

French Laundry: The covert feminism of 19th Century Parisian Laundresses

AYURG | Arts, Humanities, and Performance (AHP) | Tags: Archival; Literary/Compositional Analysis; International Travel; Language Competency

*This cover page is meant to focus your reading of the sample proposal, summarizing important aspects of proposal writing that the author did well or could have improved. **Review the following sections before reading the sample.** The proposal is also annotated throughout to highlight key elements of the proposal's structure and content.*



Proposal Strengths	Areas for Improvement
The gap in knowledge and justification for the research aims are clearly stated, and the scope of the proposal stays narrowed to what funding the researcher requests.	Some in-text citations are missing. When you make a claim about what is known on your research topic, you must cite evidence in the form of past literature to support your claim.
The location of the study is specifically justified. In particular, the researcher lists the specific archive they will travel to, and what specifically they will find there.	The researcher mentions conducting an interview but there are no interview questions in an appendix.
This project cites the help of a faculty member outside of the main faculty sponsor in an area where the student does not have as strong of a background. This type of relationship is important in projects that cross disciplines, and it shows the researcher has sought the necessary expertise to address areas where they do not have as much background.	The researcher should address the issue of access to the archive they plan to visit by including a proof of contact in an appendix. This proof can be an email exchange or other informal communications that confirm the contacts the researcher claims to have.




Other Key Features to Take Note Of
For applicants using AYURGs to fund their thesis, remember that the grant proposal is for funding a specific aspect of the project, not the entire project itself. Focus your grant proposal on what the money is needed for, and do not simply use your thesis proposal. It will be too broad for the purposes of the URG review committee. In this case, the researcher focused rightly on what would be gathered from the trip to Paris, not the entire thesis project.
Projects that require international travel are eligible to receive additional funding of up to ½ the price of the round-trip plane ticket (as long as that travel is not to a researcher's country of permanent residence).
All Academic Year URGs require a budget. There is no required format; however, we do provide a template on our website. The scope of the proposal should focus on what the funding covers.
If a language other than English is required for your project, you must address your language proficiency. Translators are acceptable, and can/should be included in your budget/proof of contact.

French Laundry


The covert feminism of 19th-Century Parisian Laundresses

As part of my double-major in Journalism and French, I am currently completing a Senior Thesis in French on women during the Impressionist Period in Paris, 1860-1886. Specifically, I am exploring the role of wives who worked as laundresses and acted as the breadwinners of their families, and I am using *L'Assommoir* [The Drinking Den] by Emile Zola, *L'Absinthe* [Absinthe] and *Repasseuses* [Women Ironing] by Edgar Degas as my chief sources. I am applying for an Academic Year URG to travel to Paris over Winter Break 2016 (December 5 – December 12) to deepen my research by locating and analyzing two types of primary sources I cannot locate from Northwestern: inspection records of the laundry businesses and Emile Zola's notebooks containing observations on working women's lives. I will use the grant to visit local archives and libraries that house these documents and to conduct an interview with an Impressionist women expert at the Musée d'Orsay. In conducting this onsite research, I hope to better answer one central question: *Are depictions of the working-class laundress-wife in Degas' art and Emile Zola's literature corroborated by periodic inspection records and Zola's journals?*

Clear research/project statement occurs in 1st paragraph




In-text citations missing. Needed to support claims




The Impressionist period has been widely studied, and women comprise a portion of this research. However, women are typically analyzed in their roles as seamstresses, prostitutes, or day laborers. The laundress, however, was a particularly fascinating and complicated member of 19th-century Paris, one who is often depicted in Impressionist art but much more rarely discussed in literature. Not only did she work long hours in messy conditions, cleaning the garments the working class dirtied through their manual labor professions, but she was often the primary breadwinner of her family—a fact that was not overtly acknowledged in such a male-dominant society. Likely, the laundress's husband was an alcoholic who spent whatever francs he could find drinking in a Parisian café instead of supporting his family. Still, he maintained authority over family life, which led to complex power dynamics and, often, domestic violence. These cruel realities come alive in the works I am studying. *L'Assommoir* uses protagonist Gervaise Macquart, an archetypal working-class laundress, to illustrate both the irreversible damage of alcoholism in the 19th century and the mistreatment of working-class women despite their economic contributions to their families¹. The female subject in Degas' *L'Absinthe* is a depiction of Gervaise in a café, where she ultimately falls prey to alcoholism and depression. *Repasseuses* serves as a more general complement to these two works, as it depicts two female laundresses completing a hard day's work with a bottle of wine next to them. In each of these, one thing is clear: women were simultaneously overworked and undervalued in their roles as small business owners and family breadwinners.

