism uses as its subject the lives of ordinary people in ordinary circumstances. In "A Simple Heart," the life of Felicite, a servant woman, is traced. Felicite loves many people and then loses them. Discuss her condition at the beginning of the story, and how things change over time. Discuss her parrot, Lou-Lou, and what the parrot does for her, and the parrot's role. Explain the similarities between the parrot, Lou-Lou, and things you might find in a church. How does Lou-Lou's appearance at the end of the story reinforce Felicite's losses and her relationships?

Fyodor Dostoyevsky (1821-1881)  
"The Underground Man"

Overview Ruminations of a Man out of Sync with Society

Introduction In his *Notes from Underground*, Dostoyevsky goes far beyond the realism of the little person that we have mentioned in connection with Wordsworth, Pushkin, and Flaubert, all of whom were in that regard promoting the broad agenda of Romanticism. Dostoyevsky here becomes the persona of a bitter, sarcastic clerk, whose contempt for humanity informs his life. Among the cultural values he scorns is his time's longing—as embodied in the London Crystal Palace—for functional, lifelessly streamlined perfections.

Question Q1. The mere existence of such striving for social purity drives the underground man to revel further in the dysfunctional existence he himself occupies. Do you see a connection between this harsh and lastingly modern text, and the viewpoint emerging from the speech of the Grand Inquisitor in *The Brothers Karamazov*? Does the Grand Inquisitor believe in the simple people Jesus Christ has come to save, or is the Inquisitor just the cynical CEO of a vast manipulative organization? Is the Underground Man of a mindset which resembles that of the Inquisitor? Do you find these Dostoyevsky texts of interest? Have they an interface with your life as you live it?

Question Theme: Alienation Q2: Discuss the theme of alienation of "The Underground Man." Why does he never experience friendship and love? Describe his interactions with his friends and Liza. How and why, and with whom, does he fail to make connections? When and how does his mental condition take a turn for the worse? Why do you think that this novel is considered a realistic work?

Henrick Ibsen (1828-1906)  
Hedda Gabler

Overview Middle Class Marriage and its Perils

Introduction The date of this play, 1890, is 'close' to our time, and you will probably recognize a 'social consciousness' dimension here which we have seen in Mary Wollstonecraft, as well as earlier, but which in its Ibsen form strikes close our own social moment. Like many of Ibsen's plays --most clearly *The Doll's House*—this one analyzes the heart of a dysfunctional marriage, in which the spouse finds herself bored, unrecognized, ultimately tossed to the social winds, and in which the ultimate result is...ultimate. (Onstage today, in the West, would this play seem up to date, or out of style, old hat?)

Question Q1. This play of ideas raises the issue of literature as philosophy. Have we read other works that raise philosophical questions, in this case moral questions? How about the work of Cervantes, Montaigne, Moliere? Would it be correct to say that those authors raise issues that they try to solve or clarify? Or is that not what literature does, when it represents an author's thinking? By the way, just to make sure we are on the same page, what is Ibsen's attitude toward Hedda's suicide?

Question Character: Hedda Gabler Q2. Discuss the theme of unfulfilling marriages in the case of Hedda Gabler. Discuss how the characters in the play demonstrate how she feels bored, trapped, and oppressed in her marriage. Examine scenes in which she manipulates other people destructively. Explain how Mrs. Elvested is used as a kind of foil, or

counterpart. Discuss the progression of her boredom, entrapment.

**Essay**

E2. How does realistic writing differ from romantic in style, attitude towards material, vision of human possibility or limitation by society or by the nature of things? Please discuss the works that corresponded with Realism and explain the connections between the works and the world at large.

**III**

7-9

**Naturalism**

Emile Zola (1840-1902)

*Therese Raquin*

Overview

Literature and the Reduction of Human Grandeur

Introduction

Has the literary term, 'realism,' acquired some meaning for you, from the three preceding readings? Of course there is a wide difference among the works of Flaubert, Ibsen, and Dostoyevsky—especially the last—but isn't there some closeness to the texture of daily life that you have not felt before in the literature we have read, even in Boccaccio and Chaucer? If you agree with this broad generalization, you may also agree that Naturalism—if at all what Zola proclaims it to be, in the theoretical statement before us here--is a step beyond Realism,

Question

Q1. The fundamental principle of Naturalism is that human beings are ruled by their material/social circumstances: by all those factors, from the body given us to the social setting in which we are placed. This literary philosophy was underpinned in its day by the growth of thinking in the physical sciences and by the new science of Sociology. While realism strove to respect the quality of real life, the Naturalists imposed a theory on their perception of 'real life.' If you have a chance, look into a novel of Zola, like *L'Assommoir* (*The Slaughter House*.) Does this kind of text seem sharply different from the texts of Realism?

Question  
Theme:  
Naturalism

Q2: Naturalism believes that environmental and hereditary factors play a significant role in the behavior of individuals. Discuss Zola's purpose in writing "Therese Raquin." How does Zola explain his method in his preface to the novel? What are the chief principles stated? How does this resonate with social science?

Anton Chekhov (1860-1904)

*The Cherry Orchard*

Overview

Debt and Dissension Bring down a Family

Introduction

Anton Chekhov was a physician by profession, and invests in playwriting the same analytical skills required of the good physician: the ability to dissect human affairs (or bodies), then to see what makes them tick and what makes them dysfunctional. *The Cherry Orchard* typifies those skills: presenting in simple dialogue the pretensions, fears, and jealousies of a well to do family, then taking us to the ultimate breakdown of the family.

