The nineteenth century in France is a nightmare for literary historians. Their thirst for categorization is more easily quenched by prior centuries, which seem to be unified by cohesive preoccupations and goals: Renaissance, Classical Age or *le grand siècle*, and Enlightenment or Age of Ideas, for example, become appropriate appellations. But the protean nineteenth century—to which no such handy tag has been, or can be, appended—is beyond all else distinguished by extreme heterogeneity and eclecticism. It is a period of chaotic social and political instability, of scientific and industrial revolution. In literature it is, fundamentally, a time not of solidarity but of unprecedented individualism, when sparks of genius fly at the periphery of this social flux. Collective social consciousness yields to isolated probings into the uncharted recesses of the human mind and soul, and revolt against standardized (even valorized) literary practice—e.g., the slow undermining of the “accepted” literary lexicon and of the qualities of unity, clarity, and reason; the overhauling of the traditional system of prosody—proliferates.

If such divergence obfuscates potential coherence in nineteenth-century French literature, it can itself be recognized as the “organizing” element of this literary epoch. It is precisely this paradox that the present volume of essays intends to reflect. The studies to follow are not unified, as orthodoxy might dictate, by a common approach or theme or author, nor are they presented as festschrift or anniversary celebration. Rather, they are marked, as was the century that is their context, by divergence and variety, not harmony and consistency. Thematically, they examine such varied topics as pygmalionism, allegory, mirage, self-consciousness, plagiarism, madness, feminism, the grotesque, and dance. Critical approach further reflects a collective heterogeneity, as the volume includes discussions that are, in turn, thematic, intertextual, historical, stylistic, psychocritical, sociological, and semiotic. Furthermore, these essays consider virtually all the important writers of a prolific nineteenth-century France, with the exception of some of the romantic poets, Corbière, Laforgue, and Zola.

Eclecticism is also reflected in the basic conception of the volume, which
approaches the process of writing from three discrete directions: before (pre-text), during (text), and around (context). The essays in part 1 are essentially thematic studies that illuminate three provocative and vital areas of nineteenth-century thought—the fantastic and the grotesque (Nash, Knapp, McLendon), madness (Lowe, McKenna), and feminism (Miller, Mercken-Spaas, Moss). These themes are presented as "pre-text" in the sense that they inform either authorial motivation or the orientation of a given text prior to the actual scriptural activity. Part 2 includes essays that approach the process of writing from the perspective of the text itself. These studies—basically stylistic in nature—examine texts by Stendhal (Sonnenfeld, Wahl) and Baudelaire (Peschel, Wing, Chambers), a novelist and a poet who were perhaps the two staunchest defenders and living embodiments of individual genius, which so characterized the century. Also included in this part of the volume are studies of three poètes maudits who were models of aesthetic individualism: Rimbaud (Porter), Mallarmé (La Charité), and Lautréamont (Nesselroth). Part 3 ("Context") is concerned with elements—spatial, temporal, and linguistic—that surround the literary text. The first three essays (Festa-McCormick, Franklin, Lewis) consider the relationship between texts written outside of France (specifically, in England, Italy, Germany, and Canada) and the French literary tradition. Next, the problem of "anteriority" is confronted: focus on nineteenth-century texts or reactions as they relate to texts of the seventeenth (Albanese) and eighteenth (McDonald) centuries helps to elucidate the temporal (historical) contexts of the former. Finally, the literary text in relation to the more general problem of language as a system of verbal signs forms the context for discussions of Flaubert (Prince) and Jarry (Issacharoff) that conclude the volume.

In his "Epigraph for a Condemned Book," Baudelaire admonished the reader to discard his copy of Les Fleurs du mal, which would be meaningless reading unless he has "learned his rhetoric from Satan." Unlike that reader, the reader of the present volume—dix-neuviémiste or not—needs no such specialized training or inflexible orientation to appreciate, or find meaning in, its contents. And, whereas Baudelaire's ultimatum reflects a narrow field of vision, this book offers a global view of the richness and diversity that pervaded the literature of the past century in France.
Editor’s Note

Scholarly interest in nineteenth-century French literature on this side of the Atlantic has grown tremendously during the past decade. Evidence of this are the journal *Nineteenth-Century French Studies*—founded and edited by Professor T. H. Goetz (State University College, Fredonia, N.Y.)—which first appeared in 1972; and an annual colloquium on nineteenth-century French studies, which has been held since 1975 on various American college and university campuses and which has attracted a broad range, and a growing number, of scholars of all ages and critical persuasions specializing in French literature (and related areas) of the nineteenth century. It was my pleasure to organize and host the third of these annual colloquia at the Ohio State University in October of 1977: the great majority of the essays in the present volume are expanded or revised versions of papers presented at that conference. It is my hope that all of the essays to follow reflect the quality and diversity of research that is being done today in this field and are a collective reminder that nineteenth-century French studies are alive and well and living in prosperity.
PART ONE : PRE-TEXT