

# FRN350 Readings in French Literature

1st and 2nd quarters, Senior

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<b>Instructor</b>	MATSUDA KAZUYUKI
<b>Style of class</b>	Lecture, seminar
<b>Number of Credits</b>	2
<b>Day and Period</b>	To be advised

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## Course Description

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Our subject matter will be French literary works, along with descriptions of the authors. We will read the opening passages and passages relevant to the theme of the story in the original French. The objective of this course is to let students encounter the attractive depth of French literature and improve their ability to read French. We will use works such as Mérimée's short stories, Daudet's "La dernière classe," Renard's *Poil de carotte*, Saint-Exupéry's *Le petit prince*, and Camus' *L'Etranger* as our texts. There are two conceivable ways to proceed. One is to choose one of the long or medium-length novels and devote the entire 15-week course to it. The other is to concentrate on short stories, dealing with several of them and comparing their individual features. Each year, I will choose one or the other of these formats, but I will make my decision with consideration for the students' interest and wishes.

In addition to reading the texts, we may set aside time to view relevant films or video documentaries on an ad hoc basis in order to promote in-depth understanding of the works.

## Course Objectives

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- (1) By reading some of the greatest works of 19<sup>th</sup>- and 20<sup>th</sup>- century French literature in the original, students will develop their ability to read and understand French.
- (2) We will do close readings of each of these famous works, which have a firm place in literary history, despite their individuality. Reading these works and understanding the authors and the historical background will give the students wide-ranging knowledge about French literature, culture, and religion and foster their literary sensibilities.

## Expected Outcomes

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- (1) Making use of their French reading ability, which is fostered through encountering the polished prose of the literary works, will enable the students to read a wide range of French writings.
- (2) If possible, the instructor plans to distribute English translations of the texts. Reading and comparing the same text in two languages will allow students to polish not only their French skills but also their English skills.
- (3) By becoming familiar with French culture, thought, and religion, students will, by extension, become familiar with basic Western culture, thought, and religion.

## Prerequisites

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French I-IV (general education courses), Readings in French Language and Cultures

## Class Materials

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- The instructor does not plan to use any specific textbook. Printed handouts will serve as reading selections.
  - Reference materials, including reference books and films, will be introduced during class as needed. I will present only the following two books on literary history.
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- Aeba, Takao et al. (eds.), *Shinban Furansu bungakushi* (New Edition French Literary History), Hakuishisha, 1992.
  - Kashiwagi, Takao et al. (eds.), *Ekurichuuru no bouken: shinpen Furansu bungakushi* (Adventures in Ecriture: New Edition History of French Literature) Osaka Daigaku Shuppankai, 2003.

## Course Method

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The course will be essentially run as a seminar based on reading texts, but the instructor to incorporate lectures on an ad hoc basis in order to provide more in-depth understanding. The texts (printouts) to be read each time will be handed out at least one week before the class in which they are discussed, so that students have plenty of time to study them. Since the course also covers music and films, I would like to make effective use of audiovisual devices for CDs or DVDs.

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## Evaluation/Assessment

Students will be graded on an overall basis, including base points that measure their participation and attitude, a final report (or final written exam), reaction papers, and homework handed in.

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## Grading

- 40% Participation and attitude
- 20% Reaction papers, homework handed in
- 40% Report or written exam

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## Course Schedule

### Week 1: Orientation

I will first offer an overview of the class and the texts to be studied and explain how evaluation and grading will work. Then I will discuss the life and works of Prosper Mérimée (1803-1870), the author of the first short story we will deal with, “La perle de Tolède(1845).” We will also prepare the texts for the Sessions.

### Week 2: Mérimé “La perle de Tolède,” --An Exemplar of a Short Story

Over the next three Sessions, we will read “La perle de Tolède,” one of the greatest short stories of any place or time, as Mishima Yukio wrote in *Bunshou dokuhon*. This is due to the effect of Mérimée’s unique style, the characteristic sense of speed created by his terse and compact style. We will continue reading, paying special attention to the distinction between the past tense and the variety of present tense referred to as the “narrative present.”

### Week 3: Mérimé “La perle de Tolède,” --A Story that Symbolizes *la Reconquista*

The story takes place in Spain, and although it is never clearly stated, the time is the period of *la Reconquista* (the reconquering of the country), when Spain was the site of the battle between the Christian and Islamic forces. We will focus on the main characters, two knights, to understand how the story symbolizes the conflict between the Christian world and the Islamic world.

### Week 4: Mérimé “La perle de Tolède,” The Tale of the *Femme Fatale*

The title of the story is taken from the nickname of the heroine. Turning our attention to the “most beautiful woman in the world,” who is desired by both proud knights, we can find the same theme of the *femme fatale*, the woman who brings the men around her to ruin, in one of Mérimée’s novels, *Carmen*, upon which Bizet’s famous opera is based.

### Week 5: Daudet “La dernière classe”—The Franco-Prussian War and the Alsace Region

Like Mérimée, Alphonse Daudet (1840-1897) was another master of the short story, and we will spend the next four Sessions reading one of his most famous works, “La dernière classe (1873).” Before we begin reading the story, I will provide some background on the Franco-Prussian War and the position of the province of Alsace, so that students will have sufficient knowledge about the historical background.

