Great Authors of the Western Literary Tradition

Part I:
Near Eastern and Mediterranean Foundations

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Before coming to Whitman College, Professor Vandiver was Distinguished Visiting Lecturer in the Department of Greek and Roman Studies, Rhodes College, Memphis, Tennessee. Her previous academic appointments include serving as Director of the Honors Humanities program at the University of Maryland and visiting professorships at Northwestern University; the University of Georgia; the Intercollegiate Center for Classical Studies in Rome, Italy; Loyola University, New Orleans; and Utah State University.

In 1998, Dr. Vandiver received the American Philological Association’s Excellence in Teaching Award, the most prestigious teaching award available to American classicists. Other awards include the Northwestern University Department of Classics Excellence in Teaching Award for 1998 and the University of Georgia’s Outstanding Honors Professor Award in 1993 and 1994.

Dr. Vandiver has published a book, Heroes in Herodotus: The Interaction of Myth and History, and several articles and has delivered numerous papers at national and international conferences. Her translation of Johannes Cochlaeus’s 1549 Commentary on the Works and Writings of Martin Luther was published in 2002 under the title Luther’s Lives; this is the first English translation of Cochlaeus’s work. She is currently working on a third book, examining the influence of the classical tradition on the British poets of World War I. Her previous Teaching Company courses include The Iliad of Homer, The Odyssey of Homer, Virgil’s Aeneid, Classical Mythology, Greek Tragedy, and Herodotus: The Father of History.
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Great Authors of the Western Literary Tradition
Part I: Near Eastern and Mediterranean Foundations

Scope:

*Great Authors of the Western Literary Tradition* is a survey of Western literature from the *Epic of Gilgamesh* and the Bible through Samuel Beckett. The course provides a sampling of some of the greatest writers of fiction, poetry, and drama in our cultural heritage. In selecting authors for this anthology, we have sought to be representative of a range of national traditions and a variety of genres.

These first two parts of *Great Authors of the Western Literary Tradition* move from the very beginnings of Western literature up to the advent of Christianity, as marked in the Gospels and the writings of St. Augustine. The 24 lectures provide an overview of the foremost genres of ancient Western literature and highlight the works of representative authors.

Lecture One introduces both the entire course and Parts I and II in particular, by defining the key terms *Western* and *literature*, then describing the course’s objective, and finally, laying out our approach and objectives for Parts I and II.

In Lecture Two, we begin our study of Western literary tradition by discussing the Mesopotamian *Epic of Gilgamesh*. The lecture begins by describing the discovery and decipherment of the *Epic*, then turns to the text itself. We consider the importance of such themes as friendship and the desire for immortality, which are foregrounded in the Homeric epics of Greece, as well as in *Gilgamesh*. We also briefly consider the parallels between the Mesopotamian flood story of *Gilgamesh* and the Genesis story of Noah.

Lectures Three through Six consider the Hebrew Bible. We begin in Lecture Three with a close reading of the creation stories in Genesis; this lecture also discusses the *Documentary Hypothesis* and its implications for our understanding of the Hebrew Bible. Lecture Four continues to discuss both the content of the Hebrew Bible and the way in which these texts were edited and assembled, by looking at the so-called *Deuteronomistic History*. The lecture focuses in particular on the presentation of King David.

In the fifth lecture, we consider prophets and prophecy. We begin by defining the role of the Hebrew prophet, then concentrate on the Book of Isaiah. We look at key passages, such as 7:14 and 53:3–9, and discuss their importance in the original context and in later Christian interpretations that saw these passages as messianic predictions. The lecture ends by touching briefly on the related genre of *wisdom literature*. Lecture Six concludes our discussion of the Hebrew Scriptures by considering one of the most remarkable books of the Bible, the Book of Job. We consider the challenge that Job offers to the so-called *Deuteronomistic Theology*, which assumes that God rewards good actions and punishes evil ones. We consider whether the “answer” that the Lord gives to Job is, fundamentally, an answer to the problem of undeserved suffering at all.

In Lectures Seven and Eight, we begin our survey of ancient Greek literature by considering the two great Homeric epics. Lecture Seven briefly sketches the nature of Homeric epic, then gives a brief summary of the storyline of the *Iliad*. We discuss the epic’s overall themes and the way in which it uses the story of Achilles’s anger and desire to avenge his dead friend Patroclus as a vehicle for discussing the human condition in general and the necessity of accepting mortality in particular. Lecture Nine continues our reading of Homeric epic by turning to the *Odyssey*. The *Iliad* focuses on human mortality in time of war; the *Odyssey*, in contrast, focuses on the necessity of reconciling ourselves to loss and death in time of peace. The lecture concludes with a brief discussion of the influence of Homeric epic on later literature.

Lecture Nine, which discusses the development of Greek lyric poetry, forms a transition between the world of Homeric epics and the “Golden Age” of Greek literature in 5th-century B.C. Athens. We consider the two main forms of lyric poetry in ancient Greek culture, monodic lyric and choral lyric; we concentrate on two primary poets, Sappho and Pindar.

Lectures Ten through Twelve examine Athenian tragedy and the works of the three great tragedians: Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides. Lecture Ten begins with an overview of tragedy’s development and nature in 5th-century B.C. Athens. After briefly outlining the conditions of performance and the social functions of tragedy in Athens, the lecture turns to discussing Aeschylus, the first of the three great tragedians, with particular focus on his trilogy *The...
Oresteia. Lecture Eleven moves on to the second great tragedian, Sophocles, and focuses on his play Ajax. In Lecture Twelve, we conclude our discussion of tragedy by focusing on two of Euripides’ plays, Hippolytus and The Bacchae.
Scope: This lecture serves as an introduction both to the first two parts of this seven-part course and to the course in general. We begin by defining the key terms of the course, Western and literature, then describe the course’s objective: to offer a sampling of great authors from that literary tradition. The lecture briefly describes the content of each of the course’s seven parts; we then look in more detail at the first two parts, which cover the literature of the ancient world.

Outline

I. This introductory lecture has two main objectives.
   A. The lecture introduces the entire course, Great Authors of the Western Literary Tradition. We define the terms Western and literary or literature as they are used in the course and briefly describe the different parts of the course.
   B. Second, the lecture introduces Parts I and II of the course, on the ancient world.
      1. We set out the specific authors and works (Mesopotamian, Hebrew, Greek, and Roman) covered by Parts I and II and outline the approach we will take to the discussion of literature.
      2. We consider some difficulties inherent in the study of the earliest works of literature, particularly those founded on oral tradition.

II. What do we mean by the phrase Western literary tradition?
   A. Western refers broadly to the literature of European and European-derived cultures, from the ancient world onward.
      1. The term European itself poses many questions.
      2. The two main sources of inspiration for the Western literary tradition are the Bible and Greco-Roman antiquity.
   B. Literature is even more difficult to define than Western.
      1. The basic sense of the term is “something written,” but we will consider several works that were originally composed without the aid of writing.
      2. Literature, for our purposes, means works preserved in writing.
      3. But does any written work qualify as literature?
      4. The Oxford English Dictionary (OED) suggests, “the body of writings produced in a particular country or period, or in the world in general” (definition 3a), but this definition is probably too broad to be helpful.
   C. Another approach is to say that literature means “narrative,” that is, the use of language to tell a story.
      1. This covers many of the genres we will encounter, both in poetry and in prose.
      2. Epic, drama, history, and novels all are forms of narrative.
      3. But we will see other works—particularly in Parts IV and V—that are philosophical, meditative, or exploratory, not narrative.
   D. Perhaps the most useful approach is to define literature through its effect, not its form.
      1. The OED’s definition continues: “Now also in a more restricted sense, applied to writing which has claim to consideration on the ground of beauty of form or emotional effect.”
      2. This is probably key to what most of us understand as literature.

III. This course offers a sampling of great literature of the Western tradition.
   A. It is not possible, even in a multi-part course, to cover anything like all the high points of Western literature.
      1. Each professor will discuss a few of the most important authors from a given period, but the selection is inevitably somewhat arbitrary and omits a great deal.
      2. We cannot go into depth on any of these authors or works; we can only scratch the surface.
B. The course is divided into seven main sections, each focusing on the literature of a particular historical period.
1. Parts I and II cover the roots of the Western literary tradition in Mesopotamia and the Hebrew Scriptures, then trace the development of literature in classical Greek and Roman culture.
2. Part III, taught by Professor Thomas Noble, covers literature of the Middle Ages.
3. In Part IV, Professor Ronald Herzman looks at literature of the Renaissance.
4. Part V, by Professor Susan Heinzelman, discusses the Neoclassical literature of the 18th century.
5. In Parts VI and VII, Professor James Heffernan brings us to the modern world with the literature of the 19th and 20th centuries.

IV. Parts I and II of the course range widely over time and over cultures; the basic organization is chronological.
A. Part I lays the groundwork for the course and brings us up to the high point of classical Greek literature in 5th-century B.C. Athens.
1. We begin with the earliest known work of literature, the Mesopotamian Epic of Gilgamesh.
2. We then turn to the Hebrew Bible and consider some of the most important texts in that foundational collection of literature.
3. Next, we discuss some of the most important authors of ancient Greek culture, starting with Homer.
4. We move on from epic to the lyric poets of the 7th and 6th centuries B.C., then to the Classical age of Athenian literature, the 5th century B.C.
5. Part I concludes with our discussion of the tragedians Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides.

B. Part II completes our survey of Greek literature in Lectures Thirteen through Seventeen, moves into Roman literature in Lectures Eighteen through Twenty-Two, and concludes, in Lectures Twenty-Three and Twenty-Four, with the development of Christianity.
1. We continue with 5th-century B.C. Athenian literature in Lectures Thirteen and Fourteen on the historians Herodotus and Thucydides. Lecture Fifteen, on the comic playwright Aristophanes, moves us from the 5th to the 4th century B.C.
2. Lecture Sixteen concentrates on Plato, who wrote in the 4th century B.C.
3. Lecture Seventeen introduces the Hellenistic Age by discussing the comic playwright Menander and outlines the importance of Hellenistic Greek literature for Roman culture.
4. Lectures Eighteen, Nineteen, and Twenty introduce Roman literature, specifically, Roman poetry. We discuss the lyric poets Catullus and Horace, Virgil and Roman epic, and Ovid.
5. Lectures Twenty-One and Twenty-Two discuss Roman historiography and the development of the ancient novel.
6. The last two lectures bring together threads from the Hebrew Bible, Greek literature, and Roman culture, as they intertwine in the development of early Christianity.
7. Lecture Twenty-Three examines the Gospels, and Lecture Twenty-Four discusses St. Augustine.

V. Each lecturer in the different parts of the course will have his or her own approach to the study of literature. Carolyn Heilbrun suggests that there are two basic kinds of literature: “that which still speaks to us and our particular anguishes of today, and that which spoke to its contemporary audience and can only have a scholarly interest for us as we try to discover what the work meant to those for whom it was written.”

A. Heilbrun calls study of the first type literary criticism and of the second, literary history. She admits this is a problematic distinction; however, it is useful as a means of thinking our way into the study of literature.

B. This course will examine works from both these angles.
1. Almost all the works highlighted in this course were chosen because they do still “speak to us and our anguishes of today.”
2. But my approach as a literary critic incorporates a good deal of what Heilbrun calls literary history; I intend to set works in their own cultural and historical context, whenever possible.
3. Together, these approaches give us a well-rounded view.

C. The modern study of literature has produced a great many theoretical approaches. Though literary theory is a fascinating topic in its own right, I will not adopt any particular theoretical stance in this course.
The study of ancient literature brings specific problems with it. Paradoxically, for some of the Western literary tradition’s most important early works, it is problematic to speak of an “author” at all.

A. The *Epic of Gilgamesh* developed over a period of 1,000 years or more and exists in several fragmentary versions.
   1. Can we safely assume that the latest version is the “best” or most authentic?
   2. Are we justified in compiling a composite version that preserves the most important parts of the different traditions but represents a work that never existed in ancient Mesopotamian society?

B. The *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* are foundational works of Greek literature.
   1. The ancient Greeks themselves attributed these texts to a single author called Homer.
   2. But modern scholarship is virtually unanimous in agreeing that these epics represent the culmination of a long oral tradition.

C. The problems are perhaps most severe in our approach to the Hebrew Bible, because it is a sacred text for the religious traditions of three great religions and because at least some of the adherents of those religions consider it the “Word of God.”
   1. However, again, scholarship identifies multiple authors for the different books of the Bible.
   2. There are multiple authors writing at different times discernible even within single books, such as Genesis.

D. These are among the issues and difficulties that we will consider as we begin to discuss the foundational texts of the Western literary tradition.

**Supplementary Reading:**
Selden, et al., *Contemporary Literary Theory.*

**Questions to Consider:**
1. How would you define *literature*? What differentiates literature from other forms of narrative writing?
2. Are you more drawn to the “critical” or the “historical” approaches to literature? Why?
Lecture Two

The Epic of Gilgamesh

Scope: This lecture begins our study of the Western literary tradition by examining the earliest surviving work of Western literature, the Mesopotamian Epic of Gilgamesh. The lecture starts with a brief overview of the 19th-century discovery and decipherment of Gilgamesh. We consider the development of Gilgamesh as an orally transmitted work that has survived in fragments, written in two different languages over a period of many centuries, and discuss the implications for our understanding of the text. We then turn to the epic itself and highlight its exploration of themes, such as friendship and mortality, that are crucial in Homeric epic as well. After briefly sketching the polytheistic worldview implied in the Epic, we summarize the standard reconstruction of its plot. Finally, the lecture considers the parallels between the Mesopotamian flood story as reflected in Gilgamesh and the story of Noah as it appears in Genesis.

Outline

I. The earliest surviving work of literature in the Western literary canon is the Epic of Gilgamesh. This work was entirely unknown from the 2nd century B.C. until the 19th century A.D.

A. The rediscovery of the Epic of Gilgamesh was part of one of 19th-century archaeology’s most exhilarating accomplishments, the uncovering of ancient Mesopotamian culture.
   1. In 1850 and 1853, archaeologists excavating in the Royal Library of Nineveh found the collections of the Assyrian king Ashurbanipal (668–627 B.C.).
   2. Among Ashurbanipal’s collection of cuneiform texts were 12 tablets containing what scholars now call the “Standard Version” of the Epic of Gilgamesh.
   3. The archaeologists sent the tablets to the British Museum.

B. The year 1872 saw the first translation and publication of any part of the Gilgamesh fragments, when the British Assyriologist George Smith presented a paper on a “Chaldean” account of the Flood to the Society of Biblical Archaeology in London.
   1. This was Tablet 11 of the Gilgamesh tablets.
   2. Smith’s paper caused great excitement because it seemed to provide independent verification of the story of Noah.
   3. Neither Smith nor anyone else realized that these fragmentary tablets also contained the oldest work of Western literature.

C. Since Smith’s day, our knowledge of the Epic of Gilgamesh has increased enormously.
   1. Archaeologists have discovered more tablets, which fill in some of the gaps in the narrative, and further excavations and decipherment of other Babylonian texts have increased our knowledge about Mesopotamian culture in general.
   2. We now know that the historical King Gilgamesh lived around 2800 B.C. and was deified by 2600 B.C.
   3. However, these continuing discoveries have highlighted the problematic nature of the Gilgamesh text.

II. There are two main sources of difficulty, linguistic and chronological, for establishing a definitive text of the Epic of Gilgamesh.

A. Mesopotamian literature was written in two unrelated languages, Sumerian and Akkadian. Fragments of Gilgamesh poems exist in both languages.
   1. Sumerian died out as a spoken language by about 2000 B.C. but continued as a priestly and literary language.
   2. Akkadian was the common spoken language from about 2000 B.C. and became a language of literary production from about 1750 B.C.
   3. Thus, oral traditions about Gilgamesh probably circulated in both Sumerian and Akkadian for several centuries.
   4. Our primary versions of the text of the Epic are all in Akkadian, but other extant Sumerian poems about Gilgamesh overlap with some episodes of the Epic.

B. Even in just the Akkadian versions of the epic, the picture is extraordinarily complicated.
1. There are fragments of three different versions of the Epic, spanning a period of more than 1,000 years’ duration.
2. The “Old Babylonian” versions were written around 1700 B.C.
3. The Standard Version, on the first 11 of the 12 tablets discovered in Nineveh, dates from the 7th century B.C. (The 12th tablet is an independent Sumerian poem.)
4. In between these are the “Middle Versions,” written between 1500 and 1300 B.C.

C. Studying the Epic of Gilgamesh is, thus, different from studying most ancient literature.
1. When we approach most ancient texts, we have a set text to work with. Scholars may disagree about details of those texts and debate how those texts came to be in their current form, but we are not faced with fragmentary remnants of various versions.
2. But with the Epic of Gilgamesh, it is difficult even to say precisely what we mean by the text (and the term Standard Version is something of a misnomer).

III. The textual history of the Epic of Gilgamesh would require a whole course of its own to unravel. However, enough of the overall plot and themes remain to make it clear that the work deserves to be called both an epic and Western culture’s earliest work of literature.

A. The story focuses on one main character, of exceptional status and divine parentage.
1. Gilgamesh is king of a great city, Uruk.
2. He is the son of a goddess, although he is part human himself.

B. The narrative focuses largely on his relationship to Enkidu, who is created as both a rival and companion to Gilgamesh.
1. Enkidu represents “natural man,” or man before the advent of civilization, while Gilgamesh, the king of Uruk, is ultra-civilized.
2. The first encounter of the two is a fight, but they then become fast friends.

C. The plot also deals with two primary themes, the quest for fame and the quest for immortality.
1. These are the same overriding concerns that inform the Homeric epics.
2. Like Achilles and Odysseus after him, Gilgamesh has to confront his own and others’ mortality and the question of whether fame is a sufficient compensation for death.

IV. Another element that the Epic of Gilgamesh has in common with the Homeric epics is its assumption of a polytheistic worldview and its associated implications.

A. In both the Mesopotamian and the Greek religious systems, the gods were not creators outside the universe; rather, they were natural forces or elements of the universe.
1. Mesopotamian gods were not even immortal; they could be killed.
2. Greek gods were immortal, but they were not transcendent.

B. The gods are gendered and reproduce sexually. This implies their ability to produce offspring with human beings.
1. Gilgamesh himself is two-thirds divine and one-third human.
2. Ishtar wants to marry Gilgamesh and is furious when he rebuffs her.
3. Greek and Roman myths are notoriously filled with stories of gods (and goddesses) mating with human beings.

C. But despite their sexual unions with human beings, these gods are not particularly fond of or merciful toward humans.
1. Gilgamesh does not include a creation story for humans in general, but another Mesopotamian poem, the Atrahasis, does recount the creation of humans.
2. The gods made humans so that they themselves could gain relief from work. Thus, humans were made to be the gods’ servants.
3. Greek myth does not say that humans were created to serve the gods, but it does strongly imply that humans must strive to please the gods and not to anger them.

D. These implications of ancient Mediterranean polytheism, which does not assume benevolence and justice on the part of its deities, are worth bearing in mind as we move through the course.

V. The plot of the Epic of Gilgamesh can be summarized quickly. There are gaps and episodes that are hard to
follow, but the overall narrative outline of the Standard Version seems clear.

A. The first main section (Tablets 1 and 2) concerns the creation and civilization of Enkidu.
   1. Gilgamesh is overly proud and arrogant; his people pray for relief, and the gods decide to create someone who will be Gilgamesh’s equal.
   2. Enkidu is created as a wild man, in a natural and uncivilized state; he lives with the animals, is covered with hair, and knows nothing of civilization.
   3. He is “tamed,” or civilized, through an encounter with a prostitute, who introduces him both to sexuality and to human society.
   4. When Gilgamesh and Enkidu meet, they fight, but after the fight, they become fast friends.

B. The next main section of the Epic (Tablets 3 through 7) narrates Gilgamesh’s and Enkidu’s quest for fame and their deeds of prowess.
   1. In Tablets 3 through 5, the two friends undertake a dangerous journey to a great cedar forest, where they kill the forest’s guardian, Humbaba.
   2. In Tablet 6, the goddess Ishtar is smitten with desire for Gilgamesh and asks him to become her husband.
   3. He rebuffs her, and she sends the Bull of Heaven against him.
   4. Gilgamesh and Enkidu kill the bull and return in triumph to the palace.

C. The third main section (Tablets 7 and 8) deals with Enkidu’s sickness and death and Gilgamesh’s mourning for him.
   1. Tablet 7 opens with Enkidu narrating a dream about his own death.
   2. The gods are angry over the slaying of Humbaba and decree that either Gilgamesh or Enkidu must die.
   3. Enkidu falls ill. He laments his fate and the fact that he was ever civilized; he also mourns over the shame of dying from illness rather than in battle.
   4. The description of Enkidu’s death is missing from the end of Tablet 7; Tablet 8 recounts Gilgamesh’s mourning for his friend.

D. Finally, the last section (Tablets 9 through 11) narrates Gilgamesh’s travels in search of the secret of immortality.
   1. Enkidu’s death fills Gilgamesh with terror over his own mortality.
   2. Gilgamesh sets out to find the one man, Uta-napisht, who has ever become immortal and learn from him the secret of avoiding death.
   3. Gilgamesh’s travels take him to the edge of the world, where he meets a goddess, Shiduri, who keeps a tavern.
   4. Shiduri tells Gilgamesh that if he insists on continuing his journey, he will have to be ferried across the Ocean to Uta-napisht’s home.
   5. She tells Gilgamesh where to find the ferryman Ur-shanabi.

E. When Gilgamesh comes to Uta-napisht’s land, Uta-napisht tells him that death is inevitable; there is no escape.
   1. Uta-napisht and his wife survived the Great Flood and were granted immortality by the gods, but this will not be given to any other human being.
   2. At his wife’s urging, however, Uta-napisht gives Gilgamesh a gift for his return journey; he tells Gilgamesh how to find a plant at the bottom of the sea that will renew his youth.
   3. Gilgamesh dives for the plant, finds it, and sets out for home.
   4. However, when he stops for the night to bathe in a pool, Gilgamesh puts the plant down, and a snake steals it.
   5. Tablet 11 ends with Gilgamesh praising the walls of Uruk to Ur-shanabi.

VI. Gilgamesh’s conversation with Uta-napisht in Tablet 11 includes the narrative of the Great Flood.
   A. The parallels with the account of Noah’s Flood in Genesis are striking.
      1. In both stories, there is a divine decision to send a great flood.
      2. A god warns one man to build a boat and to save not just himself but also animals.
      3. There is a detailed description of the building of the boat.
      4. After the flood, the survivor sends out a bird to see if there is anywhere to land.
   B. However, there are also some striking differences.
1. Uta-napishti takes other people with him, including all his relatives, as well as craftsmen and artisans.
2. The flood lasts only seven days.
3. Most important, Uta-napishti and his wife are given immortality.

C. One other important difference is recounted not in the Gilgamesh tablets but in the Atrahasis; that is the reason for the flood.
   1. In Genesis, God destroys humanity because of its sinfulness.
   2. But in the Atrahasis, the gods are annoyed because human beings are making too much noise and decide to wipe them out.

D. These parallels in the flood stories raise the question of direction of influence or priority. Did the Bible influence the writers of the Mesopotamian flood stories or vice versa?

VII. Fragmentary as it is, the Epic of Gilgamesh nevertheless retains the power to move and to astonish.

A. Clearly, the themes of this poem are rich with possibilities for exploration and consideration.
   1. One of the most obvious themes is the connection of sexuality and civilization or sexuality and self-awareness as a human being.
   2. Then, there is the whole question of male friendship, as exemplified by Enkidu and Gilgamesh.

B. The Epic is a fitting beginning to a course such as this one; as far back as we can look, we find that humans are, fundamentally, storytelling creatures.
   1. One reason we tell stories is both to ask and to explore questions of what it means to be human.
   2. Here, at the very beginning of extant literature, we find the same questions: What separates humans from animals? What is friendship? Why do humans die? Can we avoid death? Where do we find comfort for it?
   3. Like all the world’s greatest literature, the Epic of Gilgamesh offers no pat answers; instead, it helps us see what the questions are.

Essential Reading:
The Epic of Gilgamesh.

Supplementary Reading:
Tigay, Evolution of the Gilgamesh Epic.

Questions to Consider:
1. Are scholars justified in using older versions of the Epic of Gilgamesh to supplement the Standard Version? Why or why not?
2. I identified several key themes (friendship, the desire for immortality, the link between sexuality and self-awareness) in the Epic of Gilgamesh. What other important themes do you see in this epic that resonate throughout later literature?
Lecture Three

Genesis and the Documentary Hypothesis

Scope: This lecture turns to the Hebrew Bible. We start by discussing terminology that scholars use to refer to this text, then focus on the Torah, the first five books of the Hebrew Scriptures. We consider the so-called Documentary Hypothesis, which posits four different authors for the Torah, and discuss the implications of multiple authorship for the presentation of materials in these books and our understanding of them. We then turn to an examination of the opening narratives of the Book of Genesis and see how two strands of tradition are traceable in the creation story, as presented in Genesis. Finally, the lecture traces parallels between Genesis and the mythologies of other ancient Near Eastern cultures, particularly the Mesopotamian creation story preserved in the Enuma Elish.

Outline

I. The Hebrew Bible is one of the most important foundational texts of Western culture, and it is difficult to choose which parts to focus on.
   A. The first point to address is the terminology we use to refer to the canon of texts accepted by Jews as “the Bible” and by Christians as “the Old Testament.”
      1. One designation is Tanakh, an acronym for the three sections that comprise the canon in the traditional Jewish division.
      2. The first section, the Torah, consists of the first five books of the canon, often also called the Pentateuch.
      3. The next section is the Nevi‘im, or “Prophets.”
      4. The final section is the Ketuvim, or “Writings”—everything not defined as either Torah or Prophets.
   B. In this lecture, we will look quickly at the Torah’s composition and importance.
      1. These five books contain many of the Hebrew Scriptures’ most famous and important stories.
      2. We will use the creation story as an example through which we can address some of the questions about the composition of Genesis, the Torah, and the Tanakh in general.

II. Tradition attributes the five books of the Torah to Moses, but most biblical scholars agree that these books are the work of more than one author.
   A. There are several clear indications of multiple authorship.
      1. The Pentateuch shows variations in ways of referring to God, as Elohim (usually translated “God”) and as YHWH (usually translated as “The Lord.”)
      2. There are variations in vocabulary and style and contrasting perspectives, giving different versions of the same stories.
   B. The Documentary Hypothesis posits four main source documents behind the Pentateuch.
      1. There was a “Yahwist narrative” (usually called J), written in the 10th or 9th century B.C.
      2. An “Elohist narrative” (E) was composed in the 9th century B.C.
      3. Deuteronomy (D), the fifth book, is from the 7th century B.C.
      4. Finally, a Priestly source (P) dates to the 6th or 5th century B.C.
   C. The Documentary Hypothesis claims that the Torah was assembled in stages.
      1. In the 8th century B.C., an editor combined J and E. The resulting (hypothetical) document is often called JE.
      2. Around 500 B.C., a second editor added P, producing JEP.
      3. Deuteronomy was added to the first four books of the Torah around 400 B.C.
      4. These different stages are reflected in differing styles, emphases, and theological viewpoints.
   D. The different “voices” of the Torah are clearly detectable in the creation stories.
III. According to the Yahwist creation narrative (Genesis 2:4b–3:24), the Lord created man—that is, a male human being—from the dust, before there were plants on the earth.

A. The Lord planted a garden and placed the man in it but prohibited him from eating the fruit from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

B. The Lord then decided that the man needed a companion.
   1. First, the Lord made all the animals and brought them to the man.
   2. The man named all the animals, but “there was not found a helper as his partner.”
   3. Next, the Lord cast the man into a deep sleep, removed a rib from his body, and created a woman as the man’s companion.

C. The serpent persuaded the woman to eat the fruit of the forbidden tree.
   1. She, in turn, persuaded her husband to eat, as well.
   2. This violation of the Lord’s prohibition led to the humans’ expulsion from Eden.

IV. This is probably the most familiar part of the Genesis creation story. But Genesis 1:1 through 2:4a differs both in emphasis and in details.

A. These chapters, the Priestly account, recount the creation of the whole cosmos.
   1. At first, there is a formless void; then God creates light.
   2. After separating the primeval waters by creating the dome of the sky on the second day, God creates the dry land (earth) and the plants on the third day.
   3. On the fourth day, he creates the sun and the moon.

B. The first four days of creation establish the environment in which both animals and humans can live.
   1. God creates swimming and flying creatures on the fifth day.
   2. On the sixth day, God creates land animals of all kinds, including humans, both male and female.
   3. God gives the humans dominion over other creatures.
   4. He tells them they may eat every seed-yielding plant and any fruit that contains a seed.

V. Thus, the first three chapters of Genesis preserve two separate creation stories, with notable differences.

A. Most obviously, the order of events is different.
   1. In the earlier Yahwist account, the order is man, plants, animals, woman.
   2. In the later Priestly account, the order is plants, animals, humans (male and female).

B. There are other important distinctions in the two accounts.
   1. The Lord of the J narrative is strongly anthropomorphic; he walks in the garden and speaks directly to Adam and Eve. God of the P narrative is far less anthropomorphic.
   2. In the P narrative, male and female humans are created at the same time, and there is no etiology of female submission; both are given “dominion” over the earth.
   3. The P narrative is far more focused on cosmology and the creation of the whole universe than the J narrative, which focuses mainly on human beings and their fall from primeval happiness.
   4. The J narrative provides etiologies for the harsh realities of human existence, including the necessity of work and the pain of childbearing; the P narrative does not address these issues at all.

VI. The P creation narrative is strikingly similar to the creation narrative of the Mesopotamian Enuma Elish.

A. In the Enuma Elish, the original state of the universe is a watery chaos.
   1. This chaos is composed of two deities, Apsu (fresh water) and Tiamat (salt water).
   2. As they are mingled together, other gods are born out of them, beginning with a pair who represents silt.
   3. Several generations later, the story culminates in a war among many gods, from which the young god Marduk emerges victorious.
   4. The cosmos attains recognizable form when Marduk kills Tiamat and divides her body in two.
   5. Marduk makes the sky out of one part of Tiamat’s body and the earth out of the other.

B. Several of these elements are traceable in the P narrative.
   1. P shows God creating the universe from preexisting primeval waters.
   2. The Hebrew word tehom, traditionally translated “the deep,” may be cognate with Tiamat; if so, then God’s control of tehom parallels Marduk’s control of Tiamat.
3. God’s division of the waters through creating the sky seems to echo the cleaving of Tiamat’s body to form the earth and the sky.

VII. The P narrative also differs from the Enuma Elish in significant ways.

A. Both narratives assume a preexisting watery void, which is then formed into the recognizable universe.
   1. But in the Enuma Elish that void is itself two gods, who bring forth other gods, while in the P narrative, the world comes into shape only through God’s intervention.
   2. The P narrative accepts that the original state of the universe was watery chaos but affirms that it required the creative agency of God to bring the universe out of that state.

B. In the Enuma Elish, the progress of the world from chaos into its present shape takes an unspecified length of time and relies on strife among many gods.
   1. The whole process is violent and ridden with conflict.
   2. The P narrative stresses the essential orderliness of the process of creation.

C. It is possible that the author(s) of P wrote in intentional contrast to the Enuma Elish.
   1. P is normally dated to the period after the Babylonian Exile of the Jews (586–538 B.C.).
   2. A creation story reworking the Babylonian material into a form consonant with Jewish belief would make good sense.
   3. The P story of humans’ creation can also be read in contrast to the Mesopotamian version, where humans are created to work for the gods.

VIII. The Documentary Hypothesis covers not only Genesis but also the rest of the Torah, in which the four different source documents are connected in complex ways.

A. For example, the flood narratives of P and (probably) J are interwoven with one another to form one coherent story, but traces remain of two different original versions.

B. In recent years, the Documentary Hypothesis itself has come in for criticism and revision, but the complexity of the narrative tradition out of which the Pentateuch grew seems undeniable.

IX. The Pentateuch contains some of the most important stories of the Western literary tradition, as well as the foundational stories of both Judaism and Christianity.

A. Genesis is particularly rich in memorable and influential stories, including the stories of Abraham.
   1. It is with Abraham that the Lord becomes a god specifically of the Hebrew people.
   2. This is represented by the covenant Abraham makes with the Lord.

B. Exodus through Deuteronomy focus on Moses as hero, leader, and lawgiver. Moses’s story contains a great many notable points.
   1. The narrative of his “heroic” birth and childhood marks his importance.
   2. He receives direct visions of God but is at first unwilling to accept the task required of him.
   3. He is the recipient and spokesman of the Ten Commandments and the leader of the Israelites in their flight from Egypt.
   4. He leads his people within sight of the Promised Land but cannot reach it himself.

Essential Reading:
Genesis.

Supplementary Reading:
Alter, Art of Biblical Narrative, especially chapters 1 and 7.
Exodus through Deuteronomy.
“The Epic of Creation” (Enuma Elish), in Dalley, Myths from Mesopotamia.
Fox, Five Books of Moses.

Questions to Consider:
1. Is there any way other than multiple authors or sources to account for the existence of different and contradictory versions (for example, of the creation story) in the Bible?
2. Many scholars think that the P narrative in Genesis directly responds to the *Enuma Elish*. If this is correct, does it make any difference in the way we read Genesis?
Lecture Four

The Deuteronomistic History

Scope: This lecture considers the so-called Deuteronomistic History, that is, the Books of Deuteronomy, Joshua, Judges, 1 and 2 Samuel, and 1 and 2 Kings. The lecture summarizes the theory that these books were assembled and edited during the Babylonian Captivity of the Hebrews (586–538 B.C.) and that their overarching purpose is not to record history per se but to provide a theological explanation of the Babylonian conquest of Judah as retribution for wrongdoing on the part of the Jewish people. The lecture then turns to a close reading of the story of David and Bathsheba and considers the implications of this narrative for our understanding of David and of the Deuteronomistic History itself.

Outline

I. The Book of Deuteronomy looks in two directions, back to the Torah and forward to the Tanakh’s second main section, “Prophets.”
   A. The Prophets are traditionally subdivided into “Former Prophets” and “Latter Prophets.”
      1. The Former Prophets include the Books of Joshua, Judges, 1 and 2 Samuel, and 1 and 2 Kings.
      2. The Latter Prophets are the Books of Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and the 12 “minor prophets.”
   B. This lecture looks at the Former Prophets in connection with Deuteronomy.
      1. We will return to a discussion of prophecy in the next lecture.
      2. Here, we consider the theory that the Books of Deuteronomy through 2 Kings form a unified whole, the Deuteronomistic History.

II. The term Deuteronomistic History indicates that Joshua, Judges, Samuel, and Kings reflect the theological viewpoint of Deuteronomy.
   A. Deuteronomy narrates the end of Moses’s life and leadership.
      1. The word Deuteronomy means “Second Law”; the text assumes that Moses here refines and amplifies the Law he had presented earlier in the Torah.
      2. But the book’s current form probably dates to the 7th century B.C., not to the time of Moses.
      3. Deuteronomy covers forms of religious worship, political institutions, and legal statutes.
   B. Deuteronomy assumes that Israel suffers or flourishes depending on its people’s obedience to God and to the Mosaic covenant.
      1. The Mosaic covenant is modeled on ancient Near Eastern treaties of mutual obligation, under the suzerain-vassal model.
      2. The suzerain promises to protect the vassal in return for loyalty and obedience.
      3. In this view of the covenant, God (the suzerain) promises to reward good behavior and to punish bad behavior.
      4. The Ten Commandments can be seen as fitting into this “treaty” framework.
      5. For instance, the First Commandment, “Thou shalt have no other gods before me,” reflects the vassal’s standard oath of loyalty.

III. The strongest version of the Deuteronomistic History theory posits that Deuteronomy itself was edited to serve as an introduction to the next four books of the Bible.
   A. It further claims that a single editor (or school) compiled these five books.
      1. Other scholars argue that there are too many internal inconsistencies for this to be the case.
      2. Thus, another version of the theory posits successive editions of the Deuteronomistic History, beginning in the 7th century B.C. and continuing into the period of the Babylonian Exile.
   B. The writer(s) of the Deuteronomistic History faced the task of explaining the events of history in the face of God’s covenant with Israel.
      1. Why did the Israelites adopt monarchy as their form of government?
      2. Why did the United Monarchy, founded by Saul and reaching its high point under David and Solomon, divide into two parts, Israel in the North and Judah in the South?
3. Why did Assyria conquer the Northern Kingdom in 722 B.C.?
4. Most troubling of all, why did the Babylonians succeed in subduing Judah and capturing Jerusalem in 586 B.C.?

C. Within the covenant-as-treaty framework, the Deuteronomistic History portrays these events as the consequences of vassals’ disobedience to their overlord (God).
1. Various stories of different leaders, culminating in the establishment of the monarchy and the Davidic line, are all directed toward explaining the ultimate destruction of the monarchy.
2. This helps explain a certain discomfort with the very idea of monarchy, obvious as early as 1 Samuel 8.

IV. The term history as applied to these books does not imply that they follow modern historiographical standards.

A. The Deuteronomistic History is as much a work of literature as of “history.” Appreciation of the full richness of this text requires close attention to its literary aspects.
1. The books of the Deuteronomistic History were written long after the events they describe.
2. Thus, the writers had to draw on their own imaginations to describe characters and events.

B. Robert Alter uses the terms “historicized prose fiction” and “fictionalized history” to describe the Hebrew Bible.
1. This does not mean that there are no historical facts embedded in the text.
2. But the text falls somewhere between what we moderns would categorize as “history” and “fiction.”
3. Alter compares the writer(s) of the “David stories” to Shakespeare’s approach to *Henry V*.
4. A similar comparison can be made with “Homer’s” relationship to his material.

V. The recognition that the Deuteronomistic History is a literary work, compiled and arranged with an overarching “take” on monarchy and God’s hand in history, has important implications for our understanding of the monarchy and of the roles of the most famous kings, as we can see in the story of David and Bathsheba (2 Samuel 11–12).

A. David is not admirable in this part of his story.
1. In direct contradiction of a king’s military duty, David is idle at home while his troops are off at war.
2. In direct contradiction of a king’s civic duty, David seduces the wife of one of his soldiers, then arranges for the soldier’s death.

B. David sees Bathsheba, the wife of Uriah the Hittite, bathing on the roof of her house and summons her to him.
1. We are not told what Bathsheba wants or whether David gives her any choice.
2. The only time she “speaks” in this passage is to send David a message that she is pregnant.

C. David’s first reaction is to try to palm the child off as her husband’s; when that doesn’t work, he arranges for Uriah’s death and marries Bathsheba himself.
1. David summons Uriah back from the battlefield and tells him to go home and visit his wife.
2. Uriah honors the tradition that a soldier consecrated for war should not engage in sexual relations and, thus, does not see Bathsheba.
3. David then has Uriah placed in the front line of battle, where he is killed.

D. The Lord sends the prophet Nathan to rebuke David.
1. Nathan uses a parable about a poor man with one ewe-lamb to make David realize his guilt.
2. A rich man with many flocks took the poor man’s one lamb away and slaughtered it.
3. David grows angry and says the rich man deserves death; Nathan responds “You are the man,” and predicts evils to come in David’s family.
4. David admits his guilt, and Nathan predicts that the baby Bathsheba is carrying will die.

VI. What are we to make of this story about Israel’s most famous king? There are several obvious possibilities.

A. Perhaps because David’s crimes were remembered by the tradition, the author “had” to include them.
1. However, the author could have tried to explain these traditional details away.
2. Instead, the author stresses the cruelty and deceit of David’s actions.

B. Perhaps the author is concerned to remind us that the legitimacy of the king does not depend on his own ethical behavior.
1. David is God’s anointed, but he is fallible and even, at times, evil.
2. Perhaps such stories serve as reminders of the dangers inherent in even a good king’s rule.
3. The only fully obvious conclusion is that the Deuteronomistic History presents a multifaceted view of kingship.

C. It is worth remembering that the books of the Deuteronomistic History were written ex post facto, to explain not what went right in the monarchy so much as what went wrong.

VII. The idea that God rewards good behavior and punishes bad underlies a conception of the nature of good and bad fortune, often called the Deuteronomistic Theology.

A. In this worldview, good fortune is evidence of righteousness, while bad fortune is evidence that one did wrong.
   1. Therefore, when the conquest of Judah imposed calamity on the whole people, the question arose, what have we done wrong to deserve this?
   2. The Deuteronomistic History’s presentation of the development of the monarchy attempts to answer this question.

B. According to the Deuteronomistic History, what did go wrong? Most important, the people tended to fall into idolatry and to worship other gods.
   1. One fascinating point here is that the other gods are not denied or seen as meaningless.
   2. Even in the Ten Commandments, the prohibition on having any other god before God does not necessarily imply monotheism.
   3. Turning to other gods is seen as breaking the treaty’s requirement of loyalty to one’s overlord/suzerain.

Essential Reading:
1 and 2 Samuel, 1 Kings.

Supplementary Reading:
Alter, Art of Biblical Narrative, especially chapters 4–6.
———, World of Biblical Literature, chapter 3 (“The Literary Character of the Bible”).
Gottwald, Hebrew Bible.

Questions to Consider:
1. Why do you think the writer(s) of the Deuteronomistic History chose to include stories that showed their own cultural heroes (such as David) in a bad light?
2. Can you think of any modern works of literature (or film) that adhere to the Deuteronomistic Theology by implying that good fortune is evidence of righteousness and bad fortune, of wickedness?
Lecture Five
Isaiah

Scope: This lecture begins by defining the role of the Hebrew prophet in the monarchy and later, gives a brief overview of the different time periods represented by the books of prophecy in the Hebrew Bible. We then concentrate on the Book of Isaiah, which itself represents at least three different eras of prophecy (from the 8th century B.C.; the period of the Babylonian Exile; and the post-exilic period). We discuss key passages that were taken by later Christian authors as foretelling the events of Christ’s life (such as Isaiah 7:14 or 53:3–9) and consider their possible meanings in their original context. We also discuss the development, in chapters 40–55, of the idea of a universal god of all humankind and the challenge this poses to the Deuteronomistic History’s conception of God. The lecture concludes with a brief discussion of the related genre of wisdom literature.

Outline
I. The Latter Prophets are Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekial, and the 12 minor prophets.
   A. These books reflect the sayings of spokesmen, or wise men, who were considered intermediaries between God and his people.
      1. The books of prophecy probably record actual oral sayings of the prophets.
      2. These books were later edited, annotated, and augmented, so that the oral sayings formed a nucleus around which the books developed.
      3. The books of the Prophets probably did not assume canonical form until the 5th through 3rd centuries B.C.
   B. What was a prophet in this section of the Bible?
      1. Hebrew prophets did not necessarily foresee or predict future events.
      2. Rather, they were messengers, or spokesmen, for God.
      3. The Hebrew word navî’îm may be related to the verb “to call”; a prophet is either one who “calls out” a message from God or one who is called by God to deliver a message.
      4. The Greek prophētēs indicates an interpreter or proclaimer, who “speaks forth” a god’s words.
   C. Hebrew prophets were less concerned with predicting the future than with analyzing the people’s behavior in the present in terms of God’s requirements.
      1. Nathan’s rebuke to David in 2 Samuel 12 is a good example.
      2. This rebuke ends with a prediction of the future, but Nathan’s main purpose is to chastise David’s present behavior.
   D. However, Christian theologians interpreted the prophets of the Hebrew Bible as foretelling the coming of Christ.
      1. Thus, the sense of “foretelling the future” is present in the Christian tradition.
      2. To understand the Prophets’ influence on the Western literary tradition, we must consider how these texts were interpreted both at the time that they were written and later.
II. Scholars identify four major periods of prophetic activity, from the early monarchy to the post-exilic period of Hebrew history.
   A. In the early monarchical period (11th through 9th centuries B.C.), prophets served both to advise and to warn the kings.
      1. Local or itinerant prophets, whom individuals could consult and who advised the community, probably existed before this time.
      2. With the advent of the monarchy, prophets assumed increased importance.
      3. The prophets could announce that God had chosen a particular individual to be king or had rejected a king for wrongdoing.
   B. During the 8th century B.C., the prophets’ role seems to have changed from “kingmaker” to public adviser.
      1. Eighth-century prophets were concerned with such issues as social justice and religious practice.
2. During this century, the Assyrian Empire destroyed the Northern Kingdom (Israel) and subjugated the Southern Kingdom (Judah).
3. The prophets interpreted these events as signs of God’s judgment against the Hebrew people.

C. The third main period of prophecy coincided with the ascendancy of Babylon. During the exile, the prophets provided hope for an eventual return to Jerusalem and rebuilding of the Temple.

D. The fourth prophetic period was during the post-exilic period, when Cyrus of Persia allowed the Jews to return to Judah.
   1. The main issues the prophets now addressed were the challenges of reestablishing a community in post-exilic conditions.
   2. In particular, the post-exilic prophets are concerned with the community’s identity, social organization, and resistance to assimilation.

III. The Book of Isaiah is one of the most famous and most beautiful of the prophetic books and encapsulates many of the difficulties involved in analyzing prophetic literature.

   A. The book falls into three divisions, from three different time periods; these divisions are conventionally called First, Second, and Third Isaiah.
      1. Isaiah himself lived in the late 8th and/or early 7th centuries B.C., and First Isaiah (chapters 1–39) probably dates from around this time.
      2. Chapters 40 through 66, Second Isaiah, must date to the 6th century B.C. because these chapters refer to the fall of Jerusalem and the deportation of the people.
      3. As a subdivision of Second Isaiah, chapters 55 through 66 (Third Isaiah) may be post-exilic.

   B. These three parts were not joined randomly, however; there are thematic connections throughout the book.
      1. One reappearing theme, that all the events of history reflect God’s plan, recalls the Deuteronomic History.
      2. This includes the actions of great empires, such as the Assyrian Empire in the 8th century B.C. and the Babylonian and Persian Empires in the 6th century B.C.

   C. The Book of Isaiah reflects both the manner in which the prophet’s words were gathered in his own day and the process by which they were reinterpreted and reapplied in later periods.
      1. In his own day, Isaiah’s descriptions of hostile and threatening foreign powers must have referred to the Assyrians.
      2. Later, these descriptions were applied to the Babylonian conquest of Judah.
      3. In its final redaction, the contrast between “worldly” governments and the Jewish people is highlighted by the primacy of Jerusalem and the expectation of a righteous “anointed leader.”

   D. The book is by no means a slapdash concoction of disparate parts. Its unity is not only thematic but is also reflected in its style.
      1. Isaiah is written mainly in poetry.
      2. Most critics agree that Isaiah contains some of the finest poetry in the Bible.

IV. Second Isaiah’s description of God implies that he is a universal God of all peoples, not just a god of the people of the covenant.

   A. In 45:5–7, God directly states that he is the only god who exists.
      1. This is in striking contrast to the Deuteronomic History’s view of God.
      2. Second Isaiah thus articulates true monotheism.

   B. Second Isaiah is also striking for its treatment of the Persian king, Cyrus.
      1. In chapters 44 and 45, Cyrus is referred to as God’s “anointed,” who will carry out God’s purpose.
      2. In other words, Cyrus is identified as the (or a) messiah, the anointed one.
      3. This is the only biblical passage where the term messiah refers to someone who is not an Israelite.

V. Christian writers continued the process of reinterpretation and reapplication of Isaiah, which became a rich source for predictions of Christ.

   A. One of the most important verses in this regard is 7:14: “Look, the young woman is with child and shall bear a son, and shall name him Immanuel.”
1. The word the Revised Standard Version renders “young woman” is the Hebrew ‘almah. Hebrew has another word, bethulah, which means “virgin.”
2. The Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible, the Septuagint, renders ‘almah as parthenos.
4. Matthew’s Gospel and later Christian works interpreted Isaiah 7:14 as referring to the Virgin Mary’s conception of Christ.
5. Most scholars of the Hebrew Bible think that this verse refers to Isaiah’s own mother or to the mother of Hezekiah, the king of Judah who averted the conquest of Jerusalem in 701 B.C.

B. Another crucial passage for later Christian thought was the description of the “suffering servant” at 53:3–9.
1. Early Christian writers identified these verses with Christ, especially with his Passion.
2. Thus, the “suffering servant” of Isaiah lent support to the developing idea of an atoning Messiah, rather than a triumphant Messiah.
3. Scholars continue to debate the original meaning of the passage in its own context.

C. Isaiah’s importance in Christian theology led to its greatest non-literary influence on later Western culture: Some of the most memorable sections of Händel’s Messiah are settings of the King James translation of Isaiah.

VI. The third segment of the Hebrew Bible, the Writings, includes an important genre that developed after the exile: wisdom literature.
A. The most important books of wisdom literature, such as Ecclesiastes and Proverbs, meditate on the nature and place of justice in the world.
B. Ecclesiastes casts doubt on the Deuteronomistic Theology’s assumptions that righteousness is rewarded and evil punished.
C. The next lecture discusses the Book of Job, which is sometimes classified as wisdom literature and which poses the strongest questioning of the Deuteronomistic Theology of any text in the Hebrew Bible.

Essential Reading:
Book of Isaiah.

Supplementary Reading:
Bandstra, Reading the Old Testament.
Wilson, Prophecy and Society.

Questions to Consider:
1. Do we have any analogous figures to prophets in our culture (that is, people who rebuke, warn, and advise)? If so, who are they and in what medium do they work?
2. Does historical context matter for our reading of works such as Isaiah? Does it make a difference to our experience of this poetry if we think that verse 7:14 refers to Hezekiah’s mother or if we think it refers to the Virgin Mary?
Lecture Six

Job

Scope: This lecture concludes our treatment of the Hebrew Scriptures by considering one of the most remarkable books of the Bible, the Book of Job. In contrast to the Deuteronomistic Theology, which assumes that God rewards good actions and punishes evil ones, the Book of Job presents the story of a righteous man who undergoes great suffering and torment through no fault of his own; the book thus raises the question of why evil exists and why the good suffer. The lecture briefly summarizes the plot of the Book of Job and considers whether the “answer” that the Lord gives to Job is, fundamentally, an answer to the problem of undeserved suffering at all. We also discuss some of the compositional questions about this book and consider some problems of translation at key points in the book.

Outline

I. The Deuteronomistic Theology assumes that God rewards good actions and punishes evil ones.
   A. This worldview has two important implications.
      1. Anyone who is flourishing must be a righteous person; thus, good fortune is evidence of one’s righteousness.
      2. Anyone who is suffering must have done something wrong.
   B. This view is comforting and long-standing but does not, ultimately, address the complexity of the world.
      1. Clearly, there are times when evil people do not suffer and times when good people do suffer.
      2. For a believer in an all-powerful god (or gods), this raises the question of theodicy.
      3. If god is both righteous and all-powerful, why does he allow good people to suffer?
   C. Thinkers from antiquity on have grappled with this question.
      1. Answers range from the Stoics’ denial of the reality of suffering to the Gnostics’ dogma that the creator of the material world was evil.
      2. Others say that suffering is a test and that its recompense will come in the afterlife.
      3. Other approaches recognize the problem and say that there is no answer.

II. The Book of Job confronts the problems of theodicy head-on but offers no simple answers. The book’s basic plot presents the utterly undeserved suffering of an undeniably good man.
   A. The book suggests that Job’s suffering began as a test of his righteousness by God.
      1. The beginning states that Job is righteous, pious, and fortunate.
      2. Ha-satan, “The Accuser,” persuades God that if Job is tested, he will cease to be pious.
      3. God gives Satan permission to test Job.
   B. In a horrific crescendo of disasters, Satan inflicts a whole series of sufferings on Job.
      1. First, he loses his possessions.
      2. Then, his children are all killed.
      3. Finally, he is attacked in his own person, afflicted with a terrible skin disease.
   C. Through all these tribulations, Job remains steadfast in his faith, even when his own wife tells him to “curse God and die.”
      2. But “endurance” or “steadfastness” would be a better translation than “patience” of the Greek word hupomonē.
   D. In a coda to the book, God rewards Job by giving him new wealth, his health again, and a new set of children.
      1. This seems to validate the Deuteronomistic Theology, at least to some extent.
      2. However, the end does not answer many of the questions raised earlier in the book.
III. In the middle of the book, the focus changes from the testing of Job by Satan to a questioning of the reason and justification of evil by Job. This section of the book is the most fascinating and the most complicated.

A. Job is visited by three friends, often called his “comforters.”
   1. When the friends first approach Job, they do not recognize him.
   2. Their most comforting action is to sit beside him for seven days and nights without speaking.

B. After this, the friends each offer their opinions about why Job is suffering.
   1. Eliphaz says that Job’s suffering indicates that everyone is guilty of some sin. He suggests that Job’s suffering will end because he is a relatively righteous man.
   2. Bildad suggests that Job’s children must have been wicked to bring destruction upon themselves. If Job is indeed innocent, God will rescue him.
   3. Zophar claims that Job must be a sinner and that his suffering is evidence that he deserves to suffer. Zophar advise Job to admit his sin.

IV. Thus, all three friends adhere to the Deuteronomistic Theology; they take Job’s suffering as evidence that he—or at least his children—must be guilty of some sin. God punishes only the sinful; therefore, the existence of punishment is evidence of sin.

A. Job, however, does not accept their presentation of his situation.
   1. He says that it is not his place to judge God, and he remains loyal to God.
   2. However, he also maintains his awareness of and insistence on his own innocence as he answers each of his “comforters.”

B. The final “comforter” to visit Job is Elihu, a young man who is angry at Job for attempting to argue with God and angry at Job’s three friends for failing to answer Job properly.
   1. Elihu rebukes Job for questioning God’s justice; this is, in itself, a sin.
   2. No human can be truly “righteous” or innocent.
   3. Furthermore, suffering is a form of discipline that God uses to teach humans.
   4. Elihu’s recommendation is that Job (and everyone) submit to God.
   5. This section, in which Elihu tries to answer Job’s objections, is probably a late addition to the original text.

V. Job remains uncomforted; he cannot accept that he is sinful in some way unknown to himself.

A. In his responses to his comforters, he calls out to and challenges God.
   1. Job wants an explanation for his suffering.
   2. He challenges God, using legal terminology; in effect, he wants to bring his case into court and force God to defend his own position.

B. Finally, immediately after Elihu’s speech, God appears and responds to Job.
   1. God speaks to Job out of a whirlwind in a series of rhetorical questions.
   2. In one of the most famous passages of the Bible, God asks Job, “Where were you when I laid the foundation of the Earth?”
   3. Interestingly, God does not mention the “testing” aspect of Job’s sufferings.

C. God thus seems to ratify Elihu’s contention that humans are too small to dispute the ways of creation. But this leaves many questions unanswered.
   1. The statement that humans cannot understand the complexity of creation does not address the problem of theodicy; if God is just, why does undeserved suffering occur?
   2. If God is implying that he himself was somehow bound by rules of creation that made suffering inevitable even when not deserved, then God is no longer omnipotent.
   3. If God is all-powerful and permits undeserved suffering, he is not just. If God is just but cannot prevent undeserved suffering, he is not all-powerful.

D. The Book of Job, then, although a powerful discussion of the problems of theodicy, ultimately offers no explanation for undeserved suffering. In effect, it says, “There is no point in asking these questions.”
VI. There are many compositional and textual difficulties in the Book of Job. The book’s author is anonymous, and its date of composition is debated.

A. The bulk of the Book of Job probably dates to between the 7th and 4th centuries B.C., but the text reveals a complex history of composition.
   1. The philosophical and theological discussions of the middle section apparently were grafted into an earlier “folktale” text.
   2. In the folktale, the righteous Job was tested, suffered, remained steadfast, and was rewarded with more prosperity than he had before his testing.
   3. Later, someone added the discussion of theodicy.

B. This supposition is supported by differences in style between the “framing narrative” and the theological discussion.
   1. The framing narrative is in simple prose.
   2. The middle section features dialogues in poetic style.
   3. Elihu’s speeches show distinctive style and vocabulary.
   4. This could indicate multiple authors of the text, one author working from many sources, or a text that has been redacted several times.

C. The text of the Book of Job is rife with difficulties of reading and understanding. Unfortunately, these affect some of the more important passages in the text.
   1. Chapter 13, verse 15, is traditionally rendered “Though he kill me, yet will I trust in him.”
   2. Equally plausible translations are “See, he will kill me, I have no hope” (NOAB) or “Yes, he may slay me; I shall not be quiet” (Robert Gordis).
   3. Similarly, the NOAB renders chapter 19:25–26 as “I know that my redeemer lives, and that at the last he will stand upon the earth; and after my skin has been thus destroyed, then in my flesh I shall see God.”
   4. But “redeemer” could also be translated “vindicator”; “in my flesh” should perhaps read “without my flesh”; and the meaning of the Hebrew traditionally translated “I shall see God” is uncertain.

Essential Reading:
Job.

Supplementary Reading:
Bandstra, Reading the Old Testament.
Gordis, Book of God and Man.
Gordis, Book of Job.
Zuck, Sitting with Job.

Questions to Consider:
1. Is there any way to answer the problem of theodicy without making reference to an afterlife where the evil will be punished and the good rewarded?
2. What are the implications for our understanding of Job’s own viewpoint of the alternative translations of 13:15 and 19:25–27?
Lecture Seven
Homer—The Iliad

Scope: This lecture begins our survey of ancient Greek literature. The lecture starts by sketching the nature of Homeric epic, focusing on its oral composition. We then turn to a summary of the storyline of the Iliad and discuss the epic’s overall themes, paying special attention to the importance of kleos (glory or fame) and timē (honor). We consider how the epic uses Achilles’s anger over his dishonor by Agamemnon and his later desire to avenge the death of his friend Patroclus to discuss the human condition in general and the necessity of accepting mortality in particular. The lecture concludes with the great culminating scene of the Iliad, in which Achilles returns the body of his enemy Hector to Hector’s father, Priam, and in so doing, faces and accepts mortality.

Outline

I. The Iliad and the Odyssey are the first fully developed epics in Western culture, far longer and more complex than the Epic of Gilgamesh.
   