Question

Q1: Are you not struck by the simplicity with which Chekhov carries you through the Cherry Tree crisis, highlighting one character after another, and eventually introducing the first fatal axe chopping, which will signal the death of the glorious orchard—and the financial survival of the family? Does this work represent the Naturalistic perspective Zola was advocating? Does the cherry orchard itself function as a symbolic theme, or as a realistic property of the world staged in this play.

Question Idea: Loss  
Q2: How do the different characters in "The Cherry Orchard" deal with the loss? What effects do the memories and the past have on the people in the play? Compare and contrast the values and behavior of the old aristocracy vs. the new middle class. How effectively does Chekhov depict the nature of the loss of social and economic power?

**Essay**  
E3: Explore the deterministic outlook of naturalists, and discuss scenes and situations in the readings that show how people are prisoners of their environments and the influences around them. Why and when do they demonstrate that they cannot adapt to changing conditions?

**IV**      10-12      **Feminism**

Kate Chopin  
The Story of an Hour  
Desiree's Baby

Charlotte Perkins Gilman  
The Yellow Wallpaper

Emilia Pardo Bazan (1852-1921)  
The Revolver  
The Oldest Story

Overview      Restive Women and Oppressive Men

Introduction      We have read texts dealing with woman's predicament in society and culture: works of Mary Wollstonecraft and Flaubert come to mind. We have read poetry by sensitive women suffering in the throes of love. Don't you think though, that the Feminist material under review here is different in focus from what we have been reading? Think of 'The Story of an Hour,' 'The Yellow Wallpaper,' and 'The Revolver.' Don't all those stories portray women in extreme situations, taking the full measure of their dominated and isolated position?

Question      Q1: Does this Feminist writing seem to you to belong to the Realist/Naturalist movement? Or is it rather a new kind of prose fiction, ideologically driven? That interpretation could draw support from the wealth of women's movements erupting in the late 19th and early 20th century West. These movements form a setting for the texts of this assignment. So, in a broader sense, does the work of social critics such as Karl Marx, who in mid-19th century were analyzing the economic bases of social oppression. D/o you find the above Feminist texts good literary reading, or propagandistic? Or both?

Question Theme: Gender Inequality  
Q2: In the nineteenth century, the roles for women were very limited and constrained. When the attempt was made to transcend the role, the woman was forced into a place of "no place" – a no man's land of non-identity. How do the authors of the stories explore the relations between the powerful and the powerless? Do these circumstances justify the movement of feminism in the nineteenth century?

**Essay**  
E4: The feminist movement gained momentum as writers brought to light issues of gender inequality. Within the works read for this course, which ones contained a critique of society, and illustrated gender inequality? How did the authors make the readers aware and sympathetic of the reality of gender inequality?

**V**

13-15

**Symbolism**

Charles Baudelaire (1821-1867)

## Overview

The Invention of Evil in Poetry

## Introduction

Both Realism and Naturalism, as you will have deduced from our readings, aspire to present a closely drawn picture of life as we live it, in our persons and in society. (If this seems abstract, think back to the world portrayed in *The Song of Roland* or even *The Inferno*. 'Real life' is certainly at stake in those texts, but not 'real life' in the optic of daily experience). Charles Baudelaire carries the 'realistic' tradition over into lyric poetry. He does not content himself with a clearcut squeeze of the 'ordinary,' as do Flaubert and Chekhov, often with touching effects, but he goes for the 'realistic' in the sense of the unvarnished, not cleaned-up aspects of society.

## Question

Q1. There is much of the macabre, the lower depths, in the society Baudelaire portrays. Certainly this poet has an attitude, a bitter and self-mocking one, while Flaubert or Zola, as you can perhaps see, try either to have no attitude or to couch it subtly in descriptive prose—as Flaubert does in 'A Simple Heart.' Do you feel that Baudelaire, manages, in this way, to create a verbal world that is close to our contemporary world? Does the macabre play a role in our contemporary art? What would Baudelaire have said of 'sex and violence on TV?'

Question  
Theme:  
Aesthetics

Q2. What is Baudelaire trying to do in his poetry and why does it shock people? How does he invert conventional aesthetic values of beauty? What impact does it have on the reader?

**Essay**

E5. Symbolism moves away from realism and objectivity to posit a world filled with myth, magic, and the ineffable. Baudelaire's work engages ideal worlds as places to escape to and to enjoy, via pure sensation, for their own sake. Discuss the obsession with the chthonic and death, impermanence and corruption on the one hand, or the ideal and the fantastic on the other. How do Symbolist writers try to reconcile them?

**VI**

16

**Review, Annotated Bibliography, Research Paper****Final Essay  
Question**

Please choose one question from the selections below for your final essay.

FE1. We live in an age proud of its willingness to look all facts of death and life straight in the eye. Is our 'realism' like that you see reflected in the literary perspectives of Flaubert, Zola, Chekhov? Do you feel closer to the realism of Flaubert than to that of, say, Sophocles? Is Sophocles a realist?

FE2. What does Romanticism mean to you? Would you include Blake, Wordsworth and Pushkin under your definition? Why or why not? In formulating your response read a little more in these three authors, to enrich your response.

FE3. Discuss the movement from the visions of nearly unlimited human possibility early in the century to their moderation or suppression later in the century? What are major elements that promised hope; what are those—social, psychological—which seem to limit human freedom and possibility?

FE4. Compare and contrast Romanticism and Realism in novels that explore human emotions and conditions. How is each effective in garnering sympathy from the reader? How might both Romanticism and Realism be used to inspire people to become reform-minded and/or revolutionary?