Specific works of focus are broken down, justified, and connected to research aims



Identifies gap in knowledge



Like the world they lived in, however, most of the existing literature and art about these women was produced and recounted from a male perspective. Much of the secondary research we have available about the women of the Impressionist period come from men. Art historians like as T. J. Clark and W. Scott Haine and social historians like Lenard Berlanstein have contributed a significant knowledge to the existing body of research on the relationship between Parisian cultural development and the working class at the end of the 19th-century.²³ Significant literature has also been written on female Impressionist artists, prostitutes, and seamstresses; Russell T. Clement's *The Women in Impressionism: A Sourcebook*⁴ and *Painted Love* by Northwestern professor Hollis Clayson⁵ are particularly robust sources on artists and prostitutes. The laundress, however, is less frequently examined.⁶

With that in mind, the reason I feel so strongly about conducting on-site research in Paris is to gain access to primary sources that I can't locate here at Northwestern. After further research and reflection, I refined the focus of my research trip to be more literary than art history-focused. From there, I worked with Professor Tessie Liu in the History Department, who is an expert on Emile Zola and 20th-Century Paris, as well as Professor Clayson, an Art Historian and author on Impressionist art and women in 19th-Century France, to craft my on-site research. In Paris, I will have two main objectives: 1) to analyze inspection records of Parisian laundries in working-class neighborhoods, specifically the 18th Arrondissement (where *L'Assommoir* takes place), because these will help me better understand the conditions in which these women worked and lived, as well as if any criminal or hygiene violations were brought against their laundries; and 2) to analyze Emile Zola's notebooks, which contain the firsthand observations of women and working class Paris that he used to write *L'Assommoir*. I have chosen Zola because he was a contemporary and friend of the Impressionist artists I am studying, but also because he likely had some of the most authentic reports on working class families. While excerpts of these notebooks are available in some online databases, certain editions and many full versions can only be found in Parisian archives.

The principal location where I will examine these documents is at Le Musée Sociale du XIXème Siècle, which houses journals, diaries, newspapers and other historic primary sources on the social history of 19th Century Paris. To locate periodic inspection records, I will visit the Archives de la Prefecture de Police in the Parisian suburb of Le Pré-Saint-Gervais. Lastly, I will visit La Département des Estampes et de la Photographie and the Site Richilieu at La Bibliothèque Nationale de France. Here, I will find photos and prints of laundries and neighborhoods in late 1800s Paris, and hopefully even obtain photocopies that I can add into the appendix of my thesis.

After my conversations with these professors, I have come to understand that finding primary sources written by women—such as letters and diaries—would be challenging and capricious. However, if time and resources permit, I hope to search for firsthand correspondence between 19th-century wives as well. I plan to conduct an on-site interview with Caroline Mathieu, chief curator at Le Musée d'Orsay. Mrs. Mathieu has extensive experience curating exhibits for on Impressionist art, many of which focus on women. I believe Mrs. Mathieu has the background requisite to provide more tailored insights into female perspectives during this period, and she may even be able to direct me towards better primary sources penned by women. I will also consult the Service de Documentation at the d'Orsay, which is a private archive of correspondence amongst Impressionists that Professor Clayson has helped me gain access to.

I feel confident that my skills and experience are ample for the work I am proposing. As a French major completing a Senior Honors Thesis, my French proficiency is sufficient for the materials I will read and the local interviews I will conduct. I also feel well-equipped for these interviews as a Journalism major, having gained extensive interview experience as a previous reporter for the Daily, the founder of a campus magazine and the editor of another. Last year, I spent a semester studying French history at SciencesPo in Paris. I gained a deep understanding of the city's geography and historical development, and this command of the city helped me shape my thesis—for example, which cafés the Impressionists frequented, and what their respective locations say about the social, economic and political climate of their patrons. Finally, my passions for French language and culture have fostered a deep desire to work in Paris after I graduate.

Methods are justified by explicitly connecting to aspect of research aim they are addressing.

A specific location is mentioned and justified. Access is addressed but and particular target sources are identified

Specific Interview questions should be in an appendix

Worked with and cites sponsor with relevant expertise

There should be detail on what these analyses entail. What information will be abstracted? How will it be organized? What is the output and how does that relate to the research aims?

A proof of this contact should be in an appendix

Language qualifications addressed

¹ Zola, Émile, and Robin Buss. *The Drinking Den*. London: Penguin, 2003. Print.

² Clark, T. J. *The Painting of Modern Life: Paris in the Art of Manet and His Followers*. New York: Knopf, 1985. Print.

³ Berlanstein, Lenard R. *The Working People of Paris, 1871-1914*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1984. Print.

⁴ Clement, Russell T., Annick Houzé, and Christiane Erbolato-Ramsey. *The Women Impressionists: A Sourcebook*. Westport, CT: Greenwood, 2000. Print.

⁵ Clayson, Hollis. *Painted Love: Prostitution in French Art of the Impressionist Era*. New Haven: Yale UP, 1991. Print.

⁴ Conversations with Professor Hollis Clayson and Professor Tessie Liu

PROPOSED BUDGET

Flights: Chicago to Paris, December 5 to December 12		\$1,400
	Total:	\$700
Lodging: Airbnb or Hotel, 7 Nights		\$600
Transportation: Public Transportation to/from airport and around Paris		\$75
Meals: 8 Days, 7 Nights		\$275
Museum Passes		\$20
Photocopies		\$10
Books/other materials I can't get through Library Loan		\$20
	Total:	\$1000



Repasseuses, Edgar Degas (http://www.musee-orsay.fr/en/collections/works-in-focus/painting/commentaire_id/women-ironing-2236.html?cHash=e1121cba6c)



L'Absinthe, Edgar Degas (http://everypainterpaintshimself.com/article_images_new/INAC2.jpg)