   A. The Iliad and the Odyssey became models for later epic.
      1. By epic, the Greeks meant any long poem in dactylic hexameter.
      2. Later writers, basing their work on Homer’s, took epic to mean narrative poems dealing with gods and heroes and often associated with war or adventure.
      3. Scholars called the Gilgamesh story the Epic of Gilgamesh because of this association.
   
   B. The Iliad and the Odyssey were primary cultural texts for classical Greek civilization.
      1. They served as educational tools and moral frameworks, provided examples of behavior, and so on.
      2. They offer our fullest accounts of several episodes from the Trojan War myth.

II. But despite their status as the foundation works of Greek literature, the Homeric epics represent the culmination of a centuries-long tradition of orally transmitted poetry.
   
   A. The events described in the epics supposedly took place in the 12th century B.C., centuries before the alphabet was introduced into Greece. How did these epics come to be created?
      1. As early as the 2nd century A.D., scholars discussed whether the same poet wrote the two epics and whether either was written by a single poet at all.
      2. The question of whether the Iliad and the Odyssey are unified wholes created by one supreme poetic genius is often called the Homeric Question.
      3. In 1928, Milman Parry demonstrated that the epics were products of an ongoing oral tradition.
   
   B. If the Homeric epics are grounded in oral composition, what are the implications for our understanding of the epics’ genesis?
      1. Some scholars think there was never any one “Homer”; the epics we have are simply one version, from one performance of traditional material.
      2. Others think that the epics’ sophistication and complexity of design must indicate careful structuring by a single poet working within the oral tradition.
      3. Thus, Parry’s work recast the Homeric Question in different terms rather than settling it.
      4. There is little consensus of opinion about how, when, and why the epics came to be written down.

III. The mythic background of the Homeric epics is the story of the Trojan War.
   
   A. The Trojan War began because the Trojan prince Paris abducted Helen, wife of Menelaus, king of Sparta.
      1. Menelaus’s elder brother Agamemnon raised a fleet of 1,000 ships and an army to man it and sailed to Troy to retrieve Helen.
      2. The war lasted for 10 years and ended with the Greeks’ ruse of the Trojan Horse.
   
   B. Neither epic tells the entire story of the war.
      1. The Iliad focuses on events that happened during a short period in the last year of the war.
      2. The Odyssey deals with Odysseus’s adventures after the war.
C. The *Iliad*'s basic subject is the wrath of Achilles, who is angry that Agamemnon took away his concubine Briseis.
   1. Achilles’s anger motivates him to withdraw from the fighting, leaving his fellow Greeks to suffer great losses.
   2. Starting with this particular episode allows the bard to focus on crucial themes that bear on the entire warrior ethos.

IV. To understand the nature of Achilles’s anger, we must examine the Homeric hero’s motivations for fighting.
   A. The Homeric warrior fights for honor (*timē*) and glory or fame (*kleos*).
      1. *Timē*’s most basic meaning is the tangible expression of honor in the form of gifts, spoils, or a particular prize (or *geras*).
      2. *Kleos*, usually translated “glory” or “fame,” means what is spoken aloud about one.
   B. Agamemnon dishonors Achilles because of a loss of *timē* he himself suffered when he had to return his concubine Chryseis to her father.
      1. Agamemnon thus tries to restore his own lost *timē* by taking Achilles’s *geras*, Briseis.
      2. Achilles responds by declaring that he will no longer fight and threatening to return home.
   C. Given the assumptions of Achilles’s culture, his reaction is not excessive; Agamemnon has removed Achilles’s motivation for fighting.
      1. In Homeric society, a warrior’s sense of worth is largely determined by how others perceive him.
      2. Agamemnon has done more than dishonor Achilles; he has called Achilles’s whole worth into question.
      3. These concepts—*timē*, *kleos*, and the warrior’s motivation for fighting—resonate throughout the rest of the epic.

V. From Books II through XVIII, Achilles refrains from battle; the Greeks are ever harder pressed by the Trojans, led by their greatest warrior, Hector.
   A. The Greek leaders realize that they must do something to change their situation.
      1. Agamemnon selects three men to ask Achilles to accept Agamemnon’s apology and lavish gifts and to return to battle.
      2. The three go to Achilles’s tent, but he rejects their pleas forcefully.
      3. Achilles’s mother, Thetis, a goddess, has informed him he has two possible fates: to win *kleos* by dying at Troy or to return home and live a long, inglorious life.
      4. Achilles says that he will sail home and counsels others to do so.
      5. He finally agrees not to leave but says that he will not fight until the Trojans reach the Greeks’ ships.
   B. In Book XVI, Achilles’s dearest friend, Patroclus, goes into battle in Achilles’s place.
      1. Patroclus goes into battle wearing Achilles’s armor and is slain by Hector.
      2. His death is the crucial turning point of the *Iliad*.

VI. After Patroclus’s death in Book XVI and the fight over his body in Book XVII, the focus of the narrative and of Achilles’s character both change.
   A. Achilles no longer cares about *timē* or *kleos*; he is concerned entirely with revenge.
      1. Books XVIII through XXIII focus on Achilles’s return to battle.
      2. He is fueled by a desperate desire for vengeance against Hector.
      3. The two meet in single combat, and Achilles slays Hector.
      4. Achilles’s desire for vengeance continues in his savage mistreatment of Hector’s corpse.
   B. Book XXIV provides the resolution of the *Iliad* through a meeting between Achilles and Hector’s father, Priam.
      1. Priam comes to Achilles’s tent to ransom the body of his son.
      2. Achilles agrees to return the body, and the *Iliad* ends with the funeral of Hector.

VII. Within this basic plotline, one of the most important themes is the human condition, or what it means to be mortal, and the paradox of *kleos aphthiton*, “imperishable glory.”
   A. Imperishable glory is the only kind of meaningful immortality available to Homeric warriors.
      1. The existence of the *psyche* after death, in the underworld, is vague and unsubstantial.
2. This view of the afterlife does not offer consolation for bodily death.
3. Only kleos provides any kind of significant immortality; the Homeric warrior lives on in what others say about him after he is dead.

B. This is similar to the view of mortality in the Epic of Gilgamesh.
1. But the Iliadic picture of kleos is more limited than the picture given in Gilgamesh.
2. Gilgamesh could find his own version of kleos in the walls of Uruk, but the Iliad’s heroes can gain kleos only on the battlefield, by losing their own lives or causing someone else to lose his.
3. Thus, the only available form of immortality in the Iliad depends not on any lasting human achievement but on death and killing.

VIII. We must accept not only our own deaths but also the deaths of those we love. The latter part of the Iliad addresses this problem through Achilles’s reaction to Patroclus’s death.

A. In Books XVIII through XXIII, Achilles is consumed with desire for vengeance and utterly refuses to accept Patroclus’s death.
1. He puts his own life on hold by refusing to eat, sleep, bathe, or engage in sexual relations.
2. He is described in terms that are usually applied to dead warriors, not to living ones.
3. He utterly rejects Hector’s suggestion that whichever of them kills the other should treat the dead body with respect.
4. He dishonors Hector by dragging his body around the walls of Troy.

B. Even after killing Hector, Achilles still cannot reconcile himself to Patroclus’s death.
1. He refuses to give Patroclus his appropriate funeral rites until Patroclus’s ghost appears and asks for a funeral.
2. Achilles complies with the ghost’s request with an elaborate ceremony.
3. But after the funeral, Achilles still fasts, refrains from bathing, and drags Hector’s corpse around Patroclus’s tomb.

IX. Zeus sends Thetis to speak to Achilles and Iris to urge Priam to visit Achilles and ransom Hector’s body. Somehow, this visit from his enemy allows Achilles to accept the reality of death and loss as nothing else has.

A. Priam enters Achilles’s tent and beseeches Achilles, in his own father’s name, to show pity and return Hector’s body.
1. Achilles reacts with wonder, compassion, and grief to Priam’s request.
2. The two enemies weep together, Priam for Hector and Achilles for Patroclus.
3. Achilles comforts Priam by reminding him that all humans must bear grief and adversity.
4. Achilles himself carries Hector’s body to Priam’s wagon.

B. By recognizing the humanity of his enemy, Achilles finally accepts mortality and is reintegrated into humanity.
1. Achilles himself serves a meal to Priam; after they eat, Achilles promises a truce of 11 days for Hector’s funeral.
2. Achilles has a bed prepared for Priam, and he himself sleeps beside Briseis. This is our final view of Achilles in the Iliad.
3. The culminating paradox is that Achilles himself will now return to battle and die.

Essential Reading:
Homer, Iliad.

Supplementary Reading:
Griffin, Homer on Life and Death.
Kirk, The Songs of Homer.
Lord, Singer of Tales.
Schein, The Mortal Hero.
Questions to Consider:

1. Do you find the resolution of the *Iliad* psychologically credible in its portrayal of the effect of Priam’s grief on Achilles? Why or why not?

2. Does the end of the *Iliad* give any role to *kleos* at all? Put another way, has Achilles reaccepted the norms of his society, along with accepting Patroclus’s death?
Lecture Eight
Homer—The Odyssey

Scope: This lecture continues our discussion of Homeric epic by turning to the *Odyssey*. The *Iliad* focuses on human mortality in time of war; the *Odyssey*, in contrast, focuses on the same problem—the necessity of reconciling ourselves to loss and to death—in time of peace. We begin by sketching the overall narrative outline of the *Odyssey*, then focus on the epic’s portrayal of the human condition through Odysseus’s final reunion with his wife and son after 20 years of absence.

Outline

I. The human condition and the acceptance of mortality are no less important in the *Odyssey* than in the *Iliad*, but the focus is different.

   A. Both the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* present mortality as something that must be accepted without any compensation from outside human life itself.
      1. In both epics, the main character is set aside from humanity, isolated and alone.
      2. In both, the resolution depends on the main character’s willing acceptance of mortality and his consequent reintegration into humanity.

   B. But where the *Iliad* foregrounds on the losses inflicted directly by death, the *Odyssey* meditates on accepting the losses inflicted by life.
      1. Achilles’s main task is to accept the loss of Patroclus; he must come to terms with the death of another whom he dearly loves.
      2. Odysseus’s main task is to accept his own mortality, even in the face of an offer of immortality from the nymph Calypso.

II. Odysseus is an important character in the *Iliad*, renowned for his cleverness and rhetorical skill. The *Odyssey* recounts his adventures after the Trojan War.

   A. Many of the Greeks had great difficulties in returning home after the Trojan War.
      1. Agamemnon arrived home and was murdered by his wife and her lover.
      2. Menelaus and Helen were stranded in Egypt for seven years.
      3. Many others were lost at sea.

   B. But Odysseus suffered the greatest difficulties of all.
      1. His homeward journey took 10 full years; thus, his absence totaled some 20 years.
      2. The *Odyssey* describes both his 10 years of wanderings and the dangers he faces upon his return to Ithaca.

III. The narrative structure of the *Odyssey* is intricately complicated.

   A. The first four books focus on Odysseus’s son Telemachus.
      1. Books I and II show Telemachus at home on Ithaca.
      2. Books III and IV show Telemachus traveling to visit Nestor and Menelaus to seek news of Odysseus.

   B. Books V through VIII take up Odysseus’s own story.
      1. At the beginning of Book V, the nymph Calypso holds Odysseus captive and wants to make him her husband.
      2. At Zeus’s command, Calypso lets Odysseus go.
      3. From her island, he journeys to the Phaeacians, a people who will help him home.

   C. Books IX through XII are a flashback to Odysseus’s adventures from the time he left Troy until he arrived at Calypso’s island; with his arrival on Ithaca in Book XIII, the structure returns to a straightforward chronology.
      1. Odysseus himself narrates Books IX through XII, in the first person.
      2. Odysseus’s most famous adventures occur here.
      3. The story shifts to third-person narration again in Book XIII.
4. A strict chronological arrangement of the *Odyssey* would put Books IX through XII first, followed by V through VIII, followed by XIII through XXIV.

5. Books I through IV happen at the same time as Books V through VIII.

IV. Delaying Odysseus’s entrance for four full books lets us see how badly he is needed on Ithaca. His absence causes great problems for his family and his community.

A. Odysseus’s family cannot know whether he is alive or dead; this means they do not know how to order their own lives.
   1. Many young suitors are courting Odysseus’s wife, Penelope. If Odysseus is dead, she should remarry, but if he is alive, she should remain faithful to him.
   2. Telemachus does not know if he should guard the kingdom for his father or assert his own rights.
   3. Odysseus’s absence causes problems for his society because Ithaca has been kingless for 20 years.

B. Penelope’s suitors are the focal point for these troubles in both family and society.
   1. They are destroying Odysseus’s household and threatening his marriage.
   2. Apparently, whichever one of them marries Penelope will become ruler of Ithaca. Thus, they are threatening Telemachus’s rights as well.
   3. Homer starts the *Odyssey* at the precise moment when the situation on Ithaca is reaching crisis point.

V. We first see Odysseus himself in Book V, when Calypso tells him he may leave her island. Odysseus’s and Calypso’s interaction here foregrounds the human condition and Odysseus’s understanding of it.

A. Calypso offers Odysseus the chance to become immortal, but he chooses to remain human and return home.
   1. Greek mythology is filled with stories of humans whose attempts to gain immortality end in disaster.
   2. By rejecting Calypso’s offer, Odysseus indicates that he accepts and desires the human condition.
   3. His desire to return home is a desire to return to his full humanity and selfhood.
   4. He is offered what Gilgamesh went to seek—and he refuses, because he realizes that to be human *means* to be mortal.

B. Odysseus knows how badly he is needed on Ithaca, which gives urgency to his desire to return.
   1. In Book XI, we learn that Odysseus visited the underworld, where the prophet Teiresias told him about the suitors who would court Penelope.
   2. Thus, Odysseus’s longing for home is increased by his fear of what is happening in his absence.

VI. Books IX through XII are the most famous part of the *Odyssey*, but for the theme of mortality and what it means to be human, Books XIII through XXIV are far more important.

A. The second half of the *Odyssey* differs noticeably from the first half in its slower narrative pace and in the type of challenges Odysseus faces.
   1. Odysseus is no longer in danger from monsters and divinities but from Penelope’s suitors.
   2. He has to exercise extreme self-control to meet this danger; his own human emotions threaten to betray him, because he must keep his identity secret.
   3. Any betrayal of emotion—for instance, when he sees Penelope for the first time—would be highly dangerous.

B. The goddess Athena disguises Odysseus as an old beggar and advises him to stay with his loyal swineherd, Eumaeus.
   1. Odysseus is a particular favorite of Athena, and she had helped him on his way home.
   2. On Ithaca, her help is crucial because she can disguise Odysseus.
   3. As a beggar, Odysseus can enter his palace without raising any suspicions.

VII. Odysseus’s reunions with Telemachus (Book XVI) and Penelope (Book XXIII) underline the theme of the inevitable losses occasioned by the human condition.

A. Athena instructs Telemachus to visit Eumaeus’s hut, where Odysseus is.
   1. While Eumaeus is present, Odysseus must not indicate that he realizes who Telemachus is.
   2. Thus, he must suppress all emotion during his first sight of his son in 20 years.
   3. Finally, Telemachus sends Eumaeus to the palace; this leaves father and son alone.
4. Athena tells Odysseus to reveal his true identity to Telemachus; she makes him younger and handsome again.

B. Odysseus goes back into the hut and tells Telemachus who he is.
   1. At first, Telemachus does not believe that this is his father.
   2. Odysseus can offer no proof; Telemachus has to decide to accept him “as is.”
   3. Telemachus does so, and the two weep in each other’s arms.
   4. A simile comparing their weeping to the cries of birds whose young have been stolen stresses what Odysseus and Telemachus have lost.

C. This scene contrasts directly with Athena’s reaction when Odysseus first arrived back on Ithaca.
   1. Odysseus asks Athena why she has not helped him during the 10 years of his absence.
   2. Athena responds that she did not want to argue with Poseidon, who hated Odysseus, and that she knew Odysseus would reach Ithaca some day.
   3. She seems utterly oblivious to the difference 10 years make in a human life.

VIII. With Athena’s help, Odysseus and Telemachus kill all the suitors. Odysseus and Penelope are finally reunited.

A. Penelope does not immediately greet Odysseus; instead, she sits and looks at him.
   1. Telemachus scolds her, but Penelope says that Odysseus and she have private ways of recognizing one another.
   2. Penelope tests Odysseus by implying that their marriage bed could be moved.
   3. Odysseus reacts with anger and describes the bed in terms that prove his identity.

B. One of the bed’s posts is a still-rooted olive tree; the bed is a symbol of Odysseus’s and Penelope’s marriage, of Athena’s patronage, and of Penelope’s fidelity.
   1. Penelope rushes to Odysseus and kisses him.
   2. One of the most famous similes in the Odyssey describes their reunion.

C. These reunions reflect the reality of human life in all its complexity.
   1. The Odyssey’s story of a man foregoing immortality to return to human life affirms the importance and worthiness of being human.
   2. It is only through the sorrows of life that we can truly be human and only in contrast to those that we can know joy.

Essential Reading:
Homer, Odyssey.

Supplementary Reading:
Austin, Archery at the Dark of the Moon.
Clay, Wrath of Athena.
Nagler, “Dread Goddess Revisited.”
Olson, Blood and Iron.
Vernant, “Refusal of Odysseus.”

Questions to Consider:
1. All three epics we have read—Gilgamesh, the Iliad, and the Odyssey—deal with human reconciliation to and acceptance of death. Which epic’s treatment do you find most powerful or most moving? Why?
2. My treatment of the symbol of Odysseus’s and Penelope’s bed seems to imply conscious artistry on the part of “an author.” Is this a valid way to approach the Odyssey, given what we know about its process of composition?
Lecture Nine
Sappho and Pindar

Scope: This lecture considers the development of Greek lyric poetry. We begin by defining lyric poetry, then consider the two main forms of Greek lyric poetry, choral and monodic. Both forms were written for performance, but monodic lyric emphasized personal concerns, especially erotic interests, and implied a personal rather than a choral voice. The lecture concentrates on Sappho (late 7th century B.C.), whose reputation in antiquity was such that she was hailed as the “tenth muse.” We discuss Sappho’s subject matter, including love poems to other women, and outline the difficulties that modern scholars face in understanding her work because of the very small amount that has survived (one intact poem and several fragments). We then turn to discussing choral lyric, especially the works of Pindar, whose victory odes for athletic competitions are our best extant examples of Greek choral lyric.

Outline

I. Epic was not the only form of poetry to flourish in ancient Greece. By the middle of the 7th century B.C., a very different poetic tradition appeared, consisting of relatively short poems in a variety of meters. Modern scholars call this form of poetry lyric.

A. The term lyric was first used by Alexandrian scholars in the 3rd century B.C.
   1. Originally, lyric meant poems sung to the accompaniment of a lyre.
   2. It was distinguished from other forms of personal poetry that were declaimed and not sung or were sung to other instruments.
   3. In later usage, however, lyric came to mean any short poem foregrounding the individual voice and concerns of the poet; this lecture uses the term in that sense.

B. Lyric is distinguished from epic by its length and its meter.
   1. Lyric poems are short, often only a few lines long.
   2. Lyric was written in a variety of meters, while epic was (by definition) composed in dactylic hexameter.

C. Most important, lyric is distinguished from epic by its subject matter.
   1. Epic poetry memorializes the past and the deeds of famous characters.
   2. The epic poet does not interject his own personal experiences into the poetry.
   3. Lyric is “personal poetry,” about love, friends, enemies, personal experiences.
   4. Unfortunately, lyric poetry survives mainly in fragments.

II. Short poems composed for performance probably existed for many centuries before they came to be written down.

A. However, it seems clear that there was an increased production of lyric and a change in its focus, starting in the late 7th century B.C.
   1. At this time, named individual poets become prominent. Their poems often set the speaker in deliberate opposition to Homeric epic.
   2. A short fragment by Archilochus is a good example of this.
   3. The reasons for this change must remain speculative, but during the 7th and 6th centuries B.C., traditional values were reevaluated in several spheres, including the political.

B. Modern scholarship divides lyric into two main forms, choral and monodic. The same poets often wrote both choral lyric and monody.
   1. Both forms were written for performance, but the circumstances were (probably) different.
   2. Choral lyrics were performed at public occasions, while monody was more likely performed for small private audiences.
   3. There is some distinction of subject matter between the two forms of lyric.
   4. There were also formal differences of meter and dialect.
III. The most famous lyric poet was Sappho, born on Lesbos around 630 B.C. Her collected poems filled nine books in the edition prepared for the Alexandrian library.

A. Although Sappho’s reputation in antiquity was higher than any other female author’s, we know little about her life.
   1. The fragments of her poetry include few biographical details.
   2. Most extant information about her is from much later sources and often contradictory.
   3. She was probably married and apparently had a daughter.
   4. She may have spent some time in exile in Sicily.

B. Speculation about the details of Sappho’s life has been rife from antiquity onward.
   1. Female authors were so rare in antiquity that one of her status attracted a good deal of attention.
   2. The speculation has also owed a good deal to the erotic nature of much of her poetry.

C. Modern readers tend to assume that Sappho was “lesbian” in our sense of the term, but this was not the immediate assumption about Sappho’s sexuality in antiquity.
   1. Attic comedies portrayed her as a sexually voracious lover of men.
   2. One tradition says that she committed suicide over a man named Phaon.
   3. Her poems undoubtedly praise the beauty of other females in terms that strike us as homoerotic, but it is hard to tell how much of this was conventional rather than personal.

IV. Our evaluation of Sappho’s exact tone and the content of her work is hampered because so little of her work has survived.

A. We have only one complete poem, usually called the “Hymn to Aphrodite.”
   1. This poem was quoted in its entirety by Dionysius of Halicarnassus in the 1st century B.C.
   2. Dionysius praised the elegance and smoothness of the poem’s construction.
   3. It is also extraordinarily beautiful in its sounds; Sappho uses alliteration and assonance to brilliant effect.
   4. The poem’s meter is the Sapphic strophe, which is difficult to reproduce in English.

B. The sex of Sappho’s beloved is not made as clear by this poem as it sounds in translation.
   1. The beloved’s sex is indicated in only one word in the Greek text.
   2. Unfortunately, the text is uncertain at that point.

C. From the rest of Sappho’s work, we have fairly extensive fragments of a few poems and tiny bits and pieces of others. Fragments refers to two different sorts of incomplete texts.
   1. There are literal fragments, usually on scraps of papyrus from Egypt.
   2. There are quotations in later authors, of lines or, sometimes, of single words.
   3. The loss of most of Sappho’s poetry is one of the greatest losses of ancient literature.

V. The second main type of lyric poetry was choral lyric. Many of the writers of monody also wrote choral lyric; several of Sappho’s poems may have been intended for choral performance.

A. This highlights the danger of reading too much biographical information into lyric poetry.
   1. Sappho’s poems sound like sincere outpourings of emotion.
   2. It is extremely tempting to assume that they reflect actual circumstances of the poet’s life.
   3. But some of these expressions of emotion may have been stereotyped, rather than “genuine.”

B. Choral lyrics were performed by choruses at various types of public gatherings.
   1. Types of choral lyric included dithyrambs (in honor of Dionysus), wedding songs, dirges, hymns, and others.
   2. The most well preserved category of choral lyric is the victory ode, poems commemorating an athlete’s victory in competition.
   3. Among the writers of victory odes, Pindar takes pride of place.

VI. Pindar was born in Thebes, probably in 518 B.C., and died in 438 B.C. He probably went to Athens as a young man.

A. He received his first commission to write a victory ode at the age of 20; his last datable poem was written in 446 B.C.
   1. During his working life, he wrote odes for victors from Aegina, Corinth, Rhodes, and Athens.
2. In or after 476 B.C., he moved to Sicily, where he spent time in the courts of two tyrants.

B. Pindar’s victory odes (or epinicians) survive in four books, arranged according to the particular festival for which the Odes were written: the Olympic Games, the Nemean Games, the Pythian Games, and the Isthmian Games.
1. These four religious festivals each included athletic competitions.
2. Pindar wrote other kinds of choral lyric as well, but only the victory odes survive.

C. Pindar’s epinicians usually contain three distinct elements, interspersed with one another.
1. The first is information about the victor and his victory. The typical ode gives the victor’s name and the names of his father and city.
2. It commemorates his specific victory, comments on his prowess, and offers recollections of previous victories by the same athlete.
3. Second is mythological material; the typical ode cites heroes of Greek myth as antecedents or exemplars for the victor.
4. The ode also often contains maxims or wise sayings, summing up aspects of the human condition.

D. The prominence of each of these elements varies from ode to ode, but usually all three are present to one degree or another.
1. The first 18 lines of Olympian 2 are an excellent example of Pindar’s use of these three elements.
2. This interweaving of individual glory in victory, mythic exemplars, and meditations on the nature of human existence is typically Pindaric.

Essential Reading:

Supplementary Reading:
Miller, A., *Greek Lyric*, “General Introduction.”
Vandiver, “Fireflies in a Jar.”

Questions to Consider:
1. Are we hampered or helped in our appreciation of these poems by our lack of knowledge about the poets’ biographies? In other words, does the lack of biographical context make it easier to read the poems “for themselves”? Is that a possible (or desirable) approach to reading poetry?
2. Can you think of any modern forms of writing that are analogous to Pindar’s epinicians? If so, who are the authors, and who are the honorees?
Lecture Ten
Aeschylus

Scope: This lecture considers another genre of performed poetry, tragedy. We begin with an overview of tragedy’s development and nature in 5th-century B.C. Athens and its performance as part of a civic festival honoring Dionysus. After outlining the conditions of theatrical performance and the social and societal functions of tragedy in Athens, we turn to Aeschylus (c. 525–456 B.C.), the first of the three great Athenian tragedians. Seven of Aeschylus’s 90 plays have survived; we focus in particular on his trilogy The Oresteia and discuss how Aeschylus used the traditional myth of the doomed House of Atreus to reflect on crucially important social and cultural issues of his day.

Outline

I. Tragedy began in Athens in the late 6th and early 5th centuries B.C.; its exact origins are unknown.
   A. Tradition holds that Thespis gave the first tragic performance in 534.
      1. Aristotle says that Thespis invented tragedy by separating himself out as a “character” from the chorus of dithyramb.
      2. Unfortunately, we know very little about dithyramb.
   B. Tragedy and comedy were both performed at annual festivals of Dionysus, but the majority of surviving plays do not deal with this god and the exact nature of his association with drama remains unclear.
      1. One theory is that tragedy originated in a ritual performance commemorating episodes in Dionysus’s life.
      2. A second theory sees the origins of tragedy in a fusion of epic recitation and choral lyric.
   C. Tragedies were performed as part of a competition at the annual City Dionysia.
      1. Three tragedians each entered three tragedies and a short burlesque satyr play into competition. Judges awarded first, second, and third prizes.
      2. Thus, tragedians wrote on the assumption that their plays would be performed only once.
   D. The subject matter of tragedy was drawn almost exclusively from traditional myth.
      1. The audience already knew the broad outlines of the story.
      2. The tragedian’s creativity and skill lay in the use he made of the traditional material.
      3. The playwright could modify many details and “refocus” the traditional myth to highlight certain aspects or themes.
      4. In this regard, the tragedians’ method was similar to Homer’s or to the Deuteronomistic historian’s.
      5. The important difference is that we know the individual tragedians’ names and circumstances.

II. The cast of a Greek tragedy consisted of three actors and a chorus. Plays were performed in outdoor, open-air theatres.
   A. The actors were all male, and the three of them played all the characters in any given tragedy.
      1. One actor played two or three different roles in each play.
      2. The great female characters of Greek tragedy were acted by males.
      3. Both of these aspects of Athenian acting were facilitated by the use of masks.
   B. The chorus too was all-male and wore masks.
      1. The chorus consisted of 12 or perhaps 15 members.
      2. The chorus often represents a “marginal” group, such as old men, women, or slaves.
      3. The chorus normally takes no direct part in the action; rather, it comments on the action and provides background information.
      4. The word chorus comes from a Greek word meaning “dance.” The members of the chorus sang their lines and danced simultaneously.
   C. The conditions in the Theatre of Dionysus in Athens preclude any kind of “naturalistic” acting.
      1. The audience numbered 12,000 to 17,000 people, most of whom were a significant distance above the actors.

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2. The masks made facial expression impossible but made the actors more immediately recognizable as certain types.
3. There was no artificial lighting and little in the way of sound-effects.
4. There was little if any scenery; the texts of the plays indicate a few props.

III. We know of several tragedians who wrote in the 5th century B.C., but three were considered outstanding in their own day.
   A. The first was Aeschylus (525–456 B.C.).
      1. We know the titles of 82 of his plays; some ancient sources say he wrote 90.
      2. Only seven have survived, and one of those (Prometheus Bound) may not be by Aeschylus.
   B. The second and third great tragedians were Sophocles (496–406 B.C.) and Euripides (480–406 B.C.), whom we will discuss in the next two lectures.

IV. We know little of Aeschylus’s life beyond the fact that he fought in the great Persian Wars, at the battle of Marathon in 490 B.C. and probably at Salamis as well in 480 B.C., and died in 456 B.C.
   A. We know more about his career as a tragedian.
      1. He won his first victory in 484 B.C.
      2. One ancient source says that he won 13 victories in all; another says he won 28.
      3. The higher figure probably includes victories when his works were restaged after his death.
      4. These “revivals” of his plays illustrate his high status.
   B. Aeschylus favored writing trilogies on unified themes, exploring the development of one story through all three plays (and in the satyr play as well). The Oresteia is our only surviving example of such a trilogy.

V. The Oresteia was performed in 458 B.C., two years before Aeschylus’s death. As the only extant trilogy, it is invaluable for giving us a sense of how the trilogy form worked.
   A. Aeschylus sets up themes, complex strands of imagery, and even turns of phrasing in the first play that are amplified, reiterated, and finally resolved in the second and third plays.
      1. The first play, Agamemnon, deals with Agamemnon’s return after the Trojan War and his murder by his wife, Clytaemestra, and her lover, Aegisthus.
      2. The chorus tells us, early in the play, that Clytaemestra is motivated in part by vengeance.
      3. Agamemnon had sacrificed his daughter Iphigenia to the goddess Artemis to get a fair wind for Troy.
   B. Themes of familial murder and vengeance resonate throughout the trilogy.
      1. In Libation Bearers, the second play, Agamemnon’s son Orestes avenges his father’s murder by killing Clytaemestra and Aegisthus.
      2. But Clytaemestra is Orestes’s mother, and thus, he commits a terrible transgression by killing her.
      3. The Furies, goddesses of blood vengeance, pursue Orestes to punish him.
      4. The third play of the trilogy, Eumenides, resolves these issues of vengeance and counter-vengeance when the goddess Athena sets a court in Athens, where Orestes can be tried and acquitted.

VI. No brief discussion can begin to cover The Oresteia. However, we can note some of the profoundly important issues that this complex trilogy addresses.
   A. The story is one of the most famous and haunting in all of Greek mythology.
      1. Agamemnon’s family, the House of Atreus, suffers under a multigenerational hereditary curse.
      2. This curse tends to express itself in intergenerational violence.
      3. Thus, the dreadful deeds that Agamemnon, Clytaemestra, and Orestes commit are, in some sense, inevitable.
   B. However, the individuals in this story act not merely out of fated necessity, nor out of malice, but out of an attempt to reconcile impossibly conflicting duties.
      1. Agamemnon must go to Troy; Zeus has ordered it. But a father must not kill his daughter.
      2. Orestes must avenge his father’s death, but a son must not kill his mother.
      3. The Oresteia is a meditation on individual human beings’ inability to find the “right” thing to do in such situations of conflict.

VII. Finally, Aeschylus uses these irreconcilable conflicts to discuss the transition from archaic blood vengeance to...
civic justice and to examine methods of justice and the value of a court system.

A. Orestes’s dilemma is insoluble according to a system of individual blood vengeance.
   1. The only way out is to remove the duty of vengeance from the victim’s heirs and vest it in a court system.
   2. On Apollo’s advice, Orestes goes to Athens, and Athena inaugurates just such a court.

B. Orestes thus appears as the first defendant on a murder charge in the first trial ever held.
   1. In effect, Apollo is the defense lawyer, the Furies are the prosecution, and Athena serves as judge.
   2. Athena herself reiterates the earlier plays’ idea of conflicting claims to justice.
   3. She appoints a jury of Athenian citizens to hear the case.

C. After Apollo and the Furies both present their arguments, the jurors vote. There are two separate interpretations of how the jurors voted, depending on the number of jurors.
   1. The first interpretation is that the jurors’ votes are tied; Athena’s vote breaks the tie and acquits Orestes.
   2. The second interpretation is that the number of jurors is uneven, and that they vote by one to convict Orestes; Athena’s vote thus makes the tie.
   3. In actual legal practice, a tie vote amounted to an acquittal; Athena’s deciding vote establishes the precedent for this.

D. Orestes’s acquittal lifts the curse on the House of Atreus.

VIII. We are able to trace a direct connection between the mythic story of Aeschylus’s text and the social conditions of his own day.

A. In the 5th century B.C., Athens actually had a system of trial by jury, which had been in place at least since the early 6th century B.C.
   1. Aeschylus and his audience undoubtedly realized that their court system did not really date to the time of the Trojan War.
   2. Aeschylus “backdates” the invention of the court system to give it imaginative power and mythic importance.
   3. This is particularly noteworthy because of a political development of Aeschylus’s own day.

B. Aeschylus situates Orestes’s trial on the Areopagus, the “hill of Ares,” in Athens. This was the site of an actual political council, whose powers had been important in the 6th century B.C. but decreased in the 5th B.C.
   1. In 462 B.C., the powers of the Areopagus council were radically decreased; before this, the Areopagus had dominated most areas of Athenian government.
   2. The reforms of 462 B.C. restricted its powers to cases of homicide, arson, and malicious wounding.

C. Eumenides can be read as a response to these reforms.
   1. Aeschylus may be disapproving; the reformers showed disrespect to an ancient institution.
   2. He may be approving; the members of the Areopagus council still have a crucial role to play in Athens.

Essential Reading:
Aeschylus, The Oresteia.

Supplementary Reading:
Conacher, Oresteia.
Easterling, “Show for Dionysus.”
Goldhill, Oresteia.
Herington, Poetry into Drama.
Oxford Classical Dictionary, “Tragedy, Greek.”
Pickard-Cambridge, Dithyramb, Tragedy, and Comedy.
Rosenmeyer, Art of Aeschylus.
Vidal-Naquet, “Hunting and Sacrifice.”

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Questions to Consider:

1. Can you think of any issues raised throughout *The Oresteia* that are *not* addressed by the resolution at the end of *Eumenides?* Are there any important questions left unanswered?

2. If Agamemnon was caught between two irreconcilable duties—to his army, family honor, and Zeus’s command on one side and to his daughter Iphigenia on the other—did he have any real choice about whether to sacrifice Iphigenia?
Lecture Eleven
Sophocles

Scope: This lecture considers the work of Sophocles (496–406 B.C.), the second great Athenian tragedian. The lecture begins by summarizing Sophocles’s biography, then discusses the limitations imposed on our understanding of the playwright by the fact that so few of his plays have survived (only 7 out of 123). We then note that, within the surviving plays, it is possible to discern some characteristic Sophoclean elements; in particular, we focus on the typical Sophoclean isolated hero and concentrate on the play Ajax. The lecture then discusses the absence of the gods in Sophocles’s drama and the implications of this implied distance between the divine and the human for our understanding of his work. Finally, the lecture notes that this absence of gods makes Sophocles’s presentation of the human condition in some ways the most “realistic” of the three tragedians.

Outline

I. We know more about the life of Sophocles (496–406 B.C.) than we do about Aeschylus’s life, although the reliability of some details is questionable.
   A. Sophocles held several important positions in Athenian political and religious life.
      1. He was a treasurer of Athena in 443–442 B.C. and one of ten annually elected generals in 441–440 B.C.
      2. He was a priest of a local hero, and when the cult of the healing god Asclepius was introduced into Athens, Sophocles temporarily housed the god’s sacred snake in his own house.
      3. After his death, Sophocles was revered as a hero under the new name Dexion, “the Receiver.”
      4. Clearly, he was held in high esteem and trust.
   B. Our sources also refer to his friendships with other important literary figures of 5th-century B.C. Athens, including the historian Herodotus.
      1. Some passages in Sophocles’s work seem to quote Herodotus.
      2. But this could be the source for the story that the two authors knew each other, rather than evidence to support it.

II. During his long working career (468–406 B.C.), Sophocles wrote (probably) 123 plays. Unfortunately, only seven have survived.
   A. This is even more of a handicap in our assessment of Sophocles than it is in our assessment of Aeschylus.
      1. Because Sophocles wrote more plays than Aeschylus, we have an even smaller percentage of his work.
      2. Most of the plays cannot be securely dated; thus, it is hard to make any statements about the development of Sophocles’s style or about contemporary events.
      3. But Sophocles seems to have abandoned the trilogy form; the surviving plays are self-contained works.
   B. In these seven plays, we can note some characteristic Sophoclean elements.
      1. Sophocles concentrates more on the individual than Aeschylus does.
      2. In addition, the gods in Sophocles’s plays are remote and unreachable.
      3. Sophocles focuses the audience’s attention on the human condition, without the direct intervention of gods.

III. Of Sophocles’s seven extant plays, only one is named for its chorus; the rest take their names from their protagonists, who are characterized by a kind of heroic isolation.
   A. Bernard Knox points out that the plots of these six plays fit one basic pattern.
      1. The main character is faced with a crisis in which disaster can be averted only by a compromise that would constitute betrayal of something that the protagonist holds to be supremely important.
      2. The protagonist refuses to compromise, despite being urged to by persuasive speeches, threats, or violence or all three.
      3. The protagonist remains steadfast, and the end result is usually his or her destruction.
   B. Aeschylus’s characters often face crises or dilemmas.
1. But in Aeschylus’s extant plays, the protagonist cannot find a way out through compromise.

2. Although Aeschylus’s work portrays human beings struggling under terrible circumstances, it does not foreground the isolation of the characters as the plays of Sophocles do.

3. Aeschylus’s characters may be isolated through the force of circumstance, but Sophocles’s characters choose and maintain their isolation.

IV. The isolated protagonist is already observable in Ajax, probably Sophocles’s earliest extant play. The play dramatizes the story of Ajax’s suicide.

A. Ajax was the second greatest Greek warrior in the Trojan War; the only greater fighter was Achilles.
   1. After Achilles’s death, the Greeks voted to decide who should be awarded his armor: Ajax or Odysseus.
   2. The armor was awarded to Odysseus, and Ajax committed suicide.

B. Sophocles focuses on Ajax’s reaction to the loss of the armor.
   1. Driven mad by Athena, Ajax slaughters sheep because he thinks they are his fellow Greek soldiers.
   2. When Ajax returns to his senses, he is overcome with shame at his folly.
   3. Despite the pleas of his wife, Tecmessa, he decides to kill himself.

C. Sophocles’s emphasis is on Ajax’s shame at failing in his revenge and killing only animals; shame at losing the armor is secondary.
   1. Other authors had depicted Ajax’s suicide as a result of his shame over the armor.
   2. But in this play, the loss of the armor motivates Ajax’s desire for revenge, not for suicide.
   3. Neither he nor any other character calls into question the justification of his desire to murder his fellow soldiers.

V. Ajax’s character is marked by fierceness and emotional coldness.

A. He is unresponsive to Tecmessa’s pleas that he think of her and their son and not kill himself.
   1. Ajax operates by the Homeric code, in which insults require bloody vengeance and death is preferable to shame.
   2. Odysseus adheres to a more modern worldview, which allows for compromise.
   3. Odysseus feels pity for Ajax, even though Ajax is his enemy.
   4. Athena, though Odysseus’s patron, shares Ajax’s moral framework.

B. Ajax kills himself little more than halfway through the play, after a deceptive speech to Tecmessa and the chorus, implying that he will not commit suicide.
   1. The rest of the play revolves around the question of whether to bury him honorably.
   2. Teucer, Ajax’s brother, argues for burial.
   3. Agamemnon and Menelaus argue against it.
   4. Odysseus finally persuades Agamemnon to allow the burial.

C. Ajax is a troubling figure to modern audiences, but within the play, Tecmessa, Teucer, and the chorus all speak of him with love and reverence.
   1. These characters see him as their protector and their strength.
   2. The contrast between Ajax’s heroic code and the more modern code of Odysseus may have endowed Ajax with a kind of archaic grandeur.
   3. All six of Sophocles’s isolated protagonists are both repellent and admirable; in Greek, they are called deinos, meaning “terrible, wondrous, strange.”

VI. Sophocles’s tragedies are also characterized by an almost total lack of direct human interaction with the gods.

A. Athena is the only god who appears as a character in Sophocles’s plays, and her role in Ajax is far from helpful to the human characters.
   1. Unlike the Athena of Aeschylus’s Eumenides, Sophocles’s Athena does not solve any dilemmas or give any useful advice.
   2. She is the force behind Ajax’s madness. Furthermore, she brings the mad Ajax out of his tent to mock him in front of Odysseus and goad him into boasting.
   3. The sane Odysseus cannot see her, while the mad Ajax can.
   4. Thus, the one appearance of an Olympian deity in Sophocles’s extant plays is profoundly disturbing.
5. Once Ajax has regained his sanity, there is no direct divine-human intervention.

B. Athena’s absence after Ajax has regained his sanity reflects the situation in the rest of Sophocles’s extant plays. The characters must try to determine the will of the gods through ambiguous omens, prophecies, and oracles and their own understanding of the gods.

1. This underscores the isolation of the characters; they try to take the gods’ will into account but may misinterpret omens and oracles.

2. It also corresponds closely to the realities of human life in general.

3. In this regard, Sophocles is the most “realistic” of the three tragedians.

**Essential Reading:**

Sophocles, *Ajax*.

**Supplementary Reading:**

Blundell, *Helping Friends*.

Easterling, *Cambridge Companion to Greek Tragedy*.


Reinhardt, “Ajax.”

Segal, C. “Visual Symbolism.”

**Questions to Consider:**

1. Given the small number of Aeschylus’s and Sophocles’s plays that have survived, are we justified in making stylistic judgments about the difference in the two tragedians’ portrayal of their main characters?

2. Ajax is a difficult character for modern audiences to “identify” with or to feel sympathy toward. Does this have an impact on your reading of the play, or is it still moving even though the main character is not sympathetic?
Lecture Twelve
Euripides

Scope: This lecture considers the tragedies of Euripides (c. 480–406 B.C.). Again, we begin with a summary of Euripides’s biography and his importance for 5th-century B.C. tragedy. Eighteen of Euripides’s plays are extant; the lecture outlines some possible reasons for their survival, then turns to discussing the ways in which Euripides differs from Aeschylus and Sophocles. In particular, we focus on Euripides’s treatment of the gods, especially in Bacchae and Hippolytus. We consider the ways in which Euripides, while allowing gods to appear as characters in his plays, questions the standard cultural view of these divinities. The lecture also touches briefly on the intellectual and historic environment of late-5th-century B.C. Athens to provide context for Euripides’s presentation of the gods as vengeful, petty, and cruel.

Outline

I. Euripides was born c. 480 B.C. and died in 406 B.C., shortly before the death of Sophocles. We know little about his life.
   A. He first entered plays into competition in 455 B.C., placing third.
      1. His first victory was in 441 B.C., and during his lifetime, he won only four times.
      2. His last entry was in 408 B.C.; he then traveled to Macedon, where he died in 406 B.C.
      3. His last three plays, including Bacchae, were performed posthumously and won.
   B. Euripides wrote around 90 plays; 18 tragedies and 1 satyr play survive.
      1. Thus, we have more plays by Euripides than by Aeschylus and Sophocles combined.
      2. Nine surviving plays all begin with the Greek letters epsilon, eta, iota, and kappa.
      3. These plays are probably one or two volumes from Euripides’s “collected works.”
      4. Thus, we have, in effect, a random sample of Euripides’s plays, rather than a selection of the “best” plays.

II. In Euripides’s plays, the gods appear to be callous, petty, and vengeful. Aphrodite in Hippolytus and Dionysus in The Bacchae are good illustrations of many of these qualities.
   A. In Hippolytus, Euripides uses the story of Phaedra, a woman smitten with lust for her own stepson, to portray Aphrodite as completely ruthless and without pity.
      1. The traditional story of Phaedra portrayed her as an immoral woman who tried to seduce a young, chaste man and took vengeance on him when he rebuffed her.
      2. Euripides recast Phaedra as a good woman fighting desperately against a sickness inflicted on her by Aphrodite.
      3. Aphrodite herself speaks the prologue of the play. She tells us that Hippolytus refuses to honor her but gives all his attention to Artemis, so Aphrodite intends to punish Hippolytus through Phaedra.
      4. Phaedra is simply the tool she will use to punish Hippolytus.
      5. She inflicts passion for Hippolytus on Phaedra.
   B. Phaedra struggles against her passion for Hippolytus, even trying to starve herself to death rather than reveal it.
      1. Phaedra’s nurse betrays her by telling Hippolytus about Phaedra’s passion.
      2. Phaedra kills herself and leaves a note accusing Hippolytus of rape.
      3. She does this to protect her own good name as well as that of her sons and her husband, Theseus.
      4. Theseus believes Phaedra’s note and curses his son; this leads to Hippolytus’s death.
      5. In the last scene of the play, the goddess Artemis tries to “comfort” Hippolytus by saying that the next time Aphrodite loves a human, Artemis will destroy him.

III. The picture of divinity portrayed by Euripides’s late play The Bacchae is equally disturbing. This play focuses on Dionysus, telling the story of his vengeance against members of his family who do not believe in his divinity.
   A. Dionysus is unique among the Olympian gods in being the son of a god (Zeus) and a human mother (Semele).
1. Normally, the offspring of a god-human union is a human being.
2. However, Semele died while carrying Dionysus when the jealous Hera tricked her into being incinerated by the sight of Zeus in his full glory.
3. Zeus rescued the unborn infant by implanting it in his own thigh, and Dionysus was born a god, not a human.
4. However, Semele’s sisters did not believe that Zeus had been her lover. Thus, they did not believe that there was any such god as Dionysus.

B. *Bacchae* depicts Dionysus’s return to his mother’s town, Thebes, and the vengeance he takes on his unbelieving relatives.
1. The king of Thebes, Pentheus, is Dionysus’s cousin.
2. Pentheus is a young king; his grandfather Cadmus (Semele’s father) had abdicated in his favor.
3. Dionysus’s vengeance begins with driving all the women of Thebes mad.
4. Pentheus’s attempt to counteract the women’s madness leads to his own destruction by Dionysus.

C. Dionysus, who speaks the play’s prologue, is disguised as a human priest.
1. He has come to Thebes for two main purposes: to punish his relatives for disbelieving in him and dishonoring his mother’s memory and to establish his worship.
2. He identifies himself to the audience but says he is in disguise as a priest of Dionysus.
3. The audience, therefore, knows that this “priest” is the god himself; the other characters in the play do not know that.

IV. The play’s action revolves around the conflict between Dionysus and Pentheus.

A. Pentheus thinks that there is no such god as Dionysus and anyone claiming to be his priest is a charlatan.
1. To protect his city, Pentheus considers it his duty to expose this imposter for what he is.
2. Therefore, Pentheus orders the “priest” to be arrested and imprisoned.
3. Dionysus soon frees himself, simultaneously causing an earthquake that destroys Pentheus’s palace.

B. Dionysus reappears after the earthquake and tells the chorus that Pentheus was unable to chain him; whenever he tried, a bull appeared instead.
1. Pentheus is irritated at Dionysus’s escape but still does not accept the reality of the new god.
2. Given Pentheus’s assumptions—that there cannot be a new god and that a god cannot be born from a human mother—his continued disbelief makes sense.

C. But the women of Thebes are still under the influence of this newcomer. Finally, Dionysus suggests to Pentheus that he should go see for himself what the women are doing.
1. Dionysus slowly gets Pentheus into his power; Pentheus dresses as a woman, sees double, and suffers hallucinations.
2. This scene reminds us of Dionysus’s connection with wine, because under his spell, Pentheus acts very much as he would when drunk.

D. Pentheus suffers a terrible death, recounted in one of the most famous messenger speeches of extant tragedy.
1. The messenger says that Pentheus’s mother, Agave, and her sisters dismembered him, thinking he was a mountain lion.
2. Agave enters, carrying Pentheus’s head.
3. Cadmus has the terrible task of bringing his daughter to her senses and showing her what she has done.
4. Thus, Dionysus’s revenge against his family is complete, and his worship is established.

V. Several lines are missing from the end of *Bacchae*, but clearly, there was a scene in which Dionysus, revealed as a god, spoke to Agave and Cadmus.

A. Cadmus reproached Dionysus and said that gods should be above human-like passions. However, Dionysus remained unmoved and implacable.
1. Dionysus’s lack of compassion and forgiveness are constant throughout the play.
2. He is utterly focused on the dishonor done to him, both directly and through his mother.
3. It never occurs to him that it is reasonable and understandable for his human relatives to doubt his divinity.
4. His desire for vengeance is reminiscent of the worse types of human obsession.

B. In both Bacchae and Hippolytus, Euripides paints a deeply disturbing picture of the gods.
   1. Aeschylus’s and Sophocles’s extant plays demonstrate that this was not the only way to portray gods in tragedy.
   2. It seems that Euripides chose to portray the gods as petty and vindictive. Why?

VI. Part of the answer lies in the dual nature of the gods themselves. These anthropomorphic beings were also personifications of powerful natural forces.

   A. Anthropomorphism brought many problems with it, from the Homeric epics on.
      1. Endowing the gods with human-like qualities is an aid to conceptualizing them.
      2. But immortal, ageless gods are immune from suffering; this implies a lack of nobler human qualities, such as courage and altruism.
      3. A certain lack of true nobility among the gods is “built into the system.”

   B. More important, the gods are personifications of forces of nature.
      1. Aphrodite is sexual passion, a force that does, in fact, destroy lives and wreak havoc.
      2. Dionysus is frenzy, irrationality, and the intoxicating power of alcohol.

   C. It makes no sense to ask such deities for mercy. Insofar as these gods are representations of the forces of nature, they simply are as Euripides portrays them.

VII. The nature of the gods was one of many religious and philosophical topics that were fiercely debated in 5th-century B.C. Athens.

   A. By pushing the anthropomorphism of the gods to this disturbing extreme, Euripides may have been trying to contribute to this debate.
      1. No one can deny the power of such forces as sexual attraction or physical realities, such as the sea.
      2. But we can debate whether anthropomorphizing those forces is the proper way to theorize them.
      3. Euripides’s treatment of the gods says, “If we anthropomorphize our gods, then these are the gods we get.”

   B. Some critics have suggested that Euripides was an “atheist,” but this does not seem likely; it is hard to read Bacchae as a denial of the power of Dionysus.
      1. When the gods are personifications of realities of nature, atheism, in the sense of disbelief in such gods, is almost a cognitive impossibility.
      2. It is more likely that Euripides was suggesting that traditional anthropomorphism was inadequate to conceptualize undeniable forces of nature.

Essential Reading:
Euripides, Hippolytus.
Euripides, The Bacchae.

Supplementary Reading:
Burian, “Tragedy Adapted.”
Diller, “Euripides’ Final Phase.”
Knox, “Hippolytus of Euripides.”
Rosenmeyer, “Tragedy and Religion.”
Schlesier, “Mixtures of Masks.”

Questions to Consider:
1. What do you think Euripides intends his audience to make of his gods? Is he arguing that the gods in their traditional forms must be respected, that such gods cannot exist at all, or something in between?
2. Which character do you find more sympathetic, Hippolytus or Phaedra? Why?
Timeline

B.C.

4th millennium......................... Uruk becomes an important city

c. 2800 ............................... The historical Gilgamesh

c. 1700 .................................. Babylonian “Old Version” of Gilgamesh

1184 ..................................... Traditional date of the fall of Troy

c. 1025–928 ......................... The United Monarchy in Israel

c. 1025–c. 1005 ....................... Kingship of Saul

c. 1005–c. 965 ....................... Kingship of David

c. 965–928 .......................... Kingship of Solomon

10th or 9th century .................... Composition of the Yahwist narrative (J)

9th century ............................ Composition of the Elohist narrative (E)

Late 8th–early 7th centuries ........ The prophet Isaiah

753 ....................................... Traditional date of Rome’s founding

c. 750 .................................... Royal library of Nineveh constructed

c. 750 .................................... Homeric epics written down

722 ......................................... Assyrians conquer the Northern Kingdom (Israel)

7th century .......................... Composition of Deuteronomy; “Standard Version” of Gilgamesh

668–627 .............................. Reign of Ashurbanipal

Late 7th century ...................... Archilochus; Sappho

6th or 5th century ..................... Composition of the Priestly narrative (P)

586 ....................................... Babylonian sack of Jerusalem and destruction of the Temple; end of the Southern Kingdom (Judah); beginning of the Babylonian Captivity of the Jews

539 ....................................... Cyrus, king of Persia, conquers Babylon

538 ....................................... End of the Babylonian Captivity

534 (?) ............................ Thespis produces first tragedy in Athens

525 ....................................... Birth of Aeschylus

520–515 ............................. Rebuilding of the Temple in Jerusalem

509 ....................................... Overthrow of the monarchy in Rome; beginning of the Roman Republic

496 ....................................... Birth of Sophocles

490 ....................................... Darius invades Greece; Battle of Marathon

480 ....................................... Xerxes invades Greece; Battles of Thermopylae and Salamis; birth of Euripides

479 ....................................... Battle of Plataea; defeat of Xerxes

462 ........................................ Areopagus reforms in Athens

458 ....................................... Production of The Oresteia

456 ....................................... Death of Aeschylus
406.................................................. Deaths of Sophocles and Euripides

\[ \text{A.D.} \]

1872 .................................................. George Smith publishes first edition/ translation of part of The *Epic of Gilgamesh*
Glossary

**anthropomorphism**: The representation of non-human entities in human form and with human emotions.

**Areopagus council**: The advisory council of the archons in Athens. The extent of its original powers is unclear; in the reforms of 462 B.C., it was restricted to trying cases of homicide, arson, and malicious wounding.

**Atrahasis**: The Mesopotamian account of the creation of human beings and their subsequent destruction by (among other things) a great flood.

**Babylonian Captivity**: The period from 586 to 538 B.C., when a large proportion of the population of Judea was deported to Babylon.

**City Dionysia/Greater Dionysia**: Annual Athenian festival in honor of Dionysus, at which dramatic competitions were held. Tragedy may have been performed at the City Dionysia as early as 534 B.C.

**cuneiform**: Literally, “wedge-shaped.” The writing system used in Mesopotamia; the *Epic of Gilgamesh* and the *Enuma Elish* survive on clay tablets inscribed in cuneiform.

**Deuteronomistic History**: The section of the Hebrew Bible consisting of the Books of Deuteronomy, Joshua, Judges, 1 and 2 Samuel, and 1 and 2 Kings. Many scholars believe that these books were edited in the 7th and 6th centuries B.C. to form a coherent unit, reflecting the theological viewpoint articulated in Deuteronomy.

**Deuteronomistic Theology**: A conception of the nature of good and bad fortune that holds that God rewards good behavior and punishes bad. Thus, good fortune is evidence of righteousness and bad fortune, of wickedness.

**dithyramb**: Choral songs in honor of Dionysus. Aristotle says that tragedy developed out of dithyramb when the leaders of dithyramb “separated themselves” from the chorus.

**documentary hypothesis**: The theory that the Tanakh (Pentateuch) was composed from four original sources or “documents”: the Yahwist document (J), the Elohist document (E), Deuteronomy (D), and the Priestly document (P).

**Enuma Elish**: The Mesopotamian story of the creation of the world and the gods.

**Library of Alexandria**: Founded in the 4th century B.C. by Ptolemy I Soter, the library and the museum (Greek *museion*, “place of the Muses”) of which it was part were the foremost centers of scholarly and literary activity in the Hellenistic world; indeed, scholars there began the critical study of Homer. The library’s goal was to collect copies of all known works of Greek literature; it may have contained as many as 500,000 scrolls (approximately 100,000 modern books).

**Peloponnesian War**: War between Athens and Sparta and the allies of each polis; it began in 431 B.C. and continued (with brief interruptions) until 404 B.C., when Athens was defeated.

**Persian Wars**: The great conflict between the vast Persian Empire and Greece. The wars occurred in two stages, 10 years apart; Persia’s first invasion of Greece took place in 490 B.C. and ended with Athens’ victory at Marathon. The second invasion began in 480 B.C., the year of the Spartan defeat at Thermopylae and the Athenians’ victory at the naval battle of Salamis, and ended in 479 B.C. with the Greeks’ victory at Plataea.

**polis**: The basic political unit of Greece in the 5th century B.C. (and, in fact, the origin of our word *political*). Often translated “city-state” to indicate the lack of any precise English equivalent, a *polis* was small enough to qualify as a city by modern standards but was also self-governing.

**Salamis, Battle of**: The great naval victory of 480 B.C., in which the Greek fleet routed the Persians. The battle was fought in the channel between Athens and the island of Salamis.

**satyr play**: A short burlesque or satirical play performed after a trilogy of tragedies.

**Sophism/Sophists**: An intellectual movement of the 5th century B.C. The Sophists were, foremost, itinerant teachers of rhetoric. They espoused a naturalistic view of morality and religion and questioned the universal validity of morals. Their opponents accused them of corrupting morals and weakening religious beliefs.
**Synoptic Gospels**: The first three Gospels (Matthew, Mark, and Luke), which share a viewpoint (Greek, *synopsis*). The exact relationship among these three Gospels is often called the *Synoptic Problem*. The most commonly accepted theory is that Matthew and Luke used Mark and the hypothetical Q as sources.

**Thermopylae, Battle of** (480 B.C.): The crucial first land battle of Xerxes’s invasion of Greece. Leonidas and his band of about 2,300 defenders, including 300 Spartans, held the pass against the Persians until they were betrayed by Ephialtes and surrounded. The defenders died to the last man.

*time*: Honor, especially the external, visible tokens of honor bestowed on a Homeric warrior by his peers.

