FRENCH SYMBOLIST POETRY. KIND OF LIKE ROMANTICISM

French Symbolism was a literary movement that flourished during the last two decades of the 19\textsuperscript{th} century. Important symbolists were Baudelaire, Verlaine and Rimbaud. Their works were characterized by a concern with moods and temporary sensations rather than descriptions, a hermetic subjectivity, and an interest in morbid (unhealthy stare/gruesome) or esoteric (understood by on meant for only the select few who have special: knowledge on interest)

The symbolist poets rejected conventional religious, social, moral values and the mode of the naturalists. Instead, the symbolist poets were primarily concerned with the expression of inward experience, and their approach often resulted in works that were intentionally obscure and highly personal.

The Symbolist movement emerged as a reaction to advert criticism that had been directed at poets associated with the decadent movement. Responding to critical attacks aimed at the decadent style of writers who had their inspiration primarily from the works of Boudelaire.

Two important principles of Symbolist poetry:

- Esoteric parallels exist between material and spiritual worlds.
- Human sense perceptions may correspond to one another in a phenomenon known as synaesthesia.

By the end of the 19\textsuperscript{th} century, the symbolists had virtually disappeared from the French literary scene. Its effect on the world literature has been lasting and profound; Symbolist poetic influence predominated for decades throughout the world.

Representative works:

- Baudelaire: The Flower of Evil (most famous poet of the 19\textsuperscript{th} century)
- Rimbaud: The Drunken Boat.

In 1886 Symbolism was a poetic movement in the last 25 years of the 19\textsuperscript{th} century. It started in France with Baudelaire. The main representatives were Verlaine, Rimbaud and Mallarmé. They were known as “Los Malditos” (The damned ones)

Symbolism is only manifested in poetry and it maintains some features of Romanticism such as individual subjectivity and the poet was seen as a strange person and as a not adapted member of a modern society.

Characteristics:

- The poet looks for a revelation by means of his intuition and solving /guessing.
- Importance of music, rhythm of the verse.
- Use of the free verse to express the thoughts.
Walt Whitman was considered the first great North American Poet. His poems were first published under the title of *Leaves of Grass*. He was inspired from the Bible, Homer, Shakespeare, Dante and Goethe. He wrote verses with sensuality and without rhythm.

Rimbaud wrote *Poésies Complètes* (Poems), *A Saison en enfer* (*A Season in Hell*) and *Illuminations*. He wanted to waken the spirit of the unknown, the mysterious. In his first poems he focused on the ironic and humorous, but later adopted a rebel attitude which was sometimes blasphemy, attacking the fatherland/country, and the religion.

In his verses he brings up his childhood, prophetic visions and reflections of his own personal hell. At this point, a brief biography of Rimbaud and his friend Verlaine is given: Rimbaud was born in France. At 6 years old, his parents separated and he was raised by his overprotective and devoutly Christian mother. At 10, he began to write poetry thanks to his mentor Izambard. At 1871 he moved to Verlaine’s house in Paris and they started a tempestuous relationship. They travelled together and experienced a period of intense creative activity under the influence of drugs and very little sleep. At 37 he died in France after having travelled throughout Europe and Africa.

Literarily speaking, *Le Bateau ivre* (*The drunken Boat*) is supposed to be the most important poem of Rimbaud. His poetry is difficult to understand due to several factors: innovation, unconventional vocabulary, colloquial expressions, provincial terms, banal elements associated with lower-class life but combined with the more formal language and subject matter.

Verlaine was a French lyric poet. His main works were *Amour*, *Sagesse* and *Romances sans paroles*. He was not a thinker, but a creator of moods.

**Style**: themes of sex, the city, irrational phenomenon and sometimes a vaguely medieval setting. In poetry, the symbolist procedure – as typified by Verlaine- was to use subtle suggestion instead of precise statement and evoke moods and feelings through the magic of words and repeated sounds and the cadence of verse and metrical innovation.

The sensitive appreciation of the common incidents and sights of life ant the haunting and simple music of his verse, combined with the melancholy and unreal disillusion of the decadents, distinguish his poetry.

**Parnassianism**. French literary style which began during the positivist period of the 19th century. The style was influence by the author Théophile Gautier as well as the philosophical work of Arthur Schopenhauer. It occurred after Romanticism and prior to Symbolism. They were influenced by Arthur’s doctrine “art for art’s sake”

The Decadent movement: was a late 19th century artistic and literary movement of Western Europe. It flourished in France, but also had devotees in England and throughout Europe, as well as in the USA. They were influenced by Gothic novels such as those of Edgar Allan Poe. They were associated with symbolism and /or aestheticism.

Baudelaire was a French poet of the mid 19th century with a stunning imagery and extraordinary musicality. He also was the first to herald that new consciousness (urban, pushing at the edges of things, uncertain of itself) which we recognize as our modern way of being.
Baudelaire life was almost as important as his poetry. His rejection of bourgeois values, his use of drugs, his fascination with sex, his close friendships with painters and other poets: all of these made him a sort of model for the poet as a *bohemian* figure. He is the archetype of the poet as someone who lives his own life on the fringes of society, rebellious in life style, dedicated to moving so far beyond the middle class that his work shocks them so deeply that their either cry out, “But is it art’” or attempt to censor it as blasphemous, evil, pornographic.