### Week 6: Daudet “La dernière classe”— War Seen Through the Eyes of a Child

Having lost the Franco-Prussian War to Germany (or, strictly speaking, to Bismarck’s Prussia and its allies), France was required to pay a large sum of money as reparations and to cede part of its territory to Germany. The territory in question was Alsace-Lorraine, which lies on the border of France and Germany, and in those regions, the language of instruction in the schools changed from French to German. The story is told as an adult’s recollection of his “last class” taught in French, the way he experienced it as an elementary school pupil. There are occasional examples of the free, indirect speech, and as we continue reading, you will need to pay careful attention to the discourse and to the tenses of the verbs.

### Week 7: Daudet “La dernière classe”—Differences between One’s Native Language and the Language Used in School

If Mérimée's writing style is "dry" and matter-of-fact, then Daudet's style is "wet," full of emotion. We will savor his magical storytelling as he builds up a sense of tragedy leading to the climax, skillfully bringing tears to the reader's eyes. In addition, it is worth noting that the tragedy that Daudet portrayed did not necessarily reflect the feelings of the people of Alsace. We will touch upon the differences between the local native language, the Alsatian dialect, and the language of the school (Parisian French) and consider the matter of language use seriously.

**Week 8: Daudet "La dernière classe"— Why This Story Disappeared from Textbooks**

In the years before and during World War II, "La dernière classe" was well known and loved in Japan in translated form. During the war and in the postwar period, it was a favorite story for teaching love of one's language and patriotism. However, it began disappearing from textbooks beginning around 1980. In studying the reason for this change, we will refer to one of the books that served as the motivation for this change, Tanaka Katsuhiko's *Kotoba to kokka (Words and Nation)* as we consider the good and bad influence of this story

**Week 9: Renard *Poil de carotte*—An Author Whose Family Name Means "Fox"**

In Japan, *Poil de carotte* (1894) by Jules Renard (1864-1910) is usually seen as a novel for children, but we will read it over the next four Sessions. The episodes I have chosen are dark ones that do not easily fit into the framework of children's literature, and I would like to look at them from several aspects. First, we will read "The Chickens," which comes at the beginning of the novel, in order to get a sense of the warped relationships in the family of the boy known as "the Carrot."

**Week 10: Renard *Poil de carotte*—"The Carrot" as a Sadist**

The main character, the "Carrot," is recognized as a sympathetic character who is abused by his mother, but that is a one-sided view, as we see in "The Cat," a grotesque scene in which he kills a cat.

**Week 11: Renard "Poil de carotte"—The "Carrot" Looking through the Keyhole**

Coming almost in the middle of the book "Les joues rouges" stands out among the rest of the chapters with its overtones of homosexuality and pedophilia and the number of pages devoted to it. When we read this episode, I believe that we can interpret it as referring to "the Carrot's" hidden longings, his incestuous feelings for the mother who abuses him.

**Week 12: Renard "Poil de carotte"— "The Carrot" (Carotte) Against the Skullcap (Calotte)**

"La tempête de feuilles," is a unique chapter in a different sense than "Les joues rouges," in that it is full of descriptions of weather phenomena. When we read this episode, we should keep in mind that the matrix of the windstorm is compared to a *calotte*, which symbolizes none other than the power of the Roman Catholic church, we will seek the implications hidden in a masterful description of Nature.

**Week 13: Saint-Exupéry *Le petit prince*—The Snake that Swallowed an Elephant**

*Le petit prince* by Antoine de Saint-Exupéry (1900-1944) is the third best-selling book in the world, outranked only by the Bible and Marx's *Das Kapital*. We will read several excerpts from this 1943 book over the next three Sessions. We will begin with a scene from the beginning of the book in which the narrator, a pilot, tells about his childhood in a scene that highlights the differences between the perceptions of adults and children. The impressive illustrations, drawn by the author himself, are also noteworthy.

**Week 14: Saint-Exupéry *Le petit prince*—The Encounter Between the Prince and the Fox**

In this Session, we will look at Chapter 21, which might be called the core of the book. Keeping in mind that the verb *apprivoiser* "tame" and the plural noun *rites* "ceremonies" may have unique meanings here, we will read the dialogue between the prince and the fox, with its wealth of implications, to infer the author's thoughts.

**Week 15: Saint-Exupéry *Le petit prince*—"What is essential is invisible to the eye."**

We will carefully read the scene in which the fox teaches the prince about the secret principles of life and try to pin down the exact meaning of the often-quoted aphorism, "What is essential is invisible to the eye. After Iwanami Shoten's exclusive translation and publication rights to the book expired in 2005, several new translations were published in quick succession. We will switch back and forth among several translations, including the pioneering Naito version, for a fuller understanding of the text

As noted in the Course Description, this schedule is only an example, and the selection of texts may differ, either wholly or partly, from year to year.

## **Preparation and Follow-up**

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- (1) Before class (preparation): As noted above, printed handouts will be used instead of a textbook, but at the end of each session, you will be notified of the assigned reading for the next class, so students should read the assigned selections with the aid of a dictionary and make sure that they understand most of it before coming to class.
- (2) After class (follow-up): Reread the passages that were discussed in class, make sure that you understand all the grammar, and make an effort to learn the most useful phrases. It is also recommended that you organize the notes that you took during class, including the notes on the instructor's lecture and PowerPoint slides, in order to reinforce your understanding