**trilogy**: The three tragedies entered into competition by a tragedian. Each trilogy would be followed by a satyr play. Aeschylus wrote unified trilogies on a single theme; *The Oresteia* is our only surviving example.
Biographical Notes

Note on transliteration of names: There is no easy way to handle the question of how to transliterate Greek names into the Roman alphabet. The old-style, Latinized system (in which Greek kappa became c, the ending -os became -us, iota on the end of diphthongs became e, and so on) is the most familiar, but it is inaccurate in many ways. However, the more accurate system is jarring to English readers’ eyes and often renders familiar names unrecognizable (Thucydides becomes Thoukydides, Ajax becomes Aias, Oedipus becomes Oidipous, and so on). Because the Latinized system is followed in most of the translations that I recommend, I have followed it in these outlines, with a few exceptions.

Historical Figures (including some “legendary” characters mentioned by historians or in the “historical” books of the Hebrew Bible):

Aeschylus (?525–456 B.C.): The first and oldest of the three great Athenian tragedians. He wrote more than 90 tragedies, of which 7 are extant, including the trilogy The Oresteia (comprised of the plays Agamennon, Libation Bearers, and Eumenides).

Cyrus “the Great” (d. 530 B.C.): The conqueror of Media, Lydia, and Babylonia, he was the first Persian king to form an empire. He ended the Babylonian Captivity of the Jews and, thus, is hailed in Isaiah as a “messiah”—the only Gentile to be given that title.

David (r. c. 1005–c. 965): King of the United Monarchy in Israel; successor of Saul; father of Solomon. In the Christian tradition, his role as the ancestor of Jesus is extremely important.

Euripides (480–406 B.C.): The third and youngest of the three great Athenian tragedians. His 18 extant tragedies include The Bacchae and Hippolytus.

Homer (c. 750 B.C.?): The name traditionally given to the bard of the Iliad and the Odyssey, but there is little to no agreement about when or where such a person lived, or even if it is reasonable to refer to one bard for the epics at all.

Parry, Milman (1902–1935): An American scholar whose 1928 doctoral dissertation for the University of Paris was the first clear demonstration of the importance of oral compositional techniques in the Homeric epics.

Pindar (518–438 B.C.): Writer of epinicians (victory odes); the most important representative of choral lyric whose work has survived.

Sappho (b. c. 630 B.C.): The most famous lyric poet; born on Lesbos. Her collected poems filled nine books in the Alexandrian library but survive in scanty fragments, with only one complete poem. Her erotic poems to and/or about other women lead modern readers to assume that she was “lesbian” in the modern sense, but this may not be an accurate assessment.


Sophocles (496–406 B.C.): Second of the great Athenian tragedians. He wrote perhaps as many as 120 plays, of which only 7 survive: Ajax, Antigone, Electra, Oedipus the King, Oedipus at Colonus, Philoctetes, and Trachinia.

Thespis (mid–late 6th century B.C.): According to tradition, the founder of tragedy, who added the first actor to the chorus. The traditional date given for his first victory at the City Dionysia, 534 B.C., may be unreliable.

Legendary, Mythological, and Fictional Characters (humans, monsters, and gods):

Achilles: Greatest Greek warrior in the Trojan War. The framework of the Iliad is formed by his withdrawal from battle after Agamemnon takes his concubine Briseis and his subsequent return to avenge the death of his friend Patroclus.

Aegisthus: Cousin of Agamemnon and Menelaus, who seduces Clytaemestra while Agamemnon is away at war. He helps Clytaemestra murder Agamemnon upon his return from Troy and is himself killed by Agamemnon’s son Orestes.
**Agamemnon**: Commander-in-chief of the Greek forces. Brother of Menelaus; husband of Clytaemestra. In the *Iliad*, his initial refusal to surrender his concubine Chryseis and subsequent appropriation of Achilles’s concubine Briseis motivate Achilles’s withdrawal from battle.

**Ajax**: Son of Telamon; the greatest Greek warrior after Achilles. He figures prominently in the *Iliad*. According to the epic cycle, he committed suicide out of shame after the Greeks voted to award the dead Achilles’s armor to Odysseus rather than to him. This suicide is the centerpiece of Sophocles’s great tragedy *Ajax*.

**Aphrodite** (Roman Venus): Daughter of Zeus and Dione; mother (by the mortal Anchises) of the Trojan Aeneas; lover of Ares. Goddess of sexual passion. She motivates Paris’s abduction of Helen. Addressed by Sappho in the “Hymn to Aphrodite.”

**Apollo**: Son of Zeus and Leto; twin brother of Artemis; god of prophecy, reason, healing, and music but also of plague and of sudden death for men. His identification with the sun is post-classical.

**Ares** (Roman Mars): Son of Zeus and Hera; god of war; particularly associated with the physical, bloody, distressing aspects of war (cf. Athena).

**Artemis** (Roman Diana): Daughter of Zeus and Leto; twin sister of Apollo. A virgin goddess. She is the patron of hunters, wild animals, and girls before their marriage; later associated with the moon. She brings sudden death to women.

**Athena** (Roman Minerva): Daughter of Zeus, who sprang from his brow fully grown and wearing armor. She is the goddess of warfare in its nobler aspects (cf. Ares). A virgin goddess, she is associated with wisdom, cleverness, and weaving. In the *Odyssey*, she appears as Odysseus’s special patron. Usually favors the Greeks but becomes enraged with them during the sack of Troy.

**Bacchae/Bacchantes**: Female followers of Dionysus; in myth, they have extraordinary powers, such as being able to make wine or milk flow from the ground, to handle snakes, and to tear animals apart with their bare hands. Also called Maenads.

**Briseis**: Achilles’s concubine and geras. Agamemnon’s taking her motivates the opening episode of the *Iliad*.

**Calypso**: Nymph (or minor goddess) who keeps Odysseus captive on her island Ogygia for seven years.

**Chryseis**: Daughter of Chryses; concubine and geras of Agamemnon. His refusal to return her to her father, Chryses, motivates the opening episode of the *Iliad*.

**Clytaemestra** (also spelled Clytemnestra): Wife of Agamemnon, mother of Orestes, half-sister of Helen. She takes Aegisthus as her lover while Agamemnon is away at Troy and assists Aegisthus in murdering him upon his return. This story is frequently cited in the *Odyssey* as a parallel to Odysseus’s family situation.

**Dionysus** (Roman Bacchus): Son of Zeus and the mortal woman Semele. After Semele’s incineration, Dionysus was incubated in Zeus’s thigh. He is the god of wine, intoxication, frenzy, and drama; also associated with rapidly growing plants, such as vine and ivy. Euripides’s *Bacchae* is our fullest extant description of him.

**Enkidu**: Gilgamesh’s friend and companion.

**Eumaeus**: Odysseus’s swineherd, who remains loyal to his master. The disguised Odysseus goes to his hut and receives xenia from him in Book XIV of the *Odyssey*.

**Eumenides**: A euphemistic term for the Furies; literally means “kindly ones.” Also the title of the third play in Aeschylus’s trilogy *The Oresteia*.

**Furies**: Spirits of blood vengeance, who avenge violence against kin, especially violence of children against their parents. In Aeschylus’s *Eumenides*, they torment Orestes for killing his mother, Clytaemestra.

**Gilgamesh**: King of Uruk (modern Warka) c. 2800 B.C.; according to legend, the builder of the city walls. Hero of the Mesopotamian *Epic of Gilgamesh*, according to which he was one-third man and two-thirds god. His name may mean “Old Man Who Became a Young Man.”
Hector: Crown prince of Troy, son of Priam and Hecuba, husband of Andromache, father of Astyanax. He kills Patroclus and is killed by Achilles.

Helen: Daughter of Zeus and Leda, sister of Clytaemestra, wife of Menelaus; the most beautiful woman in the world. Her seduction (or kidnapping?) by Paris is the cause of the Trojan War.

Hera (Roman Juno): Wife and sister of Zeus, mother of Hephaestus and Ares. She is the patron goddess of marriage and married women. In the Iliad, she hates the Trojans and favors the Greeks.

Hippolytus: Son of Theseus and Hippolyta (or Antiope), the Amazon queen. His devotion to Artemis and scorn for Aphrodite and its consequences are the subject of Euripides’s play Hippolytus.

Humbaba: Guardian of the Cedar Forest, whom Gilgamesh and Enkidu killed.

Iphigenia: Daughter of Agamemnon and Clytaemestra; Agamemnon sacrifices her at Aulis, where the Greek fleet is gathered, in order to gain a fair wind to sail for Troy.

Ishtar: The principal goddess of Uruk; she desires Gilgamesh for her husband and is enraged when he rebuffs her.

Job: Main character in the Book of Job in the Hebrew Bible; a righteous man beset with undeserved suffering.

Maenads: See Bacchae.

Menelaus: Brother of Agamemnon, husband of Helen. Prominent figure in the Iliad; appears briefly in Book IV of the Odyssey.

Odysseus (Roman Ulysses): Husband of Penelope, father of Telemachus. Cleverest and craftiest of the Greeks; an important character in the Iliad, where he takes part in the embassy to Achilles (Book IX). Main character of the Odyssey.

Orestes: Son of Agamemnon and Clytaemestra. He avenges his father’s murder by killing Aegisthus and Clytaemestra.

Paris: Son of Priam and Hecuba; brother of Hector; prince of Troy. His abduction or, perhaps, seduction of Helen from her husband, Menelaus, motivates the Trojan War.

Penelope: Wife of Odysseus, mother of Telemachus. One of the main themes of the Odyssey is her courting by 108 suitors and the difficulties this causes her. The question of whether or not she will remain faithful to Odysseus permeates the epic.

Poseidon: Brother of Zeus, god of the sea. In the Iliad, he favors the Greeks; in the Odyssey, he hates Odysseus for blinding his son, the Cyclops Polyphemos.

Priam: King of Troy, father of Hector and Paris, husband of Hecuba. He visits Achilles in Book XXIV of the Iliad to ransom Hector’s body.

Shiduri: A minor goddess; the tavern-keeper whom Gilgamesh meets on his journey to seek immortality.

Tecmessa: Wife of Ajax in Sophocles’s tragedy Ajax.

Telemachus: Son of Odysseus and Penelope. The first four books of the Odyssey (the Telemachy) focus on him. In Books XVI–XXIV, he helps his father defeat the suitors.

Ur-shanabi: The ferryman of Uta-napishti.

Uta-napishti: The survivor of the flood (thus, the Mesopotamian equivalent to Noah), whom Gilgamesh visits on his quest for immortality.

Bibliography

Essential Reading:

Note: Most of the Greek and Roman texts cited are available in many translations; the same is, of course, also true for the Bible. The editions listed here reflect my own preferences. In general, the Penguin editions are good choices; they tend to include helpful and up-to-date notes and bibliographies.


Supplementary Reading:


Blundell, Mary Whitlock. *Helping Friends and Harming Enemies: A Study in Sophocles and Greek Ethics*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989. A close study of the importance for Sophocles’s plays of the Greek ethical imperative to help one’s friends and hurt one’s enemies. Includes individual chapters on all the plays except *Oedipus the King* and *Women of Trachis*.


“tragic hero” was Sophocles’s invention. Also provides a close reading of Antigone, Philoctetes, and Oedipus at Colonus.


**Internet Resources:**

Bandstra, Barry L. *Reading the Old Testament: An Introduction to the Hebrew Bible*. http://www.hope.edu/academic/religion/bandstra/RTOT/RTOT.HTM. This online version is accessible, easily navigable, and quite useful. Provides clear and readable outlines and commentaries and thorough bibliographies for further study.


*Diotima: Materials for the Study of Women and Gender in the Ancient World*. http://www.stoa.org/diotima/. A site devoted to the studies of gender issues and the status of women in antiquity. Includes an anthology of translated texts, a collection of essays, links to other sites, and more.
Great Authors of the Western Literary Tradition
Part II:
Literature of the Classical World
Professor Elizabeth Vandiver
Elizabeth Vandiver did her undergraduate work at Shimer College, Mt. Carroll, Illinois, where she matriculated in 1972 as a 16-year-old “early entrant.” After receiving her B.A. in 1975, she spent several years working as a librarian before deciding to pursue graduate work in Classics at the University of Texas at Austin. She received her M.A. in 1984 and her Ph.D. in 1990.

Before coming to Whitman College, Professor Vandiver was Distinguished Visiting Lecturer in the Department of Greek and Roman Studies, Rhodes College, Memphis, Tennessee. Her previous academic appointments include serving as Director of the Honors Humanities program at the University of Maryland and visiting professorships at Northwestern University; the University of Georgia; the Intercollegiate Center for Classical Studies in Rome, Italy; Loyola University, New Orleans; and Utah State University.

In 1998, Dr. Vandiver received the American Philological Association’s Excellence in Teaching Award, the most prestigious teaching award available to American classicists. Other awards include the Northwestern University Department of Classics Excellence in Teaching Award for 1998 and the University of Georgia’s Outstanding Honors Professor Award in 1993 and 1994.

Dr. Vandiver has published a book, Heroes in Herodotus: The Interaction of Myth and History, and several articles and has delivered numerous papers at national and international conferences. Her translation of Johannes Cochlaeus’s 1549 Commentary on the Works and Writings of Martin Luther was published in 2002 under the title Luther’s Lives; this is the first English translation of Cochlaeus’s work. She is currently working on a third book, examining the influence of the classical tradition on the British poets of World War I. Her previous Teaching Company courses include The Iliad of Homer, The Odyssey of Homer, Virgil’s Aeneid, Classical Mythology, Greek Tragedy, and Herodotus: The Father of History.
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## Great Authors of the Western Literary Tradition

### Part II: Literature of the Classical World

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Great Authors of the Western Literary Tradition
Part II: Literature of the Classical World

Scope:
This set of 12 lectures continues the overview of the foremost genres of ancient Western literature and highlights representative great authors and their works, from Greek and Roman historians, playwrights, philosophers, poets, and novelists to St. Augustine, one of the last great writers of Roman antiquity and one of the first great writers of Christianity.

We start with Lectures Thirteen and Fourteen, which move us into history, a great genre of 5th-century B.C. Athenian literature. Lecture Thirteen describes the work of Herodotus, the first Greek author whose work can be classified as “history” and discusses his own statements of his purpose for writing. In Lecture Fourteen, we consider Herodotus’s successor, Thucydides. We examine Thucydides’s methodological statements and consider whether his History of the Peloponnesian War is, in fact, closer to modern standards of objective historiography than the work of Herodotus.

Lecture Fifteen brings us back to Athenian drama and introduces us to the work of Aristophanes, the great writer of Old Comedy. The lecture discusses the development of comedy as a genre, then focuses on Aristophanes’s lampooning of the philosopher Socrates in Clouds and the tragedian Euripides in Frogs. We discuss the serious undertones in these satirical depictions of public figures in Athens and the importance of the political context of the time for understanding the work of Aristophanes.

Our discussion of Aristophanes brings us from the 5th into the 4th century B.C., and in Lecture Sixteen, we turn to Plato, one of Greece’s greatest thinkers and writers. We concentrate on his depiction of the ideal state in the Republic and, in particular, on his exclusion of poetry from that state. Lecture Seventeen revisits comedy with a discussion of the New Comedy of Menander; we see how both the form and the topics of comedy have changed from Aristophanes’s work of the late 5th century B.C. to Menander’s Dyskolos, written near the end of the 4th century B.C. Lecture Seventeen ends with a brief discussion of Hellenistic literature in general, and this provides our bridge into Roman literature.

Lectures Eighteen through Twenty discuss Roman poetry, from Catullus through Ovid. Lecture Eighteen begins by describing the importance of Hellenistic literature, particularly the Alexandrian poets, for Catullus’s Roman lyric; from there, we move into a summary of Catullus’s work and its importance for late love elegy. This lecture also discusses the work of Horace, one of the greatest lyric poets of any age. In Lecture Nineteen, we discuss Horace’s friend and contemporary, Virgil, and examine the ways in which his great epic The Aeneid both draws on and differs from its Homeric models. In particular, we focus on the political situation of Virgil’s day and consider whether the Aeneid is meant to reflect approval of or unease with the Augustan regime. Lecture Twenty brings us to Ovid, whose Metamorphoses became one of the most influential texts for the reception of classical literature in later European culture. We discuss Ovid’s erotic writings and the possible reasons for his exile to the Black Sea; we then consider the relationship of Metamorphoses to Ovid’s oeuvre in general.

In Lectures Twenty-One and Twenty-Two, we conclude our discussion of classical Roman literature by turning, once again, to prose. Lecture Twenty-One describes the work of the two most important Roman historians, Livy and Tacitus, and considers their debt to and differences from classical Greek historiography; the lecture then examines the work of the great Greco-Roman biographer Plutarch. In Lecture Twenty-Two, we look at two of the most fascinating works to survive from Roman literature, the novels of Petronius and Apuleius. We discuss whether Petronius’s fragmentary Satyricon should be classified as a novel, then concentrate on Apuleius’s great comic novel, The Golden Ass, and its presentations of Roman life and religion; in particular, we discuss the final book of the novel, in which the goddess Isis appears in an epiphany.

Lectures Twenty-Three and Twenty-Four conclude this part of the course by moving from the literature of classical antiquity to the literature of Christianity. In Lecture Twenty-Three, we discuss the Gospels of the New Testament. We consider what kind of literature they are and the difficulties of assigning them to any preexistent genre; we also look briefly at other, non-canonical Gospels that were not included in the New Testament. The last lecture of Part II, on the work of St. Augustine, delineates how this great thinker’s writings both looked back to the classical world and formed the foundation for much of later Christian theology.
Lecture Thirteen

Herodotus

Scope: This lecture discusses the first great prose narrative in Western literature, Herodotus’s *Histories* of the Persian Wars. We start by sketching what is known of Herodotus’s life and giving a brief account of the Persian Wars. The lecture then describes the nature of Herodotus’s achievement. After noting the overall sweep of Herodotus’s narrative and his inclusion of legendary material from the remote past, we focus on the programmatic opening sentence of the *Histories*, in which Herodotus states that he writes for two main reasons: to keep great human achievements from being forgotten because of the passage of time and to explain why Greeks and Persians went to war with each other. We discuss the importance of this desire to explain the causes of events, and the belief that such causes can be found out through inquiry, for the development of historiography in Western culture.

Outline

I. Herodotus was the first Greek writer to focus on events of the recent past and to try to explain the causes of those events.
   A. Herodotus was born in Halicarnassus in Caria (western Turkey). This area was Greek speaking and culturally Greek.
      1. He was probably born in 484 B.C., and he probably died sometime in the 420s B.C. in Thurii in southern Italy.
      2. We know little about his life; he says that he traveled widely, and his work reflects this.
   B. Herodotus’s book was probably published some time in the 420s B.C. His main topic was the Greco-Persian War of 490 and 480–479 B.C.

II. The first Persian invasion of 490 B.C. ended with the Athenians’ victory at the Battle of Marathon; the second invasion began in 480 B.C. and ended with the Persians’ defeat in 479 B.C.
   A. Greece was not a unified country; Athens played a crucial role in the victory over the Persians.
      1. The victory led to Athens’ position of hegemony in Greece.
      2. Athens’ political power influenced her cultural and intellectual development.
   B. By the time Herodotus wrote, Athens and Sparta were involved in the Peloponnesian War (431–404 B.C.).
      1. Most scholars agree that Herodotus wrote well into the 420s B.C.
      2. One of his motivations may have been to recall a time when Athens and Sparta had joined forces against Persia.

III. Herodotus’s primary purpose was to record and explain the events of the Persian War.
   A. To do that, he needed to explore the background of that war.
      1. Herodotus discusses the rise of the Persian Empire and of the most important Greek city-states, especially Athens and Sparta.
      2. To explain the Persian Empire’s power, he must describe nations the Persians had previously conquered.
   B. Modern scholars sometimes call these descriptions of other cultures “digressions,” but that is not Herodotus’s term.
      1. Herodotus called the various components of his work *logoi*, “accounts”; there is no reason to think he considered some of them irrelevant.
      2. To explain Persia and its threat to Greece, he needed to examine other major empires of the past.

IV. In tracing the causes of the Persian Wars, Herodotus includes accounts that modern historians consider legendary or mythic. Some take this as evidence that Herodotus himself was naïve or incapable of evaluating his sources.
   A. Herodotus’s primary source material was oral tradition, which involves stories that moderns would classify as myth or, at least, legend.
1. Scholars still debate whether Herodotus himself distinguished between myth and history as categories of explanation.
2. When he wrote, the Greek language had no word corresponding to myth or to history; thus, Herodotus makes no terminological distinction.
3. Herodotus took for granted that the famous characters of Greek tradition had really lived.

B. Most scholars agree that Herodotus makes a chronological distinction between the remote past and the recent past in terms of verifiability.
1. Herodotus does not exclude the remote past; for instance, he refers to the Trojan War.
2. But he says that he will start his main narrative with the man whom “I myself know” was first to wrong the Greeks, Croesus, king of Lydia, who ruled from c. 560 to 546 B.C.
3. Herodotus distinguishes between verifiable accounts and ones that cannot be checked by the memories of eyewitnesses or those who had spoken to them.

V. Herodotus’s Histories consists of nine books; the text’s organization moves clearly toward its culmination in Greece’s victory over Persia.

A. The first three books recount the ancient roots of East-West conflict and trace the rise of Persia.
1. Book I moves from the mythic beginnings of the conflict to the first great Persian king, Cyrus.
2. Book II focuses on Egypt (which Cyrus’s son Cambyses conquered), and Book III concentrates on Cambyses’s successor, Darius.

B. The next three books foreground Darius’s campaigns.
1. Book IV recounts his expeditions against Scythia and Libya.
2. Book V describes the revolt of Greek-speaking Ionian city-states from Persian rule in the 490s.
3. Book VI begins the narrative of the Persian Wars themselves, describing Darius’s invasion of Greece and the defeat of his troops at the Battle of Marathon.

C. Books VII through IX narrate the second Persian invasion of Greece, by Darius’s son Xerxes.
1. Book VII describes the beginnings of Xerxes’s invasion and includes the Battle of Thermopylae.
2. Book VIII builds to the account of the crucial naval battle of Salamis.

D. Thus, the narrative of the Histories narrows from a broad portrait of foreign cultures and the remote past into a detailed and vivid description of the Persian Wars.

VI. The opening sentence of the Histories provides insight into Herodotus’s motivations and achievement and describes how this work differs from anything that preceded it.

A. The third word of the sentence is crucial. Historiē means “inquiry” or “research.”
1. Herodotus says that he is setting out his research, what he found out by inquiry.
2. Because Herodotus’s work was a new kind of writing, for which a term was needed, historiē came to mean “history” in our sense.

B. “Human achievements” is Sélincourt’s translation of ta genomena ex anthrōpōn, “the things that have come about from human beings.”

C. The next phrase narrows ta genomena by specifying that Herodotus is concerned with erga megala te kai thōmasta, “great and astonishing works or deeds.”

D. Herodotus’s purpose in recording these human achievements is to prevent them from becoming aklea—“without glory.”

VII. Thus far, Herodotus has presented two reasons for writing: so that noteworthy events will not be forgotten and so that human achievements will not lose their glory.

A. Neither of these reasons is truly new; Homeric epic memorialized human achievement and preserved its kleos.
1. But the last clause of the sentence is the most important of all.
2. Herodotus says that he wants to record “through what cause [aitiē] they warred with one another.”

B. This is the point at which Herodotus breaks genuinely new ground, in the intention to explain the reasons for the Greco-Persian conflict.
1. Homeric epic had given reasons for individual human actions, but the wider, sweeping causes were attributed to gods.
2. The opening lines of the Iliad reference the will of Zeus.
3. The germ of true historiography lies in Herodotus’s attempt to explain rationally why things happened as and when they did.

C. Herodotus owed a great deal to previous modes of thinking and earlier literature, particularly to Homer; for instance, he does not dispense with the gods.
   1. Herodotus mentions gods frequently and cites them as causes.
   2. But the gods are not characters in his work.
   3. Herodotus focuses on human actions and human responsibility; when he cites a god as a cause of an event, he normally includes a human cause as well.

D. Herodotus was not a full-fledged historian in the modern sense, but his approach to narrating the past provided a crucial foundation on which later historians could build.

**Essential Reading:**
Herodotus, *The Histories*.

**Supplementary Reading:**
Lateiner, *Historical Method*.
Luraghi, *Historian’s Craft*, especially chapters 1, 2, and 10.
Marincola, “Introduction.”
Waters, *Herodotos the Historian*.

**Questions to Consider:**
1. Which of Herodotus’s two purposes, to record the past or to explain it, strikes you as more important for the development of historiography?
2. Would it be possible for an author to make a distinction of category between myth and history when his language had no words for either those concepts?
Lecture Fourteen
Thucydides

Scope: This lecture discusses Herodotus’s successor, Thucydides. Herodotus wrote his *Histories* during the early years of the Peloponnesian War (431–404 B.C.), but Thucydides took the Peloponnesian War itself as his subject. After briefly summarizing the events of this war, the lecture examines some of the key differences between Thucydides’s methodology and that of Herodotus. These include Thucydides’s motivation for writing; his almost complete omission of the gods, fate, and the supernatural; his choice to concentrate on events of the recent past rather than looking to the more remote past for patterns; and his presentation of his method as one of objective reporting. The lecture concludes by analyzing Thucydides’s own statement of his methodology in one key area—his approach to the speeches he reports—and discusses the degree to which we can trust his claim of accurate reporting.

Outline

I. The Peloponnesian War began with a quarrel between Athens and Corinth, an ally of Sparta. War was declared in 431 B.C., and Sparta invaded Attica.

A. The war’s history is quite complex.
   1. Its early years included plague in Athens (in 430, 429, and 427 B.C.).
   2. During the 420s B.C., both sides had victories and defeats; a peace treaty signed in 421 B.C. did not hold.
   3. In 415 B.C., the Athenians undertook an expedition against Sicily, which ended in 413 B.C. with the destruction of the Athenians’ fleet and the capture of their troops.
   4. In 411 B.C., a revolutionary oligarchic council of 400 took over the government of Athens; democracy was restored in 410 B.C.
   5. In 404 B.C., the Spartans defeated the Athenians and the war ended.

B. Under the peace terms, 30 men were chosen to govern Athens.
   1. During their reign of terror, the *Thirty Tyrants* executed some 1,500 citizens and exiled many others.
   2. Democracy was restored in 403 B.C.

C. Thucydides’s *History of the Peloponnesian War* is our main source of information about these events; unfortunately, the work is incomplete and breaks off in the winter of 411 B.C.
   1. Thucydides was an Athenian and served as a general in 424 B.C.
   2. Given that generals had to be at least 30, Thucydides must have been born no later than 454 B.C.
   3. He caught the plague sometime between 430 and 427 B.C.
   4. He lived at least until the end of the Peloponnesian War.
   5. He was exiled from Athens from 424 B.C. until 404 B.C.
   6. He probably died around 400 B.C.

II. Thucydides excludes the fantastic, legendary, or seemingly irrelevant elements that permeate Herodotus’s work. But the difference between the two historians is more in manner of presentation and method of approach than in exclusion of material.

A. Herodotus set the course of later historiography in two primary ways.
   1. In recording events of the recent past, he described motivations and causes rather than just listing events.
   2. He saw wars as the most significant of those recent events.

B. Thucydides almost entirely omits the gods; he focuses on human motivations and actions.
   1. Herodotus often cites divine motivations for occurrences even in the recent past, while Thucydides gives only human, rational motivations for occurrences even in the remote past.
   2. Both historians rely heavily on oral report and decide which version of events to report based on their own sense of what is probable, but Thucydides persuasively presents his work as straightforward reporting of facts.
C. The two historians’ stated motivations for writing are different. Herodotus wants to memorialize the great deeds of the past, while Thucydides suggests that the horrors of the present can provide insight into future events.

D. The most important difference is that while Herodotus addressed East-West conflict from the remote past down to his own time, Thucydides focused on the recent past or even the present.

E. Here, Thucydides’s influence on later historiography was profound.
   1. Many later Greek historians were mainly interested in the events of their own time, especially political and military events.
   2. This set the focus of history primarily on men and masculine fields of endeavor.

III. Thucydides’s influence on later historiography is also evident in the assumption of objective reporting that informs so much of the Western historiographical tradition.

A. Throughout most of the last 2,500 years, historians have modeled their works on Thucydides’s claim of factual reporting.

B. In Book I, chapters 21–22, Thucydides makes two main points about his method.
   1. He discusses the speeches that he includes throughout his text.
   2. He describes his reliance on eyewitness evidence.
   3. We will consider these two points in reverse order.

IV. Thucydides says that he did not assume the accuracy of whatever some chance informant told him or depend on what seemed likely to him but, rather, worked by comparing the statements of eyewitnesses.

A. Either he was personally present at the events he describes or he talked to people who were there.
   1. Comparing eyewitnesses’ reports seems at first to ensure accuracy.
   2. But Thucydides admits that informants disagree.
   3. Admitting that this is a methodological problem does not tell us how he solved it.
   4. His statement that he checked the facts with as much accuracy as possible is vague.

B. Despite his portrayal of himself as an objective reporter, Thucydides’s method is less transparent than Herodotus’s.
   1. Herodotus often reports different versions of stories, even when he considers them incredible.
   2. Thucydides omits his own voice almost entirely and does not specify what method he uses for choosing between versions of events.
   3. This approach gives the appearance of objectivity but not necessarily its substance.

V. Even more problematic is Thucydides’s description of how he composed the speeches in his History.

A. Scholars continue to debate precisely what Thucydides means. There are several problems in his terminology.
   1. He says that it was difficult for him and his informants to remember with precision (akribeia) what was said.
   2. Therefore, the speeches say what—in his opinion—was appropriate, or necessary, on each occasion.
   3. But he held as closely as possible to the overall sense of what was actually said.

B. The two halves of this sentence contradict each other; the more one looks at the statement, the more unclear it becomes regarding what Thucydides claims for these speeches.

VI. Whatever Thucydides means about his method, there are two noteworthy points about the speeches themselves.

A. They are all in Thucydides’s own voice.
   1. The style does not vary from one speaker to another.
   2. This is true even with speeches by famous speakers.

B. The speeches occur frequently. Thus, Thucydides’s methodology in these speeches is significant for his methodology overall; some of the most important parts of the History are presented as speeches or debates.
   1. The “Mytilene Debate” (Book III) presents arguments for and against executing and enslaving the population of Mytilene, which had rebelled against the Athenians.
   2. The discussion is cast as a debate between Cleon, arguing for severe punishment, and Diodotus, arguing against it.
3. This likely reflects a genuine debate in 427 B.C., which Thucydides may well have attended.
5. This raises formidable problems of accuracy, which are exacerbated by the debate’s date of 416 B.C., after Thucydides’s exile.

C. We should be cautious in accepting at face value Thucydides’s claim to be an accurate and objective reporter.
   1. The more one looks at Thucydides’s claims of accuracy, the more questions arise.
   2. His greatest triumph may well be his convincing literary portrayal of the historian as an objective recorder of facts.

Essential Reading:
Thucydides, *History of the Peloponnesian War*.

Supplementary Reading:
Connor, W. R. *Thucydides*.
Rawlings, *Structure of Thucydides’ History*.
de Romilly, *Thucydides and Athenian Imperialism*.
Rood, *Thucydides: Narrative and Explanation*.

Questions to Consider:
1. Reread Thucydides’s statement about the speeches, preferably in more than one translation. What do you think Thucydides is claiming here? Is there any way to reconcile the two halves of this statement—that he made the speakers say what he thought they should say but also held as closely as possible to the overall sense of what they did say?
2. Which author do you find more congenial to read, Herodotus or Thucydides? Which one do you consider the “better” historian? Why?
Lecture Fifteen
Aristophanes

Scope: This lecture returns us to Athenian dramatic literature. The lecture briefly describes Old Comedy, which featured fantastic plots, mythological burlesques, and a strong role for the chorus, including political commentary. We focus on the works of Aristophanes, the only 5th-century B.C. comic playwright whose work has, in part, survived. Eleven of his plays are extant; we know that he wrote at least 32 others. After a brief summary of Aristophanes’s biography, the lecture pays particular attention to two plays, Clouds and Frogs. We consider the satirizing of philosophy in Clouds, where Aristophanes lampoons the philosopher Socrates and philosophical speculation in general. We then discuss his treatment of tragedy, particularly in Frogs, in which Dionysus travels to Hades to bring back either Euripides or Aeschylus.

Outline

I. Comedy developed in Athens in the 5th century B.C.
   A. We do not know comedy’s origins are or why it was performed at Dionysus’s festivals.
      1. The Greek word κόμιδα ("comedy") derives from κόμος, “band of revelers.”
      2. Κόμιδα seems to mean “κόμος-song.” This implies no specific connection with Dionysus.
      3. But Aristotle’s Poetics says that comedy derived from phallic processions in honor of Dionysus.
      4. Comic actors wore large padded phalluses as part of their costumes, which offers some evidence for a connection with phallic processions.
   B. Competitions in comedy were added to the City Dionysia in 486 B.C. and to another festival, the Lenaea, from about 440 B.C.
      1. Before the Peloponnesian War, five comedies were performed per competition.
      2. During the war, the number may have been reduced to three.
   C. Aristophanes is the only 5th-century B.C. comedian whose works have survived, and his earliest surviving comedy, Acharnians, dates to 425 B.C.
      1. This gap of 60 years between comedy’s inclusion in the City Dionysia and our first extant comedy makes it difficult to know what early comedy was like.
      2. It is difficult to know which features belong to comedy in general and which are parts of Aristophanes’s own style.
   D. Scholars generally divide Athenian comedy into three forms, Old, Middle, and New Comedy.
      1. The only complete examples of both Old and Middle Comedy are by Aristophanes, but there are fragments from other authors for both genres.
      2. Lecture Seventeen discusses Menander, the most important author of New Comedy.

II. Old Comedy features characteristic form and subject matter. Both of these elements are important for our understanding of the genre.
   A. Like tragedy, comedy involved all-male casts. The chorus was of primary importance.
      1. The chorus numbered 24, and several Old Comedies were named for their choruses.
      2. The chorus was frequently costumed as animals.
      3. Most of Aristophanes’s extant comedies require four actors, not the three of tragedy.
   B. The two main formal elements were the ἀγών and the παράβασις.
      1. The ἀγών (“struggle” or “contest”) is a dispute between two characters or groups of characters.
      2. The παράβασις is a choral section near the midpoint of the play. The action of the storyline stops and the chorus speaks directly to the audience, often in the playwright’s voice.
      3. The παράβασις is always in a particular meter, ἀναπέστης.
   C. Within this fixed structure, there was a great deal of room for invention, of which Old Comedy’s subject matter took full advantage.
      1. Old Comedy’s subjects tend toward the fantastic and surreal.
      2. In Frogs, Dionysus journeys to the underworld to bring back a dead tragedian; in Clouds, Socrates swings from a basket in mid-air to try to study the sun.
3. *Birds* features a society of birds, Cloudcuckooland; in *Peace*, the main character tries to ride an enormous dung-beetle to Mount Olympus.

D. These fantastic, outlandish, and ridiculous plots were a means of discussing important political and social realities. Old Comedy included pointed satires of well-known individuals and public figures.

III. Aristophanes was probably born no earlier than 460 B.C. and no later than 450 B.C., and he probably died in or around 386 B.C.

A. Eleven plays are extant; we know that he wrote at least 32 others. We have a much larger percentage of his work than of the tragedians'.
   1. Aristophanes's nine extant Old Comedies were written during the Peloponnesian War.
   2. He won at least six first prizes and at least four second prizes.

B. Political commentary, particularly concerning the war, permeates most of the comedies, and the *parabases* tend to single out individual politicians for ridicule.

C. Aristophanes's plays frequently satirize other playwrights, especially Euripides, and current intellectual movements.

IV. Aristophanes's *Clouds* placed last at the City Dionysia of 423 B.C. The text we have is a later, unperformed revision from c. 418 B.C.

A. *Clouds* satirizes a group of philosophers called *Sophists*. The Sophists were itinerant teachers who specialized in rhetoric and techniques of argumentation.
   1. They espoused a naturalistic and relativistic view of morality and religion.
   2. The Sophists' opponents accused them of corrupting morals and weakening religious beliefs.
   3. One charge against them was that they taught young men to “make the worse [or weaker] argument appear better [or stronger].”
   4. However, they were very popular as teachers of rhetoric.

B. *Clouds* paints an extremely funny (though inaccurate) portrait of Socrates.
   1. Socrates was not a Sophist, but Aristophanes lumps him in with them.
   2. Socrates did not accept money for teaching, nor did he ever found a school.
   3. In Plato's *Apology*, Socrates repudiates the picture of him given in *Clouds*.
   4. But Socrates was the most well-known philosopher of the time and, thus, the obvious one to mock.

V. *Clouds* features a farmer, Strepsiades, who wants his extravagant son Phidippides to receive a Sophistic education, which will enable him to lie well enough to win the lawsuits brought on by his debts. When Phidippides refuses to cooperate, Strepsiades decides to get an education himself.

A. Strepsiades goes to a school called the “the Thinkery,” where he meets several students and, finally, Socrates.
   1. The students are working on absurd problems, including how many flea-feet a flea can jump.
   2. Socrates appears suspended in a basket, studying astronomical and meteorological phenomena.

B. Socrates tries to instruct Strepsiades in the basics of education. The result is a ludicrous caricature of current philosophical, scientific, and linguistic theories.
   1. Socrates displays his religious unorthodoxy by praying to the Clouds (represented by the chorus) as goddesses.
   2. He gives naturalistic explanations for phenomena that were traditionally ascribed to Zeus.
   3. Because Strepsiades wants to become a skilled speaker, Socrates tries to instruct him in poetry and grammar, with ludicrous results.

C. Finally, Socrates gives up on Strepsiades and recommends that Phidippides enroll instead.

VI. When Phidippides arrives at the Thinkery, the personified Better Argument and Worse Argument make their cases for their own forms of education.

A. Their *agōn* encapsulates the serious issues lying behind the comedy of *Clouds*.
   1. What form of education—traditional or modern/Sophistic—produces the best citizens?
   2. What is the appropriate reaction to the intellectual challenge presented by the Sophists?
B. Phidippides becomes so good a Sophist that he makes a coherent argument for the right of sons to beat their fathers.
   1. Strepsiades, aghast at the result of his son’s “education,” reproaches the Clouds for misleading him.
   2. The Clouds respond that Strepsiades himself chose to do wrong by wanting to cheat his creditors.
   3. Strepsiades sets out to burn down the Thinkery, and the play ends.

VII. *Frogs* (405 B.C.), which makes fun of tragedy, also has serious issues at its core.

A. Dionysus descends to Hades to bring back Euripides, who has just died.
   1. Dionysus needs a tragedian to save Athens, but the great ones are all dead.
   2. He intends to retrieve Euripides, but the play quickly turns into a contest between Euripides and Aeschylus over which one should be resurrected.

B. Aeschylus’s and Euripides’s contest is over which one is the better tragedian but also over which one did more for Athens.
   1. Aeschylus, the spokesman for an old-fashioned style of tragedy, also represents the virtues of the generation that won the Battle of Marathon.
   2. Euripides represents the war-weary Athenians of the present, as well as a newer style of playwriting.

C. The contest builds to an actual weighing of lines in a scale.
   1. Dionysus chooses to resurrect Aeschylus.
   2. When Euripides objects, Dionysus quotes an infamous line from *Hippolytus*: “my tongue swore, but my heart remained unpledged.”

D. *Frogs* is strong evidence that tragedy played a serious social role in Athens and that the mood of the city in 405 B.C. was pessimistic.
   1. A desire to recapture the ethos of the men who won the Persian Wars is understandable near the end of the Peloponnesian War.
   2. The audience voted Aristophanes a crown of sacred olive and ordered that the play be given a second performance.

VIII. Aristophanes’s *Ecclesiasouzae* and *Plutus* are the only surviving examples of Middle Comedy.

A. Alexandrian scholars invented the term *Middle Comedy* to explain the changes that occurred between Aristophanes’s works and Menander’s, some 60 years later.
   1. So little Middle Comedy survives that it is difficult to say much about it.
   2. A few structural points are obvious.
   3. Most noticeably, the role of the chorus is greatly reduced, and the *parabasis* disappears.

B. To what degree the works of other 4th-century B.C. comedians resembled those of Aristophanes remains a matter of conjecture.
   1. Middle Comedy seems less concerned with political and personal satire than Old Comedy.
   2. The fragments of other Middle Comedies indicate an interest in domestic life and especially food, but this may be a matter of selection.
   3. Most of our fragments occur in Athenaeus’s work *Deipnosophistae* (c. A.D. 200), a literary account of a dinner party.

**Essential Reading:**
Aristophanes, *Clouds* and *Frogs*.

**Supplementary Reading:**
Dover, *Aristophanic Comedy*.
Reckford, *Aristophanes’ Old-and-New Comedy*.

**Questions to Consider:**
1. What modern forms of entertainment are closest, in themes and presentation, to Old Comedy?
2. Can comic caricatures, such as Aristophanes’s portrayal of Socrates, provide any useful information to the historian, or should we regard them purely as fictions?
Lecture Sixteen

Plato

Scope: This lecture offers an overview of Plato’s philosophical writings by concentrating on one work, The Republic, and its treatment of literature and poetry. The lecture begins with a brief summary of the relationship between Plato’s philosophy and that of Socrates, whom Plato uses as a mouthpiece in his dialogues. The lecture discusses the reasons that the Athenians considered Socrates dangerous and the extent to which we can reconstruct his actual teachings from Plato’s portrayal. We consider the idea that the “Socrates” of Plato is as much a character as the “Socrates” of Aristophanes and discuss the open-ended nature of the Platonic dialogue form. After surveying the difficulties that the dialogue form presents for our construal of Plato’s own beliefs or arguments, we turn to The Republic. After a summary of the work’s content, we concentrate on the sections in which Plato discusses poetry and poets and consider why he banishes poets from his ideal state.

Outline

I. Plato was born in Athens around 429 or 427 B.C. Though of a wealthy family, Plato devoted his time to philosophy rather than to a public career.

A. Socrates was the primary influence on the development of Plato’s philosophical thought.
   1. Plato may have been very young when he met Socrates and was no older than 30 at the time of Socrates’s execution.
   2. Plato wrote 28 philosophical works and founded the Academy, a school for students of philosophy.

B. The question of the relationship between Socratic and Platonic philosophy is formidably difficult.
   1. Plato writes in dialogue form and includes Socrates as a character.
   2. Scholars differ greatly over the Socratic Question, the relationship between the words and ideas of the dialogues’ “Socrates” and the words and ideas of the actual man.
   3. Our lack of a secure chronology for Plato’s writings further complicates the situation.
   4. The Apology, Plato’s account of Socrates’s speech of defense at his trial, probably preserves something close to Socrates’s own words.

II. Socrates wrote nothing himself. Our knowledge of him rests on the writings of those who knew him: Plato, Xenophon, and even Aristophanes.

A. Several of Socrates’s other pupils wrote dialogues with Socrates as protagonist, but only Plato’s have survived.

B. Most scholars agree that Aristophanes’s comic portrayal of Socrates is an inaccurate caricature, which bore grim fruit in 399 B.C.
   1. In his trial, Socrates was charged with teaching young men to “make the worse argument appear better.”
   2. He was also charged with corrupting the youth of Athens and with failing to respect (or honor) the gods of Athens.
   3. One of Socrates’s young associates, Alcibiades, had proven both treacherous and persuasive during the Peloponnesian War.

C. Xenophon, best known in modern times as a historian, also wrote reminiscences of Socrates.
   1. Both Plato and Xenophon apparently wrote to try to rehabilitate Socrates’s reputation.
   2. However, Xenophon’s Socrates is much more straightforward than Plato’s and a spokesman for traditional ideas about virtue.
   3. Plato’s Socrates operates by eliciting opinions from others, not by offering his own.

III. Plato’s dialogues discuss ethics, politics, the nature and proper objects of knowledge, the nature of the soul, and the construction of the cosmos. Plato never speaks in a narrator’s voice; we must try to deduce his opinion from the words of his characters.

A. Thus, Plato’s works resemble literature, especially drama.
   1. We can never be certain that Plato’s characters—even Socrates—speak for him.
2. The reader almost becomes an interlocutor in the dialogue, which is left open-ended and unresolved.
3. This is especially true in the *aporetic* dialogues, in which Socrates questions interlocutors who think they know what a particular concept means.
4. Usually the only definition reached is what a particular concept is *not*, rather than what it *is*.

B. Like Plato’s other works, *The Republic* is a dialogue among Socrates and various interlocutors. *The Republic*’s primary topics are justice and the composition of the ideal state.
1. *The Republic* was probably written around 375 B.C.
2. The dramatic date of the dialogue is around 420 B.C., some 20 years before Socrates’s execution.
3. The setting is the house of a man named Cephalus, a native of Syracuse who is a resident alien in Athens; his sons Polemarchus, Lysias, and Euthydemus are all present, as are Plato’s brothers Glaucon and Adeimantus.
4. The Sophist Thrasyvachus responds to Socrates’s questions in Book I.

C. These characters were all real people, whose later fates Plato’s original readers would have known.
1. Cephalus probably died before the end of the Peloponnesian War.
2. Both his sons were arrested by the Thirty Tyrants.
3. Polemarchus was executed; Lysias managed to escape but had to flee Athens.
4. Thus, this great discussion of justice and the ideal state takes place in a non-citizen household that will be destroyed by the Thirty Tyrants. This is just one example of *Republic*’s ironies.
5. Throughout it all runs our knowledge that Socrates would be killed by Athenian society.

IV. *The Republic* begins as a debate of the question “What is justice?” At first, the discussion focuses on justice between individuals, but it broadens in Book II to justice in the state.

A. Book I may have been written first, for separate publication.
1. In Book I, Socrates questions Thrasyvachus about the nature of justice, but Thrasyvachus is unable to answer satisfactorily.
2. Socrates and his other interlocutors are not content to let the matter rest.
3. Thrasyvachus retires into the background; Book II opens with Glaucon and Adeimantus pushing the question further.

B. Adeimantus lays out the traditional Homeric system of justice and declares that it is not sufficient.
1. Adeimantus puts the challenge in terms of what the young should be taught, one major topic of the rest of *The Republic*.
2. The dialogue then focuses on the nature of the ideal state and what form of education system would be necessary to bring it about.
3. In Books II and III, Socrates discusses the role of literature and poetry in his ideal state, especially for the ruling class, the Guardians.
4. Book IV examines what justice would consist of in a state ruled by such rulers; in Book V, Socrates outlines the roles of women (to be educated equally with men) and children (to be reared by the state).

C. Adeimantus requests proof that it is possible to organize a state along these lines; Socrates responds that he has been describing an ideal state, not necessarily a possible one.
1. For actual states to approach his ideal state, the most important point is that the Guardians be trained as philosophers.
2. This leads to a discussion of the nature of the philosopher; moving into Book VI, Socrates returns to the question of the education of the philosopher-rulers, who must study the Good.
3. Socrates cannot provide a definition of the Good but articulates the theory of Ideas or Forms.

D. Book VII includes the well-known Allegory of the Cave. Socrates imagines people chained in a cave, with their backs to the entrance, watching shadows projected on a wall in front of them by the light of a fire behind them.
1. They think that the shadows are reality; if one were taken outside, he would at first be pained and confused.
2. If he returned to the cave and described the real world, his fellow prisoners would mock and even kill him.

E. Books VIII and IX discuss the different types of human beings and governments, and Book X considers the role of poetry. *The Republic* ends with a discussion of the immortality of the soul.
V. The Republic excludes poetry from the ideal state. Socrates first discusses poetry in Books II and III, where he objects to both its content and its form; in Book X, he gives a further discussion of why poetry is problematic.

A. In Books II and III, Socrates notes that many poets’ traditional stories are false and misrepresent the natures of gods and heroes.
   1. Homer depicts Zeus as an adulterer and the gods in general as quarrelsome and violent.
   2. Similarly, Homer portrays Achilles as greedy and vengeful.

B. In addition, Socrates objects to stories that instill fear and timidity in their hearers, rather than encouraging courage and self-control.
   1. Homer contains passages that conduce to fear of the afterlife.
   2. Such passages must be kept from the Guardians-in-training.

C. All literature consists of either narration or representation, or a combination of the two.
   1. By representation, Socrates means the author’s assumption of a character other than his own.
   2. Representation’s milder form is direct quotation; in its stronger form, it turns into acting.
   3. Traditional Greek education involved reciting aloud; Socrates wants to exclude representation from the poetry that the Guardians will study so that they will not be trained to express the viewpoints of inferior characters.
   4. Great poets and great performers have no place in the ideal state.

D. Socrates’s analysis of poetry’s form continues in Book X, where he defines art (including poetry) as a “copy of a copy.”
   1. The rational part of the human soul does not respond to imitations; art and poetry appeal to a lower part of the soul.
   2. By appealing to the part of the soul that enjoys such emotions as pity and grief, poetry influences people away from virtue.
   3. The ideal state must control poetry and allow only poems praising gods and virtuous men.

VI. What are we to make of Socrates’s exclusion of most forms of traditional poetry from his ideal state?

A. There is an obvious irony here; literary productions are inadmissible and potentially harmful, Plato’s Socrates says—in a beautifully crafted literary production.
   1. Furthermore, although Socrates singles out Homer for exclusion, he quotes Homer in no less important a context than the Allegory of the Cave.
   2. Socrates identifies dialogue without intervening narration, precisely the form of The Republic, as the most troublesome form of poetic imitation.

B. We must be careful not to assume a simple correspondence between the words of the character “Socrates” and Plato’s own beliefs.
   1. We must also bear in mind the distance between the ideal state as imagined and the possibilities for enactment.
   2. Would Plato himself even have wanted his ideal state to be brought into existence, or are some of the precepts he lays out meant to challenge, rather than to recommend?

Essential Reading:
Plato, The Republic.

Supplementary Reading:
Annas, Introduction to Plato’s Republic.
Blondell, Play of Character, especially chapters 1 and 4.
Cross and Woozley, Philosophical Commentary.
de Romilly, “Philosophers of the Fourth Century,” chapter 8 in Short History of Greek Literature.

Questions to Consider:
1. Plato’s arguments against poetry are similar to arguments made against forms of entertainment in our own society that some consider harmful. Are such arguments valid? Does art affect behavior in any direct way?
2. Plato’s exclusion of all literature except hymns of praise seems repellent to many modern lovers of literature. Do you think Plato meant this and other aspects of *The Republic* as a serious blueprint for a possible society? How would he answer the objection that he omits too much of what makes art interesting?
Lecture Seventeen

Menander and Hellenistic Literature

Scope: This lecture begins by discussing Menander, the most important writer of New Comedy. Menander’s works were lost by the 8th century A.D.; recent times have brought to light one almost complete play and significant portions of six others. These plays confirm that New Comedy differed from Old Comedy in taking the private troubles and misunderstandings of ordinary individuals as its subject matter. Menander’s plays featured unusual situations (the discovery of long-lost children, the troubles of star-crossed lovers, and so on) but did not depend on the frankly fantastic occurrences of Old Comedy. Along with plots concerning everyday people, Menander’s work featured stock figures, such as the boastful soldier, the clever slave, or the grumpy old man. After discussing New Comedy and Menander, the lecture ends with a brief introduction to the Hellenistic Age (323–31 B.C.). We summarize the work of Callimachus as a means of considering Hellenistic literature’s importance, both in its own right and as a model for later Roman poets.

Outline

I. New Comedy flourished from the late 4th through the 3rd centuries B.C.
   A. More than 80 writers of New Comedy were active in Athens between 325 and 200 B.C. However, we have only one complete play, the Dyskolos (“Grouch”) of Menander (c. 344/3–c. 292/1 B.C.).
      1. Menander wrote nearly 100 plays, staging his first one in 321 B.C., but he won only eight victories.
      2. After his death, his plays became very popular but were lost by the 8th century A.D.
      3. Until the 20th century, knowledge of Menander and New Comedy depended on fragments and on Roman authors’ adaptations.
   B. The rediscovery of Menander is one of the great success stories of 20th-century classical scholarship.
      1. In 1907, significant segments of three plays were published from a manuscript found in Egypt; the total amount of text was about 1,600 lines.
      2. Before this, only about 20 lines total had been known of these three plays.
      3. The all-but-complete Dyskolos was discovered in Egypt in 1957 and published in 1959.
   C. We now have one almost-complete play and enough of several others to yield a fairly good understanding of their plots and style.
      1. These discoveries tend to confirm scholars’ earlier theories about the nature of New Comedy and its differences from Old and Middle Comedy.
      2. There is reason to hope for more to come, because Menander was popular in Egypt, the richest source of papyrus texts.

II. The plots of New Comedy revolve around personal relationships, misunderstandings, and reconciliations effected through chance.
   A. Many of Menander’s plots involve star-crossed lovers.
      1. One plot involves a freeborn young man falling in love with a young woman whom he cannot marry, because her social status does not match his.
      2. The resolution depends on the discovery that the young woman is actually freeborn.
      3. A variation (repeated in Roman adaptations) is that a young man discovers that his new wife is, in fact, the same woman he had previously raped.
   B. Another favorite topos is that of the lost or misidentified child.
      1. A girl, kidnapped as a baby, is restored to her rightful parents after spending her early years as a slave.
      2. This can facilitate the star-crossed lovers plot.

III. This overview of typical plots highlights New Comedy’s most important differences from Old Comedy.
   A. New Comedy was almost entirely apolitical.
      1. The plays are not tied to any particular place or time.
      2. There are almost no overt political references.
      3. The characters are stock: the young lover, the grumpy old man, the ingenue, the clever slave.
B. New Comedy’s plots rely heavily on coincidences, but the fantastic element of Old Comedy is entirely lacking.
   1. Chance and luck play important roles, but there are no talking animals or flying dung-beetles.
   2. Instead, the plots are set in the everyday world; the events may be unusual, but their context is not.

C. New Comedy also differs markedly from Old Comedy in its form and style.
   1. There is no fixed structure of *agōn* and *parabasis*.
   2. The only role of the chorus is to divide the “acts” by musical interludes.
   3. The language gives the impression of everyday colloquial speech.

IV. *Dyskolos* illustrates many of these elements. It involves potentially thwarted young love, in this case, because of the misanthropic nature of the girl’s father, the “Grouch” of the title.

A. The god Pan gives essential background information in the prologue.
   1. The plot involves families living on two adjacent farms.
   2. On the right is the farm of Cnemon, an old man who lives alone with his daughter, Myrrhine.
   3. Cnemon’s estranged wife lives with her now-grown son, Gorgias, in the farm on the left.

B. Myrrhine is a good girl who deserves a better life; therefore, Pan has caused a rich young man, Sostratus, to fall in love with her.
   1. Cnemon’s threats of violence have thwarted all the attempts of Sostratus to court Myrrhine.
   2. Sostratus tells Gorgias (Myrrhine’s stepbrother) that he wants to marry Myrrhine. Gorgias agrees to help.

C. After some intricate plot convolutions, Cnemon falls into a well, from which Gorgias and Sostratus rescue him.
   1. Cnemon formally adopts Gorgias as his son and gives him the privilege of picking Myrrhine’s husband.
   2. Gorgias picks Sostratus, who in turn, arranges for his own sister to marry Gorgias. Thus, all ends well for all concerned.

V. Menander’s working life corresponds with the beginning of the Hellenistic Age of Greek literature. This term is generally applied to the period from the death of Alexander the Great (323 B.C.) to the Battle of Actium (31 B.C.).

A. *Hellenistic* means “Greek-influenced” or “Greek-dominated.”
   1. In the 5th century B.C., Athens’ and Sparta’s power struggles concerned the hegemony of other Greek city-states.
   2. After prolonged campaigns, Philip of Macedon won the Battle of Chaeronea in 338 B.C., effectively ending the era of independent Greek city-states.
   3. The empire ruled by Philip’s son Alexander stretched from Egypt all the way to the borders of India.

B. When Alexander died, generals to whom he had entrusted the rule of different regions assumed power as monarchs and founded dynasties, including the Ptolemaic dynasty in Egypt.

C. Greek was the Eastern Mediterranean world’s *lingua franca*, and the Hellenistic kingdoms reproduced Greek cultural norms.
   1. Alexandria, the cultural capital of the Greek-speaking world, saw a flowering of Greek literature and an astonishing development of scholarship.
   2. The Hellenistic Age came to an end with the fall of the last Ptolemy, Cleopatra, in 31 B.C.

VI. Alexandria was noteworthy for its museum and library (both founded during the reign of Ptolemy I, by the end of the 4th century B.C.) and for the scholars and authors who worked there.

A. *Museum* (Greek *mouseion*) meant “place for the Muses.” The Alexandrian Museum was a center of scholarship, learning, and philology.
   1. The modern equivalent would be a research foundation associated with a university.
   2. The museum’s importance for Western literature is incalculable.

B. The library, associated with the museum, set out to assemble texts of all known Greek authors.
VII. The museum and the library fostered creativity as well as scholarship. One of the most important Hellenistic scholar-poets was Callimachus (fl. c. 285–270 B.C.).

A. Callimachus was astonishingly prolific as both scholar and poet.
   1. His scholarly works included the catalog of the Library of Alexandria, editions of Pindar, and a bibliography of Greek literature.
   2. He supposedly wrote more than 800 books. Only 6 hymns and around 60 epigrams survive, along with many fragments.

B. Callimachus’s most important work was the *Aetia*, or “Origins,” a collection in four books of short poems. Callimachus’s approach to poetry would have enormous influence on Roman poets.

**Essential Reading:**
Menander, *Dyskolos*.

**Supplementary Reading:**
Green, J. R. *Theatre in Ancient Greek Society*.
Green, P. *Alexander to Actium*.
Pierce, “Rape in New Comedy.”

