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Module: English

3 LMD/ Group: 08



French Civilisation and Its Discontents

According to nineteenth-century French historian Edgar Quinet, "soit bonheur, soit malheur, la France depuis deux siècles a mis sa destinée à se faire organe dominant de la civilisation." Jules Michelet extended this civilising mission even further back in time, claiming the French people had been "dans tous les temps, à toutes les époques . . . le missionnaire de la civilisation en Europe." If such nineteenth-century notions have long since been denounced as ethnocentric and imperialistic, popular perceptions in France and the United States still often characterize France as the self-designated cradle of civilisation. In the words of the sassy French phrasebook called *Wicked French for the Traveler*, "French people believe that they invented Western civilisation. In fact, many of them doubt that cultural refinement has ever spread beyond the borders of their beau pays."

Within today's academy, when critics of eurocentrism are questioning the assumptions and values underlying the concept of "Western civilisation," university professors who call themselves specialists in "French civilisation" sometimes feel their chosen field calls for qualification bordering on the apologetic. This feeling of being *mal dans sa peau* is exaggerated by the paradoxically low status traditionally held by "French civ" as an academic subfield within French studies.

In order to avoid both of these unfortunate connotations and to cash in on a more fashionable currency, "French cultural studies" is being used increasingly as a cognate for civilisation. For example, the society formed in 1980 as a forum for professors of civilization has recently renamed itself the Association for French Cultural Studies; many positions posted in recent MLA job lists specify a specialisation in cultural studies where they might formerly have designated civilisation; and "cultural studies" is now used to identify the non-literary track for French majors in some French departments. However, this new term should be used judiciously because, as the editors of a recent anthology on cultural studies warned, cultural

studies is no more synonymous for the "study of culture" than "women's studies" is for the "study of women."

Although their work is heterogeneous, practitioners of British and American cultural studies generally share familiarity with a theoretical corpus and a body of scholarly and critical reflection, which have thus far been defined and developed more by scholars in departments other than French, such as English, film and media studies, sociology, and women's studies.

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Part I: Reading Comprehension

Read the above text carefully and answer the following questions:

- 1. The provided text has displayed several details on French civilisation. In what manner has this civilisation been described?**
- 2. What are the main ideas presented in the text.**
- 3. Is cultural refinement proper to French civilisation?**
- 4. The presented text is:**
 - a- Narrative**
 - b- Descriptive**
 - c- Expository**
 - d- Argumentative**
- 5. Identify in the text a sentence that uses the conditional mood and determine its type.**

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- 6. Find in the text words that are semantically equivalent to:**
 - Task =**
 - Commonly =**
 - Opinions =**
 - Contemporary =**

7. Part II: Written Expression

After having read the presented text and discovered some discontents with French civilisation, try to explain in a well-written paragraph why French civilisation is considered more sophisticated than others.