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## The Evolving Definition of Man: Lamarck's Natural Philosophy and Literary Legacy

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**Keywords:** French literature; Lamarck; natural philosophy; Stendhal; Balzac; Sainte-Beuve

**URI:** <http://hdl.handle.net/2022/22525>

**Date:** 2018-10

**Publisher:** [Bloomington, Ind.] : Indiana University

**Type:** Doctoral Dissertation

### Abstract:

Ordering the collections of worms and insects at the Muséum National d'Histoire Naturelle led Jean-Baptiste Lamarck to believe that the great diversity of plants and animals was due to gradual changes over a long period of time, accumulated in living bodies of increasing complexity. This theory is recognizable as an early account of evolution. But there is more that is unfamiliar: animals harnessed an atmospheric element which, by its direct action upon animal tissues, produced a nervous system and ultimately an organ of intelligence. The latter part of this process hinges on the existence of an origin-destination of sensation, Lamarck's sentiment intérieur. My dissertation examines the possibilities and constraints of the natural history genre which Lamarck inherited from Georges-Louis-Leclerc, comte de Buffon (Chapter 1). Through close readings, I identify rhetorical strategies that are constitutive of their natural philosophies. I compare their statements about style and imagination to show how they approached the diversity of nature, the need for conceptual and aesthetic handles, and truth claims in their negotiations with the reader. Next, I survey uses of sentiment intérieur in works of various genres, especially from 1700-1850, when its popularity rivaled that of conscience (consciousness, conscience) (Chapter 2). This "power" is key to Lamarck's 1817 dictionary definition of humankind. I expose trends in thinking about individuality and the source(s) of action in nature among Lamarck's predecessors and contemporaries, especially the Idéologues. His solution to the "insurmountable hiatus" between the physical and moral facts of human experience is situated – historically, textually, culturally – in a moment of transition between worlds and genres. Finally, I analyze three novels to determine Lamarck's immediate influence in French literature (Chapter 3). Henri Beyle (Stendhal), Honoré de Balzac, and Charles-Augustin Sainte-Beuve grappled with the analysis of ideas (idéologie), and their semi-autobiographical protagonists likewise search for the seat of consciousness. Their encounters with nature-as-narrator in "Lamarckian moments" describe the perils and potentials of the life of the mind. I propose that these moments constitute a Lamarckian sublime.

### Description:

Thesis (Ph.D.) - Indiana University, Department of French and Italian, 2018

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In the nineteenth century evolution, progress and natural laws were intimately related in understandings of nature. Scholars are coming to treat all of these themes as part of related and intertwined cultural processes rather than distinct and independent lineages. At the beginning of the century, the evolution of species, especially man, and the evolution of the earth were generally considered absurd and beyond the bounds of learned discussion. Victorian ideas of natural and social progress were descended from French revolutionary and Enlightenment thinkers like Condorcet, Volney and Baron d'Holbach. So too the Victorians' talk of natural laws was a legacy of the French Revolution. Related Material. J.B. Lamarck.