**Questions to Consider:**
1. Which form of comedy do you find more interesting and congenial to read, Old Comedy or New Comedy? Which do you find funnier? Why?
2. The change in 4th-century B.C. comedy’s subject matter, from biting political satire to apolitical plots featuring type characters, is often attributed to changes in Athens’ actual political situation. Can you think of any analogous situations elsewhere, when authors have stopped writing about the political situations of their own day and have turned to a kind of escapism?
Lecture Eighteen
Catullus and Horace

Scope: This lecture examines two Roman lyric poets, Catullus and Horace. We begin with a quick summary of Rome’s “cultural borrowings” from Greece, then move on to Catullus’s emulation of Callimachus’s elegance of vocabulary, meter, and form. The ideal for Catullus was a short, carefully crafted, highly allusive and learned poem, as opposed to lengthy epic. Catullus’s poetry is noteworthy not just for its form but also its concentration on personal themes, both erotic and otherwise; we briefly describe his poetry for a woman he calls “Lesbia” and its importance for the development of Latin love elegy. The lecture then turns to the work of Horace, who perfected the use of Greek lyric meters in Latin poetry. We give a brief discussion of the role of poetic patronage under the first Roman emperor, Augustus; the lecture then turns to an overview of the range and scope of Horace’s work and ends by examining two translations (by Pope and Ferry) of one of Horace’s most famous poems, the “Pyrrha Ode.”

Outline

I. Roman literature is inconceivable without Greek models; in every major genre, Roman authors drew on Greek models. To explain this, we must consider the historical and cultural relationship between Greece and Rome.

A. As the Greek city-states lost their independent status, Roman political power was on the rise.
   1. Rome came into its own as an international power after the three Punic Wars (against Carthage).
   2. Philip gained control over Greece in 338 B.C.; the First Punic War was fought in 264–241 B.C.
   3. The Second and Third Punic Wars took place in 218–202 B.C. and 151–146 B.C.
   4. With the end of the Third Punic War, Rome dominated the Mediterranean, including Greece.

B. Instead of developing its own traditions, Rome derived much of its art, literature, and mythology directly from Greece.

C. Roman attitudes toward Greek culture were highly ambivalent.
   1. According to legend, Romulus founded Rome in 753 B.C.; thus, the Romans considered themselves a much “newer” people than the Greeks.
   2. This helped justify their cultural “borrowings” and meant that Greece was admired as a cultural model.
   3. At the same time, Romans considered the Greeks tricky, overly crafty, and decadent.

D. One strand of Roman thought admired plain speaking and the avoidance of luxury as hallmarks of sterling character.
   1. From this viewpoint, the highly refined, erudite Hellenistic culture was particularly repellant.
   2. But Hellenistic authors were appealing to those Romans who rejected this model of Roman character.

II. In the mid-1st century B.C., a group of young Roman poets began to model their work closely on Callimachus and other Alexandrian poets.

A. This group is often called the neoterics, or poetae novi, terms used by Cicero.
   1. The neoterics enthusiastically adopted Callimachus’s ideas about poetry.
   2. They wrote short, polished, learned, and allusive poems, using arcane and sophisticated references to works of previous literature.
   3. They adapted Greek poetic meters to the Latin language.

B. Our knowledge of most of the neoterics is based on scanty fragments. However, the complete works of one poet, Gaius Valerius Catullus, have survived.
   1. Catullus was probably born in 84 B.C. and probably died soon after 54 B.C.
   2. He was from Verona but apparently spent most of his adult life in Rome.
   3. His poems range from extraordinarily beautiful love lyrics through harshly obscene invective, from the intensely personal to the directly political.
   4. His work was profoundly influential on the next generations of Latin poets and on later European poetry.
III. Catullus’s admiration for Callimachean models is obvious throughout his work.

A. His first poem demonstrates the neoteric style.
   1. It is short, highly polished, carefully crafted, and witty.
   2. The vocabulary of the first two lines lays out Catullus’s poetic program.
   3. The book is charming, little, and “polished.”

B. The book contains three main sections: short poems in a variety of meters, a central section of longer poems, and a concluding section of short poems in “elegiac couplets.”
   1. These three sections cover a wide range of subjects and a variety of tones.
   2. Several cycles of poems addressing the same subject or featuring the same people are scattered throughout the collection.
   3. The most famous consists of poems to and about a woman Catullus calls “Lesbia.”

IV. The “Lesbia poems,” which reflect a wide range of emotions and tones, sound so immediate and personal that many critics have taken them at face value as direct outpourings of emotion.

A. The name Lesbia recalls Sappho and compliments the woman so addressed on her erudition.
   1. Poem 51 is a free translation of one of Sappho’s poems.
   2. Many scholars place poem 51 first in the chronology of the “Lesbia poems.”

B. The poems make it clear that Lesbia is a married woman, and Catullus is only one of her many lovers.
   1. The poems run the gamut of emotion, from claiming that Catullus doesn’t mind Lesbia’s infidelity, to presenting their love as a powerful bond, to denouncing her as utterly profligate.
   2. This portrait of a young man’s progress from romantic love to bitter hatred makes it almost irresistible to ask, “Who was she?”

C. In A.D. 158, Apuleius wrote that by Lesbia, Catullus meant Clodia.
   1. We know of three sisters by that name; the evidence is insufficient to tell which one Catullus meant.
   2. The usual identification is Clodia Metelli, but this may be because we know more about her than about her sisters.
   3. Most scholars accept that Lesbia is a pseudonym for a genuine woman.

D. The “Lesbia poems” laid the groundwork for a genre of Latin poetry, love elegy, in which the poet is in thrall to a cruel mistress (domina).
   1. In the next generation, Propertius, Tibullus, and Ovid made love elegy one of the foremost genres of Latin poetry.
   2. Catullus’s Lesbia is the ultimate ancestor of Dante’s Beatrice, Petrarch’s Laura, and Shakespeare’s Dark Lady.

E. Catullus also wrote short poems on political subjects, friendship, and his love for his home, among other topics. His handling of Greek lyric meters and his use of short, self-contained poems influenced the greatest Latin lyric poet of all, Horace.

V. Quintus Horatius Flaccus was born on December 8, 65 B.C., and died on November 27, 8 B.C.

A. Horace included many biographical details in his poetry; in addition, Suetonius’s biography of Horace has survived.
   1. Horace was born in Venusia, where his father, a freedman, worked as an auctioneer.
   2. Horace received the education typical for an upper-class youth, first in Rome, then in Athens.

B. Horace’s family lost its possessions after Caesar’s assassination.
   1. Caesar’s death led to an open power struggle.
   2. Caesar’s friend Mark Antony joined forces with Caesar’s great-nephew and adopted son, Octavian, to fight against the assassins Brutus and Cassius.
   3. Horace’s family sided with Brutus; Horace joined Brutus’s army.
   4. After defeating Brutus and Cassius at Philippi (42 B.C.), Antony and Octavian competed for leadership.
   5. Antony became involved with the Egyptian queen Cleopatra.
   6. In 31 B.C., Octavian defeated Antony and Cleopatra at Actium.

C. After Actium, Octavian became the sole ruler of Rome and remained so until his death in A.D. 14. In 27 B.C., Octavian was awarded the title Augustus (“the revered one”), which came to function as his name.
1. Although historians call him the first Roman emperor, Augustus never used kingship terms.
2. He carefully restored and preserved the appearances of the republican form of government.
3. Augustus was also a patron of the arts, including poetry.

D. Augustus’s close friend Maecenas provided financial support for various poets and served as the link between those poets and Augustus.
1. Despite his support of Brutus, Horace made a career as a poet.
2. In part, this was because of the influence of Virgil, who introduced Horace to Maecenas.
3. Maecenas’s patronage gave Horace the resources and security for three decades of working life as a poet.

VI. Horace’s most famous and influential poems are his four books of odes.

A. The Odes, a collection of lyric poems on a variety of subjects, includes love lyrics to various different addressees, political statements, and vignettes of daily life.
1. Horace’s tone is detached and urbane.
2. He never expresses the heights or depths of passion of Catullus’s amatory poetry.
3. Within this controlled persona, Horace achieves great lyrical beauty and extraordinarily memorable poetry.

B. Formally, the odes are a tour de force. Horace adapts Greek meters to Latin poetry with astonishing success.
1. The odes show an amazing facility with meter, word choice, and placement.
2. They are, fundamentally, untranslatable, especially into a non-inflected language such as English.

C. The placement of Horace’s Latin words is all important. The opening lines of Odes I.5 give some idea of his technique.
1. Translated literally, the first three lines read: “Pyrrha, what graceful boy, drenched in liquid fragrances, urges you among many roses in a pleasant cave?”
2. The Latin word order is “What many graceful you boy among roses drenched liquid urges fragrances pleasant, Pyrrha, in cave?”
3. The word order mimics what is being described.

D. Milton tried his hand at translating this poem, as have many others, including, recently, David Ferry.
1. Milton and Ferry’s translations indicate the difficulty inherent in translating Horace.
2. But no other lyric poet of antiquity had so strong an influence on English poetry during the Renaissance and the neoclassical period.
3. Impossible though a true translation of Horace may be, Wyatt, Dryden, Pope, and many others were drawn to try.

Essential Reading:
Catullus, Poems.
Horace, Odes.

Supplementary Reading:
Armstrong, Horace.
Galinsky, Augustan Culture.
Lyne, “Augustan Poetry and Society.”
Miller, P. Lyric Texts, especially chapters 4–8.
Wiseman, Catullus and His World.
Questions to Consider:

1. In recent decades, critics have turned from reading the “Lesbia poems” as autobiographical to stressing the superb technique whereby Catullus gives the *impression* of emotional directness. Do you think we lose any of our enjoyment of the poems or they move us less, if we assume that they do *not* transparently reflect the real man’s own experiences?

2. Why do you think so many great English poets wanted to try to translate Horace? What is it about Horace that is particularly compelling to other poets?
Lecture Nineteen

Virgil

Scope: This lecture begins by quickly surveying Virgil’s biography and his relationship to the emperor Augustus. We then focus on Virgil’s great epic poem, The Aeneid. We consider the Aeneid’s debt to Homeric epic and crucial ways in which it differs from its Homeric models and discuss the implications of an individual author writing an epic grounded in specific history, compared to the traditional oral nature of Homeric epic. Virgil presents Aeneas as the founder of the Roman people and, therefore, as someone whose overall destiny led to good (the creation of Rome); yet in the mythic tradition of the Trojan War, the Trojan Aeneas was a member of a defeated people. The lecture discusses how the conflicts between Aeneas’s own desires and regrets and the demands of his destiny infuse the Aeneid with a complexity and tension completely unlike traditional oral epic and give rise to one of the great interpretative issues of the Aeneid, whether or not it is to be taken as pro-Augustan propaganda.

Outline

I. Horace’s patron Maecenas was also the patron of Publius Vergilius Maro, or Virgil, author of the great Roman epic The Aeneid. Virgil was born on October 15, 70 B.C., and died on September 20, 19 B.C.
   A. Virgil was born in Mantua. By the time he began work on the Aeneid, he was already an experienced poet.
      1. His first work, the Eclogues, was a collection of 10 bucolic poems, probably published around 38 B.C.
      2. His second work, the Georgics, was completed after 29 B.C.; it deals with agriculture and the virtues of the farmer’s life.
   B. The Aeneid was incomplete when Virgil died; tradition says that he asked on his deathbed for the manuscript to be burned.
      1. A 4th-century B.C. grammarian, Servius, preserves this story.
      2. The Aeneid is indeed unfinished; the text includes half-lines (that is, incomplete hexameters) and some plot inconsistencies.
      3. Tradition also says that Augustus forbade the burning of the manuscript and appointed two friends of Virgil’s to emend it for publication.

II. The Aeneid is Rome’s great national epic, celebrating the mythical past and the Augustan present. Virgil drew on Homer for form, style, and many elements of his narrative, but the differences from Homeric epic are no less important.
   A. The Aeneid’s debt to and difference from Homer are obvious in its first 11 lines.
      1. The first words, “I sing of arms and of a man,” recall both the Iliad (which concentrates on warfare) and the Odyssey (which concentrates on one man’s adventures).
      2. Virgil’s use of the first-person singular reminds us that the Aeneid is the work of a single author.
   B. One of the Aeneid’s main purposes is to provide a mythological background and explanation for Rome’s subsequent development.
      1. This epic is as much about the inevitability of Rome as it is about Aeneas.
      2. Virgil recasts the overall focus from the Greeks to the Trojans.
      3. The Iliad portrays its doomed Trojans sympathetically, but the story is told from a Greek perspective.
      4. Virgil, who cannot let the Trojans’ defeat cast doubt on their worthiness, makes the Greeks seem cruel and untrustworthy.

III. The Aeneid’s opening lines set several of the epic’s key themes, including that Aeneas’s adventures are not only the result of fate but also of the goddess Juno’s anger at the Trojans, that Rome’s foundation is inevitable, and that Aeneas is distinguished for his pietas.
   A. Juno’s anger is mentioned in line 4; a few lines later, we learn that she is concerned for the future of Carthage.
      1. The enmity of Carthage and Rome is thus given divine sanction.
      2. Book IV gives this enmity a human motivation when the Carthaginian queen Dido vows undying hatred toward all Romans because Aeneas leaves her.
B. Aeneas is characterized as a “man noted for pietas” in line 10.
   1. *Pietas* and the related adjective *pius* set Aeneas’s essential character note throughout the epic.
   2. The English derivatives “piety” and “pious” do not convey the sense of the Latin terms.
   3. *Pietas* refers to one’s duty and proper behavior toward all those to whom duty is owed.
   4. The *Aeneid* foregrounds the tensions between Aeneas’s own private desires and his *pietas* as a leader, a father, a son, and a founder of a new people.

C. Rome comes at a great cost to individuals.
   1. Line 33 stresses both Rome’s inevitability and its cost by saying it was a great *moles* to found the Roman people.
   2. *Moles* means “burden, weight, task, heavy undertaking.”

IV. The *Aeneid’s* plot mirrors both Homeric epics but in reverse order; the first six books, describing Aeneas’s wanderings, are his *Odyssey*, and the last six are his *Iliad*.

   A. Book I sets the scene. In this book, Aeneas and his men are shipwrecked on the coast of Africa.
      1. They take refuge with Dido, queen of Carthage, and Aeneas agrees to tell her about his wanderings.

   B. Aeneas’s description of the sack of Troy in Book II is the fullest extant account of the sack.
      1. In the *Iliad*, Poseidon mentions that Aeneas will flee Troy and found another city in the West.
      2. Virgil has to make sure that Aeneas’s flight does not appear to be disloyal or cowardly.
      3. Thus, Aeneas’s mother, the goddess Venus, instructs him to leave and shows him the gods fighting “behind the scenes.”

   C. Aeneas recapitulates Odysseus’s wanderings.
      1. He unknowingly follows in Odysseus’s steps and visits the same scenes.
      2. Aeneas’s encounter with Dido recapitulates the *Odyssey* in another way, because Aeneas’s destiny is threatened by his desire to stay with Dido.

   D. Aeneas’s journey to the underworld in Book VI mirrors Odysseus’s journey there.
      1. Aeneas consults the ghost of his father, Anchises, who shows him a vision of great Roman heroes to come.
      2. With Aeneas’s return from the underworld, the epic moves into its second half.

V. Virgil described the second half of the *Aeneid* as a “greater work.” In Books VII–XII, Aeneas is embroiled in wars on Italian soil.

   A. The wars occur because Aeneas is destined to marry the Italian princess Lavinia; however, she is already engaged to a man named Turnus.
      1. The battles between the followers of Aeneas and those of Turnus continue through several subplots and introduce several important characters.
      2. Throughout this second half of the *Aeneid*, Virgil stresses both Aeneas’s *pietas* and the human cost of such wars.

   B. The epic ends when Aeneas kills Turnus in single combat.
      1. The wounded Turnus admits defeat and begs for mercy, invoking the memory of Anchises and asking for pity for his own father.
      2. He concludes, “Lavinia is your wife; do not go further in your hatred.”
      3. Aeneas hesitates, but then notices on Turnus’s shoulder the belt of a young man, Pallas, who had been under Aeneas’s protection and whom Turnus had killed.
      4. Saying, “Pallas strikes this blow,” Aeneas kills Turnus.
      5. The *Aeneid* ends with the soul of Turnus fleeing to the underworld.

VI. This final scene raises two crucial questions of interpretation: Was Aeneas justified in killing Turnus, and what implications does our assessment of Aeneas’s actions have for our reading of the entire *Aeneid*?

   A. One view is that Aeneas would be wrong not to kill Turnus.
      1. To leave Pallas unavenged would be to fail in *pietas* toward Pallas and his father.
2. Aeneas’s hesitation indicates magnanimity and humanity, but it is anachronistic to expect him to spare Turnus, who would have served as a focal point for Aeneas’s enemies.
3. Aeneas acts through anger, but justified anger is not perceived negatively in this context.
4. The end of the Aeneid, therefore, shows Aeneas acting appropriately for a leader and is positive.

B. But another view is that killing Turnus represents Aeneas’s crucial failure to embody the ideals set out throughout the Aeneid.
   1. Turnus’s invocation of Anchises’s memory has two implications.
   2. It reminds the reader of the last time Anchises appeared in the epic, in the underworld journey of Book VI.
   3. There, Anchises advised the future Romans to “spare the defeated/submissive and battle down the proud.” By killing Turnus, Aeneas disregards Anchises’s advice.
   4. In hesitating, Aeneas is subordinating his private desire for vengeance to the public good.
   5. Aeneas kills Turnus out of private emotion, when he is overcome by anger, grief, and desire for vengeance.
   6. The end of the Aeneid, therefore, shows Aeneas acting inappropriately for a leader and is negative.

C. These questions have implications for our overall understanding of the epic.
   1. Virgil’s portrayal of Aeneas can be read as a commentary on Augustus’s leadership.
   2. It is overly simplistic to ask, “Is the Aeneid pro-Augustan propaganda?”
   3. But the text can be read in radically different ways, as supporting or protesting against the political program of Augustus.

VII. Ambiguous or not, the Aeneid stands as one of the most influential texts in Western culture.

A. In late antiquity, it was one of the most commonly read and cited works; St. Augustine mentions weeping over Dido’s death.

B. The Aeneid’s influence continued into the Middle Ages; Dante’s Divine Comedy is the most obvious example.

C. The Aeneid’s popularity and influence continued to grow during the Renaissance and after; the work of such authors as Marlowe, Spenser, and Milton is unimaginable without the Aeneid.

Essential Reading:
Virgil, The Aeneid.

Supplementary Reading:
Bowra, “Aeneas and the Stoic Ideal.”
Galinsky, “Anger of Aeneas.”
Johnson, Darkness Visible.
Parry, “Two Voices.”
Stockton, “The Founding of the Empire.”
Wiltshire, Public and Private.

Questions to Consider:
1. Scholars disagree over whether the Aeneid is optimistic or pessimistic, pro-Augustan or anti-Augustan. Does it matter? Can we enjoy so very historically grounded an epic “on its own terms,” without reference to the author’s possible political agenda?
2. What is your own view of the end of the Aeneid? Is Aeneas justified in killing Turnus? Why or why not?
Lecture Twenty

Ovid

Scope: This lecture considers the work of Ovid, a prolific poet whose oeuvre includes love elegies; a work on the Roman religious calendar (the Fasti); and his most important work, the mythological compendium Metamorphoses. The lecture begins by sketching Ovid’s biography and the chronology of his poetry and considers theories about the reason for his exile in A.D. 8 to Tomis on the Black Sea. The lecture then concentrates on Metamorphoses and the interpretative issues that poem raises. We discuss the fact that the form and subject matter of Metamorphoses are in tension with each other, so that the work defies easy categorization. Written in dactylic hexameter, it is, formally speaking, an epic, but its stated subject matter, “bodies changed into other forms,” bears no resemblance to the heroic themes of epic, and its individual stories are linked as much by the themes of love, desire, and sexual passion, licit and illicit, as by the theme of metamorphosis. Unique among ancient epic, Metamorphoses had enormous influence on later Western literature and art; the lecture concludes by noting some of these important later influences.

Outline

I. Publius Ovidius Naso was born on March 20, 43 B.C., and died probably in A.D. 17.
   A. His life encompasses some of the most turbulent and important years of Roman history.
      1. He was born one year after the assassination of Julius Caesar.
      2. He was just entering his teens when Octavian defeated Antony and Cleopatra at Actium.
      3. He died three years after Augustus’s death.
   B. These crucial historical events may have been a defining element in the last years of Ovid’s life.

II. Ovid first came into prominence as a writer of erotic poetry, including Amores, Ars Amatoria, and Remedia Amoris.
   A. Amores, a collection of love elegies, was published in or after 16 B.C.
      1. This work consists of three books, containing 15, 20, and 15 poems, respectively.
      2. Amores presents itself as the autobiographical adventures of a poet-lover, who is smitten with a woman named Corinna.
   B. Ars Amatoria was published around 1 B.C., and the Remedia Amoris between 1 B.C. and A.D. 2.
      1. Ars Amatoria is a three-book manual on methods of courtship and seduction.
      2. Remedia Amoris tells readers how to end a love affair.
   C. Ovid clearly had a deep interest in mythology, as well as in love-elegy.
      1. The two interests intersected first in his work Heroïdes, which is a set of letters from mythological women to their faithless lovers.
      2. The intersection is equally clear in his great work Metamorphoses, written around A.D. 2.
      3. Although Metamorphoses takes the transformation of bodies from one form to another as its primary subject, it deals as much with eroticism as with transformation.
   D. Ovid’s mythological interests are also evident in Fasti, which treated the Roman calendar, one book per month, and discussed religious and philosophical associations for each day.

III. Ovid’s lighthearted amatory works apparently had serious consequences for the poet’s life; in A.D. 8, Augustus exiled Ovid to Tomis, an outpost on the Black Sea. Augustus had undertaken a program of “moral” or “social” reforms in 18 B.C.
   A. In upper-class Roman society of the late 1st century B.C., divorce was common and adultery widely condoned. Augustus set out to rectify this situation. Among other things, he made adultery a criminal offense.
   B. Ovid’s treatment of seduction and adultery must have appeared as direct and deliberate defiance of Augustus’s laws.
   C. In exile, Ovid wrote two books, Tristia and Ex Ponto, which beseeched Augustus to allow him to come home.
1. He says that his erotic poetry was no more offensive than Catullus’s poems to Lesbia or than Virgil’s description of Aeneas’s liaison with Dido.
2. In *Tristia*, he hints at another reason for his exile.
3. He says that he was banished because of “a poem and a mistake.”
4. The poem in question was probably *Ars Amatoria*, but what was the mistake?

D. Ovid hints that he was somehow (involuntarily) involved in a scandal concerning Augustus’s family.
1. We will probably never know the exact nature of his “mistake.”
2. He was never allowed to return to Rome but died in exile.

IV. Ovid’s most influential and still most widely read work is *Metamorphoses*, to which we owe our knowledge of some of the most important myths of Greco-Roman antiquity. This work defies easy categorization.

A. On a purely formal level, *Metamorphoses* is an epic, a lengthy work written in dactylic hexameter.
B. The subject matter of *Metamorphoses* also resists categorization. The basic thread that unites the work is “bodies changed into other forms.”
C. Another linking thread is an interest in eroticism in all its guises, from romantic love through the most horrifying sexual perversions.
D. Most of Ovid’s stories are myths. Because Ovid’s ostensible theme is “transformations” of bodies into other forms, he is limited in the stories he can draw from everyday life.
1. However, his prologue says that he intends his story to run from the beginning of the world down to his own day.
2. The last book includes a speech set in the mouth of Pythagoras, describing the transmigration of souls and the transformations of all physical entities into others. Thus, “transformation” is presented as the natural order of existence.
3. These natural transformations are not the only recent metamorphoses Ovid catalogs; he also includes the apotheosis of Caesar.
4. He ends by saying that Augustus, too, will be deified.

V. So complex and multivalent a work raises many critical and interpretative questions, including the exact nature of Ovid’s presentation of Augustus.

A. *Metamorphoses* was probably written around A.D. 2.
1. Its elaborate praise of Augustus may be Ovid’s attempt to redeem himself for his previous overtly erotic poetry.
2. This reading takes passages praising Caesar and Augustus at face value or at least presumes that Ovid hoped Augustus would take them at face value.
B. It is equally possible that Ovid’s “praise” mocks Augustus.
1. The penultimate passage of the text compares Augustus to a line of famous gods and heroes.
2. The ostensible point is that Augustus must be content to surpass his “father,” Julius Caesar, just as ancient heroes surpassed theirs.
3. But Ovid’s examples are negative ones of father-son violence, vengeance, and neglect.
C. One final “tease” in the book comes in its very last lines, in which Ovid announces that his own fame will live forever.

VI. *Metamorphoses* had incalculable influence on later Western literature and culture. The chances of literary transmission are partly responsible for this, because *Metamorphoses* preserves the fullest form of many Greco-Roman myths.

A. Some later authors used *Metamorphoses* as a handbook of mythological tales. This causes difficulties.
1. Like Ovid’s other works, *Metamorphoses* is highly polished and self-consciously ironic.
2. Using such a text as a straightforward handbook of “classical myth” is deeply problematic.
3. Ovid very likely altered some of the myths for effect; he may well have played against the standard versions at times.
B. Some later authors moved in the opposite direction and treated *Metamorphoses* as a storehouse of proto-Christian allegories.
1. The allegorical use of Ovid reached its high point in the 14th century, in a French poem entitled “Ovide moralisé.”
2. This work reads the flight of Daedalus and his son Icarus from imprisonment in the labyrinth in Crete as an allegory of the soul’s flight toward God.
3. Daphne, a nymph transformed into a tree to protect her from rape by the god Apollo, represents the Virgin Mary.

VII. Caxton’s English translation of Ovid appeared in 1480, followed by Golding’s translation of 1567. For English literature and culture, the primary importance of Ovid’s popularity is his influence on Shakespeare.

A. It is abundantly obvious that Shakespeare knew Metamorphoses very well indeed.
1. If Shakespeare attended “grammar school,” he would have read Ovid in Latin.
2. He also probably consulted Golding’s translation.
B. When Shakespeare wants a point of comparison, Metamorphoses seems to be the first source he turns to.

Essential Reading:
Ovid, The Love Poems and Metamorphoses.

Supplementary Reading:
Holzberg, Ovid.
Lerner, “Ovid and the Elizabethans.”
Lyne, “Ovid, Golding, and the ‘Rough Magic.’”
Martindale, Ovid Renewed.
Wheeler, Narrative Dynamics.

Questions to Consider:
1. Do you consider Metamorphoses an epic? Why or why not?
2. In his pleas to be allowed to return home in Tristia, Book II, Ovid argued that his erotic poetry was not meant to be taken seriously and, therefore, was not a threat to morals; he further argued that others had written poetry as salacious as his or more so. Do you think these are legitimate lines of defense?
Lecture Twenty-One
Livy, Tacitus, Plutarch

Scope: This lecture focuses on Roman history and biography. We discuss two historians, Livy and Tacitus. The first section concentrates on Livy’s attempt to narrate the entire sweep of Roman history, from the city’s foundation until his own day. After a brief summary of Tacitus’s work, the lecture then moves on to the closely related genre of biography, whose primary representative is Plutarch. Plutarch, who wrote in Greek, is best known for his Parallel Lives, which pair famous Romans and famous Greeks; the lecture mentions some of the more noteworthy of these Lives. We conclude by discussing the influence of Plutarch’s Lives on literature, biography, and history in the Renaissance and after.

Outline

I. Although Roman historians modeled themselves on their Greek predecessors in style, format, and presentation, there were also differences in the materials available to the Roman historian and in his own view of the purpose of his writing.

A. Herodotus and Thucydides had set the overall parameters of history, from which Roman historians did not deviate.
   1. Wars and politics were still historiography’s primary focus.
   2. In Rome, the civil struggles of the 1st century B.C. made this focus even more pointed.
   3. Roman historians took a pronounced moral stance on the issues they recorded, writing not just to memorialize and inform but also to warn and instruct.

B. Rome kept official records, called Annales Maximi, from at least the 4th century B.C. onward.

C. Rhetoric was another crucial influence on Roman historiography.
   1. Cicero (and others) thought that history should both give information and persuade the reader to the historian’s viewpoint.
   2. Thus, the same techniques were appropriate to history and to forensic rhetoric.

II. Livy (Titus Livius, c. 59–A.D. 17) is our most important source for Rome’s early history. Most of Livy’s work Ab urbe condita is lost, but we can reconstruct his overall project from its surviving parts.

A. Born in Padua, Livy moved to Rome at some point but returned to Padua by the time of his death.
   1. Livy did not hold public office himself; thus, he did not take direct part in the events he narrates.
   2. In this, he resembles Herodotus more closely than Thucydides.

B. Ab urbe condita (“From the foundation of the city”) set out to recount Rome’s history from its beginnings to Livy’s own day.
   1. The total work comprised 142 books; 35 have survived.
   2. These are Books 1–10 (from Rome’s mythic origins to 289 B.C.) and Books 21–45 (covering 218 through 167 B.C.). Books 41 and 43–45 are damaged.
   3. We also have summaries, probably compiled in the 4th century A.D., of everything except Books 136 and 137.

C. The earliest sections, which deal with purely legendary materials, illustrate important aspects of Livy’s overall approach and method.
   1. Events that took place at the time of Rome’s foundation and for the next two or three centuries could not be verified.
   2. Therefore, Livy had to rely on tradition and legend to describe the development of the early Roman state.
   3. He fills the stories out with details, events, and personalities that make them memorable and point to the morals he wants to draw.

D. Livy’s preface indicates anxiety about Rome’s current stability and the fear that civil war might return.
III. In Livy’s narrative, the story of Lucretia’s rape and suicide provides an etiology for the overthrow of the kings and the foundation of the Roman Republic and offers an example of fortitude and moral courage.

A. The Roman matron Lucretia is raped by Sextus Tarquinius, the son of the ruling king.
   1. At first, she resists, but when he says that he will kill her and a slave and leave their bodies together, she submits rather than suffer worse dishonor.
   2. Lucretia then summons her father and husband, tells them what has happened, and declares her resolve to die.
   3. The men urge her to reconsider, saying that she is blameless.

B. Lucretia responds, “Although I absolve myself from wrongdoing, I do not free myself from punishment; nor shall any unchaste woman hereafter live through Lucretia’s example.”
   1. Lucretia does not mean that she herself is unchaste, but that if she chose to live, adulterous women could cover their own guilt by claiming to have been raped.
   2. She considers her life to be of less importance than the moral fiber of her society.
   3. She urges her husband and father to decide what punishment is due the rapist.
   4. Lucretia’s suicide leads her husband and his friend Brutus to overthrow the royal house of the Tarquins and found a new form of government, the Roman Republic.

C. Lucretia’s story is memorable, moving, and filled with dramatic speeches, but it also draws a strong parallel between individual vice and lack of control and a deranged form of society, and between individual courage and sacrifice and appropriate and rational government.

IV. Unlike Livy, Publius Cornelius Tacitus held public office and had taken direct part in the politics of his day. His work concentrated on recent events.

A. Tacitus was born around A.D. 56 and died around A.D. 117 or 118.
   1. He held important public offices in Rome and probably in the provinces.
   2. His first published work (in A.D. 98) was an encomium of his father-in-law.

B. Tacitus began writing after the death of Emperor Domitian in A.D. 96.

V. Tacitus’s two greatest works, the Histories and the Annals, survive only incompletely, but enough remains to give us a good sense of Tacitus’s style, material, and subject matter.

A. The Histories was published around A.D. 109.
   1. Originally, it contained 14 books, covering the years from A.D. 69 (the reign of the emperor Galba) to A.D. 96 (the death of Domitian).
   2. Only Books I–IV and the beginning of Book V have survived; the narrative ends in A.D. 70.

B. The Annals was published around A.D. 116.
   1. It began with the death of Augustus in A.D. 14 and concluded with the suicide of Nero in A.D. 68.
   2. Of its 18 books, we have Books I-IV and XI-XV, covering portions of the reigns of Tiberius, Claudius, and Nero.

C. In both works, Tacitus focuses on the virtues of the old Republic and the degeneracy of life and mores under the emperors. But he says that he writes sine ira et studio—without anger or partisanship.

VI. Unlike Livy and Tacitus, Plutarch was a Greek who lived in Greece all his life. However, his biographical writings focus as much on Romans as on Greeks, and he was a Roman citizen.

A. Plutarch was born Mestrius Plutarchus in Chaeronea around A.D. 50. He spent most of his life there and died in A.D. 120.
   1. He studied in Athens as a young man and traveled to Rome.
   2. He held several political positions in Chaeronea and priestly offices at Delphi.

B. He was a prolific writer; though more than half of his total work is lost, what remains is truly impressive. His work can be divided into two main categories, the Parallel Lives and the Moralia.

VII. In the Lives, he pairs famous Greeks and Romans, including Romulus with Theseus, Caesar with Alexander, and Pericles with Fabius Maximus.

A. The pairing is on the basis of character, political situation, or historical importance.

B. Plutarch states that he is writing biography, not history.
1. There had been earlier instances of biography, in the sense of works devoted to the doings of a single man.
2. Historians also often wrote works focusing on one man (for example, Alexander the Great).
3. But Plutarch’s sophistication in the analysis of character, motivation, and moral implications was unprecedented.

VIII. Plutarch had incalculable influence on later European historiography, biography, and literature.

A. In the Renaissance and after, the *Lives* were among the most widely read works of ancient literature.
   1. Amyot’s French *Lives* (1559) and *Moralia* (1572) are classics of French literature in their own right.
   2. Sir Thomas North’s English translation of the *Lives* (1579) was largely based on Amyot.

B. Shakespeare relied on Plutarch (through North’s translation) to an astonishing extent.

**Essential Reading:**
Livy, Book I, in *Early History of Rome*.
Plutarch, “Alexander,” in *Age of Alexander*.

**Supplementary Reading:**
Gossage, “Plutarch.”
Jones, C. P. *Plutarch and Rome*.
Kraus and Woodman, “Tacitus,” in *Latin Historians*.
Miles, *Livy*.
Vandiver, “Founding Mothers of Livy’s Rome.”
Walsh, “Livy.”

**Questions to Consider:**
1. Tacitus says that he writes “without anger or partisanship.” Is this possible, for any historian?
2. Why do you think Livy and Tacitus, both of whom lived under (relatively) stable governments and in (relatively) prosperous times, nevertheless felt so strong a sense of the degeneracy of the present in comparison to the “good old days”?
Lecture Twenty-Two
Petronius and Apuleius

Scope: This lecture considers the development of the ancient novel, focusing on the two remarkable extant Roman novels, the fragmentary Satyricon of Petronius and the Metamorphoses of Apuleius. The lecture begins with a brief discussion of the development of the Greek novel, to which these two Roman examples are indebted; we outline the standard plot of the Greek novel, which focuses on the love of two young people who are separated, undergo various trials, and are eventually reunited. We then consider the ways in which our two Latin novels use, depart from, and satirize the Greek model. The lecture summarizes the available biographical information about Petronius and Apuleius and discusses their novels’ importance, both as literary productions and as sources for the cultural historian. Finally, the lecture discusses the importance of the view of religion provided by Apuleius’s Golden Ass.

Outline

I. The novel had its genesis in Greece, probably in the 1st century A.D. Five complete Greek novels survive, of which the best known is Longus’s Daphnis and Chloë.

A. These Greek novels are all variations on a standard plot, featuring a pair of star-crossed lovers and their trials and tribulations.
   1. An innocent pair of well-born teenagers, just coming into adulthood, fall in love with each other.
   2. They are either prevented from marrying or separated soon after marriage by a series of misfortunes or adventures in which they journey to exotic lands.
   3. Standard elements include storms, shipwrecks, abduction by pirates, attempted rape or seduction of the girl, and even apparent death.
   4. The loving pair is reunited in a happy ending.

B. New Comedy, epic, and even history are sources of influence on this typical plot; the surprising innovation is the use of prose for fiction.
   1. New Comedy’s influence is evident in the boy-meets-girl plot and in the use of extravagant coincidences to further the storyline.
   2. The adventures, shipwrecks, kidnappings, and so forth recall the adventures of Odysseus in the Odyssey.
   3. The detailed descriptions of exotic lands recall the “ethnographic” portions of Herodotus.
   4. The novel’s use of prose was a departure from previous conventions of ancient literature; “fiction” had previously been written in poetic form.

II. Our surviving Roman novels show a freedom of invention and imagination that is both bewildering and exhilarating.

A. Only two Roman novels are extant, one of which is frustratingly fragmentary.
   1. The first is the Satyricon of Petronius (d. c. A.D. 66).
   2. The second is the Metamorphoses of Apuleius (d. c. 125), more commonly known as The Golden Ass.

B. These two works seem to depend on the conventions of the Greek novel for their form and subject matter.
   1. Both are written in prose, although Satyricon incorporates segments of poetry, as well.
   2. Both include stories of romantic—or at least sexual—escapades, adventures, and misadventures.
   3. But while the characters in the Greek novel are rather colorless and stereotypical, the Roman novels feature extremely individualistic and memorable personages.

III. The Satyricon’s author was probably a prominent figure in the circle of the emperor Nero (r. A.D. 54–68).

A. In the Annals, Tacitus describes Petronius as Nero’s arbiter elegantiae, or “judge of taste.”
   1. Nero relied on Petronius to tell him what was and was not truly elegant.
   2. Tacitus further says that Petronius was accused of treason and allowed to commit suicide rather than face execution.
   3. Petronius supposedly made even his own death an occasion to display his urbanity and wit.

B. Most scholars think this Petronius is probably the same man who wrote Satyricon, but we cannot be sure.
1. The name Petronius appears on the manuscripts of *Satyricon*, but there is no unambiguous internal evidence.
2. The novel does not directly refer to anything that would clinch the identification.

C. This is frustrating, not least because it makes a firm dating of the novel impossible.
   1. If the author is the Petronius of Nero’s court, then *Satyricon* may be earlier than the earliest surviving Greek novel.
   2. Does Petronius satirize Greek novels, then, or did Greek novels draw on *Satyricon*?

IV. *Satyricon* is a difficult work to categorize; some scholars question whether it should be called a “novel” at all.

A. The original work contained perhaps 20 books, but portions of only 3 survive, probably from late in the narrative; much of what remains is short, disjointed passages.
   1. The longest narrative, “Trimalchio’s Dinner,” probably made up the bulk of one book.
   2. We cannot be certain of the order in which the remaining fragments appeared in the original text.
   3. Unlike other ancient novels, the text includes large sections of poetry; this is similar to a genre called *Menippean satire*.
   4. But *Satyricon’s* basic framework, featuring the adventures of a main character/narrator, and its length make novel as accurate a term as any for this work.

B. Despite the disjointed nature of *Satyricon’s* remains, we can get some sense of the work’s overall nature.
   1. The book features a narrator, Encolpius, and his friends and sidekicks, including his young male lover, Giton.
   2. The surviving portions focus on different characters with whom Encolpius interacts during a series of adventures in south Italy.
   3. The tone was decidedly irreverent, bawdy, and raucous.

C. Many of the adventures include attempted (and often successful) seductions of Giton. This is one reason to suppose that *Satyricon* parodies Greek novels.

V. Fortunately, Apuleius’s work *Metamorphoses*, more commonly known as *The Golden Ass*, is complete, and we know a good deal about the author.

A. Apuleius, born around A.D. 125 in Madaurus (North Africa) to wealthy parents, was educated in Carthage, Athens, and Rome.
   1. As a young man, he married a wealthy older widow.
   2. In 158 or 159, her relatives brought a lawsuit accusing him of inducing her to marry him through magic.
   3. Apuleius’s speech in his own defense, the *Apologia*, from a collection of his public speeches from the 160s, has survived.
   4. *Metamorphoses* cannot be securely dated; most scholars think it was probably a late work.

B. The plot of *Metamorphoses* involves the adventures of Lucius, a young man who drinks what he thinks is a love potion and is transformed into a donkey.
   1. Lucius learns that to be transformed back into his rightful shape, he must eat some roses.
   2. A series of misadventures prevents him from getting any roses.
   3. His wanderings, tribulations, kidnappings, and erotic adventures provide a hilarious spoof of the adventures of a young lover in a serious novel.
   4. Finally, Lucius throws himself on the mercy of the goddess Isis, who transforms him back into his proper state.

VI. *The Golden Ass*’s sources include not only Greek novels but also a Greek short story about a man transformed into a donkey and a genre usually known as *Milesian tales*.

A. The narrator himself says, in the introduction to *The Golden Ass*, that he is adapting a story from the original Greek.

B. *The Golden Ass* incorporates a great many “tales within a tale”; in the very first sentence, Apuleius (or the narrator) says that he is putting together stories in a Milesian manner.
   1. Milesian tales were short, bawdy, erotic stories.
2. *The Golden Ass* includes many such inset stories, most concerning sexual adventures and misadventures.

C. The longest and most important inset tale, the story of Cupid and Psyche, is far more complex and serious than the standard Milesian tale.

1. Lucius overhears this story when he is in the hands of bandits who have kidnapped a young girl.
2. An old woman tells the girl the story to take her mind off her own troubles.
3. The story follows the plot of a Greek novel but is also an allegory of the progress of the soul.
4. The interspersed Milesian tales, the serious novel that Apuleius is spoofing, the use of myth as self-conscious allegory, and the plot line of Apuleius’s own novel all intersect here.

VII. *The Golden Ass* is a precious source of information about the religious world and worldview of Romans in the 2nd century A.D.

A. Lucius’s retransformation from an ass back into a man is effected by the intervention of the goddess Isis at the end of the book.

1. Book XI begins with Lucius’s prayer to Isis for help and her answering epiphany.
2. After his retransformation, Lucius (or the author?) is initiated into the cult of Isis.
3. This is the fullest surviving account of Isis worship.

B. *The Golden Ass* also indicates the scorn with which Christianity could be viewed.

1. Apuleius’s description of a cruel baker’s wife who worships one God must refer either to Christianity or to Judaism.
2. P. G. Walsh suggests that *The Golden Ass* was written in part to respond to the spread of Christianity.

VIII. *The Golden Ass* and *Satyricon* preserve a great deal of information about Roman social interactions and everyday life.

A. Even allowing for caricature and exaggeration, these texts provide precious information about Roman social realities.

B. These texts are also invaluable in their use of the Latin language.

1. *The Golden Ass* is written in an inimitable style, incorporating rhyme, alliteration, and rhythmic patterns.
2. *Satyricon* preserves many words and turns of phrase we do not find elsewhere and provides a glimpse into the speech patterns of slaves and freedmen.

IX. Petronius and Apuleius were rediscovered in the Renaissance, and Apuleius in particular quickly became very popular indeed.

A. Boccaccio was an admirer of Apuleius.

1. He found and copied a manuscript of *The Golden Ass* in 1355.
2. He incorporated stories from Apuleius into the *Decameron*.

B. Apuleius’s collected works, published in Rome in 1469, was one of the first classical books to be printed.

1. A large number of translations followed throughout Europe.
2. *The Golden Ass* became quite popular in Spain; Cervantes’s Don Quixote may be the descendent of Apuleius’s Lucius.

Essential Reading:
Apuleius, *The Golden Ass*.
Petronius, *Satyricon*.

Supplementary Reading:
Beck, “Some Observations.”
Courtney, *Companion to Petronius*.
Mason, H. J. “*Fabula graecanica*.”
Tatum, *Apuleius and The Golden Ass*.
———, “Tales in Apuleius’ *Metamorphoses*.”
Walsh, *Roman Novel*, especially chapter 8, “‘Nachleben’: The Roman Novel and the Rebirth of the Picaresque.”

**Questions to Consider:**

1. What is a novel? Does *Satyricon* fit into this genre? Why or why not?
2. Some critics read *The Golden Ass* as primarily humorous; some think that it has a serious underlying meaning. Which reading makes more sense to you, particularly in light of Isis’s appearance in the novel’s last book?
Lecture Twenty-Three

The Gospels

Scope: This lecture examines the four Gospels of the New Testament. The Gospels’ cultural and theological impact is incalculable, and their very familiarity as foundational texts in Western culture makes it difficult to examine them critically. But as literary works, the Gospels occupy a strange and rather anomalous position. Though they have a great deal in common with historiography and biography, they do not precisely fit in either genre, nor can they be easily categorized as novels, fairy tales, or myths. This lecture discusses some of the problems scholars encounter in classifying and understanding these anonymous texts; we also look briefly at some non-canonical Gospels that were not included in the New Testament. Finally, the lecture discusses the impact of the Gospels as literature and the importance of their presentation of common people as subjects for serious, not comic, writing.

Outline

I. The four canonical Gospels are among the most familiar and important works of the Western literary tradition.
   A. These accounts of Jesus’s ministry, death, and resurrection have had incalculable influence on Western culture. Quite apart from their theological importance for the Christian faith, the Gospels have permeated Western art and literature.
      1. They provided some of the most often-repeated scenes of medieval and Renaissance art.
      2. They have been a rich source of narrative elements, reference points, and quotations.
   B. The Gospels’ very familiarity makes it difficult to analyze them critically. When one does, some surprising questions emerge.
      1. What is the genre of these texts—biography, mythography, memoirs, or something else?
      2. What expectations would the original “target audience” have had for these narratives?
      3. What should we make of the fact that they disagree with one another on several key points?

II. Trying to pigeonhole the Gospels into any genre causes some uncomfortable problems.
   A. If they are historical or biographical treatises written by eyewitnesses or those who talked to eyewitnesses, we must account not just for discrepancies of fact but also for odd omissions and emphases.
      1. Discrepancies of fact include details about Jesus’s birth story.
      2. More important discrepancies include the date of the Last Supper and the crucifixion and the location where the resurrected Jesus appeared to his disciples.
      3. A great many important biographical details, such as information about what Jesus did before his ministry, are omitted.
      4. The concentration on Jesus’s death is unusual for ancient biographies.
   B. If we read the Gospels as legendary or mythical narratives, whose details were not meant to be taken literally, this, too, raises questions.
      1. Why are these accounts linked so closely to one specific historical time and to someone who lived in the recent past?
      2. If Christ is a legendary figure analogous to Heracles or Romulus, what happens to the central claim of the Gospels that the resurrection was an actual fact of recent history?
   C. These categorization problems are why the term Gospel became a genre designation. Gospel translates the Greek euangelion, “good news,” a term that originally could be used to refer to any auspicious event (such as an emperor’s birth).
      1. The word appears in the opening sentence of Mark, the earliest Gospel; thus, this term came to be used about Jesus, but it is not used to refer to a literary genre until the 2nd century A.D.
      2. The use of the term Gospel, in effect, says that these narratives do not fit into any recognizable category.

III. Who were the authors of the Gospels, and why and when did they write? Are they memoirs or reminiscences written by four different people who knew Jesus?
   A. The four canonical Gospels are not the earliest Christian texts.
1. The Letters of Paul, which were written in the 50s, are the earliest Christian writings.
2. For Paul, the primary point was Christ’s death and resurrection.
3. By *euangelion*, Paul means a proclamation about Christ’s resurrection.
4. He shows very little interest in the details of Jesus’s life or in most of Jesus’s sermons or teachings.

B. The four Gospels were written after Paul’s letters. They traditionally bear the names of two apostles and two disciples of apostles, but scholars agree that these were not the actual authors.
   1. The apostles were almost undoubtedly illiterate.
   2. Like Jesus, the apostles spoke Aramaic, but the Gospels are written in Greek.
   3. Apparently the apostles’ stories were first transmitted orally and were later written down by Greek-speaking writers for dissemination to a Greek-speaking world.

C. There is general agreement that Mark is the earliest of the four canonical Gospels and that John is the latest.
   1. Mark, the shortest Gospel, was probably written in the late 60s.
   2. Matthew may have been written around A.D. 85; Luke cannot be dated with any precision.
   3. John was written perhaps as early as A.D. 90 or perhaps much later.

D. Thus, the Gospels are not memoirs written by eyewitnesses. At best, they were written by followers of eyewitnesses.
   1. The earliest Gospel, Mark, is also the shortest and preserves the fewest of Jesus’s sayings.
   2. The longer Gospels were written at least 50 years after the events they describe.
   3. At that remove of time and with a shift of language, exact accuracy cannot be expected.

IV. Several non-canonical works are also classified as Gospels. Three of the most important are the Coptic Gospel of Thomas, the Infancy Gospel of Thomas, and the Gospel of Philip.

A. The Coptic Gospel of Thomas consists of 114 sayings of Jesus, with no narrative framework.
   1. Some of these sayings parallel well-known texts from the canonical Gospels; others do not.
   2. The Gospel of Thomas seems to show Gnostic influence.

B. The Infancy Gospel of Thomas fills in the missing years of Jesus’s childhood in a style reminiscent of folktale.
   1. At age 5, Jesus turns clay doves into living ones, withers an annoying playmate, and strikes blind the adults who protest his behavior.
   2. The Infancy Gospel was probably written around A.D. 125, perhaps not significantly later than the Gospel of John.

C. The Gospel of Philip is a collection of Gnostic meditations.
   1. It assumes two groups of Christians: the uninitiated and the initiated.
   2. The initiated understand the message of Christ on a level not available to the uninitiated.

V. These non-canonical Gospels remind us of how much the four canonical Gospels have in common.

A. All four preserve sayings of Jesus but also include a narrative framework for those sayings.
   1. Most scholars posit an earlier (lost) document, conventionally called Q, that collected the sayings of Jesus with no narrative framework.
   2. Mark began the process of providing the narrative framework; Matthew and Luke drew on both Q and Mark.
   3. Matthew, Mark, and Luke are often called the Synoptic Gospels, which means that they share a common viewpoint.

B. Each canonical Gospel gives an account of Jesus’s ministry, and each culminates in the Passion—the story of his arrest, trial, crucifixion, and death.
   1. Thus, the Gospels unite two strands of early Christian thought.
   2. The Pauline approach assumes that Jesus’s death on the cross was all important.
   3. Sayings texts, such as Q, focused on Jesus’s teachings.
   4. The Gospels unite sayings texts and a Passion account, with a narrative framework that connects the two elements.
VI. There are some important differences among the four Gospels.

A. Christians tend to conflate the Gospel narratives into one version.
   1. For instance, Matthew mentions the visit of the Magi to the infant Christ; he says nothing about shepherds.
   2. Luke recounts the shepherds’ visit but doesn’t mention the Magi.
   3. Christmas pageants and crèches show both Magi and shepherds.

B. Such differences may depend in part on each evangelist’s emphasis and assumed audience.
   1. Matthew, who emphasizes Jesus’s role as the Jewish Messiah, is especially concerned to stress Jesus’s royal heritage.
   2. Luke, who may have been a Gentile, is more concerned with Jesus as universal savior and puts emphasis on the poor and the outcast.

C. It is possible to harmonize many of the differences in the Gospels.
   1. But our view of the Gospel story would be very different if we read only one Gospel and came to it without preconceptions.
   2. This is especially true in the case of the Gospel of John.

D. The Gospel of John, the only non-synoptic canonical Gospel, differs from the synoptics in several important ways.
   1. It contains no story of Jesus’s birth but begins with the declaration that the divine Logos took on flesh.
   2. There is no Sermon on the Mount and no Lord’s Prayer.
   3. It contains long monologues by Jesus in place of the parables.

VII. Along with considering the historical problems of the Gospels—how they came to be written and what their sources were—it is also useful to consider them as literature and to compare them to other works of ancient literature.

A. One of the most surprising things about the Gospels is their emphasis on common and ordinary people in non-comic roles. The literature of Greco-Roman antiquity would not lead us to expect this.
   1. When Greek or Roman literature features ordinary people, it is generally for comic effect.
   2. Similarly, ordinary language is a mark of comic genre.

B. Erich Auerbach pointed out in Mimesis that the Gospels represent a radical break with this tradition; they treat ordinary people (for example, Peter) with the greatest seriousness.
   1. The Gospels thus mark a change in the possible forms and subjects of literature, as well as in the possible forms of religious belief.
   2. If Menander was the original source of comic novels, the Gospels may well be the ultimate ancestor of literature that takes common people’s sufferings seriously.

C. The Gospels also take ordinary language seriously.
   1. The Gospels are written in koinē, the simple Greek used throughout the eastern Mediterranean.
   2. This may be the original impetus for writing in the vernacular later developed by such authors as Chaucer and Dante.
   3. The Gospels’ simplicity of style and character may be their greatest gift to literature.

Essential Reading:

Supplementary Reading:
Catchpole, Quest for Q.
Crossan, Jesus.
Pagels, Gnostic Gospels.
Stanton, *Gospels and Jesus*, especially chapter 2 (“What Is a Gospel?”).

**Questions to Consider:**

1. Do you think the Synoptic Gospels qualify as “biography,” to be classified with (for instance) Plutarch’s “Life of Alexander”? Why or why not?

2. Can you think of modern examples of narratives that combine historical data, myth-making, and idealization in a way analogous to the Gospels?
Lecture Twenty-Four
Augustine

Scope: This lecture examines Augustine, whose writings were instrumental in the formation of later Christian thought. We consider Augustine as both one of the last great writers of Roman antiquity and one of the first great writers of Christianity, and we discuss how his work forms a bridge between Roman and Christian philosophical thought. After briefly summarizing Augustine’s biography, the lecture concentrates on his two greatest works, *The Confessions* and *The City of God*. In particular, we examine Augustine’s view of classical literature and philosophy and its lasting and far-reaching effects on later Christian theology.

Outline

I. Aurelius Augustinus (St. Augustine) is one of the most important philosophers, theologians, and authors in the Western tradition, whose work is permeated with classical influences and modes of thought.
   A. Born in Thagaste (in modern Algeria) on November 13, A.D. 354, Augustine was the son of middle-class parents.
      1. His father, Patricius, was a pagan, and his mother, Monica, was a Christian.
      2. Monica exposed Augustine to Christian ideas from his earliest years.
   B. Augustine was educated in his native town of Thagaste and in Madaurus and Carthage and was allowed a good bit of freedom in his personal life.
      1. His education included training in rhetorical techniques and classical literature.
      2. He greatly loved Latin literature but did not like Greek.
      3. His first reaction to the Hebrew Bible and the New Testament was disappointment; he considered them inferior as literature.
      4. For more than 10 years, he lived with a woman whom he met in Carthage and with whom he had a son.
   C. After finishing his education, Augustine worked as a teacher of rhetoric in Africa and Italy.
      1. He taught first in Carthage, then in Milan.
      2. He resigned in 386 because of ill health.
      3. In 387, Augustine was baptized by St. Ambrose.
      4. He was ordained in 391 and became bishop of Hippo in 396. He died in 430.
   D. After his conversion, Augustine no longer taught rhetoric, but he put his classical training to good use in his own writing. His two greatest works are *The Confessions* and *The City of God*.

II. At 19, Augustine read Cicero’s “Hortensius” and experienced the first of three “conversion experiences.” The other two would lead him first to the Gnostic religion Manichaeism and, finally, to Christianity.
   A. The first step in Augustine’s spiritual development was his “conversion to philosophy,” which he says changed his whole outlook on life.
   B. Augustine next converted to Manichaeism, a form of Gnosticism.
      1. Manichaeism posited two counterbalanced cosmic principles of good and evil.
      2. The flesh, created by the evil principle, was wholly without merit.
      3. Augustine remained associated with Manichaeism for a decade.
   C. Augustine’s final conversion was to a Neoplatonized version of Christianity.

III. *Confessions* (probably written between 397 and 401) is a pioneer in at least two separate genres.
   A. It is the first genuine autobiography in Western culture. Augustine probes the minutiae of his own life for the light they can shed on his soul and on the human condition in general.
   B. *The Confessions* also is a pioneer of what later came to be called confessional literature, writing that muses on the nature of conversion and on the soul’s individual encounter with God.

IV. The addressee of *The Confessions* was God himself, but *The City of God* is addressed to highly cultured,
A. Augustine began work on The City of God in 413; this is crucial for understanding his purpose.
   1. In 382, the Roman Senate formally banished Jupiter, and Christianity became the official religion of the empire.
   2. In 410, the Visigoths under Alaric sacked Rome; many pagans attributed this to the old gods’ displeasure.
   3. One purpose of The City of God was to answer such objections and explain why God let Rome be sacked.

B. City of God also deals with issues that were crucial in the development of Christian and, specifically, Catholic thought.
   1. Augustine develops the idea of original sin.
   2. He champions celibacy as a sign of devotion to God.
   3. He sets forth a doctrine of predestination.
   4. He argues that the punishment of the damned is eternal.

C. In addition, City of God delineates Augustine’s view of Roman history and the role that pagan literature and philosophy could play in a Christian society.

V. In his discussion of Christian women raped during Alaric’s sack of Rome, Augustine refers to Lucretia’s suicide. This passage clearly demonstrates both his debt to and his discomfort with classical literature.

A. Augustine argues that forcible rape does not deprive a woman of her chastity. He says, “We are defending the chastity not only of the minds but even of the bodies of ravished Christian women.”
   1. This reflects Lucretia’s own words in Livy: “only my body has been violated; my mind is innocent.”
   2. Her father and husband say that the mind commits a crime, not the body.
   3. However, they seem to accept that her body is, in fact, polluted.
   4. But Augustine claims that even the body of a raped Christian woman is still chaste.

B. Augustine next asks why Lucretia is so admired.
   1. If she was indeed guiltless, she was wrong to kill herself, because suicide is self-murder.
   2. If she was a willing participant in adultery, then she should not be admired and her death is merely the appropriate penalty.
   3. Far from admiring Lucretia’s wish to avoid being considered unchaste, Augustine says her suicide was “due to the weakness of shame.”

C. Augustine’s reading of Lucretia’s story highlights key differences between his thought and that of classical authors.
   1. Suicide is always and entirely unlawful.
   2. Acting from shame is reprehensible because it indicates an overvaluing of what others think.
   3. In The Republic, Adeimantus says that the traditional evaluation of justice and injustice overlooked their effects on the individual’s mind, effects that might be invisible to anyone else, even gods.
   4. But Augustine says that God knows the raped virgins are still chaste.

VI. The City of God contrasts the heavenly city and the earthly one; for Augustine, pagan literature and culture are clearly part of the earthly city.

A. But Augustine’s own mind was deeply imbued with pagan literature.

B. He also drew heavily on pagan philosophy in his development of his own theology.
   1. The first five books of City of God discuss Rome’s history and demonstrate the impotence of the pagan gods.
   2. The later books turn (among other things) to Greek philosophy; Augustine writes of the Platonists as nearly Christian.

C. Augustine could not fully admit to the Heavenly City anyone who did not accept the revelations of Christianity, but his thought had been so formed by classical literature and philosophy that neither could he fully exclude the great minds of the classical world.
VII. Thus, Augustine’s work truly provides a bridge between the pagan past and the Christian, specifically the Catholic, future.

A. His influence on later theological thought and, thus, indirectly on Western literature was incalculable.
   1. His theological views (for example, on predestination) mapped the way for centuries to come.
   2. His adherence to the Platonists’ belief that reason and faith are not incompatible led to the tradition of intellectual theology.

B. The City of God was a rich treasure house for later writers.
   1. For instance, in Paradise Lost, Milton’s Satan declares, “Better to reign in Hell than serve in Heaven.”
   2. This reflects Augustine’s words in City of God: “With the proud disdain of a tyrant he chose to rejoice over his subjects rather than to be a subject himself.”

Essential Reading:
Augustine, Confessions and City of God.

Supplementary Reading:
O’Donnell, Augustine of Hippo (Web site).
Brown, Augustine of Hippo.
Chadwick, “On Taking Leave.”
Wills, St. Augustine.

Questions to Consider:
1. Readers usually react to Augustine’s account of his adolescent theft of the pears in one of two ways: They find it a profoundly insightful analysis of human psychology, or they see it as overdone, even neurotic agonizing about a fundamentally trivial peccadillo. Which view do you take (or do you disagree with both)?
2. According to The Oxford Classical Dictionary, “Augustine’s major works are landmarks in the abandonment of Classical ideals” (p. 216). Do you agree? Why or why not?
Timeline

B.C.

753.................................................. Traditional date of Rome’s founding
509.................................................. Overthrow of the monarchy in Rome; beginning of the Roman Republic
486.................................................. Comic competitions introduced at City Dionysia
    c. 460–455 ...................................... Birth of Thucydides
    460 (?)–450 (?)............................... Birth of Aristophanes
    c. 440 .............................................. Dramatic competitions introduced at Lenaia
431–404 ........................................ Peloponnesian War
427 (?) ............................................. Birth of Plato
    c. 425 .............................................. Publication of Herodotus’s Histories
    423.................................................. Production of first version of Clouds
405 .................................................. Production of Frogs
    c. 400 (?)......................................... Death of Thucydides
399.................................................. Execution of Socrates
    386 (?) ............................................ Death of Aristophanes
382.................................................. Birth of Philip of Macedon
    c. 375 (?)........................................... The Republic
356.................................................. Birth of Alexander the Great
347 .................................................. Death of Plato
    344 (?) .......................................... Birth of Menander
342.................................................. Aristotle becomes Alexander’s tutor
    338.................................................. Battle of Chaeronea
336.................................................. Death of Philip; accession of Alexander
    323.................................................. Death of Alexander the Great
292 (?) ............................................. Death of Menander
84 (?) .............................................. Birth of Catullus
    70.................................................. Birth of Virgil
65.................................................. Birth of Horace
54 (?) ............................................. Death of Catullus
44 .................................................... Assassination of Julius Caesar
    42.................................................. Battle of Philippi; defeat of Brutus and Cassius by Antony and Octavian
31.................................................. Battle of Actium; defeat of Antony and Cleopatra by Octavian (Augustus)
19.................................................. Death of Virgil
    18.................................................. Augustus’s “social legislation”
8................................................... Death of Horace
4 (?) .............................................. Birth of Jesus; birth of Seneca
A.D.
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<tr>
<th>Year</th>
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<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>Death of Augustus</td>
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<td>17</td>
<td>Death of Ovid</td>
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<td>26–36</td>
<td>Pontius Pilate governor of Judea</td>
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<td>c. 30</td>
<td>Crucifixion of Jesus</td>
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<td>c. 50–60</td>
<td>Pauline epistles; Q document written?</td>
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<td>54–68</td>
<td>Reign of the emperor Nero</td>
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<td>65</td>
<td>Death of Seneca</td>
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<td>c. 65 (?)</td>
<td>Gospel of Mark</td>
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<td>66 (?)</td>
<td>Death of Petronius</td>
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<tr>
<td>66–73</td>
<td>First Jewish Revolt in Judea, against the Romans</td>
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<td>70</td>
<td>Capture of Jerusalem by the Romans; destruction of the Temple</td>
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<td>c. 80–85 (?)</td>
<td>Gospels of Matthew and Luke</td>
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<td>c. 90–95 (?)</td>
<td>Gospel of John</td>
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<td>c. 125</td>
<td>Birth of Apuleius</td>
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<td>132–135</td>
<td>Second Jewish Revolt in Judea</td>
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<td>325</td>
<td>Council of Nicea</td>
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<td>354</td>
<td>Birth of Augustine</td>
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<td>410</td>
<td>Sack of Rome by Visigoths</td>
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<td>413</td>
<td>Augustine begins <em>The City of God</em></td>
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<td>430</td>
<td>Death of Augustine</td>
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Glossary

**Actium, Battle of** (31 B.C.): Decisive battle on the coast of Greece, where Octavian defeated Antony and Cleopatra.

**agon**: One of the standard structural elements of Old Comedy; features a contest or debate between two characters (e.g., Aeschylus and Euripides in *Frogs*). The word literally means “struggle” or “contest.”

**Archidamian War** (431–421 B.C.): The first 10 years of the Peloponnesian War. It ended with the Peace of Nicias, but full-scale hostilities broke out again in 415 B.C.

**Attica**: The peninsula on which Athens is located; in the 5th century B.C., it was unified under Athenian government.

**Hellenistic kingdoms**: After the death of Alexander the Great in 323 B.C., his generals instituted themselves as monarchs over the areas where they had been governing. The most important Hellenistic kingdoms were those of the Seleucids in Asia Minor and the Near East, the Antigonids in Macedonia, and especially, the Ptolemies in Egypt.

**historiē**: Research, inquiry, investigation. Herodotus uses this word at the beginning of his work, and his use is the reason for the development of the sense “history.”

**kleos**: Glory or fame; that which others say about one, particularly after one’s death. One function of epic poetry is to confer *kleos* on its characters.

**logos**: A complex term meaning account, narrative, speech, word, reason, and various other things. Herodotus uses it to refer to different segments of his work; in philosophy, it means reason or the rational faculty; in the Gospel of John, it refers to the divine “Word” that was incarnate in Jesus.

**Middle Comedy**: Convenient scholarly term for the comedies produced between the end of Old Comedy (c. 404 B.C.) and the advent of New Comedy (c. 321 B.C.). The only surviving examples of the genre are Aristophanes’s *Ecclesiasouzae* and *Plutes*. Middle Comedy was apparently characterized by a decreasing role for the chorus and by an increase in plots focusing on ordinary life.

**Mycale, Battle of** (479 B.C.): With Plataea, one of the last two important battles of the Persian Wars. The Greek fleet attacked the Persians in their camp on Cape Mycale. Supposedly, the Battles of Plataea and Mycale took place on the same day.

**neoterics**: Cicero used this scornful term, along with *poetae novi* (“new poets”), to disparage those Roman lyric poets, such as Catullus, who modeled their work on Alexandrians, such as Callimachus.

**New Comedy**: The last stage of Attic comedy; written from c. 321 B.C. through the middle of the 3rd century B.C. Menander’s works are our primary example of New Comedy. New Comedy’s plots feature ordinary people and focus entirely on domestic situations and troubles. Political satire and mocking of named individuals is entirely absent, and the role of the chorus is vestigial.

**Old Comedy**: The earliest form of Attic comedy. Aristophanes’s nine 5th-century B.C. plays are our only surviving examples of the genre. Old Comedy was characterized by formal structural elements (see *agon* and *parabasis*), a central role for the chorus, and fantastic situations and characters. It featured a great deal of political satire and personal abuse of politicians, philosophers, and other public figures.

**parabasis**: In Old Comedy, a choral section near the midpoint of the play, where the action of the storyline stops and the chorus speaks directly to the audience, often in the playwright’s voice. The meter of the parabasis is always *anapests* (short-short-long; that is, an inverted dactyl).

**Peloponnesian War**: War between Athens and Sparta and the allies of each *polis*; it began in 431 B.C. and continued (with brief interruptions) until 404 B.C., when Athens was defeated.

**Persian Wars**: The great conflict between the vast Persian Empire and Greece. The wars occurred in two stages, 10 years apart; Persia’s first invasion of Greece took place in 490 B.C. and ended with Athens’ victory at Marathon. The second invasion began in 480 B.C., the year of the Spartan defeat at Thermopylae and the Athenians’ victory at the naval battle of Salamis, and ended in 479 B.C. with the Greeks’ victory at Plataea.

**Plataea, Battle of** (479 B.C.): With Mycale, one of the last two important battles in the Persian Wars. The Persian ground forces were defeated by the Greeks.
poetae novi: See neoterics.

Punic Wars: The three great wars fought between Rome and Carthage for hegemony over the Mediterranean. The Third Punic War ended in 146 B.C. with the total defeat and subjugation of Carthage.

Q: The hypothetical “sayings” source used by the authors of the Gospels of Matthew and Luke.

Salamis, Battle of: The great naval victory of 480 B.C., in which the Greek fleet routed the Persians. The battle was fought in the channel between Athens and the island of Salamis.

Sophism/Sophists: An intellectual movement of the 5th century B.C. The Sophists were, foremost, itinerant teachers of rhetoric. They espoused a naturalistic view of morality and religion and questioned the universal validity of morals. Their opponents accused them of corrupting morals and weakening religious beliefs.

Synoptic Gospels: The first three Gospels (Matthew, Mark, and Luke), which share a viewpoint (Greek, synopsis). The exact relationship among these three Gospels is often called the Synoptic Problem. The most commonly accepted theory is that Matthew and Luke used both Mark and the hypothetical Q as sources.

Thermopylae, Battle of (480 B.C.): The crucial first land battle of Xerxes’s invasion of Greece. Leonidas and his band of about 2,300 defenders, including 300 Spartans, held the pass against the Persians until they were betrayed by Ephialtes and surrounded. The defenders died to the last man.

timē: Honor, especially the external, visible tokens of honor bestowed on a Homeric warrior by his peers.
Biographical Notes

Note on transliteration of names: There is no easy way to handle the question of how to transliterate Greek names into the Roman alphabet. The old-style, Latinized system (in which Greek καπά became c, the ending -ος became -us, ιώτα on the end of diphthongs became e, and so on) is the most familiar, but it is inaccurate in many ways. However, the more accurate system is jarring to English readers’ eyes and often renders familiar names unrecognizable (Thucydides becomes Thoukydides, Ajax becomes Aias, Oedipus becomes Oidipous, and so on). Because the Latinized system is followed in most of the translations that I recommend, I have followed it in these outlines, with a few exceptions.

Historical Figures (including some “legendary” characters mentioned by historians or in the “historical” books of the Hebrew Bible):

Alexander of Macedon, “the Great” (356–323 B.C.): Son of Philip; pupil of Aristotle. He succeeded to the throne of Macedon with Philip’s death in 336 B.C.; by his own death in 323 B.C., Alexander had amassed an enormous empire, stretching from Egypt in the south to the borders of India in the east. After his death, his empire was divided into the Hellenistic kingdoms.

Ambrose, St. (Ambrosius; c. A.D. 340–397): Very important Christian thinker, who incorporated Platonism into his presentations of Christian philosophy. Ambrose’s lectures in Milan were centrally important in the conversion and later theological writings of St. Augustine.

Apuleius (b. c. A.D. 125): Author of the only complete surviving Latin novel, Metamorphoses, or The Golden Ass.

Aristophanes (?450–?386 B.C.): The greatest Athenian comic playwright. Eleven of his plays are extant; he wrote at least 32 others. His extant plays are the only surviving examples of Old and Middle Comedy.

Aristotle (384–322 B.C.): The great philosopher, scientist, and polymath; his Poetics (probably c. 335 B.C.) analyzes the structure and function of tragedy. He served as tutor for Alexander the Great from (probably) 342.

Augustine, St. (Aurelius Augustinus; A.D. 354–430): Author of the Confessions and The City of God; one of the most influential thinkers of early Christianity. He was well instructed in Roman literature and Hellenistic philosophy, especially Neoplatonism.

Augustus (Gaius Julius Caesar Octavianus; 63 B.C.–A.D. 14): Great-nephew and adopted son of Julius Caesar. After Caesar’s assassination, Octavian (as he was then called) soon became an obvious contender for power; his main rival was Mark Antony. Octavian defeated the combined forces of Antony and Cleopatra at the Battle of Actium in 31 B.C. In 27 B.C., he was granted the title Augustus, under which name he is usually identified as the first emperor of Rome.

Callimachus (fl. c. 285–270 B.C.): Great Alexandrian scholar-poet; author of Aetia. His ideas about poetic form were extremely influential on Roman lyric poetry.

Catullus, Gaius Valerius (84–54 B.C.): The only neoteric poet whose work survives complete or nearly complete. The author of a book of lyric poems in a variety of meters, he is most commonly remembered for his love poetry to a woman he called “Lesbia” (see Clodia Metelli).


Cleopatra (69–30 B.C.): Last member of the Ptolemy family to rule Egypt; a brilliant and talented ruler. Many Romans feared that she and Mark Antony (with whom she had three children) planned to set up a joint empire. Cleopatra and Antony both committed suicide in 30 B.C., after their defeat by Octavian at the Battle of Actium (31 B.C.).

Clodia Metelli (b. c. 95 B.C.): One of the three notorious Clodiae of 1st-century B.C. Rome; married Quintus Caecilius Metellus Celer by 62 B.C. Cicero castigates her for promiscuity in his speech Pro Caelio. Most scholars accept that she is the woman whom Catullus addresses as “Lesbia” in his poems; if so, their affair had started before Metellus’s death in 59 B.C.

Croesus (r. c. 560–546 B.C.): Last king of Lydia; famous for his wealth. Conquered by Cyrus.
Cyrus “the Great” (d. 530 B.C.): The conqueror of Media, Lydia, and Babylonia, he was the first Persian king to form an empire. He ended the Babylonian Captivity of the Jews and, thus, is hailed in Isaiah as a “messiah”—the only Gentile to be given that title.

Darius (d. 486 B.C.): King of Persia; ordered the first invasion of Greece, which ended with the Athenians’ victory at the Battle of Marathon (490 B.C.).

David (r. c. 1005–c. 965): King of the United Monarchy in Israel; successor of Saul; father of Solomon. In the Christian tradition, his role as the ancestor of Jesus is extremely important.

Herodotus (?484–c. 420 B.C.): The first Greek historian; his great work tells the story of the Persian Wars, with many digressions on other themes and cultures.

Horace (Quintus Horatius Flaccus; 65–8 B.C.): The greatest Roman lyric poet. Born in Venusia, he received an education in Rome and Athens that was most unusual for the son of a freedman. In Rome, Virgil introduced Horace to Maecenas, whose patronage allowed Horace to pursue his literary career.

“Lesbia”: See Clodia Metelli.

Livy (Titus Livius; c. 59 B.C.–A.D. 17): Roman historian, born in Padua; author of Ab urbe condita, our most important source for the early history and development of Rome. In its entirety, Ab urbe condita included 142 books; 35 of these have survived, including the books that recount Rome’s early history from 753 to 289 B.C. and those that cover the period from 218 to 167 B.C.

Lucretia (d. 509 B.C.): According to Livy, a chaste and noble Roman matron who committed suicide after she was raped by Sextus Tarquinius, the son of the king of Rome. Her suicide motivated her husband, Collatinus, and his friend Brutus to overthrow the abusive Tarquin dynasty and found the Roman Republic.

Maecenas, Gaius (d. 8 B.C.): Great friend of Augustus, extremely wealthy; primary patron of poets (including Horace) in Augustan Rome.

Mark Antony (Marcus Antonius; 86 or 83–30 B.C.): Friend and supporter of Julius Caesar; main rival of Octavian for primary power after Caesar’s assassination. His liaison with Cleopatra was very unpopular at Rome. Octavian defeated Antony and Cleopatra at the Battle of Actium (31 B.C.), and they both committed suicide the next year. Antony’s suicide was motivated by a false rumor that Cleopatra was dead.

Menander (?344/3–292/1 B.C.): The most famous playwright of New Comedy; his works had been completely lost by the 8th century A.D., but one complete play (Dyskolos) and large sections of several others were rediscovered in the 20th century.


Octavian: See Augustus.

Ovid (Publius Ovidius Naso; 43 B.C.–A.D. 17): Roman poet; his works include, among others, Amores, Ars Amatoria, and Metamorphoses. In A.D. 8, Augustus exiled Ovid to Tomis on the Black Sea; the exact reasons for this exile remain unclear, but Ovid’s erotic poetry may have been one cause. Metamorphoses, Ovid’s recounting of mythological stories of transformations, was an extraordinarily influential work for later Western culture.

Pericles (495–429 B.C.): The greatest Athenian statesman of Athens’ “golden age.” It is often said that under him, Athens, in effect, returned to one-man rule, under the guise of democracy.

Petronius (d. A.D. 66): The arbiter elegantiae (“judge of taste”) for Nero; forced to commit suicide in A.D. 66. The author of Satyricon is probably the same Petronius, but the identification is not certain.

Philip of Macedon (382–336 B.C.): King of Macedon and father of Alexander the Great. Philip’s victory at the Battle of Chaeronea in 338 B.C. effectively ended the era of independent Greek city-states.

Plato (c. 427–347 B.C.): The great Athenian philosopher; pupil of Socrates; author of (among many other works) The Republic. His influence on later Western philosophical thought and literature cannot be overstated. His brothers Glaucon and Adeimantus appear as characters in The Republic.
Plutarch (Mestius Plutarchus; c. A.D. 50–120): Philosopher, historian, and biographer. His *Parallel Lives* were among Shakespeare’s primary sources for the history plays.

Ptolemy I Soter (367/6–282 B.C.): One of Alexander’s generals. After Alexander’s death in 323, Ptolemy established himself as king of Egypt; his dynasty would last until the death of Cleopatra in 30 B.C. He moved the Egyptian capital from Memphis to Alexandria and founded the museum and library there.

Sextus Tarquinius (d. 509 B.C.): Son of the last king of Rome, Tarquinius Superbus (“Tarquin the Proud”). According to Livy, Sextus Tarquinius’s rape of Lucretia was the motivating event for the overthrow of the kings and the foundation of the Roman Republic.

Socrates (469–399 B.C.): Athenian philosopher whose ideas have had incalculable influence on later thought, although he himself wrote nothing. He figures as a character in most of Plato’s dialogues and is the narrator of *The Republic*; he also appears as a character in Aristophanes’s *Clouds*. He was executed in 399 B.C. on charges of corrupting the youth and failing to respect the gods of Athens.

Tacitus, Publius Cornelius (c. A.D. 56–118): Roman historian; his two most important works are the *Histories* and the *Annals*. Both survive only incompletely. In both these works, Tacitus focuses on the virtues of the old Roman Republic and the degeneracy of life, habits, and *mores* under the emperors.

Thucydides (c. 460–c. 400 B.C.): The great historian of the Peloponnesian War; his work was incomplete when he died. He built on Herodotus’s work but differed from Herodotus most notably in taking the present and very recent past as his subject. He says that he determined to write an account of the Peloponnesian War almost as soon as it broke out.

Virgil (Publius Vergilius Maro, 70–19 B.C.): Born near Mantua. Author of the *Eclogues*, the *Georgics*, and the *Aeneid*, generally recognized as the greatest Roman poet. Friend of Horace and Maecenas. The *Aeneid* was incomplete when he died; supposedly, on his deathbed for it to be burned.

Xenophon (c. 430–355 B.C.): Prolific Athenian author, best known today for his historical writings. His memoirs of Socrates are the only extant non-Platonic accounts of the great philosopher’s conversations.

Xerxes (d. 465 B.C.): King of Persia (486–465 B.C.). He led the Persian army in the second Persian invasion of Greece (480–479). He is a character in Aechylus’s *Persians*, as well as figuring largely in Herodotus’s *Histories*.

Legendary, Mythological, and Fictional Characters (humans, monsters, and gods):

Achilles: Greatest Greek warrior in the Trojan War. The framework of the *Iliad* is formed by his withdrawal from battle after Agamemnon takes his concubine Briseis and his subsequent return to avenge the death of his friend Patroclus.

Aeneas: Son of the goddess Aphrodite (Venus) and the Trojan Anchises; husband of Creusa and later of Lavinia; father of Iülus. A member of a collateral branch of the Trojan royal family. He is the main character of the *Aeneid*.

Cnemon: The “Grouch” of Menander’s play *Dyskolos*; father of Myrrhine and stepfather of Gorgias.

Daphne: In Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*, a nymph, sworn to chastity, whom Apollo desires and chases. She calls out for help to her father, a river god, and is turned into a laurel tree.

Dionysus (Roman Bacchus): Son of Zeus and the mortal woman Semele. After Semele’s incineration, Dionysus was incubated in Zeus’s thigh. He is the god of wine, intoxication, frenzy, and drama; also associated with rapidly growing plants, such as vine and ivy. Euripides’s *Bacchae* is our fullest extant description of him.

Encolpius: The narrator/hero of Petronius’s *Satyricon*.

Giton: The young male lover of Encolpius in Petronius’s *Satyricon*.

Gorgias: Character in Menander’s *Dyskolos*; helps Sostratus marry Myrrhine, who is Gorgias’s stepsister.

Hera (Roman Juno): Wife and sister of Zeus, mother of Hephaestus and Ares. She is the patron goddess of marriage and married women. In the *Iliad*, she hates the Trojans and favors the Greeks.

Heracles: Greatest Greek hero, son of Zeus and the mortal woman Alcmene. He lived (probably) two generations before the Trojan War. He appears as a character in several tragedies and in Aristophanes’s comedy *Frogs*. 
Io: Young woman, pursued by Jove, whom he turned into a heifer to hide her from Juno.

Isis: Great Egyptian goddess, who appears to Lucius at the end of Apuleius’s *Golden Ass*.

Juno: See Hera.

Lucius: The main character and narrator of Apuleius’s *Golden Ass*.

Myrrhine: Character in Menander’s *Dyskolos*; daughter of Cnemon. The play’s plot centers on Sostratus’s desire to marry her and the steps he must take in order to do so.

Narcissus: Beautiful youth who fell in love with his own reflection and pined away (in Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*).

Odysseus (Roman Ulysses): Husband of Penelope, father of Telemachus. Cleverest and craftiest of the Greeks; an important character in the *Iliad*, where he takes part in the embassy to Achilles (Book IX). Main character of the *Odyssey*.

Patroclus: Achilles’s dearest friend, who goes into battle wearing Achilles’s armor and is killed by Hector.

Penelope: Wife of Odysseus, mother of Telemachus. One of the main themes of the *Odyssey* is her courting by 108 suitors and the difficulties this causes her. The question of whether or not she will remain faithful to Odysseus permeates the epic.

Phidippides: Character in Aristophanes’s *Clouds*. The spoiled son of Strepsiades, whose Sophistic education leads him to argue that sons have the right to beat their fathers.

Poseidon: Brother of Zeus, god of the sea. In the *Iliad*, he favors the Greeks; in the *Odyssey*, he hates Odysseus for blinding his son, the Cyclops Polyphemos.

Pyramus: In Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*, a young man who commits suicide when he thinks his beloved Thisbe is dead.

Sostratus: Character in Menander’s *Dyskolos*; the “young lover” whose desire to marry Myrrhine drives the plot of the play.

Strepsiades: Main character of Aristophanes’s *Clouds*. The old farmer who seeks a Sophistic education from Socrates, first for himself, then for his son Phidippides.

Trimalchio: In Petronius’s *Satyricon*, the extremely wealthy freedman who throws a lavish dinner party.

Bibliography

Essential Reading:

Note: Most of the Greek and Roman texts cited are available in many translations; the same is, of course, also true for the Bible. The editions listed here reflect my own preferences. In general, the Penguin editions are good choices; they tend to include helpful and up-to-date notes and bibliographies.


Supplementary Reading:


Hunter, Virginia. *Thucydides: The Artful Reporter*. Toronto: Hakkert, 1973. A groundbreaking study of Thucydides’s methodology, particularly in reference to his claim to objectivity; Hunter concludes that Thucydides was “the least objective historian” (p. 177).


Wiseman, T. P. *Catullus and His World: A Reappraisal*. Cambridge, New York: Cambridge University Press, 1985. Considers Catullus’s poems in the context of Roman culture of the day; particularly useful discussions of Roman views on sexuality and of the problems involved in identifying Catullus’s “Lesbia.”

Internet Resources:

Bandstra, Barry L. *Reading the Old Testament: An Introduction to the Hebrew Bible*. http://www.hope.edu/academic/religion/bandstra/RTOT/RTOT.HTM. This online version is accessible, easily navigable, and quite useful. Provides clear and readable outlines and commentaries and thorough bibliographies for further study.


*Diotima: Materials for the Study of Women and Gender in the Ancient World*. http://www.stoa.org/diotima/. A site devoted to the studies of gender issues and the status of women in antiquity. Includes an anthology of translated texts, a collection of essays, links to other sites, and more.

Great Authors of the Western Literary Tradition
Part III: Literature of the Middle Ages
Professor Thomas F. X. Noble
Prior to coming to Notre Dame in 2001, Thomas F. X. Noble taught for 20 years at the University of Virginia and for 4 years at Texas Tech. A pupil of the distinguished early medievalist Richard Sullivan, Dr. Noble’s research interests have focused on the Carolingian world and on early medieval Rome and the papacy. His *The Republic of St. Peter* (1984; Italian trans., 1997) is a study of the origins of papal temporal rule. More than a dozen articles on Roman and papal history are preparatory to a history of the papacy from its origins to 1046. Shortly, Dr. Noble will complete a long monograph, *Images and the Carolingians*, itself preceded by six articles, which explores controversies over religious art in the 8th and 9th centuries, set against the background of late-antique and Byzantine art discourse. Dr. Noble has also edited three volumes and co-authored a successful Western civilization textbook (4th ed., 2004).

Dr. Noble has held a Fulbright Fellowship, two National Endowment for the Humanities Fellowships, and two grants from the American Philosophical Society. He has been a member of the Institute for Advanced Study (Princeton) and the Netherlands Institute for Advanced Study (Wassenaar). In 2002, he was elected a Fellow of the Societa Internazionale per lo Studio del Medioevo Latino (Florence) and, in 2004, was elected a Fellow of the Medieval Academy of America. Dr. Noble currently serves on the editorial boards of *Speculum* and *Church History* and has held offices and/or served on committees in the American Academy of Religion, the American Catholic Historical Association, the American Historical Association, and the Medieval Academy of America. Dr. Noble has supervised nine dissertations.
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Great Authors of the Western Literary Tradition  
Part III: Literature of the Middle Ages

Scope:

The literature of Europe’s Middle Ages, roughly the period from 500 to 1500, arose on three foundations. First, there was the literature of classical antiquity, which provided plot and storylines, as well as formal models. Second, there was the vast corpus of stories developed and transmitted among the peoples of medieval Europe. Third, there were the vernacular languages, French, Italian, and so forth. Only when these languages achieved a level of confidence and maturity was the emergence of a truly European literature possible.

However, neither medieval nor European point unambiguously to a single cultural reality that is, in turn, revealed by a single literature. The Middle Ages lasted a long time, and Europe is a large, complex place. Consequently, richness and diversity characterize Europe’s medieval literatures.

With that qualification in mind, we may make a few generalizations about medieval literature. Its earliest manifestations, in the British Isles, have left us the marvelous epic Beowulf (c. 900). In this poem, one can feel Christian and pagan cultures colliding and a sense of a lost past that is at once historical and elegiac. By the time of The Song of Roland (c. 1100) and El Cid (c. 1200), new forms and ideas have emerged. These are chansons de geste—songs of great deeds—that celebrate, in the first place, Charlemagne and, in the second, a contemporary figure. The latter is unusual in that chansons normally focused on characters from classical antiquity or from the age of Charlemagne. These works breathe the ethos of a militant, male world. Contemporary with the chansons were the romances. Strictly speaking, romances were just works put into romance (French, in the first place). But as the genre developed, romances added Arthurian themes to the classical and Carolingian ones common in the chansons and substituted love themes for military ones. We will consider three romances: the 12th-century German Tristan and Isolde by Gottfried von Strassburg, the 13th-century Romance of the Rose by Guillaume de Lorris and Jean de Meun, and the anonymous 14th-century English Sir Gawain and the Green Knight. The quickened pace of life in the 13th and 14th centuries had several reflexes. One of these concerned a long dialogue between the relative excellences of Latin and the vernaculars. Another concerned the proper relationship among pagan classical literature, the Bible, and medieval theological writing. Still another was the nature of storytelling and the changing audiences for literature. Four of our authors responded to these challenges (and to others!): Dante Alighieri, Francesco Petrarch, Giovanni Boccaccio, and Geoffrey Chaucer. We will consider the most famous works of these authors—the Divine Comedy and the Canterbury Tales, for example—and the less famous ones.
Lecture Twenty-Five

Beowulf

Scope: After some preliminary reflections on the aims of the lecturer and the larger subject of this set of lectures, we shall turn to Beowulf, a heroic poem of 3,182 lines in vigorous Old English, a gem without a setting. We do not know who wrote the poem, when it was written, or who its intended audience was. The poem is pleasingly complex. On the one hand, it is full of heroism, courage, duty, and honor. On the other hand, it is no less full of foreboding, doom, transience, and betrayal. Some see the poem as essentially an oral composition comprised of many earlier tales. Others see it as the product of a literate environment. Some feel that its structure is immature and incoherent, while others think that its allusive quality is a mark of sophistication. To some readers, Beowulf provides privileged access to the pagan world of the northern Germans, while other readers detect in the poem a consistent application of themes of Christian morality. Since its rediscovery in the 16th century, Beowulf has puzzled and delighted its readers.

Outline

I. This set of lectures will be delivered by a historian who has taught medieval studies for more than 30 years and who directs the oldest center for medieval studies in the United States.
   A. Literary theory and criticism will not be neglected in these lectures, but historical context will be emphasized.
   B. In any case, before the fairly recent past, historical context and literary antecedents were as important as critical theory in attempts to understand particular works and authors.

II. We may begin our explorations with a paradox: The Middle Ages produced a rich and vast array of literary creations, but “medieval literature” did not exist.
   A. First of all, medieval people did not know that they were medieval.
      1. Only in the 14th century did some thinkers begin to identify themselves closely with the culture of Greek and Roman antiquity and to disdain the millennium that separated them from the ancients.
      2. One consequence of the reflections of such scholars was the tripartite division of Western civilization into ancient, medieval, and modern.
      3. The Middle Ages—the times in the middle between antiquity and the moderns—(note the curious plural) were not named explicitly until the 17th century.
      4. The notion that people of the 14th century held of themselves and their world tells us a lot about them but little about the world they dismissed.
      5. For our purposes in these lectures, the term medieval is nothing more than a convenient frame of reference.
   B. Second, however we understand the term medieval, it forces us to think about approximately 1,000 years of history and culture. One should be wary of making bold generalizations about so much time.
   C. Third, Europe is a big, complex place. This is true today and it was no less true in the Middle Ages. One should be wary about generalizing about something that is allegedly “European.”
   D. Fourth, literature itself is an elusive term.
      1. We shall consider works in prose and in verse; works in English, French, German, Italian, and Spanish; works purportedly historical and works wholly imaginary.
      2. A medieval motto held that “clericus, id est litteratus” (“a cleric, that is to say, a literate man”), but we shall consider in detail only a few works written in Latin, yet we shall certainly be dealing with literate people.

III. Medieval European literature did not emerge entire and pristine at some point in the so-called Middle Ages. This literature rested on several foundations.
   A. Particularly in the earlier centuries of the Middle Ages, a vast stock of native stories and traditions exercised the imaginations and literary gifts of many writers.
   B. The literatures of Greece and Rome—but especially the latter as Greek was rarely known—were always models of both story motifs and formal structures.
C. The Bible, finally, was a source book of unalterable divine truths, of popular stories, and of literary forms.

D. One theme we shall have to track closely is the use that various medieval writers made of the sources that were at their disposal.

IV. In order to assess, understand, and enter into medieval European literature, we must take three crucial steps.

A. First, we must clear our minds.
   1. We must not assume that medieval people are “just like us.” We are almost better off imagining ourselves on another planet as we attempt to think about the Middle Ages.
   2. We must avoid appeals to dubious concepts, such as “human nature.”

B. Second, we must try to grasp some fundamental aspects of medieval life and culture.
   1. Medieval society was based on ideas of rank, hierarchy, and order that seem alien to our modern, egalitarian values.
   2. Christianity was pervasive in medieval culture in ways that seem odd in our modern, secular world.
   3. Theology was “the queen of the sciences,” yet in our times, it seems neither prominent nor scientific.

C. Third, we must acknowledge some of the changes and forces that have made our world different from that of the Middle Ages.
   1. Romanticism created a Middle Ages that never existed as a way of critiquing the emergence of mass, democratic, urban, industrial society.
   2. Darwin, Marx, and Freud—whether one agrees with them particularly or not—have together dramatically changed our basic views about human character, behavior, and motivation.
   3. Modern science and technology have fundamentally altered the ways we explain things and where we look for explanations.

V. We start with *Beowulf* and the beginnings of literature in the British Isles.

A. *Beowulf* is the longest poem surviving from Anglo-Saxon England, but it is by no means the only work in Old English.
   1. Old English is what we call the language of the Angles and Saxons who settled between 400 and 600 in what later became England.
   2. Angles and Saxons came from what is now Denmark and northern Germany (Saxony).
   3. The language is Germanic and closely related to Old Saxon, Old High German, and Old Dutch.

B. Before Old English began being written down, there was Celtic literature in Old Irish and Old Welsh in the British Isles.

C. Together, these Celtic and Old English materials are Europe’s oldest surviving vernacular literatures.

VI. *Beowulf* is a deeply enigmatic work.

A. We have no idea who wrote it.

B. We have only educated guesses as to when it was written.

C. It is remarkable that it survives at all.
   1. The poem survives in a single manuscript written about 1000.
   2. The surviving manuscript was apparently rediscovered by Laurence Nowell in about 1563.
   3. Robert Cotton owned the manuscript in the 17th century, and his library was severely damaged in a fire in 1731.
   4. Scholars have had to reconstruct many aspects of the poem, adding to the problems we face in understanding it.

VII. *Beowulf* is a vigorous, fast-paced poem of 3,182 lines. Yale’s Fred Robinson called it “the chief glory of early Germanic poetry.”

A. The poet clearly works with a variety of familiar tales and people, although Beowulf himself never appears in any other known work.

B. The poet could count on a high degree of familiarity on the part of his readers/listeners. He was dealing with their ancestors and the ancestral world from which they had come.

C. The basic story may be quickly summarized.
1. Hrothgar, the wise and just king of the Danes, has been ruling well and happily, celebrating in his magnificent hall, Heorot.
2. A fierce beast, Grendel—the misbegotten offspring of Cain—becomes jealous of Hrothgar’s merriment and savagely attacks his hall, killing many retainers.
3. Young Beowulf hears of Hrothgar’s plight and, partly to win fame and partly to acquit an old family debt, travels to Hrothgar’s kingdom to help.
4. Beowulf fights Grendel and wrenches off his arm, but Grendel slinks home to die in his cave in the mere.
5. Grendel’s mother, who is never named, seeks to avenge her son and wreaks havoc.
6. Beowulf plunges unto Grendel’s mere and barely manages to defeat Grendel’s mother.
7. Amidst much celebration, Hrothgar gives Beowulf both his eternal thanks and boundless treasure.
8. Beowulf, a Geat, returns home, ostensibly to what is now southern Sweden; recounts his deeds; and gives his treasure to his own king, Hygelac, who endows Beowulf with, in effect, a sub-kingdom.
9. Eventually, Beowulf succeeds as king and, after 50 years of just rule, sets out to fight a dragon that has been harrowing his kingdom.
10. Beowulf’s retainers abandon him, but his kinsman Wiglaf helps him to defeat the dragon, which mortally wounds Beowulf in the fight.
11. Although the poet jumps from the fight with Grendel’s mother to the battle with the dragon, he introduces many flashbacks to fill in the “history” of the intervening 50 years. These flashbacks, each one a story of war and betrayal, generally reveal the fulfillment of various prophecies uttered by characters in the poem.

D. The story is not, therefore, a straightforward narrative but nevertheless has coherence and closure.

VIII. How do we understand the poem?

A. We may look at stylistic devices the poet uses.
   1. The poem is constructed in half-lines with consonantal alliteration, as can be seen in its opening lines:
      
      Hwæt, we gardena In geardagum
      þeodcyninga þrym gefrunon
      Hu ða æþelingas ellen fremedon.
      
      (Listen! We have heard of the glory of the Spear-Danes’ kings in the old days, how the nobles of that people did great deeds.)
   
   2. The poet introduces an “authenticating voice” (“I have heard,” “I learned,” “They say”) to distance himself from the people in the story (and from his readers/listeners?).
   3. The poem is full of interweaving and recapitulation; for example, Beowulf has three verbal combats (with a shore-guard, with a sentry, and with Unferth, a retainer of Hrothgar’s) and three physical battles with beasts.

B. We may examine its themes.
   1. Is it Christian or pagan? Why does this matter?
   2. Is the poem primitive or sophisticated?
   3. Is the poem ironic?
   4. What is the point of the poem’s stress on doom, foreboding, and death?
   5. Does the poet admire Beowulf?

Essential Reading:
Liuzza, Beowulf: A New Verse Translation.
Baker, ed., The Beowulf Reader.
Godden and Lapidge, eds., The Cambridge Companion to Old English Literature.
Questions to Consider:

1. In what ways would you tend to relate literature to the times in which it was written? Do you tend to see literature as a reflection of a world, an escape from a world, or a commentary on a world?

2. What is at stake in arguing about whether Beowulf is pagan or Christian?
Lecture Twenty-Six

The Song of Roland

Scope: French literature emerges with stunning rapidity in the *Song of Roland*, an epic poem of some 4,000 lines written down around 1100 and profoundly influential for centuries. The poem is the earliest and, in many ways, the finest of the 100 or so *chansons de geste*, stories about a great exploit, written in the next two centuries. *Roland* celebrates Charlemagne and some of his leading men. The story has a basis in fact. In 778, as Charlemagne’s army was returning from a campaign in Spain, its baggage train was attacked by Basques, who killed its commander, Hrodland. Three centuries later, this minor event was transformed unto an epic tale of Christian versus Muslim, honor versus betrayal. The poem breathes the spirit of the crusading movement and of the social values of lords and vassals. That is clear. Less clear are: the oral or literary roots of the tale; the poet’s clever blending of past and present; the moral lessons to be drawn—for example, was Roland brave or rash, was Ganelon without merit, are the Christians always right and the Muslims always wrong—and the poem’s prevailing optimism or pessimism.

Outline

I. At the beginning of French literature stands the stately *Song of Roland*, an account of Charlemagne’s wars in Spain against Muslim adversaries.
   A. In the 19th century, the forces of nationalism and romanticism saw in *Roland* an ideal statement of the French “national character.”
   B. Schoolchildren and military officers avidly read the poem.

II. The form, content, and origins of the poem are somewhat mysterious and have occasioned a good deal of controversy.
   A. *Roland* is an epic: a long narrative poem on military themes, composed in elevated language, marked by a seriousness of tone, and universalizing in its themes.
      1. The poem is organized into 291 *laissez*, stanzas of varying length, usually ranging from 10 or 12 lines to as many as 30 lines.
      2. Each line has 10 syllables with a pause (called a *caesura*) near the middle.
      3. Lines are characterized by assonance: a rhyming of vowel sounds always between two halves of a line and often carried through an entire *laisse*.
      4. The poem is organized in four great scenes that mirror each other beautifully: It opens with Ganelon’s betrayal of Roland and concludes with Ganelon’s trial; in the middle are Roland’s death in battle against the Muslim forces and Charlemagne’s avenging of Roland and his companions.
      5. The narrative generally runs straight through the story with little in the way of flashbacks or digressions.
      6. The narrator (like the *Beowulf* poet) adopts a stance of personal detachment; he does not pretend to be an eyewitness.
      7. Interest and emphasis are maintained by dramatic shifts in the pace and rhythm of the narration: Some developments are treated quickly and some are handled at great length.
      8. The poet uses “parallel” or “similar” *laissez* to heighten dramatic effect; for example, ll. 80–81, when Oliver sees the Muslim forces approaching; ll. 83–85, when Oliver asks Roland to sound his horn (his *oliphant*) to summon Charlemagne; ll. 171–176, Roland’s death scene; ll. 209–211, Charlemagne’s mourning for Roland. This device creates a sense not of repetition but of viewing a situation from different points of view.
      9. *Roland* survives in six manuscripts, of which the earliest and best is the Oxford manuscript, written in the 12th century and generally thought to contain a poem composed about 1100.
   B. The content of the poem is at once clear and puzzling.
      1. On the face of it, we are presented with a 200-year-old Charlemagne who has been fighting in Spain for 7 years and who has wearied of the war.
      2. In fact, we have an epic whose historical kernel is actually known.
3. Under the year 778 (from other sources, we actually know that the date was August 15th of that year), the Royal Frankish Annals, written about 790 but revised in about 814, report this:

On the heights of the Pyrenees the Basques prepared an ambush, and threw the whole army into confusion. Although the Franks were obviously their betters in arms and valor, they nevertheless suffered a defeat due to the unfavorable terrain and unequal method of fighting. In this engagement a great many officers of the palace, whom the king had given positions of command were killed; the baggage was plundered, and the enemy was able to vanish in all directions because he knew the lay of the land. To have suffered this wound shadowed the king’s view of his success in Spain.

4. In the 820s Einhard, Charlemagne’s biographer, added a few details:

…the Basques laid their ambush right on the tops of the mountains. The area is especially suited to ambushes because of the dense and very deep forests. They fell upon the last part of the baggage train and those who were protecting the troops at the very back of the column as well as those who had gone on ahead into the valley below. Having joined with them in combat, the Basques killed practically every one of the Franks. Protected by night which was just falling, they snatched up the baggage and as quickly as possible scattered in every direction. The Basques were much assisted in this battle by the lightness of their arms and the lay of the land, whereas the heaviness of their arms and the unevenness of the land rendered the Franks utterly unequal to the Basques. Among many others who fell in this battle were Eggihard the seneschal, Anselm the count of the palace, and Roland the prefect of the Breton March.

5. Here is Roland! But in the Song of Roland, composed some 300 years after the event, Charlemagne is fighting a crusade-like war against Muslims.

C. So where does our poem come from? How do we get from, as it were, Basque terrorists to a virtual Crusade?

1. In the 12th and 13th centuries, some 100 epics were composed, largely in France, on the age of Charlemagne. These focused either on Charlemagne himself or on his historical and legendary companions. These epics are usually called chansons de geste—songs of deeds.

2. Scholars who study these epics fall into the “traditionalist” and “individualist” camps.

3. Traditionalists believe that stories or songs were composed close in time to the actual people and events and that these early versions stand behind Roland.

4. Individualists believe that the Roland poet prepared an original work, even though it may well be based on old stories or traditions.

5. Much turns, as with Beowulf, on the position one takes with respect to theories of oral-formulaic composition.

6. I take the view that Roland, even though it contains hundreds of formulas, is essentially an original composition, although it was meant to be performed and, therefore, every performance was new and distinctive. The Oxford version is only one, albeit perhaps the finest, of these.

7. It is worth saying, too, that Roland was sung, not read, and we have no clue about the music, the melody.

III. What, then, is this epic about? How may we summarize it, given that it is 4,002 lines long?

A. The action opens when King Marsilie, the Muslim commander, assembles a council of 20,000 men.

1. Blancandrin offers a treacherous plan: Marsilie should sue for peace, propose to come to Aachen (in French, Aix-la Chapelle; Charlemagne’s capital) to be baptized a Christian, and offer noble hostages.

2. On this plan, Charlemagne will leave Spain, Marsilie will not deliver on his promises, and the hostages will be slain, but Spain will be at peace.

3. The scene shifts to Charlemagne’s camp, where Marsilie’s envoys arrive to find an old and weary Charlemagne who is dubious.

4. Roland urged that the offer be refused, but Ganelon ridicules Roland’s advice and says that there is no reason for many more Christians to die.

5. Naimes, Charlemagne’s most trusted adviser, urges acceptance.

6. One after another, Charlemagne’s greatest warriors offer to go as an emissary to carry the terms of peace. Charlemagne refuses each one in turn.

7. Roland then nominates his stepfather (their relationship is never explained), Ganelon.

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8. Charlemagne accepts this nomination, but Ganelon is furious.
9. Nevertheless, Ganelon goes to Marsilie and plots with him the destruction of Roland. Ganelon persuades Marsilie that Charlemagne will never abandon the war as long as Roland is alive. Ganelon is rewarded richly and sent back to Charlemagne.
10. Charlemagne accepts the terms that are proposed but must appoint someone to protect his rearguard. Ganelon nominates Roland.

B. The next great scene has Roland and his companions Oliver and the lordly Archbishop Turpin realizing that they have been betrayed and that Marsilie’s vast forces are approaching.
1. Oliver three times asks Roland to sound his oliphant to summon Charlemagne.
2. Roland refuses to dishonor himself and his family name by doing so.
3. Battle is joined, and one by one, the great Franks are killed, each one killing countless Muslims before expiring.
4. In a touching scene, a mortally wounded Oliver strikes by mistake at Roland.
5. Sensing the inevitable, Roland blows his horn, bursts his temples—no enemy blow killed him—and expires.

C. The third great scene has Charlemagne returning to Spain.
1. He sees the utter destruction and grieves for his dead comrades.
2. Leaving some men to attend to the dead, Charlemagne sets off in hot pursuit of the Muslims.
3. Meanwhile Bailigant, the emir of Babylon, from whom Marsilie had long ago requested aid, appears.
4. Charlemagne wins a majestic battle.

D. The final scene treats the trial of Ganelon.
1. Ganelon had already been arrested before Charlemagne returned to Spain.
2. Back at Aachen (Aix), a trial is held.
3. Ganelon argues that he has not betrayed Charlemagne but only avenged his own betrayal by Roland.
4. Some of the nobles argue that all should be forgiven and forgotten.
5. Others argue that Ganelon’s betrayal has been so great that he must be punished.
6. A trial by combat is decided upon. Ganelon will be represented by the great warrior Pinabel. Roland’s cause is to be upheld by the totally outclassed Thierry. Miraculously, Thierry prevails.
7. Ganelon and 30 of his kinsmen are executed.
8. As the poem ends, Bramimonde, Marsilie’s queen, who had been captured in Spain, embraces Christianity.

IV. How do we understand the poem? How might its contemporaries have understood it?
A. One great critical theme is Oliver versus Roland, that is, prudence versus recklessness.
B. Another theme centers on Roland himself and the question of démesure.
C. Another theme is the conflict between duty and honor.
D. Yet another theme is pragmatism versus lofty ideals.
E. A final theme is faith and religion.
F. The genius of the poem lies precisely in tensions and paradoxes.
1. The Muslims are presented as more than worthy foes.
2. Christians worship a triune God; Muslims worship Apollo, Muhammad, and Termagant.
3. The Franks are not presented as bloodthirsty: They mourn their dead; they want to go home; they weep when they see France.

G. Composed at the time of the First Crusade, The Song of Roland opens a vista on the Europe of 1100.

Essential Reading:
Brault, trans., The Song of Roland.
Cook, The Sense of the “Song of Roland.”

Questions to Consider:
1. What is at stake in the “traditionalist” versus “individualist” dispute over Roland (or Beowulf for that matter)?
2. How is honor presented in Roland? Can you make a case that Ganelon is honorable?
Lecture Twenty-Seven

El Cid

Scope: This mighty poem of 3,735 lines, probably composed between 1201 and 1207, suits the remarkable figure who is the source and center of its action. Rodrigo Dias de Vivar was born near Burgos around 1140 and died in 1199. His years of fighting for and against Muslims earned him the title sayyidi, “lord” or “sir,” hence the familiar “El Cid.” The Poema (or Cantar) de Mio Cid is virtually the only Spanish chanson de geste. The story is told in two parts. In the first, Rodrigo is unjustly exiled and recovers his place and honor by his own efforts. In the second, Rodrigo’s two daughters go through two marriages each, the first of which defames the family, while the second recoups the family’s honor. El Cid is distinctive in a number of ways. No other chanson is comparably historical—much of the poem consists of verifiable historical detail. But the unknown author also inserted fictions with regularity. Rodrigo is presented as a heroic figure, a paragon of truth, kindness, justice, courage, honor, and devotion. But he is deeply human, too, as is his story; the superhuman feats that typify Roland are not found here. The poem evokes a time of struggle and adventure, and from the 12th century to the present, it has spawned debates over whether Rodrigo was a hero or a villain, a battler for Spain or its enemy.

Outline

I. The Poema de Mio Cid takes us into the turbulent world of medieval Iberia.
   A. Muslim forces from North Africa overran Iberia between 711 and 716.
   B. Initially, a weakly unified emirate centered on Cordoba governed the peninsula.
   C. With fitful starts in the 8th and 9th centuries, Christian forces operating from the far north began the Reconquista, the centuries-long reconquest of Islamic Spain.
   D. In 1085, Toledo fell to the Christians (a major scene in the Poema takes place there).
   E. Muslim reinforcements came to Spain from Morocco and temporarily halted the Reconquista (we learn something about them in the Poema, too).
   F. A first important point about the Poema is that it deals with real people and events, although for reasons we shall soon discuss, the poet allowed himself considerable latitude in handling history.

II. Who was El Cid?
   A. Rodrigo Diaz was born into the lower nobility in Vivar, near Burgos, around 1043.
   B. He served as standard-bearer for King Sancho II of Castile (1065–1072) at the siege of Zamora in 1072, during which battle, Sancho was assassinated.
   C. Sancho’s brother and bitter foe, Alfonso VI (1060–1102), became king of León, then added Castile. He was hostile to Rodrigo and exiled him twice (1081–1087, 1089–1092), partly for personal reasons and partly because a faction at court centered on Count García Ordóñez detested him.
   D. Rodrigo spent his first exile fighting in eastern Spain as an ally of Emir Mutamin of Saragossa against other Muslim emirs and against Berenguer Ramón, the count of Barcelona.
   E. Rodrigo continued these wars in his second exile, then attacked Valencia in 1092, which fell in 1094, his greatest victory. He died in 1099.
   F. Rodrigo Diaz de Vivar came to be called El Cid, from the Arabic sayyidi, “lord,” and Campeador, derived from the Latin Campi doctor, roughly, “one wise in the affairs of battle.”
   G. In fact, Rodrigo seems to have been a superb commander, but he was a soldier of fortune, a mercenary, and a man who looked out for himself.

III. The Poema de Mio Cid has its mysteries but is appreciably less enigmatic than Beowulf or Roland.
   A. The poem survives in one badly damaged manuscript whose handwriting appears to date from the 14th century.
   B. At the very end of the poem, however, we read: “Per Abbat wrote it down in the month of May in the year of our Lord 1207.” These words beg two fundamental questions.
C. Who was Per Abbat?
   1. He may simply have been a scribe who “wrote down” an older poem.
   2. He may have been the actual author of the Poema.
   3. If he was the author, he may be identical with a lawyer of the same name who is attested in legal documents a little later.
   4. Many things about the poem (as we will see) make sense if we suppose a layman who was a lawyer as its author.

D. What does “wrote it down” mean?
   1. Scholarship on El Cid is marked by the same traditionalist versus individualist controversies that attach to Beowulf and Roland.
   2. The great Spanish scholar Ramón Menéndez Pidal (1869–1968) devoted his life to the poem. He believed that it was early (c. 1140) and probably based on earlier works, both Latin histories and Spanish poems.
   3. “Oralists,” partly because of certain theories of epic composition and partly because of the presence in El Cid of the ubiquitous epic formulas, take different views on the date of the poem. Oralists are less interested in arguing about when it was written down, however, than they are in asserting that what we read today is probably the product of a long poetic tradition but certainly the result of an initial oral composition.
   4. An alternative thesis is that of Colin Smith, professor of Spanish in Cambridge: “the poet was a literate, well-informed, and cultured man, who composed in writing with a full awareness of the basis of his craft as it had been devised and developed in French.” For Smith, moreover, that man was the lawyer Per Abbat.

E. El Cid is the oldest epic in Spanish and is the only reasonably complete one. It did not itself exert much literary influence, but its historical evocations have been crucial at several moments in Spanish history.

IV. The basic structure of the poem may be briefly sketched as a prelude to a summary.
   A. The poem runs to 3,730 lines (plus 5 more in the “signature”), organized (like Roland) into 152 laisses of unequal length.
   B. The lines are divided by a caesura, but the half-lines show much more variability than do those of Beowulf or Roland. One may encounter half-lines of as few as 4 syllables or as many as 14. The most common pattern is 6 to 8 syllables per half-line.
   C. Like Roland, the half-lines depend on assonance, with the assonating vowels running through a laisse but not carrying over to the next one.
   D. The narrative of the poem runs straight through with very little in the way of asides or flashbacks, although the poet often stops to say, “Now I have to tell you about this…” without, thereby, turning back in time.
   E. The action, again like Roland, slows down and speeds up, but the poet here rarely uses parallel or similar laisses to create the effect of multiple points of view on a given event.
   F. The story revolves around two overlapping plots.
      1. The first plot concerns the Cid’s exile and rehabilitation.
      2. The second plot concerns the marriages of the Cid’s daughters.
   G. As we have it, the Poema is divided into three cantares (“songs”): (1) the cantar of exile, (2) the cantar of marriage, and (3) the cantar of the outrage of Corpes.
   H. The cantares and the basic plot structure do not jibe. The cantares may be how much of the poem was sung at a given time.
   I. Again as with Roland, the poem was meant for oral presentation, but we have no music telling us what it sounded like.

V. The poet’s (Per Abbat’s?) story of Rodrigo Diaz de Vivar may be summarized as follows.
   A. As the poem opens, Rodrigo is departing Castile for his exile.
      1. He accepts his unjust fate with dignity and resignation.
      2. People profess their love and admiration for him but tell him that they cannot help him because of the king’s edict.
B. The Cid crosses into Muslim territory, takes a few frontier cities, and begins a set of brilliant campaigns against Muslim princes in the east of Spain (the Levante).
1. His initial band of 60 or so followers swells to several thousand.
2. After every battle, the Cid generously shares the spoils and makes his followers rich and famous.
3. Several times, he sends envoys to King Alfonso bearing rich gifts and assurances that he is a loyal vassal of his king.
4. After the fall of Valencia, Alfonso agrees to send the Cid’s wife and daughters to him, promises pardons to all those who have gone off to join the Cid, and indicates his intention to pardon the Cid himself.

C. At the court, the Infantes of Carrión (Diego and Fernando) begin to scheme to win the Cid’s daughters (Doña Elvira and Doña Sol) as their wives.
1. The king accepts the plan, as does the Cid, but with misgivings.
2. The Infantes travel to Valencia, and the marriage is celebrated amidst joy and celebration.
3. One night in the Cid’s palace, a pet lion escapes and the Infantes show themselves to be complete cowards.
4. A little later, in the face of battle, the Infantes again prove to be cowards.
5. The Infantes now ask to return home to Carrión with their wives, but actually, they plan to humiliate and repudiate them because of the (self-inflicted!) affronts to their honor.
6. In the forest of Corpes the Infantes send everyone on ahead, then strip their wives, brutally beat them, and leave them for dead. A relative saves them and brings them back to Rodrigo.

D. Instead of seeking blood revenge, the Cid appeals to the king, arguing that the Infantes have proved to be traitorous because it had been the king who actually gave Doña Elvira and Doña Sol in marriage.
1. Abetted by the duplicitous Count García, the Carrión faction argues that they had made an unequal marriage and that they had a perfect right to repudiate their wives, arguing that doing so, and even the way they did so, brought them honor.
2. Alfonso is deeply aggrieved and summons a great court to meet in Toledo to adjudicate the matter.
3. In richly detailed legal proceedings, the judges satisfy one request after another by the Cid, finally insisting that there is to be a trial by battle.
4. The king guarantees everyone’s security, the battle is joined, and the Infantes are dealt a humiliating defeat.

E. The Cid returns to Valencia, and his daughters marry the sons of the kings of Navarre and Aragon.

VI. The poet built his story around several key themes.
A. To do so, he took license with historical reality: Many key characters are invented (Cid’s friend Martín Antolínez is surely an invention and so too, probably, is his faithful “sidekick” Álvar Fáñez); Count García is real, but he was less a sneaky plotter than a man humiliated by the Cid after a battle; the “marriage plot” is sheer fiction; there was never a great reconciliation between the Cid and King Alfonso.
B. Certain traditional epic themes are present.
1. Courage, prowess, and a willingness to overcome huge odds on the battlefield are marks of the Cid and his men.
2. The Cid and his followers are deeply religious.
3. Still, the poem has nothing in it of the miraculous or magical—except, perhaps, when the angel Gabriel appears to the Cid in a dream and assures him that in this life he will always be successful.
C. Some scenes and characters are clearly patterned on Roland in whatever form the poet knew it.

D. The aristocratic tone of Roland and even, to a degree, of Beowulf is absent.
1. Aristocratic punctilio is always observed.
2. But the nobles in the Poema are almost without exception selfish, greedy, duplicitous, and dishonorable.
3. The poet is clearly making the point that nobility is a matter of character, not of birth.
E. As in all epics, honor is a central concern.
1. Beowulf was lofgeornost (“most eager for praise), and Roland at first refused to blow his horn.
2. The Cid wins honor and fame by his own actions.
In the end, the poet brilliantly created a new kind of epic hero. The Cid is far more than the great battler who always wins.

1. Context may well be important. In the 12th century, the Reconquista had not gone well, and in 1195, the Christian forces suffered a devastating defeat.

2. The poet wanted to encourage honorable Christian soldiers to enlist in the war against Muslims instead of indulging their taste for court politics and a life of leisure. He certainly emphasizes, too, that one could win fame and fortune fighting on the frontier.

3. The poet created a kind of civic ideal: The Cid is a great warrior, but he is an exemplary husband and father, a true friend, a generous sharer of spoils, and always, always wholly loyal to his (undeserving!) king. He is cheerful and philosophical in the face of exile. He is always reflective and prudent, marked precisely by the *mesure* that Roland conspicuously lacked.

4. It is fascinating to compare the trial of the Infantes with that of Ganelon: The former runs to nearly 450 lines, whereas the latter is just over 100 and the richness of detail is fundamentally different.

5. And so the poet’s sense of *verismo*, of truth, is wrapped up in character, not in the ordinary details of history.

**Essential Reading:**


Fletcher, *The Quest for El Cid*.

Smith, *The Making of the Poema*.

**Questions to Consider:**

1. What do you make of the author’s sense of *verismo*?

2. How would you compare and contrast the Cid with Beowulf and Roland?
Lecture Twenty-Eight

Tristan and Isolt

Scope: Nothing is known of Gottfried, who wrote his incomparable (albeit unfinished) romance Tristan in about 1210. But a lot is known about the development of romance and some things are clear about the legend of Tristan. In 12th-century France, a little after the rise of the chansons de geste, the romance emerged but not as a distinct genre. That is, romances treated classical, French, or British (that is, Celtic) persons and themes. They tended to focus on courts and on refined behavior. Love themes are always prominent and sometimes dominant. Along several paths in the 12th century (and maybe earlier), Celtic material, usually dealing with King Arthur, made its way into France and received imaginative treatment in French. Stories of the star-crossed lovers Tristan and Isolt traveled with that Arthurian material. Four French renditions of the story survive and others are known to have existed. Gottfried knew French romances and the Tristan stories in particular. He also knew the romances of some German contemporaries. Gottfried created a story that played with and violated almost every convention of romance. His work can almost be read at once as a “how-to” and a “how-not-to” manual on the art of romance.

Outline

I. With the star-crossed lovers Tristan and Isolt, we enter the world of romance.
   A. Romance is a 12th-century French invention, and later, we will consider the greatest of all French romances, The Romance of the Rose.
   B. In this lecture, we study the origins of romance, then turn to the greatest of the German romances, Tristan and Isolt.
   C. It is important to bear in mind that more than 200 French romances survive, along with about 100 each in English and Italian and more than 50 in both German and Spanish.

II. The road to romance passes through the lyric poetry of the troubadours and trouvères.
   A. We have already seen that medieval epic, the chanson de geste, tended to focus on the remote Germanic past or on the world of Charlemagne.
   B. At the dawn of the 12th century, lyric poets in the south of France turned away from historical themes to sing songs of love.
      1. Troubadours (from Provençal trobar, “to find,” as in “to invent”) in the south of France, beginning with Count William IX of Poitiers and Aquitaine (1071–1127), created a new kind of poetry.
      2. By the middle of the 12th century, the conventions of southern poetry appeared in the north in the poetry of the trouvères (cf. Modern French trouver, “to find”).
      3. We know the names of more than 450 troubadours and some 200 trouvères.
   C. The love lyrics were courtly, textually creative, and often obscure.
   D. The basic ethos of this poetry has long been called “courtly love,” a term that is difficult to define or to pin down.
      1. Ideals of life are always present: skill in fighting and hunting, nobility of character, skill at social interaction, learning, refinement, a taste for luxury.
      2. Ideals of love are crucial, too: No one who did not love could be fully courtly; love and desire are essentially the same; love at once seeks and dreads satisfaction (thus, there could be no love within marriage, because satisfaction was always possible); love is a mixture of pleasure and suffering; the woman is usually of higher social status than the man who loves—and serves—her.
      3. A transformation of the chivalric code is evident, too. The “man’s world” of Beowulf and Roland gave way before a world of “gentlemen,” who displayed their gentility in their conduct regarding women.
      4. Courtoisie (“courtesy”) is essentially “courtiness,” the way people behave in courts, not on battlefields.
   E. There has been considerable controversy over the sources and meaning of this love poetry.
      1. Some suggest that it stems from the classical love poetry of, for example, Ovid (43 B.C.–17 A.D.).
2. Others point to the emergence in the vernacular of the classically inspired love lyrics of the medieval clerical schools.
3. Others argue for Arabic influences coming from Spain (this may bear on form but probably not on content).
4. A few still maintain that old “popular” poetry is behind the new poetry (but why, then, is it so learned, intricate, and aristocratic?).
5. Historians sometimes point to general social conditions involving life in castles and the presence of large numbers of young men seeking fame, wealth, a lord, and a wife.

F. There are also problems surrounding the proper interpretation of the poetry, because it flaunts the conventions of Christian and feudal society.
   1. Is it ironic?
   2. Is it a searing condemnation of sensualism and immorality?
   3. Does it allow women powerful, dynamic roles; place them on pedestals; or mock them?

G. Whatever we may think, the new poetry put love and courtly behavior at the center of literary production.

III. Around the middle of the 12th century, the romance (from Old French mettre en romanz, literally “to translate into French”) made its appearance.
   A. The romance was an amalgam of two bodies of source material.
      1. As to content, the romance drew on classical themes—stories about Troy, Thebes, Alexander, Aeneas—or on the “matter of Britain”—the stories of King Arthur and his court.
      2. As to ethos, the romance drew on lyric poetry and put love themes at the center of almost every story.
   B. Romances are full of magic and enchantment. Themes of journey or quest are common. Mistaken identities and disguises are recurrent.
   C. In the early 12th century, romances were in verse (typically in octosyllabic lines), but by later in the century, prose romances emerged.
   D. Because writers of romances borrowed freely from their common sources and from one another, one often meets the same characters in different situations or similar situations handled differently.
   E. Many scholars despair of talking about romance as a coherent genre.

IV. The greatest 12th-century writer of French romances was Chrétien de Troyes, whose influence lasted for centuries.
   A. We know almost nothing about him personally. His major works were composed, it seems, between 1159 and 1191. He was patronized by the countess of Champagne, then by the count of Flanders.
   B. His romances are all “Arthurian,” but they deal with figures from Arthur’s court, not with Arthur himself.
   C. In the opening of his Knight of the Cart—a story about the adulterous affair of Lancelot and Guinevere—Chrétien says this:
      Since my lady of Champagne [that is, Marie, the daughter of Eleanor of Aquitaine and wife of Count Henry the Liberal] wills me to undertake the making of a romance, I shall undertake it with great goodwill, as one so wholly devoted that he will do anything in the world for her without any intention of flattery… Christian is beginning his book of the Knight of the Cart. The Countess presents him with the matter and the meaning, and he undertakes to shape the work, adding little to it except his effort and his careful attention.

V. Chrétien wrote a romance about Tristan and Isolt, but because it does not survive, we turn to the masterpiece of Gottfried von Strassburg.
   A. About Gottfried, nothing is known. He wrote his Tristan around 1200/1210.
   B. Romance entered Germany from France in the middle of the 12th century, and Gottfried almost certainly knew the works of Chrétien. Nevertheless, he patterned his own Tristan on that of Thomas of England, written perhaps in the 1150s at the court of King Henry II of England and his wife, Eleanor of Aquitaine. Because Thomas’s work survives only fragmentarily, we cannot compare Gottfried’s with it.
   C. Gottfried’s Tristan takes us into the Arthurian world but deals with Cornwall and Ireland, rather than with the familiar figures of the Round Table.

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D. We may summarize Gottfried’s lengthy (19,548 verses!) story as follows:

1. Gottfried foreshadows his main story by telling about Tristan’s parents. His mother was Blanchefleur, the sister of King Mark. His father was Count Rivalin.

2. They fell deeply in love, but Rivalin was killed in battle and Blanchefleur died of grief giving birth to their son, Tristan.

3. Tristan is raised by his father’s faithful servant Rual and, for a long time, does not know who he really is.

4. Tristan grows up to be learned, musical, talented, and admired.

5. Finally, his uncle Mark recognizes Tristan and knights him. Tristan sets out to avenge his father’s death, then returns to Mark’s service.

6. To make Mark’s realm secure, Tristan fights and kills the Irish giant Morolt, leaving a notch from his sword blade in Morolt’s skull but having been dealt a poisoned blow that can be cured only by Ireland’s Queen Isolt.

7. Disguised as a musician and calling himself Tantris, Tristan goes to Ireland, ingratiates himself to all, is cured, and is appointed by Isolt to tutor her daughter, also named Isolt, in music, singing, letters, philosophy, Latin and French, and courtly culture.

8. Tristan returns to Mark, tells him of Isolt, and promises to woo her for him.

9. Tristan returns to Ireland only to learn that the king has promised his daughter to anyone who can kill a dragon. Tristan does so and cuts out the beast’s tongue but swoons from its venom. Meanwhile, the king’s cupbearer comes upon the dead dragon, cuts off its head, and goes to court to claim Isolt, who is mortified at the prospect of marrying the cupbearer.

10. Eventually, Tristan recovers and the cupbearer’s deception is revealed, but while Tristan is bathing in the palace, Isolt notices that the gap in his sword blade matches the piece taken from Morolt’s head. Because Morolt was her mother’s brother, Isolt wishes to kill Tristan, but the elder Isolt patches up peace between them, and Tristan presents Mark’s wish to marry Isolt, whose father concurs.

11. Isolt is sad to be leaving her home with her uncle’s killer. Aware of her distress, her mother gives her servant, Brangaene, a love potion to be drunk by Isolt and Mark. When the boat comes in sight of land, Tristan calls for wine, and a serving maid inadvertently gives the love potion to Tristan and Isolt.

12. Henceforth, Tristan and Isolt are hopelessly in love, and the rest of the story deals with their deception of King Mark, his eventual discovery of their love, and his pardoning of them both—even though Tristan must depart the realm.

13. Gottfried’s unfinished version ends with Tristan meeting Isolt of the White Hands. Other writers added various endings to the tale.

VI. The story poses several problems for critics.

A. Is it unfinished because Gottfried did not know how to finish it?

B. Is the moral of the story that one must adopt an air of resignation in the face of inevitable disappointment?

C. Is the story a utopian idealization of pure love?

D. What is the point of the love potion—to excuse the lovers or to elevate their love to the highest possible plane, to make of it something beyond human will?

E. This is a story of adultery, and the cuckolded husband, Mark, is a sympathetic figure. Yet Gottfried’s sympathies, and ours, are with Tristan and Isolt.

F. Is the work intended to criticize conventional court culture and the conventions of courtly love?

G. Is the point that true love is not a courtly entertainment but something so pure, so refined, so powerful that it cannot be integrated into normal society?

H. Is Gottfried inviting us to compare a love that is subject to reason with a love that is irrational and, in equal measures, sublime and destructive?

I. The story’s possibilities are inexhaustible.

Essential Reading:
Andreas Capellanus, *The Art of Courtly Love*.

**Questions to Consider:**
1. In what ways can you use Tristan and Roland as characters to compare romance with the *chanson de geste*?
2. How would you end the story that Gottfried left unfinished?
Lecture Twenty-Nine

The Romance of the Rose

Scope: In about 1237, Guillaume de Lorris wrote just over 4,000 lines of superb verse “embracing all the art of love,” and 40 years later, Jean de Meun added more than 17,000 additional verses. About the authors virtually nothing is known. Their composite text, however, is perhaps the finest work of medieval French literature and was influential for centuries. The Lover narrates all that happened to him in a dream as he set out on a quest for love. Both authors knew the classical literature on love and dreams, as well as the romance literature of the century that preceded their own. Jean, moreover, knew well the great philosophical debates of the University of Paris and the intense quarrels of the religious orders. The poem is a sustained allegory—everything has one meaning on the surface and other deeper meanings. Because neither author chose to reveal the secrets of his allegory explicitly, readers have done so in their stead. Guillaume appears to argue against reason on behalf of courtly love, but it is just possible that his pose is ironic, that he is a critic of what he appears to support. Jean appears to be a critic of courtly love, but does he see it as vain and foolish or as contrary to “nature,” or do philosophy and theology get in the way of courtly love and, thus, reveal their own shortcomings? At the poem’s end, the Lover plucks his Rose—they have sex—but how has the poem prepared us to understand this outcome?

Outline

I. We turn now to the greatest of all medieval romances, The Romance of the Rose.

   A. This is a poem of 21,700 lines composed by two authors who worked some 40 years apart.

      1. Guillaume de Lorris wrote some 4,000 lines around 1237. We know virtually nothing about him. He is named but not described by the second author.

      2. Jean Chopinel (or Clopinel), better known as Jean de Meun, says that 40 years later, he continued the poem. Indeed he did, adding some 17,000 lines. Of him, we know that he was a sophisticated intellectual, probably a teacher in Paris, and the translator into French of such works as Vegetius on war and Boethius’s Consolation of Philosophy.

   B. The Romance enjoyed unprecedented popularity in the Middle Ages.

      1. Nearly 300 manuscripts survive, many of them lavishly illustrated.

      2. Chaucer translated a portion into English, and there was a German translation, too.

   C. The work’s attraction is somewhat difficult to understand. It is long, complex, and difficult.

   D. But the Romance is also surpassingly beautiful, utterly ingenious, and infinitely fascinating. It simply takes patience to come to terms with it.

II. The Romance of the Rose is a sustained allegory, and this accounts for both its difficulty and its interest.

   A. Allegory had two distinct kinds of meanings in the Middle Ages, one more prominent than the other.

      1. In ancient rhetoric, from Aristotle to Quintilian, allegory meant, more or less, a sustained metaphor.

      2. The Middle Ages knew that meaning but also derived from the church fathers an allegorical mode of reading the Bible. Allegory is a trope through which one understands one thing by means of another, or one means something different than what one says.

   B. Part of the difficulty (and interest!) of reading the Romance of the Rose rests in its continuous use of personification, where various names (to which we shall turn presently) are assigned to abstractions. We never have the sense that we meet real people. The story is not about anybody, or maybe, it is about everybody.

III. Let us now try to summarize the remarkable poem of Guillaume and Jean before turning to some reflections on its sources, devices, themes, and meanings.

   A. We shall begin with Guillaume’s story.

   B. A young man—Lover—who is 20, just the right age for love, falls asleep in May, just the right time for love, and has a dream. The Romance of the Rose—“in which the entire art of love is contained”—is his account of that dream.
1. Lover, the main character in the story, goes for a walk along a stream and comes upon a beautiful garden that is surrounded by a wall, on which 10 images are painted in gold and azure. They depict Hate, Cruelty, Baseness, Covetousness, Avarice, Envy, Sorrow, Old Age, Religious Hypocrisy, and Poverty.

2. Lover looks and looks for an entrance to the garden and finds a small door, through which Idleness admits him.

3. Lover finds a lovely band dancing and enjoying music. Idleness is the friend of Pleasure, who owns the garden and presides over the merriment. Many other characters are introduced.

4. At the conclusion of the dance, the characters all go into the wood to disport themselves and Lover begins to explore the garden. Cupid follows him at a discreet distance.

5. Lover comes upon the spring of Narcissus and sees two crystals in the pool. They each reflect half of the garden. Looking into one, Lover sees a reflection of a rose garden, in the midst of which is one particularly beautiful Rose, which Lover wishes ardently to “pluck.”

6. Cupid then unleashes five arrows—Beauty, Simplicity, Courtesy, Company, and Fair Seeming—which wound Lover and intensify his desire for the Rose.

7. Lover then becomes Cupid’s vassal and promises to serve him faithfully. Cupid hopes Lover will not betray him as so many have before.

8. Lover asks Cupid for instruction on how he might serve faithfully. Cupid provides ample advice and tells him, above all, to fix his thoughts on love, be prepared to bear all the torments of love, and understand that the object of his desires may be unattainable.

9. Cupid departs and Lover contemplates entering among the Roses—“penetrating” them. Fair Welcome bids him enter.

10. There is a detestable villain—Rebuff—guarding the Roses, and he is assisted by Evil Tongue, Shame, and Fear.

11. Lover tells Fair Welcome that he must have the Rose, but Fair Welcome tells him that will be impossible. Rebuff scares off Fair Welcome.

12. Reason descends from her tower, tells Lover that it was unfortunate he entered the garden and urges him to abandon love. She tells him all about those who guard the Roses and says that love makes men incapable of doing anything else. Lover tells her that Cupid will not release him.

13. Lover now turns to Friend, who gives him advice, especially telling him to befriend Rebuff.

14. Rebuff is somewhat mollified by Lover’s eloquence but still forbids him to cross the hedge and approach the Roses.

15. Cupid then sends Generosity of Spirit and Piety to entreat Rebuff, who permits Fair Welcome to return.

16. Fair Welcome leads Lover to the Rose that he wants to kiss, but Chastity forbids it. Venus now comes to Lover’s aid. Fair Welcome finally accords the gift of a kiss.

17. The kiss having made the affair public, so to speak, Evil Tongue turns Jealousy against Fair Welcome. Fear meanwhile criticizes Rebuff for not being more vigilant.

18. Jealousy then builds walls and moats, guarded by a tower, around the Roses. Rebuff, Shame, Fear, and Evil Tongue guard the four gates and imprison Fair Welcome.

19. Lover despairs because his only hope of attaining his Rose is for Fair Welcome to escape.

20. Guillaume ends here. His story is unfinished: Perhaps he died; perhaps he could not resolve the dilemma he had created; perhaps that very dilemma was his point.

IV. Now Jean de Meun took over the tale, rather seamlessly, as it appears. The same characters are present and some new ones are introduced. Given that his portion of the romance is four times longer that Guillaume’s, we must summarize it more briefly. In some ways, this is easy to do, because Jean organizes his part into a few great scenes marked by long speeches.

A. Lover resigns himself to serving Cupid and taking what comes. Reason hears his lament and comes down from her tower. She delivers a speech of more than 3,000 lines (about the length of Beowulf or Roland).

1. She tells Lover of love’s contradictions and calls it a mental illness.

2. She makes three requests: Love her, spurn Cupid, and attach no value to Fortune. Fulfilling the first request, she says, will free him from the other two.
B. Having listened, Lover says he must serve his master and “not for anything would I exchange the Rose for you.”

C. Reason then matter-of-factly describes the sexual organs and tells Lover that even animals have them. Lover calls her crude, and she returns to her tower.

D. Now Friend appears, tells Lover that Fair Welcome will be released, and offers advice.
   1. Friend advises Lover to be discreet, to flatter the gatekeepers, and to ingratiate himself. Give gifts at every opportunity, but don’t turn largesse into Unrestrained Generosity and wind up poor.
   2. Friend says that being handsome is not enough and Lover needs to cultivate intelligence. He implies that the kind of intelligence that permits one to write poetry is not what is needed. Rather, something more like deviousness is needed.
   3. Friend also says that in olden times, refinements and cleverness were not necessary.
   4. Friend concludes with a tirade against marriage.

E. Now Cupid reappears. He criticizes Lover for listening to Reason, demands Ten Commandments of Love as a “penance,” and assembles his barons for an assault on the castle.

F. The allies approach the castle and speak with Old Woman, who guards Fair Welcome. She offers her own views on love, saying that a woman should never trust one man and that women must seek to regain their freedom. Like Friend, she advises deceit and dissembling. In the end, she grants access to Fair Welcome.

G. Fair Welcome permits Lover to approach the Rose again, but Rebuff intervenes.

H. Meanwhile, the battle continues before the castle, and when Cupid cannot prevail, he calls on Venus. As the battle continues, Nature appears.

I. Nature delivers a remarkable speech saying that art—meaning human skill—cannot match her and that free will and divine providence are not incompatible.
   1. She counsels against dreams and frenzies, but remember that this whole poem is a dream.
   2. She says that nobility is a matter of character, not of birth.
   3. The ancients did not know of Christ and moderns are unworthy of his sacrifice.
   4. Nature also argues that free will has been abused to evade procreative sexuality, a position with which Genius agrees, as had Reason already in Guillaume’s section. The Old Woman, rather like Friend, had argued for love as instinctive and gratifying.

J. Cupid then dresses Genius as a bishop, and he preaches to the barons of love on hell and paradise, relates the ages of man, and describes the current age of iron, or of sin.

K. Aided by Venus, who likewise indulges in dishonesty, the barons take the castle.

L. The castle falls, and Fair Welcome gives Lover access to his Rose, which he embraces.

M. The story appears to end happily.

V. Let us try to capture a sense of the sources, devices, themes, and meanings of this spectacular and enigmatic bi-authored poem.

A. The sources of the poem are easy to identify.
   1. Guillaume knew a few classical authors, some near contemporary philosophers and theologians, and the great 12th-century romances.
   2. Jean had a wide knowledge of classical texts and weaves them artfully into his narration and speeches. He also displays intimate familiarity with contemporary writers of philosophy and theology.
   3. Citing the classics was a way of showing off and of claiming authority.
   4. The text is vivid testimony to the quickening pace of intellectual life.

B. The poets use similar devices.
   1. Because the poem is cast as a dream, the authors can disclaim direct responsibility for it—an old trick.
   2. The multiple voices put every point and seeming argument well beyond the authors themselves. We never really know what they think, and to a large degree, we do not know what they want us to think.
   3. Guillaume writes in the Ovidian tradition of the “art of love” (although Jean’s embrace of deception comes from Ovid, too) and keeps faith with the 12th-century romances, as well as theoreticians of romance, such as Andreas Capellanus.
   4. Jean writes like a scholastic theologian who gives us a Summa of love.
C. The poem’s themes are too many to recount briefly, but a few may be singled out.
   1. Clearly, the poem is about the conventions of courtly love.
   2. The poem works out themes of love as something pure and idyllic and as something sexual and protean.
   3. The poem seems to be saying something about the inherent contradictions between courtly love and Christianity.
   4. The poem is about women in some fundamental way.

D. What does this poem mean? Suffice it to say that there is no consensus.
   1. Guillaume appears to uphold the conventions of courtly love, and Jean appears to subject them to relentless criticism.
   2. What are we to make of the amoral guile and deceit that mark so much of Jean’s section?
   3. Is the poem misogynist? Anti-feminist speeches are put into the mouths of many characters, but many of the poem’s most powerful figures—Reason, Old Woman, Nature, Venus—are women.
   4. The poem severely criticizes marriage yet praises, at least in part, procreative sexuality within a marriage bond. What are we to make of Genius’s sermon on Christ’s sacrifice and human sin? Is the poem really a condemnation of amoral sexuality?
   5. Some believe the poem has a homophobic tinge: Cupid speaks explicitly against homosexuality (only men and women can truly love), and the stress on procreative sexuality may tend in the same direction.
   6. It is not surprising that this was the greatest of medieval romances.

Essential Reading:
Brownlee and Huot, Rethinking the Romance of the Rose.
Fleming, The Roman de la Rose.

Questions to Consider:
1. Discuss the role of allegory in the structure of this story. Do you find it effective? Can you suggest an alternative strategy?
2. Do the two sections of the poem seem at odds with each other? Can you imagine either, or both, as ironic?
Lecture Thirty

Dante Alighieri—Life and Works

Scope: Dante (1265–1321) was the greatest poet of the Middle Ages, one of the greatest of all time. In a lifetime of study, one might begin to understand and appreciate him. We have two lectures! This first lecture has two aims. First, we shall recount the basic chronology of Dante’s life. Second, we shall consider some of Dante’s important works written before or even alongside the Divine Comedy. Specifically, we will discuss La vita nuova (c. 1293), Dante’s composite prose and verse work about his love for Beatrice. This work first displays the kind of virtuosity for which the Comedy is famous. Then, we shall speak of the Convivio and De volgari eloquentia. Finally, we shall talk about De monarchia, Dante’s impassioned defense of the empire and rejection of papal rule. With a basic understanding of Dante’s ideas about poetry, the Italian language, and political legitimacy, we will be prepared to tackle the mighty Comedy.

Outline

I. Dante’s personal life and the times in which he lived were tumultuous. Some sense of each is essential to understanding both his “minor” works and his Comedy.
   A. Perhaps all writing is somehow autobiographical.
   B. Dante is the first author we have encountered in this series about whom we know a lot, and this provides the opportunity and challenge of fitting his work into his life and times.
   C. In considering Dante’s life and works other than the Comedy, we must resist the temptation to force relationships between and among his writings: We should not see everything as leading to the Comedy, nor use the Comedy to explain everything earlier.

II. Dante was born in Florence in 1265 to a family of modest means.
   A. His mother died when he was a young boy and his father died when he was 18.
   B. Dante received a solid Latin education in a grammar school, but ironically, because his family was not rich, his education was not confined to Latin, and he read, early and eagerly, the vernacular poetry of France.
   C. In 1285, Dante married Gemma Donati, with whom he had four children, three sons (John, Peter, and James—named for the three apostles who witnessed Christ’s Transfiguration) and one daughter (Antonia).
   D. In 1273 or 1274, Dante caught sight of the lovely Beatrice—probably the daughter of the prominent Florentine Folco dei Portinari—and fell in love with her. Her death in 1290 evoked major changes (as we shall see) in his thought and writing.
   E. Dante’s family belonged to the Guelf party in Florence, the party that generally favored alliance with the papacy and the independence of Italian cities from the German emperors.
      1. In 1260, the Guelfs suffered a devastating military defeat at Monteperti; thus, Dante was born in a city dominated by the Ghibellines, the party that favored close alliance with the German empire.
      2. Between 1267 and 1289, the Guelfs gradually returned to power, aided by the papacy and France.
      3. Pope Boniface VIII, elected in 1294, angered many of the Guelfs and, most of all, Dante by his resolute efforts to dominate Tuscany.
   F. In 1295, Dante entered public office in Florence, and in 1300, he served a two-month term as one of the seven priors of the city.
      1. In the 1290s, Florentine politics had become more complicated than usual, with the Guelfs dividing into two bitterly opposed groups, the “Blacks” and the “Whites.” The sources make it impossible to identify all adherents or policies. Dante was a White Guelf, and his faction was expelled in 1301–1302, with assistance from troops supplied by Boniface VIII.
      2. In 1301, Dante was sent on a diplomatic mission, and in 1302, he was subjected to a decree of exile.
   G. From 1302 until his death in 1321, Dante was an exile from Florence, living for various periods under the patronage of prominent urban leaders and finally settling in Ravenna.
The decade of the 1290s saw crucial changes in Dante’s life and outlook, beginning with his first major work, *La vita nuova* (“The New Life”), which appeared between 1292 and 1294.

A. The death of Beatrice was a crisis for Dante, whose resolution taught him something new about what poetry is and what it is for.
   1. Previously, Dante had written lyrics and sonnets in fairly conventional ways.
   2. The “New Life” of the title is Dante’s own.
   3. The work puts on display a characteristic that will be in evidence for the rest of Dante’s career: He self-consciously comments on poetry in general and on his poetry in particular.

B. *La vita nuova* consists of poems, some old and some new, arranged by Dante within a frame, or a running prose commentary.
   1. The tradition of commenting at length on a set text was very old and very conventional.
   2. As the poems and commentary evolve through 42 sections, convention gives way to novelty.
   3. The troubadour poetry of France had first taken root in Italy in Palermo in the court of Emperor Frederick II and was conventional in themes and content but innovative in form: Giacomo da Lentini devised the sonnet.
   4. Sicilian poetry was imitated, then superseded by a group of northern poets, chief among whom were Guido Guinizelli (d. 1276), Cino da Pistoia (1270–1336), and Guido Cavalcanti (c. 1250–1300).
   5. The poets wrote in what came to be called *il dolce stil nuovo* (“the sweet new style”—hence, the *stilnovisti*).
   6. Previously, Italian poetry had stuck closely to French conventions and issues. Fundamental was the notion that love of a lady and love of God were somehow incompatible.
   7. The *stilnovisti* “theologized” French poetry by asserting that the lady might lead a man to God.

C. On one level, *La vita nuova* narrates Dante’s love for Beatrice from their initial encounter, to the time she first greeted him, to a wedding feast where he swooned in her presence, to her death, to his attempts to love others, to his dawning understanding—perhaps re-understanding of love.

D. On the most basic level, therefore, *La vita nuova* seeks to answer the question: What is love?
   1. Dante’s predecessors had been obsessed with this question and usually answered it in negative terms: Love is illusory; it brings disorder, confusion, even death; it subjects reason to passion; it focuses too much on the woman, who cannot satisfy what ought to be one’s deepest desires.
   2. Dante’s flash of insight—as he portrays it—is to see Beatrice, and here he played on her name, as bringing blessing and beatitude.
   3. *La vita nuova* becomes a story of the poet’s education.
   4. Beatrice is unlike any other woman who has ever lived; she is a miracle.
   5. Beatrice comes to stand for Christ in some ways: She can lead not only Dante but all men to God; she becomes an instrument of salvation.
   6. The poem is not about his love for Beatrice; in it, Beatrice becomes love.
   7. In formal terms, Dante turns around and reformulates positively the negative judgments of the *stilnovisti* (which has led some to ask if he is really a poet in the “new style”).
   8. The work is daring, even blasphemous, but it never called down condemnation.

E. A few lines from section XIX, the exquisite poem “Le donne ch’aveute intelletto d’amore” (“Women who have insight into [or who have deeply understood] love”), serve to show the force and meaning of the work.

IV. The years between 1304 and 1307—Dante was now an exile—saw two major but unfinished works: The *Convivio* (“The Banquet”) and *De volgari eloquentia* (“On the Eloquence of the Vernacular”).

A. Exile brought a new crisis for Dante: He lacked authority in every way.
   1. He was not rich or aristocratic, held no public office, and was not yet famous.
   2. He was “merely” a poet and at that a vernacular one: He had no standing as a man of (Latin) letters and no formal training in philosophy or theology.
   3. Yet he presumed to have important lessons to teach.

B. Beginning in the 1290s, Dante read (and re-read) widely: Boethius and Cicero, Augustine’s *Confessions*, Virgil’s *Aeneid* and *Eclogues*, scholastic theologians, and (directly or indirectly) Aristotle. He was always a careful reader of the Bible and, as a conventional Christian, heard it regularly in the liturgy.
C. In the *Convivio*, written in Italian, Dante tried to claim authority by demonstrating his deep knowledge of the great tradition—even though he acknowledged that Latin was superior to Italian.

1. The work was to have comprised 15 books, heavily emphasizing a commentary on the virtues as they had been defined by Aristotle.
2. We have only a discursive introduction, two books on how love for a woman is an allegorized love for “Lady Philosophy,” and a truncated discussion of authority and nobility.
3. Dante stressed that exegetes use allegory to find deeper, truer meanings, while poets use allegory to tell “beautiful lies.”
4. Dante tried to establish his own authority as a poet, the authority of Italian, and the authority of poetry.
5. Dante insisted that nobility is moral, not genealogical.

D. *De volgari eloquentia* (in Latin) is the first work in Romance linguistics.

1. There were to have been four books, but only fragments survive.
2. Dante explores the Romance vernaculars that use *si*, *oui*, and *oc*, then 14 Italian dialects to make a moral point about human presumption after the erection of the Tower of Babel.
3. The multiplicity of languages in the world is a consequence of the loss of Eden.
4. Italian has legitimate claims, he argues.

E. Why are the works unfinished?

1. Some suggest that the *Comedy* was underway and began to demand all of Dante’s attention.
2. Others suggest that Dante’s real project was finished: He had claimed authority for himself as a vernacular poet and as a master of the great tradition.
3. In any case, almost everything found in both works turns up in the *Comedy*.

V. Around 1310–1312, Dante wrote his treatise *De monarchia*.

A. In this work, he asked three big questions:

1. Is universal monarchy necessary or desirable?
2. Did the Romans acquire rule justly and exercise it honorably?
3. Does imperial authority derive from God?

B. Dante’s answers to these questions are adumbrated in *Convivio* and *De volgari eloquentia*, appear repeatedly in the *Comedy*, but get their fullest exposition in *De monarchia*.

1. The emperor and empire, for Dante, signify universal moral authority. The emperor is a ruler chosen by God to lead the whole human family. It is his duty to give practical force to the teachings of the philosophers. Above all, the emperor must restrain cupidity.
2. The Romans were like the Jews in that they were a chosen people, but God particularly chose the Romans to rule all mankind justly, and the Roman Empire provided the necessary conditions for the expansion of Christianity.
3. God has placed two authorities on earth: the emperor and the pope. The emperor’s office, although it comes from God, is inferior to that of the pope, who is concerned with people’s salvation. But to do his job correctly, the pope, and the clergy generally, should neither possess nor rule anything. Cupidity for wealth and power is destroying the church, while an unwillingness to assume their responsibilities is destroying the emperors.

C. Dante’s is a work of political theology more than of political theory in the normal sense.

D. Dante never sketched an ideal polity, but in his conversations with his ancestor Cacciaguida in *Paradiso* 15 and 16, we get a sense that he longed for an earlier, simpler time when common decency prevailed.

VI. Whether we see these books as antecedent to the *Comedy*, as aids to interpreting the *Comedy*, or as to be interpreted in light of the *Comedy*, we are ready to tackle that great work.

**Essential Reading:**


———, *De volgari eloquentia*, trans. Haller.
Questions to Consider:
1. Do any aspects of Dante’s life and time seem particularly helpful to you in understanding his writings?
2. How would you assess the significance of the *Vita nuova* in the context of Dante’s *oeuvre* as a whole?
Lecture Thirty-One

Dante Alighieri—The Divine Comedy

Scope: T. S. Eliot once said that Dante and Shakespeare divide the world between them; there is no third. Surely no two authors have occasioned more pleasantness for readers and more work for critics. This lecture will first discuss the formal structure of the Comedy (it was first called the Divine Comedy in 1555): its poetic forms, its sources, its antecedents. Then, through a careful discussion of selected cantos from each major section of the work, that is, from the Inferno, Purgatorio, and Paradiso, we will explore Dante’s moral, spiritual, and political outlooks as he moves from the hideous visage of Satan to the ineffable face of God. One lecture will not provide an opportunity to weigh the views of critics on specific problems in the text, but we will conclude with some of the most famous and overarching interpretations of the Comedy.

Outline

I. On the basis of the background we established in the previous lecture and after a few comments on the formal aspects of the Comedy, we will be ready to summarize and reflect on Dante’s mighty poem.
   A. Dante called his work La Commedia (“The Comedy”) and later readers tagged it Divine partly because of its excellence and partly because of its subject matter.
      1. For Dante, comedy meant a work written in unadorned language that started in sorrow and ended in joy.
      2. He was echoing (and slightly garbling) Aristotle’s argument that a tragedy was a work in elevated language that started happily and ended in horror.
   B. Dante organized his work of more than 14,000 lines into three canticles (Inferno = Hell, Purgatorio = Purgatory, Paradiso = Heaven) made up of 100 cantos (34, 33, 33, respectively) averaging some 140 lines each.
      1. The cantos are organized in three-line units: terzine.
      2. The poem is built up with a rhyme scheme called terza rima: line one end-rhymes with line three; line two with line four; and so forth.
      3. Each canticle has a tripartite organization: Cantos 1–9 are prefatory, the final cantos signify the crowning lesson of the canticle, and the remaining cantos tell the story of that canticle.
   C. The deft arrangement of Comedy, canticle, canto, and terzina provided Dante with tremendous flexibility in structuring his narrative.
   D. Dante’s sources—apart from his prodigious imagination—are numerous but fairly easily listed.
      1. Classical poets Virgil, Statius, Lucan, and Ovid predominate and are the most common literary sources.
      2. The Bible is cited or alluded to more frequently than any other source.
      3. Ancient philosophers provide “raw material” (say, on the shape of the universe) and fundamental ideas.
   E. Dante-poet sends Dante-protagonist on a pilgrimage throughout the physical and spiritual universe.
      1. Dante is accompanied—guided, really—by the Roman poet Virgil, then by Beatrice, and finally by St. Bernard.
      2. Dante’s visit to Hell is in part modeled on Book VI of the Aeneid, in which Aeneas traveled to the underworld.

II. “Midway through life’s journey” (that is, at the age of 35—Dante is alluding to Psalm 90: “seventy is the sum of our years”), Dante was wandering in a dark and terrifying forest when he encountered the Roman poet Virgil.
   A. Virgil agrees to guide Dante out of the dark forest and far beyond, too.
   B. Worried that he is merely brash, Dante asks how he can be worthy: “I am not Aeneas, I am not Paul.”
   C. Virgil tells him that he must be, will become, brave, perseverant, and rational.
   D. We get a first hint that the poet will destroy his former self.
E. Dante and Virgil approach the mouth of Hell, where they read the inscription: “Abandon hope all you who enter here.”
   1. A great irony presents itself: The sinners in Hell—those who died unrepentant—can never leave, but Dante, though a sinner, can amend his ways and escape.
   2. Dante also for the first time sees God as a judge, not only as a miracle-worker and creator. Hence, the Comedy will turn on themes of divine justice.
F. Dante and Virgil first encounter those eternally unnamed persons who refused to take chances, to take stands, during their lives. They were never really alive.
G. Then they encounter the righteous pagans—this is the realm where Virgil spends eternity. These people are just in every way except that they do not know God. Dante’s sense of justice is, therefore, absolute.
H. In Canto 5, the intrepid travelers enter Hell and encounter Paolo and Francesca, perhaps the most famous of the denizens of Hell.
   1. The Dante protagonist at first is sorrowful at Francesca’s fate, but Virgil steadies him.
   2. Francesca’s sin seems small on human terms: Spurred by a French romance, she stole a kiss.
   3. But the larger point here is that she subjected reason to passion and degraded the divine spark in her.
I. The Hell of Dante’s imagination is a pit that descends into the earth in a series of concentric circles. Once Dante and Virgil enter Hell proper, the circles represent various kinds of sins.
   1. In general, the categories of sins are incontinence, violence, and deception.
   2. On a moral scale, Dante encounters those who succumbed to human appetites, then gradually, those who willed evil.
J. Dante’s way of imagining sins is intriguing.
   1. Among the violent, we find tyrants, thugs, and brigands but also heretics, blasphemers, sodomites, and usurers. These were people who somehow aligned themselves with the created order; their private consciences and public conduct were out of step.
   2. Among deceivers, we find seducers, panderers, corrupt popes, corrupt politicians, hypocrites, and thieves. These people have undermined human dignity and simultaneously harmed society.
K. Hell is a place of ironic inversions: Cunning punishments fit each sin and speakers condemn themselves as they explain their predicaments.
L. Once the pilgrims have encountered Satan, the most treacherous of all the betrayers and, thus, of all beings, they are ready to move to a new realm, where there is hope.

III. The mountain of Purgatory is Dante’s most original creation.
A. It is a conical mountain, the very opposite of the concave, downward-pointing Hell.
   1. It lies precisely opposite Jerusalem.
   2. Purgatory consists of ante-Purgatory, Purgatory proper, and Eden—the earthly paradise.
   3. Within Purgatory, there are seven terraces or ledges, each representing one of the deadly sins: pride, envy, wrath, sloth, avarice, gluttony, lust.
B. Purgatory is a place of purgation: People who have hope of seeing God but who have been, for a period, re-subjected to time (hence, astronomical references abound) must lighten the burden of their sins to return to the pristine state of Eden.
   1. Purgatory provides a model of time well spent.
   2. Inhabitants of Purgatory are eager to see the visitors and to have news of the world they have left behind, especially to hear that people are praying for them.
   3. One great theme is reunion: of souls with God, of family members with one another, of states and societies.
   4. Poetry and the arts rise again. In Hell, they were dead as instruments of evil and corruption. Now, they are instruments of regeneration.
C. Those in the ante-Purgatory are the dilatory and negligent who compare with the cowardly in the antechamber of Hell.
D. Those on the terraces sinned mightily in some respect and their situation reminds us of Hell, but we know these sinners will pass on to Heaven.
   1. For example, envy is a sin of the eyes: One fails to see the excellence in others.
2. The envious, therefore, sit indistinguishable from the landscape and have their eyes sewn shut so that, like falcons in training, they can learn to rely on God alone.

E. In Canto 28, Dante prepares to enter Eden.
   1. Virgil tells him that he is now “free, upright, and whole.”
   2. Dante learns that freedom is not license but the ability to do God’s will.
   3. Dante also learns that Virgil has served his purpose and must now return to limbo, while Beatrice takes over.

F. The transition from Virgil to Beatrice signifies the move from time to eternity, from the natural to the supernatural.
   1. But Dante spends some time (five cantos) in Eden—the earthly paradise—learning that this is the true Parnassus, the longed-for place of the ancients.

IV. Paradise is organized on Aristotelian-Ptolemaic terms: seven planetary spheres, the realm of the fixed stars, the primum Mobile, the Empyrean.
   A. Place and distance are less fully articulated in Heaven than in Hell or Purgatory.
   B. Heaven is full of paradoxes: flesh and spirit, the gradually dawning understanding of the incomprehensible, vision growing keener and sight growing dimmer.
   C. People are less distinct and, after the first planetary spheres, virtually invisible.
      1. In the first planetary spheres, those associated with the moon, Mercury, and Venus, we find souls still shadowed by the earth. They were once guilty of inconstancy of will, vainglory, and lust.
      2. Throughout Heaven, Dante encounters souls of saints whom he praises to stress their value as examples, for Dante himself and for all people.
      3. For example, one may compare Piccarda Donati with Francesca: The latter willed passion; the former said, “in His will is our peace.”
   D. On the threshold of the Empyrean, Dante takes leave momentarily of Beatrice, whom he tenderly addresses in the familiar tu form as he thanks her for her role in saving him.
   E. St. Bernard takes over as Dante’s final guide, owing to his love for the Virgin and his theology of mystical union.
      1. Dante gains a blinding flash of insight into the majesty and mystery of God.
      2. The promise that Virgil made to him in the dark wood has been fulfilled.

V. Interpretive possibilities are almost endless with the Comedy. We may suggest just a few.
   A. At the end, Dante saw three great radiances—the Trinity—and one of them had a human face.
      1. Here is the great theme of the Comedy: how to understand the mystery of the Incarnation. How is the divine present in the human?
      2. Closely related, then, is the relation of creator and creation, of God to man, and therefore, of the divine in the human.
   B. We might ask: What is a pagan poet doing guiding Dante to Heaven?
      1. Virgil had acquired the reputation of being a Christian before Christ, and his Fourth Eclogue had commonly been interpreted as foretelling the birth of Christ.
      2. Virgil himself longed for peace, harmony, and unity; had a selfless devotion to moral ideals; had refined moral values; and had a profound sense of the transitoriness of this world.
      3. He was a herald of the Roman Empire, which was, for Dante, essential for his own times and for history.
      4. Virgil loved Italy—the land and its peoples.
      5. Like Dante, Virgil was not Roman born but was devoted to the idea of Rome.
   C. The Comedy is about the making of a prophet, about Dante’s claims to be a prophet, and about a prophet speaking in Italian.
      1. He protests that he is neither Aeneas nor Paul but learns, slowly, that Heaven has a purpose for him.
      Virgil tells him first, then Beatrice, then his ancestor Cacciaguida.
      2. Dante learns to speak as if he were God’s scribe. It is almost as if he were writing scriptures and if his work were to be interpreted as scripture.
   D. The Comedy is about truth, about what is really, finally true.
1. God wishes people to know his truths, the truths of the universe.
2. Hence, for Dante, physical “discoveries” tend to confirm theological ones: God’s truths can be expressed in the language of science and scholasticism.
3. Philosophy is not what one reads or knows; it is what one does.

E. The Comedy is about spiritual and social and political reform.
1. Constantly, one realizes that the work is written for the common good.
2. Everything is exemplary.

F. Finally, the Comedy is about love.
1. Dante permits himself in some ways to return to the “sweet new style” of his youth.
2. Dante permits himself to understand Beatrice in a new way or to give a new articulation to the Beatrice of the Vita nuova.
3. But above all, the Comedy is about God’s love and its profound mysteries. The Paradiso begins, “The glory of him who moves all things” and ends:

   Yet, as I wished, the truth I wished for came,  
   Cleaving my mind in a great flash of light.  
   Here my powers rest from their high fantasy,  
   But already I could feel my being turned—  
   Instinct and intellect balanced equally  
   As in a wheel whose motion nothing jars—  
   By the Love that moves the sun and other stars.

Essential Reading:
The Divine Comedy, trans. Ciardi.
Kirkpatrick, The Divine Comedy.

Questions to Consider:
1. Can you imagine some scenarios in which figures other than Virgil, Beatrice, and Bernard serve as Dante’s guides? How might the Comedy have been different according to your varying imaginings?
2. Is Dante’s outlook medieval or modern? Why do you choose one view or the other?
Lecture Thirty-Two

Petrarch

Scope: Unlike anyone before him, and like only a few after, Petrarch (Francesco Petrarca) dominated the intellectual life of his age. His fascination with, and deeply sympathetic understanding of, classical culture—fundamentally Roman because he did not know Greek—gave shape and focus to the dawning humanist movement. Petrarch is sometimes called the “father” of the Renaissance. Though Florentine by heritage and inclination, Petrarch (1304–1374) spent little time there, living for long periods in southern France and in various Italian cities. He also traveled widely. His travels led him to discover long-lost books and to make a huge range of acquaintances and friendships. Like Dante and Boccaccio, Petrarch wrote in both Latin and Italian. This lecture will quickly survey Petrarch’s voluminous writings, then emphasize the Letters and the Secret Book among the Latin writings and the Canzoniere, the beautiful lyric poems, among the Italian ones. Petrarch was at once secular and religious. A central theme of this lecture will be Petrarch’s attempts to reconcile humanism and Christianity.

Outline

I. Petrarch’s life is, at once, crucial, fascinating, and infuriating.
   A. His experiences help to bring his major works into focus, to see them in relation to personal experiences and to one another.
   B. But Petrarch constantly reworked his own books and constantly manipulated his own biography.
   C. We know a great deal, but paradoxically, we cannot be confident about everything we “know.”

II. Francesco Petracco (or Petrarca, Petrarch to us) was born July 20, 1304, in Arezzo. He came from a family of notaries, and his father, a friend of Dante’s, was exiled in the same purge in 1302.
   A. The family moved to Pisa, then to Carpentras. His father took a job with the papal court but could not find accommodation in the rapidly expanding Avignon.
   B. Petrarch undertook his basic studies in Carpentras, then studied law at Montpellier (1316–1320) and, along with his brother Gherardo, at Bologna (1320–1326).
      1. He studied law to please his father but quit on his father’s death.
      2. While in Bologna, he attended lectures on literature.
   C. Petrarch entered the service of the Colonna family: first, Bishop Giacomo, whom he had met in Bologna, then the powerful Cardinal Giovanni.
      1. This association brought him a modest but steady income (he took minor orders).
      2. More important, he got to travel widely and meet important people.
   D. On April 6, 1324, Petrarch saw Laura in the church of the Poor Clares in Avignon. He noted this fact, and later, her death, in the margins of his own copy of Virgil.
      1. Some have emphasized the platonic nature of their relationship.
      2. Boccaccio wondered if Laura ever existed.
      3. She clearly served as muse, or pretext, or both.
   E. In 1333, Petrarch made a tour through Germany, France, and the Low Countries; in 1336, he visited Rome; in 1337, he sought out Spain and England.
      1. He discovered lost classical works, including two of Cicero’s speeches.
      2. He made wide connections.
      3. Born in exile, Petrarch was comfortable as a citizen of the world.
   F. In 1337, Petrarch settled in Vaucluse, the one place he really seems to have loved.
   G. In 1341, he received the laurel wreath as poet laureate in Rome (he declined to be crowned in Paris).
   H. The late 1330s and 1340s were a time of creativity and challenges for Petrarch.
      1. His illegitimate son and daughter were born.
      2. He began his greatest works—and revised some early ones.
      3. He found additional classical works, especially letters of Cicero.
4. His brother entered the Carthusians.
5. He supported Cola di Rienzo’s radical revolution in Rome and broke with the Colonna.

I. In the 1350s, Petrarch met Boccaccio and served the visconti of Milan.
J. In 1361, he fled the plague in Milan and, in 1362, settled in Venice, where he lived until 1367, when a squabble with local philosophers drove him out.

K. Petrarch spent the last years of his life just outside Padua; he died on the eve of his 70th birthday in 1374.

III. There are rich ironies in Petrarch’s career as a man of letters.
A. The writings that made him famous were in Latin, and these were the writings he esteemed most highly himself.
B. The writings that made him one of the luminaries of Western civilization were in Italian, and he called them nugellae (“trifles”).
C. Moderns have most highly valued Petrarch’s classicism and humanism, but he was a deeply sensitive Christian who constantly struggled to balance the varying claims on his heart and mind.

IV. We may begin with a survey and assessment of Petrarch’s major Latin writings.
A. In 1339, Petrarch began work on his Africa, an epic poem in hexameters intended to have 12 books (like the Aeneid).
   1. Nine books were basically completed but no more.
   2. Petrarch’s aim was to integrate Livy’s History, Cicero’s thought, and Virgil’s poetry.
   3. The poem praises Scipio Africanus, Rome’s victorious general against the Carthaginians.
   4. It is typical that Petrarch chose one exemplary figure as a means to reveal the lessons taught by the Romans. Those lessons were, at base, Ciceronian.
   5. Unlike Dante, who saw Cicero mainly as a philosopher, Petrarch, who knew many more of Cicero’s works, treated him as a statesman and letter-writer of wide connections.
   6. The Africa first cemented Petrarch’s reputation.
B. On Illustrious Men was begun about the same time and reveals the same kinds of historical interests.
   1. Petrarch completed 24 lives of Romans, from Romulus to Julius Caesar, then added biblical and mythical figures.
   2. Once again, he drew moral examples from actual accounts of people’s lives.
C. Books That Must Be Remembered is a philosophical essay structured as a “temple of Wisdom” and aiming to comment on the cardinal virtues.
   1. He completed only the introduction and three books on prudence.
   2. Once again, the work is full of moral examples.
   3. Petrarch also complains about works that have been allowed to disappear or that were neglected.
D. His Guide to the Holy Land is a practical guide for pilgrims but bristles with literary allusions.
E. Petrarch wrote several deeply personal treatises, including The Solitary Life, Religious Leisure, Penitential Psalms, and the Remedies of Good and Ill Fortune.
F. Petrarch’s greatest, most intimate treatise, the Secret Book, was written after a number of crises in his life. Petrarch never published the work, but posterity has esteemed it.
   1. The book purports to be three days of discussions between Petrarch and Augustine.
   2. The dialogues treat the need to prepare for eternal life, an examination of the deadly sins (and the degree to which Petrarch committed them), and the reasons that Petrarch cannot meditate properly on love and death.
   3. Augustine tells him that Petrarch’s love for Laura diverts him from the creator to the creation and that he is too eager for worldly glory.
   4. Petrarch argues that Laura is his inspiration and ideal and that there is a place for worldly glory.
G. Petrarch also wrote several harsh invectives, the most famous of which (On His Own Ignorance and That of Many Other Men) is his attack on Aristotelian philosophers, scholasticism, and dialectical reasoning.
H. Finally, there are Petrarch’s hundreds of letters.
1. He arranged his collections as follows: *Letters on Familiar Matters* (350), concluding with his letters to ancient figures; *Letters of His Later Years* (125); *Various Letters* (57); and *Metrical Letters* (100+), letter-poems in hexameters.

2. Petrarch continually revised his letters—as he did all his works—and used them to create and “manage” his own autobiography.

3. Essentially, the letters reveal three things about Petrarch: his concern with style (and he was a master stylist); his thinking at any given moment (or what he wanted us to think that he was thinking!); and the issues of the day that engaged him.

V. Petrarch thought less—so he said—of his Italian works, but these made his reputation in later times.

A. Petrarch called his *Canzoniere* “trifles,” but he worked on them constantly for more than 30 years and put the collection through at least nine versions.

B. Of the 366 poems, only 37 do not treat Laura in some way.
   1. The collection divides between numbers 263 and 264, marking the death of Laura.
   2. The first section displays confusion, tension, and uncertainty, whereas the second shows Petrarch coming to grips with the fact and message of Laura’s death.

C. Petrarch deliberately set out to create something new: As Mark Musa has put it, “a thematic sourcebook of poetic language.”
   1. For example, number 205—a 14-line sonnet—repeats the word *dolce* (“sweet”) 13 times.
   2. One may also remark the way Petrarch played with words and sounds—drawing on Cicero’s notion that similar etymologies revealed similar meanings:

   | Laura/Lauretta, l’aura/breeze, laurea/laurel wreath, laureto/laurel grove, l’aurio/gold, l’aureo/highly praised, l’aurora/dawn, l’ora/hour (time). |

   3. The range of poetic forms, of explicit allusions, of literary commonplaces is staggering.

D. Some poems, such as number 35, are profound and reveal Petrarch at his most introspective.

E. Among Petrarch’s most admired poems, perhaps the most beautiful of his love poems, is number 126.

VI. Petrarch was a man who stood in the doorway between two worlds.

A. He was religious, devout in his way, but his dedication to the “classics”—he was, indeed, an inventor of the classics—marked him out as different from his predecessors.

B. He himself had a profound sense that his own time was somehow different, but he wished desperately to live among the ancients—except that the love of his two children anchored him to his time.

C. He had a profound sense that the classics contained truths valuable even under the Christian dispensation; perhaps the great tension of his life was not caused by his love for Laura as much as by his efforts to blend the classical and the Christian.

D. He was a humanist by both temperament and scholarship.

E. But in his “Letter to Posterity”—how many have written to posterity?—he said this, and we may give him the last word:

   As a young man I was deluded, as an adult I went astray; but old age corrected me and experience convinced me of the truth of what I had read a long time before—that youth and pleasure are vain; or to be more exact, I was taught that by Him who creates all times and ages, and who allows wretched mortals, swollen with unjustified pride, to go astray from time to time, so that eventually they may recognize their sinfulness and see themselves as they really are.

**Essential Reading:**
Petrarch, *Canzoniere*.
Mann, *Petrarch*. 
Questions to Consider:
1. In what ways is humanism a useful concept in reflecting on Petrarch’s work and achievement?
2. What themes or concerns seem to you to run through the corpus of Petrarch’s writings?
Lecture Thirty-Three
Giovanni Boccaccio

Scope: Born in or near Florence, Boccaccio (1313–1375) was a product of the wide influences of that city, as well as of Naples, where he spent about 15 years. Although admired in his own age and ever since, and despite holding several public offices in Florence, Boccaccio experienced both poverty and personal turmoil. Some earlier critics saw his darkly comedic writings as autobiographical. He earned his reputation with his Italian works but was also a formidable Latin scholar. This lecture will review Boccaccio’s early Italian writings with an eye to observing his progress as a writer. Then, we will consider his Latin works that were based on classical literature. His Latin works will open perspectives on contemporary interests in both the pleasures of classical literature and the rigors of classical scholarship. The lecture will conclude with Boccaccio’s prose masterpiece The Decameron, 100 short stories told by 10 attractive young people who have gone out into the countryside to escape the plague then ravaging Florence.

Outline

I. Giovanni Boccaccio is the third member of the Italian triumvirate who created Italian literature and ushered Europe into the Renaissance.
   A. Like his predecessors Dante and Petrarch, whom he admired, emulated, and criticized, Boccaccio stood with one foot in the Middle Ages and another in the dawning Renaissance.
   B. Like Dante and Petrarch, he also affected to disdain his Italian writings but became famous through them.
   C. Boccaccio was born in 1313, probably in Certaldo but possibly in Florence, the illegitimate son of a prosperous banker (the story that he was born in Paris is charming but false). His earliest years were spent in Florence.
      1. In 1327, he joined his father, who was then working for the Bardi bank, in Naples, where he stayed until 1341.
      2. His father had him trained first in banking, then in law, but Boccaccio dismissed both in favor of the study of literature.
      3. In Naples, he had access to elementary schooling and to the illustrious court of King Robert.
      4. The Neapolitan courts offered access to French literature, to Byzantine culture, and as a great seaport, to the wider cultures of the Mediterranean world.
      5. Boccaccio began his literary career in Naples and always remembered the Neapolitan years as the happiest of his life.
      6. He returned to Florence in 1341 but found the city unbearable.
      7. In 1345, his father went broke owing to the fall of the Bardi bank (King Edward III of England reneged on his debts and brought down the Bardi and Peruzzi).
      8. For the rest of his life, Boccaccio was in straightened financial circumstances as he sought, unsuccessfully, for a patron.
      9. He undertook a few minor diplomatic tasks for Florence, including, touchingly, a mission to Dante’s daughter Beatrice in 1350 with 10 florins voted by the government.
     10. In about 1360, he entered Holy Orders, possibly becoming a priest (he bequeathed priestly vestments in his will).
     11. He died, famous but poor and confused, in 1375.
   D. Scholars have long noticed a kind of insecurity in Boccaccio. Why?
      1. He was illegitimate.
      2. He lived in dramatically challenging and changing times.
      3. New classes of readers had to be cultivated.
      4. He was unsure of his fame.

II. Although Boccaccio wrote Italian works throughout his life, the early ones, from the Neapolitan period, laid down some themes and tendencies that marked all of his work. Let us consider a few of them.
   A. In Diana’s Hunt, Boccaccio took up a challenge of Dante in the Vita nuova to name the 60 most beautiful women of Florence.
1. The women gather in a valley, bathe in a river, and go hunting.
2. Diana urges them to sacrifice their catch to her and remain chaste.
3. The women protest and appeal to Venus, who appears and wins the women to herself. She changes the animals into handsome men and love ensues—captured in *dolce stil nuovo*.

**B.** The *Teseida* responded to Dante’s challenge (in *On the Eloquence of the Vernacular*) that no one had written a martial epic in Italian.
1. The work treats the deeds of Theseus.
2. It is written in 12 books, with the same number of lines as the *Aeneid*.
3. It is based on ancient tales, French models, and sheer invention.
4. Chaucer’s knight told this tale.

**C.** *Filostrato* (“struck down by love”) is an unhappy tale of Troy.
1. Troiolo falls in love with Creseida, the captive daughter of the soothsayer Calchas.
2. In an exchange of prisoners, Calchas asks for his daughter back.
3. Creseida then falls in love with Diomede, and when Troiolo learns this, he plans his revenge on Diomede.
4. Achilles kills Troiolo, and the story ends with a moralizing sermon on the fickleness of love and lovers.
5. Chaucer told this tale in his *Troilus and Cresside*.

**D.** On returning to Florence, Boccaccio wrote *Fiammetta*.
1. Lady Fiammetta (“Little Flame” = hot stuff) has a dull but decent husband and a captivating lover.
2. Her lover proves fickle, and Fiammetta is disappointed.
3. *Fiammetta* marks the first time since Ovid that a sad love story is told from the woman’s point of view; many call this the first psychological novel.

**III.** Boccaccio wrote Latin works throughout his life but produced his incontestably greatest ones in his last years.

**A.** *The Genealogy of the Pagan Gods* was begun circa 1355, completed circa 1360, and touched up until 1373.
1. On one level, this was a handbook for readers of classical texts.
2. On another level, the book “explained” the pagan gods: personifications of astrological themes, agents (demons and angels) of the true God, heroes and rulers wrongly turned into gods.
3. The *Genealogy* was written in 15 long books and translated into almost every European language.

**B.** *On Mountains, Springs, Lakes, Forests, Rivers, Marshes and Swamps and the Names of the Seas* is a work of vast erudition and, again, a companion to classical texts.

**C.** These works—and others—reveal Boccaccio the humanist and scholar.

**D.** As a humanist, it is important to note that Boccaccio was the first to know Greek, to secure translations of Greek works (notably, the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*), and to quote Greek works directly in his writings.

**IV.** Still, Boccaccio’s reputation stands on the *Decameron*, a work that, for all practical purposes, invented Italian prose.

**A.** *Decameron* is Boccaccio’s coinage for *dea haemeron*, “10 days.”

**B.** The work’s title is an allusion to St. Ambrose’s *Hexameron*, a book on the six (*hex*) days of creation: Boccaccio’s stories trace a new creation.

**C.** The work is joyously eclectic in content and style.

**D.** Dante’s “mid-life crisis” produced the *Comedy*, but Boccaccio’s—he was 35 when the plague struck Florence—produced the *Decameron*.

**E.** The book consists of a *Proem*, an “Introduction,” 100 *novelle*, and an author’s conclusion.
1. The frame is brilliantly constructed: Seven young ladies and three young men meet in the church of Santa Maria Novella and agree to go into the countryside to escape the plague.
2. Boccaccio’s own introduction and the comments of the characters make it clear that all normal, civilized life has broken down.
3. The young people attend to their duties, depart for the country, settle in to a comfortable life in an exquisite villa, carefully arrange all their affairs, dine, sing, dance, and tell stories. Each of them tells
one story on each of 10 days, but they are away for two weeks. Fridays and Saturdays are reserved for fasting and bathing.

F. Themes of love predominate but always with twists and turns and occasionally with ribaldry that borders on, or crosses over to, the obscene.

G. The Decameron is about its stories, but it is also about storytelling and about the place of literature in the well-ordered life.
   1. In his Proem, in the “Introduction” to the Fourth Day, and in his “Conclusion,” Boccaccio comments at some length on storytelling.
   2. He insists that no one should think badly of his ribald tales because “To the corrupt nothing is pure… the virtuous cannot be corrupted by a touch of wantonness.”
   3. “Nothing,” he says, “is too unseemly for utterance in polite society if it is delivered in polite language.”
   4. If the stories are sometimes off-color, it is because their material demands it.
   5. He gives, then, a spirited defense of literature. And remember: The young people saved themselves in part by telling stories.

V. Speaking of stories, let us tell a few—chosen from among the 100—to illustrate Boccaccio’s art and design.

A. The very first day provides two wonderful entrées (the company agreed that it would have no set theme).
   1. Cepperello (called Ciappelletto) of Prato was a thoroughly dishonest, immoral man sent to Burgundy to collect some debts owed to usurers because only he was slick enough to accomplish the task. He fell mortally ill and made a hilariously dishonest confession to a holy friar, who preached such a moving sermon about him that the local people came to venerate him as a saint.
   2. The great merchant and good man Giannotto had a rich Jewish friend, Abraham. He constantly worried that his friend would lose his soul and urged him to convert. Finally, Abraham decided to go to Rome, which disturbed Giannotto greatly. Abraham went to Rome, judged it a moral cesspool, and converted to Christianity because he felt that if the church flourished despite Rome, then God must favor the Christians.

B. The stories of the second day are about fate and its sudden reversals. As an example, we may take Andreuccio of Perugia, who went to Naples with 500 florins to buy horses. He got mixed up with a prostitute who robbed him after he fell into a latrine. Covered with feces, he fell in with two robbers who planned to strip the grave of the recently deceased archbishop. Eventually, he tricked his companions, who had tried to trick him, and he went home with a ruby ring worth more than his lost 500 florins.

C. The stories of the fourth and fifth days are about love, sometimes as a destructive force, or a challenge, or an opportunity. As an example, we may tell the story of Tancredi, the prince of Salerno, and his daughter, Ghismunda. Tancredi and his daughter loved each other tenderly; she married reluctantly, then was soon widowed. She returned to her father’s house and, at his court, observed many men, none of whom pleased her, except for a handsome, debonair servant, Guiscardo. They fell in love, Tancredi discovered the affair, Guiscardo was killed, and his heart was sent to Ghismunda. She delivered a remarkable speech on the power of love, then poisoned herself.

D. The stories of the sixth day are often about language or storytelling. The first story of this day has the noble lady Oretta going out to the countryside. A noble man offers to give her a ride on his horse and to entertain her with a story, but he botches it wretchedly and she finally asks him to put her down, claiming that the horse’s trot makes her uncomfortable. The man realizes his gaffe.

E. The stores of the seventh and eighth days are about love again but focus on the tricks adulterous women play on their husbands. The second story of day seven is about beautiful young Peronella, who has an old but dutiful husband. Predictably, she takes a lover, Gianello. One day, her husband returns home unexpectedly and, finding the door locked from the inside, is joyous about his virtuous wife. She, meanwhile, is with her lover, whom she hides in a barrel. The husband tells her that he has sold the barrel for five silver coins to the man who has accompanied him. Peronella scolds her husband for not being able to get more for the barrel, because she has sold it for seven coins to the man who is just now inside it inspecting it. Gianello actually gets the husband to clean the barrel for him.

F. The stories of the tenth day generally deal with liberality, generosity, or the restoration of some of the qualities that the plague has destroyed. The tenth story, of patient Griselda, is among the most famous
because of Chaucer’s retelling of the tale. Gualtieri, the prince of Saluzzo, had grown rather old, and his companions urged him to take a wife. He chose Griselda, the beautiful daughter of a shepherd. Wishing to prove her loyalty, he subjected her to terrible tests, including the murder of her children and, finally, dismissal from his house. Later, assured of her patience and loyalty, he revealed all to her, and they lived happily ever after.

VI. What, then, may we make of Boccaccio and his marvelous Decameron?

A. Was he a medieval or a Renaissance man?
   1. If we take him as medieval, we might point to his criticism of the corruption and worldliness of the church (Dante was no less fierce); to the medieval sources of so many of his stories, despite his humanism; to his frequent adherence to the conventions of courtly love and to the poetry of the stilnovisti; and to the frequent use of allegory in his writings.
   2. If we take him as a Renaissance man, we might point to his severe criticism of superstition and the cults of saints and relics; to his tendency to elevate reason and experience over faith; to his sense that love’s proper end is consummation; to his flesh and blood female characters; and to his humanism.

B. Does his work have grand themes?
   1. If we point to reason and experience and a practical sense of human nature, we might say, “yes.”
   2. But if we note that Boccaccio was really best on the small scale, the episodic—what one critic called the “cellular”—we might answer, “no.”

C. Was Boccaccio a social critic or reformer?
   1. Many have wished to see him this way, probably wrongly.
   2. Boccaccio uses cutting irony to uphold order, tradition, and convention, even as he appears to be undermining them.
   3. His women are memorable characters, but he never really challenges dominant male attitudes and stereotypes.

D. Did his humanism make him a sceptic, make him “modern”?
   1. Like Petrarch, Boccaccio thought that the classics held many valuable truths, but he was perfectly happy seeking truths in stories anywhere.
   2. He did not deal with religious themes often or directly, and one should not mistake his criticism of the clergy for criticisms of religion.
   3. He was, in the end, an artist who upheld the value and integrity of art.

Essential Reading:
Wallace, Giovanni Boccaccio: Decameron.
Bergin, Boccaccio.

Questions to Consider:
1. How would you compare and contrast the interests and achievements of Dante, Petrarch, and Boccaccio?
2. Are you persuaded by Boccaccio’s defense of the ribald nature of the Decameron?
Lecture Thirty-Four

Sir Gawain and the Green Knight

Scope: This anonymous poem of 2,530 lines survives in one manuscript containing three other Middle English poems, all of them perhaps by the same author. Written around 1375, Gawain is the finest of the English romances in the Arthurian mode and one of the last—the Gawain poet’s contemporary, Chaucer, was moving on to new themes. The basic story is simple, but its narrative structure is extremely complex. A hideous Green Knight appears at Arthur’s Camelot at Christmas and offers to let anyone cut off his head who will, one year hence, accept the same fate. Gawain alone accepts the challenge. The poem is full of number and color symbolism. Unusually in a romance, most of the action takes place in spring (instead of winter). The poet makes his readers ask whether Gawain is honorable or not. His “confession” and “redemption” suggest powerful Christian themes. That Arthur’s court celebrated Gawain’s trickery may be an ironic touch.

Outline

I. We have hardly left love behind us, but we did depart from romance proper a few lectures back. Now we return to romance, in the Arthurian mode, with Gawain and the Green Knight.

A. Two kinds of background will be helpful in approaching the poem. First, we will cover a few technical details.

1. The anonymous poem was composed in a somewhat archaic West Midlands dialect, perhaps around 1375.

2. The poem survives in a single manuscript that contains three other poems: Pearl, Cleanness, and Patience. It is usually assumed that all four poems are by the same author—who is usually called “the Pearl poet.”

3. The poem, of 2,530 lines (compare Beowulf at 3,182 or Roland at 4,002), is in alliterative verse, a form not seen since the eclipse of Old English literature. The vernaculars of the 12th and 13th centuries had tended to prefer elaborate rhyme schemes.

Illustration: The king lay at Camelot at Christmas time… With feasting and fellowship and carefree mirth…

4. Scholars have long spoken of an alliterative revival in the 14th century.

B. The second important piece of background pertains to Arthurian material and to Gawain’s place in it.

1. Even in early Celtic renditions, Gawain appears as Arthur’s nephew and as the great king’s support and protector.

2. From sculptures at Modena in Italy to scattered references in 12th-century Latin writings, Arthur and Gawain were widely known.

3. Not until Geoffrey of Monmouth (History of the Kings of Britain, 1139/1147) did anyone treat the “matter of Britain” seriously in a Latin work.

4. There was also an outpouring of Gawain stories, in French and German romances and in many different English versions.

5. Gawain’s unprecedented popularity may help to explain the reception of Gawain and the Green Knight, the finest of the tales.

6. Telling, too, is the conventional portrayal of Gawain: young, brave, loyal, courteous. He is the paragon of knightly qualities and virtues—more so than any other knight of the Round Table. As we will see now, our story tinkers with these conventions.

II. Gawain and the Green Knight is both a straightforward adventure/mystery tale and a dense forest of symbols. We’ll first tell the tale, then explore some of those symbols and their possible meanings.

A. Arthur and his knights have gathered for Christmas merriment; the scene is lush and joyous.

1. Arthur, however, insists that he will not eat until someone has told a tale of adventure.

2. Almost on cue, a huge, terrifying green warrior comes through the door.
3. Arthur courteously invites the stranger to join in the celebration, but the Green Knight declines, saying that he has come because he has heard of the court and wishes to challenge the men to a Christmas game.

4. The game involves trading blow for blow—one now, one a year hence—and the Green Knight offers his own battle-axe to whomever wishes to accept the challenge.

5. Gawain insists that he be allowed to accept the challenge.

6. The Green Knight offers his neck, and Gawain strikes a blow and severs his head. But to everyone’s astonishment, the knight picks up his head, reminds Gawain that he should appear to receive his blow at the Green Chapel on New Year’s Day a year later, mounts his horse, and rides away.

B. The story fast-forwards to the next All Saints’ Day (November 1), when Gawain must depart.

1. Gawain traverses a cold and mysterious landscape, but the author provides little detail.

2. Gawain appears before a grand castle just before Christmas, where he is welcomed hospitably and treated to every consideration.

3. The lord of the castle proposes that someone devise a Christmas game. Gawain meanwhile says that he is honor-bound to continue on to the Green Chapel.

4. The lord of the castle says that this will be no problem at all, then proposes that for the next three days, he and Gawain exchange whatever they “catch.”

C. The lord of the castle leaves to go hunting, and Gawain becomes the object of the lady’s amorous advances.

1. Gawain refuses to bed the lady but does kiss her.

2. On each day, therefore, the lord hands over the gains of his hunt and Gawain kisses the lord.

3. On the third day, the lady gives Gawain a green sash that will, allegedly, protect him from any evil or misfortune.

D. Gawain then takes his leave to go to the Green Chapel.

1. On arriving, Gawain is welcomed by the Green Knight, who praises him for coming as agreed.

2. Gawain twice readies for his blow but flinches. Then he sets himself a third time and tells the Knight to get on with it.

3. The Knight barely grazes him, then reveals that all has been an elaborate game of his own devising: He knows about the kisses and the green sash.

4. He also reveals himself to be Bercilak de Hautdesert, the lord of the castle.

5. Gawain confesses his error, deception, and lack of courage. The Knight tells him that he has dropped not at all in esteem.

E. Gawain returns to Camelot and tells his tale, and Arthur demands that all the knights don green sashes in solidarity with Gawain.

III. In trying to interpret Gawain, one can go more and more deeply into the story.

A. On a fairly simple level, the poet plays with knightly and chivalric conventions.

1. Gawain jumps at the chance to show off before the court by striking the first blow, believing that there will never be a second.

2. Yet he bravely honors his “covenant” to return and accept his blow.

3. Gawain hands over his kisses, but not his sash.

4. Gawain is doubtless brave, but he flinches twice.

5. Gawain does not consummate his “relationship” with Bercilak’s wife.

6. Arthur is portrayed as young and slightly frivolous.

7. Arraying the knights of the Round Table in green sashes turns a symbol of deception into a badge of honor.

B. On another level, the poem’s rich descriptions are laden with symbolic meanings.

1. Some depictions of courtly life, banquets, and so on are conventional and show an awareness of the “tricks of the trade.”

2. The remarkably detailed accounts of the clothing and armor of the Green Knight and of Gawain himself may owe something to classical models but then take on powerful medieval symbolic ranges.

3. Greens and golds, for example, suggest vegetation, life, renewal, the sun, light, and warmth.
4. The five-pointed star on Gawain’s shield—the pentangle—suggests, at the least: the five senses, the five fingers of the warrior’s hand, the five wounds of Christ, the five joys of Mary (Annunciation, Nativity, Resurrection, Ascension, Assumption), and the five knightly virtues (generosity, brotherly love, purity of mind, courtesy, and compassion).

5. Number symbolism abounds. Consider just three: three days, three hunts, three kisses, three blows in the Green Chapel.

C. There are deep religious themes in the poem.
   1. Bercilak and Gawain constantly refer to their “covenant.” Thus, Gawain must mindlessly honor his “bargain” and seek the Green Chapel.
   2. Then, in the Green Chapel, Gawain “confesses” to Bercilak, receives absolution, and agrees to wear the sash as his penance.
   3. It is as if the mechanically applied Old Testament regime of automatic justice has been replaced by the New Testament regime of forgiveness and redemption.

D. As a last look into the poem, we may consider the games and tests.
   1. Are these meant to turn the whole story into “play”? Are we to take it seriously? Did the author?
   2. Games are normal human entertainments, but here, they seem to take an ominous turn.
   3. Tests reveal character, but we may ask if Gawain passed his test or if, indeed, the test revealed flaws in his character.

Essential Reading:

Gawain and the Green Knight, trans. Harrison.

Questions to Consider:

1. How would you compare Gawain and Tristan as romances? Considering these two works and The Romance of the Rose, how would you define the genre of romance?

2. Compare Gawain to other heroic figures you have met in the literature of the Middle Ages. Is he honorable? Admirable?
Lecture Thirty-Five
Geoffrey Chaucer—Life and Works

Scope: A prolific writer, accomplished poet, and consummate storyteller, Chaucer (c. 1343–1400) seems more familiar than the other authors and books included in this part of the lecture series. Best known for the *Canterbury Tales* (to which we turn in the next lecture), Chaucer lived an eventful life and wrote numerous significant and memorable works. He hailed from the upper middle class, received a good education, entered an aristocratic household, eventually joined the royal court, served his kings as soldier and diplomat, and held several minor governmental posts. Many scholars have wondered how he found time to write so much, but he also read a great deal. He knew all the best French literature and much of the best that was then coming from Italy. As a young man, he wrote some minor poems and began a translation of *The Romance of the Rose*. Between about 1360 and 1390, he wrote several important works, among them a series of dream poems, a translation of Boethius’s *Consolation of Philosophy*, and the exquisite *Troilus and Criseyde*. This lecture will set Chaucer’s life into context, discuss the many influences that worked on him, and analyze *The Book of the Duchess*, *The Parliament of Fowls*, and *Troilus and Criseyde*.

Outline

I. Context is important to understanding the work of any author and is particularly significant in coming to grips with Chaucer. Accordingly, we shall look, in turn, at his life, the literary influences that demonstrably affected him, and some aspects of the England in which he lived.

A. We know pretty certainly that Geoffrey Chaucer died in London on October 25, 1400. Scholarly detective work suggests that he was born in about 1343.
   1. Chaucer’s father, John, was a wine merchant who held minor administrative posts in London.
   2. Chaucer’s mother, Agnes, came from a solid family of landowners.
   3. The Black Death of 1349 brought both John and Agnes substantial inheritances of family properties. Chaucer grew up in London in comfortable surroundings.
   4. Nothing is known certainly about Chaucer’s education, but his boyhood was spent in an environment of merchants and commerce. Passing acquaintances may have begun his familiarity with stories and foreign languages.
   5. In 1357, Chaucer was a page in the house of Elizabeth, the countess of Ulster whose husband, Lionel, was a son of King Edward III. His time at court may have permitted him to polish his education, observe the life and mores of the highest nobility, gain insights into politics, and hear or read courtly literature.
   6. Between the 1360s and the eve of his death, Chaucer held a variety of responsible and onerous official positions and traveled frequently abroad doing both official and private business for kings and great aristocrats.
   7. In 1366, Chaucer married Philippa de Roet, who had served in the queen’s chamber. They had two sons, Thomas and Lewis, both of whom went on to fine careers after their father’s death.

B. It is difficult to pin down the exact ways in which Chaucer came by his familiarity with broad literary conventions and specific works.
   1. For example, by 1387, he had completed work on a translation of Boethius’s *Consolation of Philosophy*. Given that this was a well-known and influential work, Chaucer’s interest in it is not difficult to understand. But where had he acquired his command of Latin, and how had he gained his familiarity with other Latin works?
   2. Of all works, the one that perhaps influenced Chaucer most was *The Romance of the Rose*; indeed, he translated it into English (only a fraction survives). Chaucer knew other French works and authors, but we should look less to specific textual influences than to the sheer dominance of French intellectual culture; Chaucer would have been as at home in French as he was in English.
   3. The works of the “Italian triumvirate” were, by Chaucer’s lifetime, beginning to gain Europe-wide fame, sometimes in Italian and sometimes in Latin or Italian, and sometimes in translations and selections. Chaucer seems to have learned Italian as a young man, and as his authorial career
advanced, he gave more and more direct evidence of familiarity with Italian works, certainly those of Petrarch and Boccaccio.

C. The times through which Chaucer lived were particularly fraught, and his keen powers of observation must have been exercised by all he saw and experienced.

1. England and France went to war in 1346—the Hundred Years’ War—and Chaucer himself was captured and ransomed early in the war and later served in key diplomatic roles.
2. The papacy spent the period from 1305-1378 in France (1309 to 1377 in Avignon), and the 14th century was a time of crisis and criticism for the church.
3. An intense movement of religious revival associated with the Lollards may have left its imprint on Chaucer.
4. England saw the execution of King Edward II in 1327, the accession of 10-year-old Richard II in 1377, and Richard’s constant troubles and eventual deposition in 1399.
5. Europe was ravaged by the Black Death in 1348–1349.
6. Social unrest, often provoked by tax policies, led to rebellions in France and Florence in 1378 and to the English Peasants’ Rebellion of 1381.

D. Chaucer was versatile and original, and one should not look for direct correlations between these “influences” and specific works, but it is helpful to keep them in mind.

1. Chaucer covered his own tracks very well. For instance, there are, perhaps, only one or two references to the Peasants’ War in all of Chaucer’s work.
2. Chaucer mocked and pilloried certain religious figures but told deeply moving and, one might say, pious tales, too. He had a personal devotion to the Virgin Mary and ended more than one of his works with advice to repent.
3. Chaucer used irony and satire, sometimes almost savagely, as tools of social commentary, but it is hard to call him a social critic, because he dished out criticism widely and never sketched some kind of alternative view of society.
4. A 16th-century writer called him “every woman’s friend,” but modern critics, including feminists, have not been able to agree whether he was a misogynist, a proto-feminist, or simply a man of his time—whatever that might imply.

II. Although Chaucer’s fame as a writer grew apace over the course of his life, his first really significant works are the “dream poems” that he composed between 1371 and 1394.

A. Of these, one, The Legend of Good Women, survives only in its prologue. Time constraints force us to omit another, The House of Fame. The two we shall discuss are perhaps the finest.

B. There was nothing unusual about using a dream as a framing device of a story by Chaucer’s time, but we should not dismiss Chaucer as derivative for using dreams because he was quite clever in doing so.

C. The Book of the Duchess is almost certainly a work written to commemorate Blanche, the wife of John of Gaunt, who died young in 1368/9. John was another son of Edward III and a patron to Chaucer in the 1360s.

1. The poem runs to just over 1,300 lines and is divided into three parts.
2. The first section introduces the narrator, who tells the story (from Ovid) of Ceyx and Alcyone. Ceyx has died at sea, but Alcyone knows only that he has failed to return. She prays for knowledge, and Ceyx appears at her bed in a dream to tell her that he is dead and that she should get on with her life. In Chaucer’s telling, Alcyone awakes and dies three days later. In Ovid’s version, the lovers are turned into sea birds and reunited.
3. In part two, the narrator, who had been reading the story in order to fall asleep, slumbers and has a dream.
4. The narrator awakens, as it were, from his dream, joins a hunt, and then follows a puppy to a knight dressed in black who is sitting under a tree and reciting a mournful lament.
5. The dreamer asks the knight why is lamenting so and learns that he has lost his lady-love, “White.”
6. The knight goes on at some length, the narrator remarks that such lamentation is unnatural, and the dreamer is awakened by the sound of the hunt, which he rejoins.
7. On one level, the story is about grief and about how excessive grief will turn into debilitating despair.
8. Chaucer uses the narrator here more effectively than ever before. But how do we understand this narrator? Is it Chaucer, or John of Gaunt, or us?
9. This most courtly of poems is not happy and has no happy ending. Is Chaucer tinkering with the conventions of courtly love or speaking of how “real” human beings respond to tragedy?
10. The moral for John—and for all—is that he must remember and let go. Thus, the story is also an elegant reflection on memory.

D. *The Parliament of Fowls* is different in tone and texture than *Duchess*.
1. The poem may have been written in connection with Richard II’s marriage negotiations between 1377 and 1382.
2. *Parliament* is Chaucer’s most experimental work to date in terms of language.
3. Dreams work in various ways here: The narrator reads Macrobius’s account of Cicero’s rendition of the *Dream of Scipio*, only to discover that he has not learned what he desired. He falls asleep and dreams. In his dream, Scipio pushes him through a gate into a kind of love garden.
4. Nature presides in this garden and arrayed before her are all the birds arranged hierarchically according to their diet, from meat to seed-eaters. Clearly, this is meant to mimic human society.
5. The female eagle is about to choose a mate, and none of the other birds can get on with their own mating until “Formel Eagle” chooses her mate.
6. Formel Eagle has three suitors, Royal Eagle and two others who go on and on—comically?—in pressing their claims.
7. Eventually, Nature invites all the birds to adjudicate the matter. Predictably, they argue among themselves and begin to debate the relative merits of fidelity.
8. Nature then tells Formel Eagle to choose for herself of her own free will, and she elects to defer her decision for a year. The other birds now pair off and, in their happiness, begin to sing. Their singing awakens the dreamer, who returns to his books.
9. The social commentary here is both obvious and obscure: Do nobles bother ordinary people or not? Is noble behavior elegant or ridiculous?
10. Does the poem uphold or mock the conventions of courtly love?

III. *Troilus and Criseyde* (1381/86) is Chaucer’s longest single poem and the only large-scale work he ever completed. Many critics regard it as Chaucer’s finest work. Chaucer himself seems to have regarded the poem highly, because near its end, he places himself in the company of Homer, Virgil, Ovid, Lucan, and Statius.

A. The poem is, in simplest terms, a translation of Boccaccio’s *Filostrato*. But it was written at the same time as the translation of *The Consolation of Philosophy* and reflects a wider array of concerns than its predecessors.
B. We have already encountered the basic lineaments of this story in discussing Boccaccio’s *Filostrato*.
C. It should be noted that Chaucer adds greater depth and interest to the characters and makes Criseyde a more powerful and ambiguous figure.

D. The range of critical issues presented by *Troilus and Criseyde* is wide and complex.
1. More than in any previous work, the role of the narrator has led to much disagreement.
2. Troilus is warrior, then lover, then warrior again. He is brother to Paris and Hector. How, thus, do we evaluate the “courtly” hero?
3. Is love a selfish and irresponsible impulse?
4. Is Criseyde a credible character or a type figure? Is she cleverly self-interested, cynical, mercenary, fickle, a victim of circumstances?
5. Do we sense here any hint of Petrarchan humanism—the idea that there are valuable moral lessons to be learned from classical tales?

IV. Certainly, we should now have a sense of Chaucer as a rich and complex author, as we turn to his most famous work, *The Canterbury Tales*.

**Essential Reading:**
Howard, *Chaucer*.
Questions to Consider:
1. Bearing in mind Chaucer’s evident debts to his predecessors, how would you assess his originality?
2. Do you detect themes, concerns, and interests that run through Chaucer’s early writings?
Lecture Thirty-Six

Geoffrey Chaucer—The Canterbury Tales

Scope: Thirty remarkable characters gathered in the Tabard Inn in London to begin a pilgrimage to the shrine of St. Thomas Becket at Canterbury. The host of the inn proposes that the pilgrims each tell two stories on the way down to Canterbury and two on the way back. Thus, The Canterbury Tales would have numbered 120. Only 23 tales survive (2 of them incomplete), but what tales they are! We meet almost every kind and class of person, both male and female, young and old, rich and poor, cleric and lay. We encounter ancient tales retold and fresh ones. Satire and parody are Chaucer’s commonest modes, but not his only ones. The individual stories are self-contained, but the dramatic interplay between the narrators and Chaucer himself adds a pleasing element of play. To form a sense of Chaucer’s art, this lecture will consider the “General Prologue,” then a few of the tales of different kinds. We shall explore critical issues ranging from literary forms and devices, to sources, to Chaucer’s responses to the momentous religious and political strife of his age.

Outline

I. The Canterbury Tales is an astonishing work that provokes tears and guffaws, provides simple entertainment and deep reflection.

A. Like Boccaccio, Chaucer puts a collection of stories within a frame.
   1. Twenty-nine pilgrims and a narrator (Chaucer himself) gather in Harry Baily’s Tabard Inn in Southwark before setting out for the shrine of Thomas Becket in Canterbury.
   2. Harry proposes that the pilgrims entertain themselves on the journey by telling tales, two each on the way down and back. He gets them all to agree to provide a free dinner at the Tabard to the one who tells the best story.

B. In fact, we do not have 120 tales but 23, and 2 of these are incomplete.
   1. The tales were assembled between 1387 and 1400, but we do not have Chaucer’s autograph manuscript.
   2. There are 84 manuscripts containing some portion of the Tales and 55 reasonably complete manuscripts.
   3. The complete manuscripts present the Tales in 10 blocks called Fragments by scholars. It appears that Fragment I (General Prologue, Knight’s, Miller’s, Reeve’s, and Cook’s Tales) was indeed meant by Chaucer to go first. After that, the order is a matter of scholarly detective work.

C. Chaucer clearly worked on the Tales for a long time, and the surviving material shows signs of incomplete editing.
   1. The Second Nun is mentioned but not described in the Prologue and is given a tale to tell. The Canon’s Yeoman is not mentioned at all in the Prologue but gets a tale.
   2. The Shipman’s Tale was originally intended for the Wife of Bath.
   3. The Cook’s and Squire’s Tales were never finished.
   4. The story of St. Cecilia (assigned to the Second Nun) was “recycled.”
   5. The Manciple’s and Physician’s Tales have no connections at all to their tellers (although critics make less of this today than they once did).
   6. Chaucer gives no hint why a monk is traveling or why the loathsome Pardoner and Manciple are going on pilgrimage.

D. For a long time, the dramatic theory seemed to provide a unified explanation of the Tales by using each tale to “explain” in dramatic terms the character of the tale’s teller.
   1. It is better to see the Tales as a series of artful literary experiments and not to look for a single, overarching critical perspective.
   2. For purposes of discussion, we may categorize the Tales as romances, comedies (among them, fabliaux), pathetic stories, and examples or fables.
II. Five of the pilgrims tell romances: the Knight, the Squire, the Wife of Bath—who tells the only Arthurian story—the Franklin, and the narrator.

A. The Knight begins by retelling Boccaccio’s *Teseida*.
   1. The basic elements of the story are familiar, but Chaucer makes Emily’s wooers—Arcite and Palamon—much more explicitly types of the warrior and lover. Recall that Chaucer had developed this same theme in *Troilus*.
   2. The tale also contains an extended reflection on fortune, destiny, and providence, which are all finally reduced to providence.
   3. Thus, courtly values are set off against philosophical ones without Chaucer’s choosing explicitly between them.
   4. Perhaps, too, this tale subtly encodes a defense of traditional social hierarchy: The knight is the highest class person on the pilgrimage and he goes first. Then, in the prologue to the next tale, everyone agrees that the knight has just told a wonderful tale.

B. The narrator—Chaucer himself, surely—tells the tale of Sir Thopas.
   1. Harry calls chubby, cuddly Chaucer forward to tell a tale. Chaucer apologizes that he only knows one tale and it is in rhyme at that (a dig at contemporary writers).
   2. He then tells a completely incoherent, pointless tale such that Harry butts in and cuts him off.
   3. Here, Chaucer’s self-deprecating humor is on display.
   4. But is he also making a point about chivalry with the rather ridiculous Thopas? In retrospect, do Palamon and Arcite look a bit foolish because they cannot act?

III. Chaucer told six comedic tales, those of the Miller, Reeve, Shipman, Merchant, Friar, and Summoner.

A. These tales are set in the present and in familiar surroundings. Their language is coarse and can border on the obscene.

B. If Petrarch set civic virtue off against chivalric/courtly values, then these tales may be said to set cleverness off against nobility.

C. The stories are carnivalesque and parodic.

D. Four tales (those of the Miller, Reeve, Shipman, and Merchant) are *fabliaux*: stories in which a bourgeois husband is duped into conniving at his wife’s sexual liaison with another man, who is usually younger, smarter, handsomer, and so on.

E. The Miller’s Tale is one of Chaucer’s finest, right from the point where the drunken miller butts in and demands to tell his tale.
   1. John the carpenter; Alison, his wife; Nicholas, a student and John’s lodger; and the parish priest Absolon make for engaging characters.
   2. We do not, in the end, come away liking or disliking anyone; we have not been taught a moral.

F. The Reeve’s Tale is a wonderful example of Chaucer at work within the *Tales*.
   1. The Reeve is or has been a carpenter; for this reason, he took umbrage at the Miller’s disparaging tale about a carpenter and responded with a venal, grotesque, and cuckolded miller.
   2. Almost as a manifestation of his ill-faith, the Reeve’s characters are uninteresting, and his tale of bed-hopping in the dark seems contrived.

IV. The pathetic tales, those of the Man of Law, the Second Nun, the Clerk, the Physician, the Prioress, and the Monk are characteristic of 14th-century taste, not 21st-century taste.

A. The point of the tales—no two are alike—is to evoke a strong emotional response, primarily sympathy.

B. Characterizations are pretty simple. Main characters are passive in the face of sheer evil and brutality.

C. The classic example here is the Clerk’s tale of Griselda.
   1. The Clerk sympathizes with Griselda; Chaucer does not accept Petrarch’s way of telling the tale.
   2. But there are hints about how contemporaries would have read the story: Pride was the greatest sin and humility, its remedy; God tests his people, the more faithful, the harder; obedience and deference are prized in a hierarchical society.
   3. What is Chaucer’s stand here?
V. Those tales that can be called examples or fables are the Friar’s, the Pardoner’s, the Nun’s Priest’s, and the Manciple’s.
   A. These kinds of tales are not in vogue now because of skepticism about general truths.
   B. The Nun’s Priest’s Tale, with Chanticleer, is Chaucer’s only beast tale.
   C. The Pardoner’s Tale is a story of blasphemy.

VI. In the end, it is easier to catalogue the questions that Chaucer makes us ask than to provide convincing answers.
   A. Is Griselda the “answer” to the Wife of Bath?
   B. Are women idealized in a misogynistic way or in an ironic way? What do we make of the Prioress, Lady Eglantine?
   C. Does Chaucer believe, with the Wife of Bath, that nobility is not a matter of birth?
   D. What do we make of the narrator?
   E. The General Prologue begins with a springtime topos and sexual innuendo. Is the latter somehow a comment on the courtliness of the former?

VII. No matter: Chaucer will go on delighting and puzzling us.

Essential Reading:
Chaucer, *The Canterbury Tales*.
*Cambridge Companion to Chaucer*, eds. Boitani and Mann, chapters 1, 8–12.

Questions to Consider:
1. What can you discern about Chaucer’s gifts and interests as a storyteller?
2. Do you see Chaucer as an entertainer or as a critic?
Timeline

c. 500 .............................................. Putative date for legendary King Arthur
768–814 ........................................... Reign of Charlemagne

c. 900 .............................................. Approximate date of Beowulf
1095–1099 ..................................... The First Crusade

c. 1100 ............................................ Probable date for The Song of Roland
1071–1127 ...................................... Life of William IX of Poitiers, first great troubadour
1159–1191 ...................................... Career of Chrétien de Troyes, author of romances
1200/1210 ...................................... Approximate date of Gottfried van Strassburg’s Tristan
1207 ................................................ Likely date of El Cid
1237 .............................................. Guillaume de Lorris completes his section of The Romance of the Rose
1275 .............................................. Jean de Meun completes The Romance of the Rose
1265–1321 ...................................... Life of Dante Alighieri
1304–1374 ...................................... Life of Francesco Petrarch
1309–1377 ...................................... Popes resident in Avignon
1313–1375 ...................................... Life of Giovanni Boccaccio
1337–1453 ...................................... Hundred Years’ War
1348–1349 ...................................... Black Death

1375 .............................................. Approximate date of Sir Gawain and the Green Knight

c. 1343–1400 ................................. Life of Geoffrey Chaucer
Glossary

**Allegory**: From the Greek for “speaking in another way,” suggesting that a text may be read on its surface in one way, often fantastic, then at deeper levels in other ways that may be didactic, moralistic, or satirical.

**Alliteration**: A device in rhetoric and poetics involving the repetition of the same sounds, usually an initial consonant. The intention may be mnemonic or ornamental.

**Assonance**: A device in rhetoric and poetics involving the repetition of sounds between syllables, usually effected with vowel sounds (consonant repetition is called *consonance*). Assonance, alliteration, and rhyme may be mixed in ways that are difficult to distinguish.

**Avignon papacy**: From 1309 to 1377, the popes resided in Avignon, in what is now the south of France. Mocked as a “Babylonian Captivity,” the papacy’s stay in Avignon occasioned severe criticism.

**Black Death**: A severe outbreak of bubonic plague that appeared in the Crimea in 1347, reached southern Europe in 1348, and spread like wildfire in 1349–1350, killing perhaps one-third of Europe’s people.

**Caesura**: A pause or break in a line of verse demanded by rhythm, syntax, or sense that was common in medieval vernacular poetry.

**Chanson de geste**: Literally, a “song of deeds,” these were epic poems, usually in French, celebrating classical or Carolingian (that is, from the age of Charlemagne) themes and exploits.

**Fabliaux**: Witty and often satirical tales involving (usually) a cuckolded older husband, a pretty young wife, and an attractive lover.

**Ghibellines**: A party that emerged by this name in Florence and later in many central and northern Italian towns that supported the claims of the German emperors to authority in Italy.

**Guelfs**: A party that emerged by this name in Florence and later in many central and northern Italian towns that supported the claims of the popes and sometimes those of the Angevins to rule in Italy.

**Humanism**: A movement initially associated with Italian scholars who loved classical literature for its own sake and who saw in that literature valuable lessons for personal and social conduct.

**Laisses**: A poetic unit common in medieval vernacular literature, typically containing a coherent thought and extending from a few to as many as 20 or 30 lines.

**Lollards**: Religious sectarians in 14th- and 15th-century England who generally followed the teachings of John Wyclif. Lollards were influential in Chaucer’s England.

**Romance**: A medieval vernacular genre (initially in French) dealing with classical figures, the world of Charlemagne, or the Arthurian world. Love and intrigue supplant war and violence in romance as compared with the *chansons de geste*.

**Troubadours**: Provençal poets of the 12th and 13th centuries whose complex lyric verse articulated what is sometimes called *courtly love*. Their influence on the development of Italian poetry was deep.

**Trouvères**: Lyric poets, often professional entertainers, writing in northern French dialects in the 12th and 13th centuries. Less bawdy and less polished than the troubadours.
Biographical Notes

**Dante Alighieri** (1265–1231): Florentine of modest means who served his city in minor public offices but suffered exile in the political upheavals of 1301–1302. Gained literary fame from his *Vita nuova* and scholarly attention for his *Convivio* and *De vulgari eloquentia*. Best known for the *Commedia*, a monumental poem in 100 cantos sketched against the background of the universe.

**Boethius** (Anicius Manlius Severinus Boethius) (c. 475–525): Late Roman statesman and philosopher whose most famous work, *The Consolation of Philosophy*, was written while he was in prison awaiting execution. The work was profoundly influential throughout the Middle Ages: Dante read *Consolation*, and both Jean de Meun and Chaucer wrote translations of the work.

**Giovanni Boccaccio** (1313–1375): Florentine banker’s son who rejected commerce for literature. Made his early reputation for works in Italian but later wrote Latin treatises, particularly handbooks to aid in the reading of classical literature. Best known for his *Decameron*, an eclectic collection of 100 tales brilliantly told.

**Geoffrey Chaucer** (c. 1343–1400): Son of a London wine merchant, Chaucer served in aristocratic households, executed sensitive diplomatic missions, and held important public positions. Widely read, Chaucer responded to the leading Italian writers of his day. His writings extend over the period from circa 1370 to his death. He worked on *The Canterbury Tales*, his most famous work, for almost 15 years but left it incomplete. *Troilus and Creseyde* is his longest complete work.

**Chrétien de Troyes** (fl. 1170–1190): Considered the greatest of the 12th-century French writers of romance, although almost nothing is known of him personally. It is believed that his major works were composed between 1159 and 1191. His romances, four of which survive completely while several others survive in fragments, are all “Arthurian,” dealing with figures from Arthur’s court, not with Arthur.

**Macrobius** (fl. c. 400): A minor late-antique writer who produced a neo-platonic commentary on Cicero’s *Dream of Scipio* that was influential in the Middle Ages. The work appears in Chaucer’s *Parliament of Fowls*.

**Francesco Petrarch** (1304–1374): Born in Arezzo because his family had been exiled from Florence in the same disturbances that caught up Dante. Grew up outside Avignon, where his father worked. Studied law but abandoned it for literature. Became famous for his Latin scholarship but is most warmly thought of today for his 366 *Canzoniere*—love poems in exquisite Italian. Petrarch’s sympathetic interest in classical literature made him a founder of humanism.
Bibliography

Note: In compiling this bibliography I have attempted to be practical in two respects. First, I cite the texts that stand at the heart of the lectures only in accessible, readable, modern translations. Those who are interested in consulting these works in the original will always find the best critical editions cited and discussed in the translations. Second, because the scholarship on many of these authors and texts is forbiddingly vast, I have cited the best recent work, with exceptions in the case of older works that have attained classic status. Almost all the works I cite have extensive bibliographies. It is important to bear in mind that, for most medieval authors, single-authored monographs are less important than collections of papers that take the form of classic essays or exciting recent work.

General Works


Keen, Maurice. *Chivalry*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1984. Comprehensive and graceful, this book is essential background reading to most of the books and authors considered in these lectures.


Paterson, Linda M. *The World of the Troubadours: Medieval Occitan Society, c. 1100–c.1300*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993. The book opens the world of southern France, which was a meeting ground for the cultures and literatures of the region itself and those of northern France, Iberia, and Italy.


Beowulf
Among many translations, this one can be recommended for its accuracy, its flavor of the original, and its aids for the reader.


Nicholson, Lewis E., ed. *An Anthology of Beowulf Criticism.* Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1963. A classic anthology that contains some of the most important studies of *Beowulf* down to almost its date of publication.

### Roland

*La Chanson de Roland: Student Edition.* Gerard J. Brault, trans. University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1984. Among many translations of *Roland,* this one is both the most scholarly and most readable. This separate paperback volume was originally volume 2 of Brault’s book noted below.


Jones, George Fenwick. *The Ethos of the Song of Roland.* Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1963. Still an admirable argument for a “secular” (that is, a feudal) reading of the poem. His argument parallels Cook’s in some ways but is fundamentally different.


### El Cid

*The Poem of the Cid.* Rita Hamilton and Janet Perry, trans., with an introduction and notes by Ian Michael. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1984. This readable prose translation, with a facing-page Spanish text, is the most accessible version of the poem, and Michael’s introduction is helpful.


### Tristan and Isolt


*The Romance of the Rose*


*Works by Dante Alighieri*


*I l Convivio*. Christopher Ryan, trans. Saratoga, CA: Anma Libri, 1989. Opens crucial perspectives on Dante’s philosophical reading and thinking; also clarifies issues that appear in the *Comedy*.


*Works about Dante Alighieri* (There can be no pretense to exhaustiveness; works listed here all have substantial additional bibliographies.)


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Jacoff, Rachel, ed. *The Cambridge Companion to Dante*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993. Like all the volumes in this series, this one is comprehensive and authoritative (and unusually well written!).

Kirkpatrick, Robin. *The Divine Comedy*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987. A brief and sprightly introduction to the *Comedy* but also to Dante’s other writings, especially the *Vita nuova*.


**Petrarch**


———. *Canzoniere*. Mark Musa, trans. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1996. By one of the greatest translators of medieval Italian texts, this volume has a literary introduction, Italian text with facing-page translation, and helpful notes.


**Boccaccio**


**Sir Gawain and the Green Knight**


**Geoffrey Chaucer**


———. *Troilus and Cressida*. George Philip Krapp, trans. New York: Vintage Books, 1932. This is now an older translation but can be recommended for its vigorous verse.


**Internet Resources:**


*Netserf: The Internet Connection for Medieval Resources*. http://www.netserf.org. A wide-ranging collection of medieval materials that is somewhat less systematic and substantial than the Labyrinth but that nevertheless contains some delightful surprises.

*Questia: The World’s Largest Online Library*. http://www.questia.com: A large collection of books on medieval topics scanned by chapter to facilitate easy reference. This site puts a decent reference library at the disposal of everyone.
Great Authors of the Western Literary Tradition
Part IV: Literature of the Renaissance
Professor Ronald B. Herzman

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Ronald Herzman was born in Brooklyn, New York. He attended Brooklyn Prep and Manhattan College, graduating with honors in 1965 and receiving the Devlin Medal for excellence in French. He studied English literature at the University of Delaware as a DuPont Fellow and a New York State Regents Fellow. He received his M.A. in 1967 and his Ph.D. in 1969, writing his dissertation on Geoffrey Chaucer. Dr. Herzman has also studied at Princeton University (summer 1973) and as a National Endowment for the Humanities Fellow-in-Residence at the University of Chicago during the 1978–1979 academic year. He received the Chancellor’s Award for Excellence in Teaching in 1976 and was awarded an honorary Doctor of Humane Letters from Manhattan College in 1991.

In 1969, Dr. Herzman was appointed Assistant Professor of English at the State University of New York at Geneseo, where he currently holds the rank of Distinguished Teaching Professor of English. He has also been an adjunct professor at Genesee Community College, teaching in the inmate education program at Attica Correctional Facility. He has been a professorial lecturer at Georgetown University and has served as a guest tutor at St. John’s College in Santa Fe, New Mexico. From 1982–1985, Dr. Herzman was on leave from SUNY to work at the National Endowment for the Humanities, where he was the founding Program Officer for the Summer Seminars for School Teachers and the Assistant Director of the Division of Fellowships and Seminars.

Dr. Herzman’s teaching interests include Dante, Chaucer, Francis of Assisi, Shakespeare, the Bible, Humanities, and Arthurian literature. Dr. Herzman’s books include The Medieval World View (Oxford University Press, 2nd edition, 2003, with William Cook); The Apocalyptic Imagination in Medieval Literature (University of Pennsylvania Press, 1992, with Richard Emmerson); and Four Romances of England (Medieval Institute Publications, 1999, edited with Graham Drake and Eve Salisbury). He has written extensively on medieval and early Renaissance literature, especially on Dante and Francis of Assisi, but including work on Chaucer, the Romance of the Rose, the Song of Roland, and Christine de Pizan’s Book of the City of Ladies. Dr. Herzman also writes on educational issues. His current research interests include a book-length study of Dante’s Paradiso.

Dr. Herzman has directed 12 Seminars for School Teachers for the National Endowment for the Humanities, conducted at Geneseo; at St. John’s College in Santa Fe, New Mexico; and in Siena and Assisi, Italy. In 2003, he was awarded the first-ever CARA Award for Excellence in Teaching Medieval Studies from the Medieval Academy of America. In 2004, he was elected to Phi Beta Kappa as a foundational member of the Geneseo chapter.
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Great Authors of the Western Literary Tradition
Part IV: Literature of the Renaissance

Scope:
The 12 lectures for this part of the course, “The Literature of the Renaissance,” present an introduction to writers who—like the others in this series—are at the heart of the Western literary heritage, including both household names, such as Shakespeare, Milton, and Cervantes, and lesser-known writers who also matter greatly and whose work is worth our serious attention, such as Christine de Pizan and Lope de Vega. The list of 11 writers included in this segment (Shakespeare is granted the well-deserved privilege of two lectures) also represents a fascinating diversity of genres and languages and spans three centuries.

Proceeding chronologically, this course segment begins with Christine de Pizan, whose Book of the City of Ladies, written in French, was published at the beginning of the 15th century (and whose work represents a transition from the Middle Ages to the Renaissance). After the first lecture on de Pizan, we move, in Lectures Two and Three to two writers who wrote in Latin, the Englishman Thomas More and the Dutchman Erasmus. Together with the subjects of the next two lectures, Montaigne and Rabelais, (two 16th-century French writers who wrote in French), they help define the movement that has come to be known as humanism. The next four lectures are on drama, starting with Shakespeare’s English contemporary Christopher Marlowe and ending with his Spanish contemporary Lope de Vega. The two lectures on Shakespeare himself focus on a comedy (The Merchant of Venice) and a tragedy (Hamlet) as one way to explore the breadth of his work. The last three lectures show the diversity of the period: the Spanish writer Cervantes, often credited with writing the first novel in his masterpiece Don Quixote; the English writer Milton, who continues the epic tradition with Paradise Lost; and the French essayist Blaise Pascal, who is celebrated as a mathematician and philosopher, as well as an essayist.

Because one of the chief goals of these lectures is to bring the viewer or listener to the texts themselves, for each lecture, the emphasis is on a single work. Each lecture, then, is part overview and part discussion and appreciation of the chosen single work. The overview both introduces the writers and suggests ways in which their major concerns overlap with others in the series, not only other writers from the Renaissance who share important thematic concerns but other writers from the ancient and medieval world who were both sources and inspirations. Indeed, concern with earlier writers, both classical and Christian, is one of the defining characteristics of the period.

For some writers, choosing a single work was a no-brainer: Paradise Lost for Milton or Don Quixote for Cervantes, for example. But for others, the choice was rather more arbitrary. Shakespeare wrote 37 plays and Lope de Vega may well have written upwards of 1,200. In the case of these wonderfully prolific writers, I have tried to choose examples that are among their best works and that will enable students to go further on their own. Like the other writers in this course, the more we learn about them, the more we see that they still have a great deal to tell us—about their time and about our own.
Lecture Thirty-Seven
Christine de Pizan

Scope: Christine de Pizan (c. 1365–1430) was one of the most versatile writers of the early Renaissance, male or female. She wrote a conduct manual for women, she wrote a life of Joan of Arc, she translated a widely read treatise on warfare, and in *The Book of the City of Ladies*, she constructed an allegory in which she openly confronted the anti-feminism of her culture. Christine is generally taken to be the first European woman to earn her living as a writer, and as such, she needed to appeal to a broad audience of both women and men. This lecture will focus on *The Book of the City of Ladies*, showing the way Christine creatively reinterprets biblical narrative and creatively rewrites classical texts to make a compelling case for female equality.

Outline

I. Christine de Pizan was a prolific, versatile, and interesting writer whose work has been neglected by scholars until rather recently.
   B. Christine’s major work is *The Book of the City of Ladies*.
      1. *The Book of the City of Ladies* is an allegory in which Christine attacks the anti-feminism of her culture.
      2. Of all Christine’s works, this text may be the one that speaks most directly to our own society.

II. *The Book of the City of Ladies* draws on numerous literary sources in order to prove that women have intrinsic worth. Christine also follows in a long line of people who have rewritten literature for their own purposes.
   A. Virgil rewrites Homer, and Dante rewrites Virgil.
   B. Christine rewrites classical, biblical, and contemporary stories.

III. Christine is influenced by classical philosophy.
   A. Christine constructs her city out of virtue.
   B. The construction of a city out of virtue is an idea that can be traced back to Plato’s *Republic*.
   C. Christine adds a feminist twist to this classical concept by creating a city out of purely feminine virtue.

IV. Christine is influenced by Dante.
   A. She makes no distinction between fictional and historical characters.
   B. She weaves classical and biblical figures together.
   C. Just as Dante the Pilgrim is led by three guides, Christine the Narrator is taught by three allegorical figures of virtue.
      1. These guides are all women—Lady Rectitude, Lady Reason, and Lady Justice.
      2. These female guides are responsible for the construction of the city of ladies.
   D. Christine begins her journey in a “dark wood” of error—the fallacy of believing in society’s negative stereotypes about women.

V. Christine gives a feminist reading of many biblical stories.
   A. She retells the story of Jesus and the Canaanite woman found in Matthew 15:21.
   B. Christine argues that the woman’s stereotypically feminine quality of talkativeness leads to her salvation.
   C. Christine examines Jesus’s treatment of women.
      1. She contrasts Jesus’s inclusiveness with the treatment of women in her society.
      2. She subtly suggests that women are the Gentiles of her own time.
VI. Christine provides a revisionist reading of many classical stories.
   A. She retells the story of the love affair between Dido and Aeneas, most famously told in Book IV of Virgil’s *Aeneid*.
   B. In Virgil, the story is a test case on the relationship between duty and desire.
   C. In Christine’s version, Aeneas leaves Dido because he is treacherous and incapable of real love.
   D. In Virgil’s version, Dido refers to the illicit relationship as a marriage. Christine turns the relationship into a valid marriage.

VII. Christine’s revisionist work is a text of empowerment.
   A. By rewriting literature’s greatest stories, Christine proves that she is just as talented and capable as the men who wrote the originals. In doing so, she argues for the capability and talent of all women.
   B. As such, Christine truly deserves her “new” place in the literary canon.

Essential Readings:
Herzman, “*The Book of the City of Ladies* as Twice Told Tale.”

Questions to Consider:
1. What implications does Christine’s historical/literary revisionism have in terms of interpreting literature?
2. In what ways does Christine’s use of Dante reflect the serious nature of her subject matter?
3. What is the significance of Christine’s argument that Jesus was not misogynistic? Why is it important that in this case Christine doesn’t rewrite the story but merely reinterprets the passage’s meaning?
Lecture Thirty-Eight

Erasmus

Scope: This lecture explores the artistic and political influence of the great Dutch humanist scholar Erasmus (c. 1466–1536). After a brief discussion of his life, centering on his travels and meetings with other important humanists, and an outline of his most important works, the remainder of the lecture analyzes his most popular work, the satirical *Praise of Folly*. This text reveals Erasmus’s mastery of classical languages and literary forms, a rhetorical control that greatly influenced writers of the English Renaissance, especially Thomas More. We will explore how Erasmus uses Folly to criticize corruption in Christianity, especially corruption at the top, yet at the same time, shows that the spirit of Folly is precisely the spirit necessary for those who wish to follow Christ closely. We will also show how *The Praise of Folly* centers on Erasmus’s position on the religious controversies of the day, emphasizing how Erasmus’s views as a moralist and reformer differed from the religious positions of Martin Luther.

Outline

I. The humanist scholar Desiderius Erasmus was one of the most famous figures of his time in Europe.
   A. Although Dutch by birth, Erasmus lived in England, Rome, Germany, and Switzerland.
   B. Erasmus was an enormously important biblical scholar.
      1. He was responsible for a Greek edition of the New Testament in 1516.
      2. He wrote a life of St. Jerome, the church father responsible for the Latin translation of the Bible that was standard in the West for well over 1,000 years.
      3. Erasmus saw the life of St. Jerome as a model for his own.

II. One of Erasmus’s early works, the *Enchiridion* (or *Handbook of the Christian Soldier*), presents the essence of Christianity as Erasmus understands it.
   A. Not coincidentally, *Enchiridion* is also the title of a work by the early Christian father St. Augustine.
   B. The *Enchiridion* is a guide to Christian attitudes and behavior.
      1. Erasmus suggests that the great weapons of the Christian soldier are prayer and knowledge of Scripture.
      2. To prepare for reading Scripture, Erasmus contends that one must learn the languages in which the texts were written.
      3. To learn these languages, one must read ancient pagan authors.
      4. Erasmus maintains that these pagan texts are valuable to Christians, arguing that “any truth you come upon anyplace is Christ’s.”
      5. Erasmus’s appreciation of pagan writers puts him in a direct line with many early Christian fathers, most especially Origen.
      6. The work provides an excellent overview of Christian humanism.

III. In his time and ours, Erasmus’s most famous and popular work has been *Moriae Encomium*, or *The Praise of Folly* (1511).
   A. In its Latin original, the title *Moriae Encomium* can be interpreted in three senses.
      1. It can be translated as “Praise of More,” a pun on the name of Thomas More, an English humanist and one of Erasmus’s closest friends.
      2. It can be interpreted as “Folly receiving praise.”
      3. It can be interpreted as “Folly giving praise.”
   B. The speaker of the text is the goddess Folly. She is the daughter of the god of wealth, begotten on Youth.
   C. *The Praise of Folly* was influenced by the works of the 2nd-century Greek satirist Lucian.
      1. Erasmus admired the ways in which Lucian mixed the serious with the comedic.
      2. That mixture helps define Erasmus himself.
Within the text, the meaning of folly progressively shifts.

A. The first part of the text is a relatively gentle analysis of the folly of the human condition.
   1. Folly exposes the folly of human procreation.
   2. Folly exposes the particular follies of each stage of human life.
   3. Folly makes the interesting observation that fools are the only people able to speak the truth to those in power.
   4. Folly also discusses flattery, which was a great concern of Renaissance humanists.

B. The tone shifts to one of savage irony and satire when Folly tackles religious abuse.
   1. Erasmus attacks theologians, especially scholastics who feverishly pursue their own learning at the expense of a Christian life.
   2. This rejection of scholastic methods is a hallmark of Renaissance humanism.
   3. Erasmus attacks the religious authorities and monks for religious hypocrisy and mistaking the letter for the spirit.
   4. Erasmus attacks religious leaders, including the popes of his time.

C. The Praise of Folly shows how Erasmus deals with the religious upheaval of his time.
   1. In his attack on the abuses of the Church, Erasmus was close to Martin Luther, with whom he exchanged letters.
   2. In his theological positions, however, Erasmus remained a staunch Catholic and broke with Luther as Luther broke with the Church.

D. In the last section of the work, there is a sudden shift in the meaning of Folly, as folly becomes the mark of a true Christian.
   1. Folly exposes the folly of Christ’s adoption of the foolish human condition.
   2. Thus, Paul is able to say that we are fools for Christ.
   3. What at first appears to be folly turns out to be the deepest kind of wisdom that Erasmus can imagine.

Essential Readings:
Erasmus, The Praise of Folly.
Sowards, Erasmus, chapters 1–2.

Questions to Consider:
1. How does Erasmus reconcile his love of classical texts with his Christian faith?
2. In what ways does The Praise of Folly reflect Erasmus’s views on the state of Christianity in his own time?
Lecture Thirty-Nine
Thomas More

Scope: In our own time, Thomas More (1477–1535) is probably better known for his life than for his works. But the life that is memorably retold in A Man for All Seasons alludes to his position as a leading humanist thinker without truly engaging it. After a brief recapitulation of his life and tragic death at the hands of Henry VIII, this lecture will focus on More’s humanism, as revealed in his most famous work, Utopia. More’s work, of course, coins the term utopia, and in this lecture, we will look at how the imaginative world that More creates here provides a vantage point for his critique of contemporary society, as well as for the exposition of some of More’s most sincerely held humanist principles. The radical simplicity of the Utopians certainly provides a contrast to the ills of the Europe of More’s day, but to what extent is More attempting to provide a viable alternative?

Outline

I. Thanks to the successful play and even more successful movie of A Man for All Seasons, Thomas More the man is better known than Thomas More the writer.
   A. Born in 1477, More was an extremely talented lawyer.
   B. He became the first layman to hold the office of Lord Chancellor of England, succeeding his mentor, Cardinal Wolsey.
   C. More came into conflict with Henry VIII over his refusal to acknowledge the king as the sole head of the English Church.
      1. More resigned in 1532 because of his beliefs.
      2. He was charged with treason for denying the validity of Henry’s divorce from Catherine of Aragon and refusing to deny the pope’s authority.
      3. More was executed in 1535, with the famous last words: “I die the king’s good servant, but God’s first.”

II. Thomas More’s most famous literary work, Utopia, the story of a non-Christian, advanced New World society, was written in 1516.
   A. The character More recounts the tale of Utopia as told to him by the fictional explorer Raphael Hythloday (“Ralph No-sense”).
   B. Utopia is an idealized communist society.
   C. In Utopia, there are few wars, no private property, and little crime.
   D. More the character concludes that while some Utopian practices are admirable, they are not feasible in the context of English society.

III. While Utopia is both witty and humorous, its message is very subtle.
   A. The fictional framework of Utopia contributes to the text’s ambiguity.
      1. More supplies a Utopian “alphabet” and a Utopian poem, which is transliterated, then translated into Latin.
      2. He invents fictional letters between real-life people to “authenticate” the story of Utopia.
      3. He includes a poem allegedly composed by the poet laureate of Utopia that favorably compares Utopia to Plato’s Republic.
   B. More coined the word utopia from the Greek words for “no place.”

IV. Utopia deals with several particular concerns of Renaissance thinkers.
   A. It examines the implications of global exploration.
      1. Exploration becomes a means of acquiring a new perspective for looking at one’s own practices and beliefs.
      2. The fictional Hythloday claims to have traveled with the real-life explorer Amerigo Vespucci.
   B. Utopia also discusses the idea of organized religion.
1. Utopia is an ideal community, in which inhabitants live according to natural law and natural religion.
2. Natural religion is God as revealed in the book of nature.
3. Christianity is a revealed religion, one based on God as he revealed himself to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.
4. The Utopians prosper without revealed religion.
5. Some people have read this as an argument that organized religion is unnecessary.
6. More, however, was a Catholic martyr.
7. Utopia, then, is a way of reminding Christians of how they fall short of their ideals; in other words, if people without revealed religion live in such an upright manner, what is the excuse of Christian people?

C. Utopia also examines the questions of what is valued in society and why it is valued.
   1. Utopia is a “communist” society.
   2. The Utopians values things for their practical worth.
   3. To Utopians, iron and water are more valuable than gold or silver.
   4. The text suggests that Europeans value worthless things for superficial reasons.

D. Utopia also deals with the death penalty, which is particularly relevant considering that More himself was executed.

V. More saw the connection between the nation-state and acquisitiveness. The work has much to teach us today.

Essential Readings:

More, Utopia.
A Man for All Seasons (film).

Questions to Consider:

1. What does Utopia suggest about the consequences of materialism?
2. How does the literary framework of Utopia contribute to the text’s ambiguity?
Lecture Forty
Michel de Montaigne

Scope: This lecture looks at Michel de Montaigne (1533–1592) as the “inventor” of the literary genre that we have come to know as the essay. The French *essai* means an experiment, a test, or an attempt, and Montaigne saw his series of essays as an experiment or a test to understand himself; by understanding himself, he hoped to better understand the human condition. After discussing the form of the essay as Montaigne practiced it, we will concentrate on his essay entitled “On the Education of Children.” Like much of Montaigne’s work, this essay is notable for its relevance to our own time and, as such, is an especially useful document for contemporary debates on questions of education. In discussing this essay, we will also say something about how Montaigne establishes a relationship between author and reader, that is, how he manages not only to speak to us but, in some ways, to speak about us.

Outline

I. The 16th-century writer Michel de Montaigne was the inventor of the personal, introspective essay.
   A. The essay was a new literary form in which Montaigne mused on his famous question: “What do I know?”
      1. No matter the ostensible topic, Montaigne’s true focus was always on himself.
      2. Montaigne viewed his essays as “attempts” to further understand himself and, in the process, others.
   B. Thus, it is helpful, and perhaps even necessary, to study Montaigne’s life in order to understand his works.
      1. Montaigne was born in 1533 to a noble family.
      2. He entered local politics but was not satisfied with the political life.
      3. After his retirement at the age of 38, Montaigne began to write to combat boredom and depression.
      4. In 1580, his first two books of essays were published.
      5. In 1581, he became the mayor of Bordeaux.
      6. In 1588, a three-book edition of his works was published.
      7. He died in 1592.
   C. Montaigne wrote more than 1,000 pages of collected essays on diverse topics.
      1. These topics ranged from vanity to physiognomy.
      2. Amongst Montaigne’s hundreds of essays, his “Apology for Raymond Sebond” is his longest, most theological, and most complex.

II. “On the Education of Children” is representative of Montaigne’s work and has particular resonance for a modern reader.
   A. The essay highlights Montaigne’s particular brand of moderate skepticism.
      1. Montaigne’s views on skepticism are shaped in part by the influence of non-skeptical thinkers, including Dante and Socrates.
      2. Montaigne quotes Dante, who claims that, without doubt, one wouldn’t push oneself to learn: “For doubting pleases me more than knowing.”
      3. Socrates, whose ideas shaped Dante’s beliefs, taught that it was necessary to admit one’s ignorance in order to come to true knowledge.
      4. Montaigne relentlessly points to our ability to deceive ourselves with pseudo-knowledge.
      5. Montaigne refrains from embracing radical skepticism by asserting that people should surrender to truth when they see it.
   B. As he does in many of his essays, Montaigne studies the personal in order to understand the universal.
      1. To discuss the education of all children, Montaigne first examines his own education.
      2. He talks about the excellent tutor hired by his father.
         a. He “heard” Latin as a spoken language, as well as his tutor’s native German.
         b. Thus, he knew Latin as a “native” speaker.
         c. He knew Latin before he knew his “native” French.
      3. Montaigne blames his loss of interest in learning as a youth on school discipline.
      4. He claims that such “violence” only encourages students to dislike learning.
5. He concludes that people learn only if they like to do so.
6. This Romantic strain is balanced by an awareness that not everyone wants to learn.
7. Montaigne does not push one position as much as examine many.

III. Montaigne’s focus on the personal makes him accessible to modern readers.
   A. His intensely personal writings are often breezy, irreverent, and colloquial.
   B. Montaigne is also revolutionary in his awareness of his audience.

Essential Readings:
Hall, “Montaigne’s Use of Classical Learning.”

Questions to Consider:
1. How does Montaigne differ from radical skeptics?
2. Are Montaigne’s observations about the educational process accurate?
3. Compare the style and goals of Montaigne’s essays with those of the modern form of the genre. How has our conception of the essay changed over the centuries?
Lecture Forty-One
François Rabelais

Scope: François Rabelais (c. 1494–1553) was a monk, a physician, and a scholar whose great work *Gargantua and Pantagruel* (1532–1564) is as influential as it is hard to characterize. It details the epic stories of two giants and their ribald adventures and journeys toward self-discovery, but it also is a work that includes comedy, satire, myth, and philosophy, a work that is characterized by dazzling verbal experimentation, and a work that was denounced for excessive obscenity. In this lecture, we will situate Rabelais within European humanist traditions and discuss his unique linguistic talent and exuberance.

Outline

I. Rabelais’s major work is *Gargantua and Pantagruel*.
   A. Imbued with Renaissance humanist philosophy, this work combines comedy, satire, myth, ribaldry, burlesque, fantasy, farce, parody, and politics.
   B. It was published as five books over a long period of time.

II. Rabelais’s life provides keys to understanding *Gargantua and Pantagruel*.
   A. Rabelais pursued a variety of careers, each of which is reflected in his literary works.
      1. Born in France in 1494, he was tutored at home and received his formal education from Franciscan friars.
      2. He surreptitiously studied Latin, Hebrew, and Greek.
      3. He was influenced in both style and content by his contemporary, Erasmus, and the Greek satirist Lucian.
      4. He joined a Benedictine monastery in 1524 and stayed there for two years.
      5. He left the Benedictines but remained a priest.
      6. He became secretary to a high-ranking bishop, with whom he traveled throughout Europe.
      7. These travels enabled Rabelais to use rustic dialogue in his works, and he wrote in the vernacular.
      8. He studied medicine at Paris and Montpellier (1530).
   B. Rabelais lived during a time of cultural exchange between Italy and France.
      1. During Rabelais’s lifetime, the French were involved in the Italian Wars.
      2. The Italian Wars were conducted to secure French control over Naples and Milan.
      3. Italian humanism infiltrated French culture.
      4. Rabelais’s works are influenced by the ideas and artistic achievements of the Italian Renaissance.
   C. As a humanist, Rabelais had an uneasy relationship with the conservative authorities of the Sorbonne.
      1. Humanism was rejected by the Sorbonne, a center of scholasticism and conservatism.
      2. After 1545, the Sorbonne was authorized to draw up a list of books to be censured.
      3. The Sorbonne attempted to ban Rabelais’s works on grounds of obscenity.
      4. Rabelais received royal permission to publish his books.
      5. After receiving his doctorate in medicine in 1537, Rabelais allied himself with the du Bellay family.
      6. The du Bellay family was interested in trying to reconcile Catholics and Protestants.
      7. Meanwhile, the French kings, Francis I and Henry II, adopted more severe policies concerning religious dissent.

III. *Gargantua and Pantagruel* touches on a number of humanist issues.
   A. The books examine the limits of human wisdom to create a just community.
   B. They discuss problems associated with religious intolerance, reflecting the religious controversies of Rabelais’s own time.
IV. The word *Rabelaisian* has become part of our cultural inheritance for good reasons.

**Essential Readings:**
Rabelais, *Gargantua and Pantagruel*. Because Rabelais is dauntingly long, as an introduction, the reader should try selections from each of the five books.
Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, any brief selection to see how an influential school of criticism operates.

**Questions to Consider:**
1. What is the significance of Rabelais’s decision to write in French?
2. How can the censorship of the works of Rabelais relate to modern debates over censorship?
Christopher Marlowe (1564–1593), born in the same year as Shakespeare, had composed seven plays by the date of his untimely death in 1593. Although his reputation at the time of his death was probably greater than Shakespeare’s—in part because of the somewhat scandalous nature of his life, but also because of the vigor and energy of his plays—only one of his plays, Dr. Faustus, has come down to us with anything like the reputation it had in the 16th century. Although Marlowe was occasionally accused of atheism in his brief lifetime, Faustus, in fact, demonstrates the ethics of Christian humanism. The character of Dr. Faustus is a learned scientist who, failing to recognize the limitations of humankind’s knowledge of the universe and control over nature, destroys himself. The tragedy serves as a warning against blind ambition and unwarranted faith in the human intellect at the expense of a relationship with God. This lecture shows how Marlowe uses what he has learned from the medieval stage and its tradition of the morality play to help create the Elizabethan stage.

Outline

I. The career of the English playwright Christopher Marlowe invites comparison with his better known contemporary, Shakespeare.
   A. Marlowe’s story, unlike Shakespeare’s, is one of the great “what-ifs” of literature.
      1. Marlowe was born in the same year as Shakespeare (1564).
      2. He died at a young age in a barroom brawl (1593).
      3. Marlowe wrote around seven popular plays, all on grand subjects, including one about Dido and Aeneas.
      4. Recently, Marlowe’s life in relation to Shakespeare’s was wittily but also accurately portrayed in the film Shakespeare in Love.
   B. In some ways, Marlowe is the model for Shakespeare and the Elizabethan stage.
      1. Marlowe draws freely and energetically from earlier English drama.
      2. He especially draws from the tradition of English religious drama, which presents a stark conflict between good and evil.
      3. Marlowe adopts the free mixture of tragedy and comedy within a single piece from medieval drama.
      4. He employs verbal pyrotechnics and sensational intrigue.
      5. His heroes constantly go beyond the limits imposed on them by God and/or society.
      6. Marlowe creates many characters and, like Shakespeare, uses doubling—his characters play more than one part.

II. Marlowe’s most famous play is Dr. Faustus.
   A. The story itself has its roots in biblical and classical literature.
      1. The plot may go all the way back to the story of Simon the Magician, found in the New Testament.
      2. The Simon story is a probable spinoff of the classical myth of Daedalus and Icarus.
   B. Faustus tells the tale of a learned scientist who sells his soul to the devil.
      1. Dr. Faustus is unsatisfied with his worldly accomplishments and wants to gain magical powers.
      2. Faustus conjures a devil, Mephistophilis, and commands him to offer Lucifer a deal—Faustus’s soul in exchange for 24 years of Mephistophilis’s service.
      3. Faustus travels throughout Europe with Mephistophilis.

III. A major theme of the play is that the material is transient and, therefore, incapable of creating lasting happiness.
   A. When 24 years have passed, Faustus despairs of his salvation.
      1. At the play’s end, Faustus conjures up Helen of Troy, who symbolizes the destructive consequences of valuing the material above all else.
      2. The fleeting nature of the happiness brought about by the material is emphasized by the structure of the play itself—the audience witnesses 24 years of material pleasure pass in 2 hours.
B. Faustus’s last speech is Marlowe at his best: “Was this the face that launched a thousand ships?”

IV. Faustus’s damnation can be read on a number of levels.

A. One could argue that Marlowe’s reasons for damning Faustus are purely dramatic.
   1. The damnation serves as an impetus for Faustus’s compelling blank-verse speech at the end of the play.
   2. It is more dramatically impressive to have the main character dragged off to hell than to have him be redeemed.

B. It is also possible, however, that Faustus does not repent because he cannot—he is addicted to sin.
   1. Faustus cannot break his habits. He is a sin junkie.
   2. “Why this is hell, nor am I out of it.”

Essential Readings:
Marlowe, Dr. Faustus.
Kuriyama, Christopher Marlowe, A Renaissance Life. The reader should first skim the book, then read selected chapters.
Bevington, Shakespeare, xxix–xliii, “The Drama before Shakespeare.” This section of Bevington’s “General Introduction” ends with a discussion of Marlowe.

Questions to Consider:
1. In what ways can Dr. Faustus be seen as a critique of materialism?
2. How do Faustus’s travels allow Marlowe to discuss contemporary political issues?
Lecture Forty-Three
William Shakespeare—The Merchant of Venice

Scope: William Shakespeare (1564–1616) occupies, without question, the central place in English literature. In this lecture, we will look at a representative comedy to examine some of the qualities that account for his central position. The Merchant of Venice (1596-1597) combines festive comedy with elements of dark tragedy, demonstrating Shakespeare’s ability to deal with multiple plots and interrelated themes; money and love, marriage and friendship, festivity and cultural prejudice interact and resonate with one another. In this play, too, we can observe Shakespeare’s methods of characterization by contrasting Shylock and his world as an outsider and a Jew with the Venetians, whose values he does not share. This lecture will take a close look at the courtroom scene in The Merchant of Venice to show how Shakespeare is able to bring so much together in such a compressed way.

Outline

I. Shakespeare wrote 38 plays in every genre of drama: comedy, tragedy, history, and romance.

II. There are an astonishing number of theatrical references in Shakespeare. In addition to being a playwright, Shakespeare was an actor, producer, and entrepreneur; he uses theatrical language because it is what he knows best.

III. The self-conscious theatrical references in Shakespeare’s works can be seen as an implicit defense of the theater and the power of drama.

A. In Shakespeare’s time, many considered the theater disreputable and dangerous.
   1. Literature and, by extension, drama were seen by some as forms of lying.
   2. Plays were dangerous because they could touch on controversial issues.
   3. Actors portraying other characters were regarded as blasphemers, according to strict reformers.

B. Shakespeare’s “theatricality” can be seen as a response to these attacks.
   1. Shakespeare often uses the theatrical theme of disguise in his comedies.
   2. Disguises in Shakespearean comedy mirror the plays themselves: In Twelfth Night, the actress plays Viola, while Viola plays Cesario.
   3. The climactic courtroom scene of The Merchant of Venice centers on the positive results of Portia’s disguise as a learned judge.

IV. The double plot found in The Merchant of Venice is a defining characteristic of Shakespearean drama.

A. The first plot involves “the pound of flesh” that Antonio owes Shylock.
   1. Antonio borrows money from Shylock to pay for his friend Bassiano’s wooing expedition.
   2. Antonio must forfeit a pound of flesh to Shylock if he defaults.
   3. Antonio defaults.

B. The second plot involves the wooing of Portia by Bassiano.
   1. According to her dead father’s will, Portia can marry only the man who passes a test by selecting the right casket (gold, silver, or lead).
   2. The test is Platonic—it assesses knowledge based on levels of understanding.
   3. The test also embodies the Shakespearean theme of the difference between appearance and reality.
   4. Bassiano chooses lead and wins Portia.
   5. Bassiano’s success and Antonio’s impending forfeit tie together another Shakespearean theme: What is the relationship between friendship and love?
   6. The fusion of plots suggests that attitudes toward money and love are related.

C. The plots fuse in the courtroom scene.
   1. Portia saves Antonio by forcing Shylock to adhere to his own policy of literalism.
   2. In the process, Portia gives a beautiful speech sounding another Shakespearean theme: the relationship between justice and mercy.
V. An awareness of theatricality helps us see what is most important in _The Merchant of Venice._
   
   A. In the _Merchant of Venice,_ Shakespeare foregrounds all the ways in which the theater is a lie.
      1. Shakespeare uses the theatrical device of disguise.
      2. He employs implausible, large-than-life villains and fairy-tale princesses.
   
   B. At the same time, however, _The Merchant of Venice_ suggests that we can come to explore deeper truths through the lies of the theater.

Essential Readings:
Shakespeare, _The Merchant of Venice._
Genesis 28–30 (the story of Jacob and Laban).

Questions to Consider:
1. What does _The Merchant of Venice_ suggest about the relationship between money and love?
2. How does the plot of _The Merchant of Venice_ emphasize the artificial nature of theater itself?
Lecture Forty-Four
William Shakespeare—Hamlet

Scope: In this lecture, we continue our discussion of the centrality of Shakespeare by looking at what is undoubtedly his most well-known tragedy, Hamlet. As in the lecture on Shakespearean comedy, we will focus on Shakespeare’s ability to weave together multiple plots, showing, for example, how the madness of Hamlet is echoed in the madness of Ophelia. The conflict in the play between Hamlet’s introspective world and the Machiavellian court of Claudius will provide another central focus for the lecture, as we use this play to make some generalizations about the nature of Shakespearean tragedy. We will look in particular at the play that Hamlet stages to “catch the conscience of the king” as a touchstone both for what is characteristic of Shakespearean tragedy and unique in Hamlet.

Outline
I. Just as The Merchant of Venice is representative of Shakespearean comedy, Hamlet is representative of Shakespearean tragedy.
   A. Hamlet is a classic tragedy, ending in the deaths of all the main characters.
      1. The play begins shortly after the death of Prince Hamlet’s father and the hasty remarriage of Hamlet’s mother to her late husband’s brother, Claudius.
      2. Hamlet is brooding over his mother’s marriage.
   B. Hamlet is full of self-conscious theatricality. Claudius sends just about everyone to spy on Hamlet, that is, to “act” as if they are Hamlet’s friends.
      1. The courtier Polonius spies on Hamlet.
      2. Ophelia, Polonius’s daughter and Hamlet’s love interest, spies on Hamlet.
      3. Two of Hamlet’s classmates, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, also spy on him.
   C. The ghost of Hamlet’s father appears, tells Hamlet that he has been murdered by Claudius, and demands revenge.
II. The plot thickens.
   A. Hamlet fights against this sort of theatricality with more theatricality, both feigning madness and employing the theater itself.
      1. Hamlet uses a play that recreates the circumstances of his father’s death.
      2. This is an extremely complex exploration on the part of Shakespeare of the power and limits of theater.
      3. Hamlet’s speech to the players, occurring in the exact center of the play, allows us to explore some of that complexity.
      4. Hamlet tells the players to be natural but ignores his own advice.
      5. Hamlet mistakenly kills Polonius, setting in motion a chain of events that eventually leads to the deaths of all the main characters.
   B. Shakespeare characteristically employs double-plotting in Hamlet.
      1. Hamlet’s madness after his father’s death is mirrored by Ophelia’s reaction to her own father’s murder.
      2. Hamlet’s desire to avenge his father’s murder by killing Claudius is mirrored by Laertes’s desire to avenge Polonius by killing Hamlet.
III. Hamlet is a play of great complexity, a very great tragedy, and arguably Shakespeare’s best known work.
   A. The true tragedy of Hamlet is that, in the process of trying to kill Claudius, Hamlet becomes suspiciously like Claudius himself.
   B. The Machiavellian practice of statecraft ends with Fortinbras seizing power.

Essential Readings:
Shakespeare, Hamlet.
Questions to Consider:
1. In what ways does Hamlet employ devices of theatricality?
2. How does the technique of double-plotting underscore the tragic elements of Hamlet?
Lecture Forty-Five

Lope de Vega

Scope: The great Spanish Golden Age dramatist Lope de Vega (1562–1635) is not nearly as well known in the English-speaking world as he is in his native Spain. For that reason, this lecture will provide some background to his life, as well as an introduction to some of the conventions of Spanish Golden Age drama, different in many ways from the Elizabethan stage that was its contemporary. Moreover, Lope was extremely prolific. Something like 450 of his plays have survived, out of the 1,500 he claimed to have written. This lecture will concentrate on Fuente Ovejuna, one of his most popular plays, and if any play can be said to be characteristic, one of his most characteristic. A story of sex, love, and justice, this play, like all of Lope’s works, contains many autobiographical elements but is also based on historical events that took place in 1476, when the peasants of Fuente Ovejuna, a village in Córdoba, rose against their feudal overlord. By examining the text of this play, the lecture also looks at Lope’s obsessive concern with his audience.

Outline

I. Lope de Vega, a contemporary of Marlowe and Shakespeare, was an incredibly gifted and prolific playwright of the Spanish Golden Age.
   A. Lope claimed to have written 1,500 works, though only 450 of his texts have survived.
   B. Lope embodied his life experiences in almost all of his written works.
      1. Nature and life experiences were as much the source of Lope’s work as studied art.
      2. Love is a major theme in his plays.
      3. His own career as a lover seems to have been slowed only slightly in 1614, when, after the death of a wife and child, he was ordained a priest.

II. Lope helped to define the Spanish theatrical tradition.
   A. Spain did not have the same distinguished medieval dramatic tradition as other European countries. This later development meant that the dramatist had to help educate his audience.
   B. Lope wrote a treatise called “The New Art of Writing Comedies at This Time” in 1609.
      1. The treatise was a rejection of dramatic rules that had developed in Italy a short time earlier.
      2. These dramatic rules were themselves re-readings of the old rules established by Aristotle in his Poetics.
      3. Renaissance theorists took Aristotle’s ideas and froze them into orthodoxy.
      4. Lope challenged this orthodoxy, claiming that instead of concentrating on theory, playwrights should aim to please their audiences.
   C. The structure of Lope’s plays is based on the notion that in order to make audiences return, the playwright must educate and please them.
      1. Lope claimed that comedies are better crowd-pleasers.
      2. He stressed that plays should never be so long as to bore the audience.
      3. He ignored the theorists’ demand for unity of time and place.
      4. Lope created realistic diction—kings speak like kings and peasants like peasants.

III. Fuente Ovejuna (“The Sheep Well”) is one of Lope’s most famous plays and demonstrates the playwright’s application of his personal theories to his works.
   A. Although Ferdinand and Isabella appear at the end of the play, the main characters are members of the lower class.
   B. The plot is based on a historical incident.
      1. In 1476, the peasants of the village of Fuente Ovejuna rose up against their feudal overlord.
      2. This feudal overlord backed the king of Portugal, an opposing claimant to the Spanish throne.
   C. The play is centered on the peasants’ reasons for rebelling against their overlord.
1. The Commendador claims that he is entitled to all the women in the village and spends time acting out that claim.
2. The women spur a rebellion against him.

D. A major theme in *Fuente Ovejuna* is love.
   1. A main plot is the developing love affair between the hero and heroine, Frondoso and Laurencia.
   2. Laurencia is the woman whom the Commendador is especially interested in, all the more because she is interested in someone else.
   3. The play includes a number of discussions about the nature of love, from multiple perspectives.

E. Community is another dominating theme of the text.
   1. The community unites to overthrow its feudal ruler.
   2. After the rebellion, the king sends a judge to prosecute the offending revolutionaries.
   3. The judge orders the villagers to be tortured in order to discover who is responsible for the uprising.
   4. All the villagers answer that “Fuente Ovejuna” did it.
   5. Because the officials cannot find any individuals to blame, they cannot punish the village.

IV. Although Lope is incredibly famous in his native Spain, he should undoubtedly be better known in the English-speaking world.
   A. Lope’s characters are well drawn and individualized.
   B. His themes are poignant and relevant.
   C. He uniquely juxtaposes broad comic humor with a direct presentation of pain and suffering.

**Essential Readings:**
Lope de Vega, *Fuente Ovejuna*.
McKendrick, *Playing the King: Lope de Vega and the Limits of Conformity*. (This study supplements the general lines of our lecture.)

**Questions to Consider:**
1. How does Lope suggest the importance of community in *Fuente Ovejuna*?
2. In what ways do Lope’s rules for theater comment on the practices of the modern entertainment industry?
Lecture Forty-Six
Miguel de Cervantes

Scope: In this lecture, we will discuss one of the most important and influential texts ever written, *Don Quixote*, by Miguel de Cervantes (1547–1616). As a new type of realistic fiction, *Don Quixote* is often considered to be the first novel. Whether or not that designation is accurate, there’s no question that it is the most important text for the subsequent history of the novel. At the same time, *Don Quixote* looks backward to the world of chivalric romance and is considered both an imitation and a parody of this form. We will look at *Don Quixote*, then, as a work standing between two worlds and examine selected portions as a way of talking about the unique position of this text. *Don Quixote* is, of course, known first of all for its original and unforgettable characters, especially Don Quixote himself and his companion, Sancho Panza. But we will try to do justice to some of the other magisterial themes in the work: the interpenetration between real and imagined worlds, sanity and insanity, art and life. We will also look at *Don Quixote* as a discourse on both creativity and values.

Outline

I. Cervantes (1547–1616) is the most famous writer in Spanish history.
   A. His literary output, other than *Don Quixote*, includes many interesting works that are little known but worth studying.
   B. *Don Quixote* is the most famous work of Spanish literature.

II. Cervantes was influenced by the writings of Erasmus.
   A. *Don Quixote* and *The Praise of Folly* exhibit similar literary techniques.
   B. Erasmus and other humanist writers were interested in church reform and were quite critical of institutional practices.
   C. Cervantes lived during the Counter-Reformation and continued the humanistic spirit of inquiry in a time of conformity.
   D. His interludes and farces contain social criticism in the spirit of Erasmus.

III. Youthful experiences prepared Cervantes for a writing career that began in middle age.
   A. Cervantes joined the army, fought, was wounded, and was held prisoner in an Algerian jail.
   B. With the defeat of the Spanish Armada, he experienced disillusionment about heroism.

IV. *Don Quixote* has been called both the first novel and the greatest novel.
   A. It is necessary to come up with a working definition to determine whether or not *Don Quixote* is, in fact, a novel.
      1. A novel is a work of prose fiction of a certain length that often moves in the direction of the depiction of everyday life.
      2. In the ancient and medieval worlds, most narratives were told in verse.
      3. The novel is the only major genre that develops after the invention of the printing press.
   B. Although the novel, as a new genre, gets the least from earlier sources, there some are influences.
      1. The Greek satirist Lucian wrote a work called *True History*.
      2. Greek romances presented separated lovers who undergo terrible trials.
      3. Medieval romances of chivalry gained popularity after the invention of the printing press.
      4. Two genres popular in Spain in the 16th century, pastoral romances and the picaresque, influenced Cervantes.
   C. The romance and the novel moved in different directions, but *Don Quixote* is, in some ways, the product of undermining the distinction.
V. *Don Quixote*, written in 1605 and 1616, may be seen as two works: There are great changes, but the cast of characters remains the same.
   A. The beginning of part 1 and the end of part 2 suggest a kind of bookend approach.
   B. The art of the novel is to manipulate the reader into believing the truth of the story.
   C. Don Quixote, the character, shows us what it means to believe in the truth of fiction.
      1. He is a fictional character who turns himself into another fictional character.
      2. He invents and gives a reality to Dulcinea.
      3. The barber’s basin becomes the Helmet of Mambrino.

VI. Although there are many instances of doubling in the text, the most famous is Don Quixote, the character, and Sancho Panza.
   A. Each provides a commentary on the other.
   B. Don Quixote becomes “Sanchified” and Sancho Panza becomes “Quixotified.”

VII. The critic Robert Alter sums up *Don Quixote* nicely: “*Don Quixote* ironically reaches for the dream of a medieval world through Renaissance literary production and becomes in the process one of the most profoundly modern of all novels.”

**Essential Readings:**
Cervantes, *Don Quixote*.
Alter, *Partial Magic: The Novel as Self-Conscious Genre*, the chapter on *Don Quixote*.

**Questions to Consider:**
1. How do Don Quixote and Sancho Panza serve as doubles for each other? Why is this important to the work?
2. In what ways does *Don Quixote* blur the line between the romance and the novel? Again, why is this blurring important?
Lecture Forty-Seven

John Milton

Scope: John Milton (1608–1674) could be studied with great profit from any number of perspectives. The great spokesman for the anti-monarchist position, he was a distinguished polemicist and humanist who wrote on education and logic. His best known prose work, *Areopagitica*, is an eloquent defense of freedom of speech and, as such, has continued to be popular down to our own time. It is primarily as England’s preeminent epic poet, however, that Milton is known today. This lecture will give a brief overview of the career and writings of Milton but will concentrate on a discussion of *Paradise Lost*, the most important epic poem written in the English language. *Paradise Lost* is Milton’s attempt to write a biblical epic that strives to “assert Eternal Providence,/And justify the ways of God to men.” Yet this biblically based undertaking is also Milton’s incorporation of the epic tradition from the classical world, the Middle Ages, and the Renaissance. After presenting a brief outline of the 12 books of Milton’s poem, we will look closely at the text of Book IX, “The Fall of Adam and Eve,” as the best way to see what is central in Milton thematically and most subtle about Milton from both a literary and a psychological point of view.

Outline

I. Milton’s life experiences not only prepared him for the enterprise of writing an epic poem but were incorporated into the poem itself.
   A. Milton’s education prepared him to write *Paradise Lost*.
      1. Milton is one of the most prodigiously learned poets in the Western tradition and does very little to hide this fact in his works.
      2. He was educated by private tutors and attended St. Paul’s School and Cambridge.
      3. He had opportunities for long-term leisure, which allowed for intensive, self-directed study.
      4. He mastered ancient and modern languages: Greek, Hebrew, Latin, French, and Italian.
   B. Milton’s earlier poetic career prepared him to write an epic.
      1. Milton wrote poems in a variety of languages, beginning as school exercises.
      2. He mastered various poetic forms, bringing together Christian and classical themes.
   C. Like Dante, Milton had a political career that ended badly and that proved to be an enormous influence on his literary works.
      1. The interplay between the active and contemplative life is an overt theme in much of Milton’s poetry.
      2. Milton’s was a strong and active voice on the side of the Parliamentarians against the Monarchists and against the established Church.
      3. Milton worked for the Protectorate, holding the title of Secretary of Foreign Tongues to the Council of State.
      4. After the Restoration, Milton was released from government service and briefly imprisoned.
      5. Milton’s sense of the awareness of the difference between a divine plan and human striving is part of the texture of *Paradise Lost*.
      6. The idea of Christian heroism as an acceptance of humiliation took on a powerful existential meaning to the poet and is reflected in the narrative voice of *Paradise Lost*.

   A. His theme is no less than “asserting eternal providence” to “justify the ways of God to men.”
   B. *Paradise Lost* accepts the epic convention of starting *In Medias Res*.
      1. Books I and II show the aftermath of the war in Heaven, with Satan and his angels plotting to avenge themselves by attacking humans.
      2. Book III shows God tracking the progress of Satan and the Son volunteering to become incarnate.
4. In Book V, Eve recounts a dream to Adam and God sends the angel Raphael to warn the couple of impending trouble.
5. In Book VI, Raphael gives the couple an account of the war in Heaven.
6. In Book VII, Raphael gives the couple an account of creation.
7. In Book VIII, Adam recalls meeting Eve and their subsequent marriage.
8. Book IX is the retelling of the fall and, by many accounts, the climax of the epic and of Milton’s poetic corpus.
9. In Book X, the Father sends the Son to earth to temper justice with mercy.
10. Books XI and XII include Adam’s dream and a vision of the future, as narrated by the angel Michael.

III. Milton saw himself as another great epic writer in a long and ancient tradition.
   A. The epic can be seen as a kind of encyclopedia of human knowledge, because it includes literary, scientific, and historical lore.
   B. Writing an epic involves using the work of previous epic writers in very self-conscious ways. This rewriting needs to be seen as both an homage to the tradition and a conscious attempt to surpass it.
   C. Milton rewrites both Dante and Virgil.
      1. In Book I, a good deal of the description of Hell comes from Dante.
      2. Satan’s speech inspiring false hope in his fellow fallen angels is a rewriting of Aeneas’s exhortation to his men in Book I of the Aeneid.
      3. Virgil uses this as an example of what a good leader Aeneas is; Milton uses it to turn Satan from hero to anti-hero.
      4. A second Virgilian echo can be scene in the panorama of biblical history of the last two books of Paradise Lost.
      5. Milton’s panorama both echoes and replaces the vision of Roman history given to Aeneas in the Aeneid.

IV. The largely self-contained Book IX of Paradise Lost is an obvious place to go for an introduction to Milton at his best.
   A. It shows Milton’s command over language, his dramatic sense, his ability to create character, his dramatization of the psychology of temptation, and his massive learning.
   B. It is also a great place to deal with Milton’s attitude toward women, an especial subject of commentary and debate in current feminist studies.

Essential Readings:
Milton, Paradise Lost, Books I–II and Book IX.
———, “On the Morning of Christ’s Nativity.”

Questions to Consider:
1. How did Milton’s life experiences prepare him to write Paradise Lost?
2. How does Milton’s chosen theme for his epic reflect his literary intentions?
Lecture Forty-Eight
Blaise Pascal

Scope: Although Pascal (1623–1662) was a scientist, a mathematician, and a polemicist, the most influential of his works, which has come down to us with the title of Pensées, or “Thoughts,” is a work of religious meditation. It was never completed, and we have a collection of fragments, perhaps about a thousand in all, that have been brought together and treated as a consistent, if incomplete, work. Perhaps they are best seen as a set of notes for a project that was never finished. Pascal is interested in a line of reasoning to show that Christianity is defensible. He also wishes to show that it is lovable and true. In this lecture, we will discuss the Pensées, both in terms of the current of thought that Pascal was responding to in his own time and the tradition that leads back to Augustine that is sometimes overlooked.

Outline
I. Pascal was a prodigy who accomplished an enormous amount in the short time he was alive (1623–1662).
   A. There are some interesting examples in his early life of his talents.
      1. He was educated by his father, a mathematician, who insisted that he learn Greek and Latin first.
      2. He taught himself geometry, and by the age of 12, he was able to demonstrate the first 32 propositions of Euclid.
   B. His writings and other accomplishments were underway by the time he was 17.
      1. His first work was a mathematical work on conic sections written in 1640.
      2. He invented a kind of calculator to help his father, who was a tax collector.
      3. In another work, he attempts to refute the notion that “nature abhors a vacuum,” a view that goes back to Aristotle.
II. Pascal underwent a series of formative religious experiences.
   A. In 1646, his contact with two Jansenists, followers of the Dutch thinker Jansenius, made him a more serious and conscientious Catholic.
   B. In 1651, when Pascal went to Paris, he seems to have suspended his religious interests in favor of the freethinking and libertine ways of the Paris socialites with whom he associated.
   C. In 1654, he underwent a religious conversion so profound that he devoted himself only to religious activities from that point on.
III. Pascal wrote the Provincial Letters, a defense of the Jansenist theological position, in 1656–1657.
   A. The work attacked what the Jansenists viewed as a kind of laxity that had developed in certain Church quarters, almost as a kind of aftereffect of the Counter-Reformation.
   B. Among other issues, Pascal takes up the debate on frequent communion begun in 1643 with the publication of a work by Jansenist apologist Arnauld.
   C. The letters show Pascal’s talent for making a highly specialized debate not only accessible but also interesting to a wide audience.
   D. Eighteen letters appeared serially and anonymously in 1656–1657.
      1. Using brilliant rhetorical strategies, Letters 1 through 8 defend Arnauld, reduce the Jesuit position to absurdity, challenge the Jesuits’ moral authority, and are a great success.
      2. Jesuit responses provoke Pascal to write further letters accusing the Jesuits of misusing their sources, leading to a discussion of language and truth.
      3. Letter 17 accuses the Jesuits of fabricating the Jansenist heresy to undermine a threat to their political hegemony.
      4. From a literary point of view, the Provincial Letters signals a change in the history of rhetoric. As a satire, it continues to have an honored place in European literature.
IV. Pascal’s most important work, the *Pensées*, was left incomplete at his death.
   A. It is a series of about a thousand fragmentary notes, whose very form and relationship to the finished project have been matters of a great deal of debate.
      1. The question arises: Should the notes be kept in the order in which they were found, or should they be ordered according to subject matter?
      2. We know something, but not all we would like to know about Pascal’s intentions.
   B. The first part of the *Pensées* is often called the “anthropological” part.
      1. Pascal thinks of humans within a nature that stretches up into infinite space and disappears in the other direction into unimaginable smallness.
      2. He deals with ideas but also with psychological states.
      3. All of this is in service of a larger aim, which is to show that Christianity is defensible.

V. One way to get some sense of what the *Pensées* is all about is through the most famous fragment, the so-called wager: “Either God is or He is not… Reason cannot decide this question… How will you wager?”
   A. This seems to take the question away from the realm of evidence and prompts us to place our bets on the option with the highest expected value: nothing to lose and everything to gain.
   B. It’s better to see the wager as part of Pascal’s overall strategy.
      1. Pascal believed that for the fair, unbiased observer, there is good deal of evidence that Christian theism is true.
      2. Pascal has a long list of what counts as evidence in the truths of Christianity.
      3. The kind of life we lead helps us to see the evidence.

VI. Pascal continues to fascinate and delight, to provoke and to inspire.

**Essential Readings:**
Pascal, *Pensées*.
Morris, *Making Sense of It All: Pascal and the Meaning of Life*.

**Questions to Consider:**
1. What are some difficulties with interpreting the *Pensées*, given that they are incomplete?
2. How does Pascal’s background in mathematics help him to argue for his religious beliefs?
Timeline

1365................................................ Birth of Christine de Pizan
1374................................................ Death of Petrarch
1400................................................ Death of Chaucer
1405................................................ Christine writes *The Book of the City of Ladies*
1430................................................ Death of Christine de Pizan
1453................................................ Constantinople falls to the Ottoman Turks
1455................................................ Gutenberg prints the Bible
1466................................................ Birth of Erasmus
1477................................................ Birth of Thomas More
1494................................................ Birth of Rabelais
1503................................................ Erasmus writes *Enchiridion militis Christiani* (“The Handbook of a Christian Soldier”)
1511................................................ Erasmus writes *The Praise of Folly*
1516................................................ More writes *Utopia* (in Latin)
1529................................................ More appointed Lord Chancellor of England
1532................................................ First edition of Rabelais’s *Pantagruel* published
1533................................................ Birth of Montaigne
1534................................................ Rabelais writes *Gargantua*, which becomes the first book in the collected edition of *Gargantua and Pantagruel*
1535................................................ Death (by execution) of More
1536................................................ Death of Erasmus
1546................................................ Third book of *Pantagruel* published
1547................................................ Birth of Cervantes
1548................................................ Fourth book of *Pantagruel* published
1551................................................ More’s *Utopia* translated into English
1553................................................ Death of Rabelais
1562................................................ Birth of Lope de Vega
1564................................................ Fifth book of *Pantagruel* published—how much of this final book is by Rabelais is still a matter of debate
1564................................................ Birth of Marlowe
1564................................................ Birth of Shakespeare
1571................................................ Cervantes wounded at the battle of Lepanto
1580................................................ First two books of Montaigne’s *Essays* published
1588................................................ Revised three-book edition of Montaigne’s *Essays* published
1588................................................ Spanish Armada defeated by the English
c. 1588–1589 ......................... Marlowe writes *Dr. Faustus*
1592 ................................................ Death of Montaigne
1593 ................................................ Death of Marlowe
c. 1596–1597 ................................. Shakespeare writes *Merchant of Venice*
c. 1599–1601 ................................. Shakespeare writes *Hamlet*
1605 ................................................ Part I of Cervantes’s *Don Quixote* is published
1608 ................................................ Birth of Milton
1609 ................................................ Lope’s treatise “The New Art of Writing Comedies at This Time” is published
c. 1612–1614 ................................. Lope writes *Fuente Ovejuna* (“Sheep Well”)
1616 ................................................ Death of Shakespeare
1616 ................................................ Part II of *Don Quixote* is published
1616 ................................................ Death of Cervantes
1623 ................................................ Birth of Pascal
1633 ................................................ Galileo gets in trouble with the Inquisition
1635 ................................................ Death of Lope de Vega
1644 ................................................ Milton’s treatise on freedom of the press, *Areopagitica*, published
1656–1657 ....................................... Pascal writes the *Provincial Letters*
1662 ................................................ Death of Pascal
1667 ................................................ Milton’s *Paradise Lost* is published in 10 books
1670 ................................................ First edition of Pascal’s *Pensées* published
1674 ................................................ Milton’s *Paradise Lost* is published in 12 books
1674 ................................................ Death of Milton
1935 ................................................ Thomas More is canonized
Glossary

Areopagitica: One of the most famous of Milton’s prose works (1644), it is still read today as a compelling argument for freedom of the press and, more generally, for free speech.

Comedias: Although the word translates as “comedies,” it is, in fact, the name that Lope de Vega uses to describe all his plays. Thus, his 1609 treatise, in which he rejects Renaissance interpretations of Aristotelian rules, is entitled “The New Art of Writing Comedies at This Time.”

Enchiridion (Enchiridion militis Christi): An early work of Erasmus, first published in 1503, which literally translates as a “Handbook of the Christian Soldier.” Erasmus modeled this treatise on an earlier treatise of St. Augustine (354–430) with the same title. Erasmus calls for Christians to be learned in Holy Scripture and affirms that religion should be more concerned with one’s interior disposition and loving God and one’s neighbor than with outward devotions. In this work, Erasmus also urges the study of ancient pagan writers, especially Greek writers, as a helpful prelude to studying the original texts of Scripture. He says, “any truth you come upon at any place is Christ’s,” thus helping to define one of the key ideas of Christian humanism as practiced by his friend More, by Rabelais, and many others.

Jansenism: Theological positions taken by followers of Cornelius Jansen or Jansenius (1585–1638). Jansen himself was an interpreter of Augustine, whose major work, Augustinus, was published after his death, in 1640. In interpreting Augustine, Jansen seems to say that humans are subject to theological determinism when it comes to the action of grace. The tendency of Jansenism, as interpreted by Jansen’s follower Antoine Arnauld, was toward extreme rigor in matters of ecclesiastical discipline and hostility to what was seen as the laxity of the Jesuit order. Although propositions of the Jansenists were condemned by Pope Innocent X in 1653, the movement found a brilliant defender in Blaise Pascal, whose Provincial Letters is a rhetorical tour de force in which the laxity of the Jesuits comes under scathing attack.

Lepanto: A naval battle fought off the coast of Greece in 1571, in which combined European forces defeated the forces of the Ottoman-Turkish Empire. Often cited as a turning point in European history because it stemmed the tide of Islam, its more immediate interest for this course is that Cervantes fought and was wounded there. The pride that he felt in this victory (which apparently continued throughout his life) exists in tension with disillusionment about his military career that came later, when he spent five years in an Algerian prison.

Pastoral romance: A genre of literature that flourished, among other places, in Spain in the 16th century. Shepherds discourse about love, although they are more like aristocrats in the guise of shepherds, living in an idealized landscape where they have to do no work. Because they are free from having to do real work, they can discourse on the inner life. This was one of many forms of romance that Cervantes used and parodied in Don Quixote. He was also aware of Greek romances of A.D. 3rd century that had been made available in the Renaissance, along with medieval chivalric romances.

Poetics: An important treatise by the Greek philosopher Aristotle (384–322 B.C.) on the nature of drama and the nature of tragedy. Indeed, in some ways, this work represents the fountainhead of literary criticism in the Western tradition. Aristotle’s norms for drama, based on his close observation of Greek tragedy, were frozen into a kind of orthodoxy by Italian theorists during the Renaissance. Lope de Vega, in his treatise “The New Art of Writing Comedies at This Time” (1609), quite self-consciously challenged this new orthodoxy, claiming that instead of concentrating on theory, playwrights should aim to please their audiences.
Biographical Notes

Cid Hamet Ben Engeli: A Moor (the name for Muslims in Spain) who is the invented narrator for most of Cervantes’s *Don Quixote*. He is represented both as a scrupulously honest historian and as a lying infidel dog, thus suggesting some of the difficulties of interpretation in the work.

Dido: In Virgil’s *Aeneid*, Dido is the queen of Carthage, whose tragic love affair with Aeneas is depicted in Book IV. The story of Dido is retold by Christine de Pizan (who gives it a very different slant) in *The Book of the City of Ladies* and by Marlowe in his early play *Dido, Queen of Carthage*. The story of Dido is also alluded to in Shakespeare’s *Hamlet*.

Euclid (fl. c. 300 B.C.): Greek mathematician whose work provides the foundations of geometry. His great textbook, the *Elements*, is perhaps the most famous mathematical treatise in history. Pascal was able to demonstrate the first 32 propositions of Euclid by the time he was 12.

Henry VIII (1491–1547): English king. In 1534, the English Parliament passed the Acts of Succession, declaring that Henry’s marriage to Catherine of Aragon was annulled and his marriage to Anne Boleyn lawful. For refusing to recognize this, Thomas More was sent to prison in the Tower of London and was executed on July 5, 1535.

Hippocrates (c. 460–c. 377 B.C.): A contemporary of Socrates (469–399 B.C.), he is the most famous Greek physician, although the works of medicine that have come down to us under his name were probably not actually written by him. Rabelais put his knowledge of Greek and his medical training to good use by translating some of these works around the time that he studied medicine at Montpellier (c. 1530).

Jerome (c. 342–420): Great biblical scholar who translated the Bible into Latin. He was, therefore, a particular model for, and hero of, Erasmus, who published an edition of the Greek text of the New Testament.

Julius II (1443–1513, r. 1503): Pope who was scathingly attacked by Erasmus in *The Praise of Folly* and in *Julius Exclusus*, a work in which Erasmus compares him unfavorably to St. Peter and in which he is excluded from heaven for his worldliness.

Lucian (b. c. 120): Greek satirist who wrote in dialogue form. In his use of humor and satire to deal with serious issues, he was both a model for, and a great favorite of, such Renaissance writers as More, Erasmus, Rabelais, and Cervantes.

Martin Luther (1483–1546): Church reformer whose break with Rome inaugurated the Protestant Reformation. Luther was a friar teaching at Wittenberg University when he made his break with Rome. (It is interesting to note that Hamlet was also a student at Wittenberg in Shakespeare’s play.) In 1519, Luther began an exchange of letters with Erasmus. Although they agreed on the need for reform in the Church, they disagreed over fundamental theological issues, with Erasmus remaining squarely in the Catholic camp.

Raymond Sebond: Fifteenth-century Spanish philosopher who wrote a work of natural philosophy, asserting that reason can play a large part in substantiating faith. Montaigne’s essay “Apology for Raymond Sebond,” considered among his most important writings, takes issue with many of the premises of this work.

Simon the Magician: A figure who appears in Acts of the Apostles (chapter 8), as someone who tries to buy the gifts of the Holy Spirit and is denounced by Peter. In the legendary account that grew up around Simon, he flew from the walls of Rome but then, through the prayers of Peter, crashed to his death. The story of the fall of Simon the Magician is often seen as a precursor to the Faust story, as is the story of the fall of Icarus from classical mythology.
Bibliography

Note: The following bibliography contains the most useful editions for the authors covered in this section of the course, as well as some of the most helpful studies about them.

Christine de Pizan


Herzman, Ronald. “*The Book of the City of Ladies* as Twice Told Tale,” in *Retelling Tales*, Thomas Hahn and Alan Lupack, eds., pp. 108–125. Suffolk and Rochester, NY: Boydell and Brewer, 1998. This essay might be useful as an introduction to the writers treated in this part of the course because it details Christine’s use of previous authors, such as Dante, thus providing, as Christine herself does, a transition between the Middle Ages and the Renaissance.


Desiderius Erasmus

Erasmus. *The Praise of Folly*. John Wilson, trans. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1965. Although this translation was done in 1688, it is not a difficult one to read, and its rhythm may prove interesting to the modern reader.

———. *The Praise of Folly and Other Writings*. New York: Norton, 1989. Like the other Norton Critical Editions, this contains critical essays and a good bibliography. It also contains selections from *Julius Exclusus*. Pope Julius is the object of a great deal of criticism in *The Praise of Folly*.

———. *The Collected Works of Erasmus*. James K. McConica, general ed. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1974–. Eighty-nine volumes have been published to date. Even granting that the first 22 volumes consist of letters, this staggering output suggests something of why Erasmus was considered such a seminal figure in his own time.

Bainton, Roland. *Erasmus of Christendom*. New York: Scribner’s, 1969. Another useful introduction to the life and work of Erasmus, this book deals extensively with the relationship between Erasmus and Luther. (Bainton is perhaps better known for his biography of Luther.)


Thomas More

More, Thomas. *Utopia*. Paul Turner, trans. New York: Penguin, 1965. In addition to the Penguin version used for these lectures, two other editions are also useful:


As the lecture on More suggests, his life is, in some ways, as interesting as his works. A good introduction to that life is the film *A Man for All Seasons*, based on the play of the same name by Robert Bolt and with a brilliant performance by Paul Scofield as Thomas More.


Michel de Montaigne

De Montaigne, Michel. *Complete Works*. Donald Frame, trans. New York: Knopf, 2003. In addition to the *Essays*, which comprise the bulk of the volume, the complete works consist of travel journals and letters. Once again, as with Rabelais, the Frame translation is the standard. Frame also has written a number of studies of Montaigne, two of which are listed below:


Auerbach, Erich. *Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature*. New York: Doubleday, 1957. The chapter on Montaigne, “L’Humaine Condition,” situates him in the larger context of the Western literary tradition and is of particular value for the entire course. With essays ranging from Homer to the 20th century, this book would make a fine companion for the entire course, as well as for the Renaissance part of it. (There is an essay on Shakespeare, for example, and one on Don Quixote.)

Hall, Michael Lee. “Montaigne’s Use of Classical Learning.” *Journal of Education* 179 (1997): 61–75. This essay is part of a series in the journal on cultural foundations for educators, written for an audience with no previous knowledge of Montaigne. It deals directly with the question of why Montaigne remains important in our time.


François Rabelais


Two other important translations:


Christopher Marlowe


Nicoll, Charles. *The Murder of Christopher Marlowe*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995. This work examines the death of Marlowe in a barroom brawl in terms of political intrigue, arguing that the key to his death is to be found in the English spy system. It takes the reader on a tour of the Elizabethan underworld.

The film *Shakespeare in Love* is an interesting introduction to the world of the Elizabethan stage. The fictionalized story should in no way detract from what the careful viewer can find out about what it meant to be a playwright and an actor during this time. Marlowe’s role in the play is a good introduction to his relationship with his contemporary, Shakespeare.

William Shakespeare

reasons that this is my text of choice when teaching Shakespeare. In addition, there is a general bibliography, which
can help orient the reader to the dauntingly complex world of Shakespeare scholarship.

Two other complete texts make an equally strong case:


In general, for those who balk at the girth of a complete edition and would rather use paperback editions of
individual plays, any edition currently available would provide a good text and a useful enough apparatus.

University Press, 2001. The Cambridge Companions are good general introductions with individual essays written
by specialists, including background essays and analyses of individual works.

Diehl, Huston. Staging Reform, Reforming the Stage. Ithaca, NY: 1997. This study is included because the lectures
on Shakespeare deal with the issue of theatricality. It has a useful bibliography.

recent book, written for a mass-market audience by one of the most widely known contemporary Shakespeare
scholars, attempts to show how Shakespeare's plays can be read in the light of what we know about Shakespeare's
life. The book gives the reader a good deal of useful background to Elizabethan England, as well as to
Shakespeare's place in it.

Killman, Bernice, ed. Approaches to Teaching Shakespeare's Hamlet. New York: Modern Language Association of
America, 2001. From the Modern Language Association’s (MLA’s) Approach to Teaching Literature series. The
text is divided into two parts, “Materials,” which covers teaching aids and useful resources, including Web sites;
and “Approaches,” which offers strategies, suggestions, and techniques for teaching the work. This volume also
contains additional tips and exercises.

to the material supplied in a complete edition, this companion to Shakespeare has many primary documents from
Shakespeare’s time. In both Bevington and McDonald, there is a section on Shakespeare on film. Given that this
medium is now the way in which many first encounter Shakespeare, it is useful to know where to go to find out
about Shakespeare on screen, as well as on stage.

Lope de Vega

Of the authors studied in “Literature of the Renaissance,” Lope is the one least well-known in the English-speaking
world, one result of which is that much less of his work is available in English translation. But there are several
volumes available that contain Fuente Ovejuna, the work we concentrate on here.

addition to the text of Fuente Ovejuna, this collection also contains a play by Cervantes, whose career as a
playwright is largely obscured because of the fame of Don Quixote.

gives a representative selection of the works of Lope, if any selection can be considered representative of an author
who may have written upwards of 1,200 plays.

McKendrick, Melveena. Playing the King: Lope de Vega and the Limits of Conformity. Suffolk: Boydell and
Brewer, 2002. (This work was originally published by Tamesis Books, which is now part of Boydell and Brewer.
Tamesis is a series that treats the literature of Spain and Portugal.) This study presents the plays of Lope in a
political context, seeing them as a reasoned critique of monarchy, rather than the often-accepted position that the
plays are a glorification of monarchy.

Miguel de Cervantes

Penguin Classics version is perhaps the most widely known translation of Don Quixote.

a Norton Critical Edition that contains background material, critical essays, and a bibliography.


**John Milton**


———. *Complete Poetry and Major Prose*. Merritt Y. Hughes, ed. Indianapolis, IN: Hackett, 2003. The standard text for Milton, it contains all the works of Milton that are mentioned in the lecture.

Crump, Galbraith M., ed. *Approaches to Teaching Milton’s Paradise Lost*. New York: Modern Language Association of America, 1986. From the MLA’s Approach to Teaching Literature series. The text is divided into two parts, “Materials,” which covers teaching aids and useful resources, including Web sites; and “Approaches,” which offers strategies, suggestions, and techniques for teaching the work.


Lewis, C. S. *A Preface to Paradise Lost*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1941. This classic study is especially valuable for this course because it relates *Paradise Lost* to the tradition of the epic by specific reference to Homer, Virgil, and Beowulf.

**Blaise Pascal**


**Internet Resources** (for general information about the period)


*Cambridge English Renaissance Electronic Service*. http://www.english.cam.ac.uk/creses/. This site features useful links for general Renaissance studies.


*Perseus Digital Library*. http://www.perseus.tufts.edu. This online library hosts the works of Marlowe and Shakespeare.
Great Authors of the Western Literary Tradition
Part V:
Neoclassic Literature and the 18th Century
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Susan Sage Heinzelman, an Associate Professor of English and Women’s and Gender Studies, has been teaching at the University of Texas since 1977 in the English Department and the School of Law. Her scholarship focuses on the representation of women in law and literature in both contemporary and historical contexts. She is co-editor (with Zipporah Batshaw Wiseman) of *Representing Women: Law, Literature, and Feminism* (1994) and author of many articles on the representation of women in law and literature, including “Black Letters and Black Rams: Fictionalizing Law and Legalizing Literature in Enlightenment England” in *Law/Text/Culture* (2002). She is President of the Association for the Study of Law, Culture, and the Humanities.

Professor Heinzelman teaches courses in Literary Criticism, the Eighteenth-Century English Novel, and Feminist Theory at the undergraduate and graduate level and has won many university teaching awards, most recently the President’s Associates Teaching Award (2003).
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Great Authors of the Western Literary Tradition
Part V: Neoclassic Literature and the 18th Century

Scope:
This group of 12 lectures examines those authors whose work is representative of the major intellectual movements of Neoclassical and 18th-century culture, a period known variously as the “Age of Reason” or the “Age of the Enlightenment.” We will also move into the opening years of the 19th century, when we address the work of two Romantic writers, Blake and Goethe. The period from 1637, when Descartes’ Discourse on Method appeared, until the death of Goethe in 1832 is generally referred to as the long 18th century to acknowledge that many of the major intellectual, social, and political concerns of the 18th century find their starting points in the 17th century and still remain central to the 19th century. Our discussion of the literature of this period will inescapably invoke the scientific, theological, and political debates of the time, given that those debates find their aesthetic expression in both the form and content of the literature.

We will begin with two French writers, Molière (1622–1673) and Racine (1639–1699), whose work will introduce us to certain primary Neoclassical concepts, such as a focus on the study of human nature understood as a universal and general principle and the appeal of the rational and moderate. Moreover, these two writers—one satiric, the other tragic—encapsulate Neoclassicism in the form that spoke most directly in their particular historical moment to a desire for the moral balance and aesthetic regulation associated with classical civilization: that is, the dramatic performance.

The third lecture in this part of the course will illustrate the universal appeal of Enlightenment ideas and aspirations through the work of a Mexican nun, Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz (1648–1695), whose voice speaks across three centuries to remind us that woman’s desire for a life of the mind is as passionate as man’s.

Returning to Europe and England, we will explore two countertrends to Neoclassicism: the steady growth of a literate middling class, ambivalent about the value of traditional forms and values, and the turn from the representation of the general and the universal toward a more individualized, less aristocratic subject for literature. The form that embodied this implicit critique of Neoclassical culture was the novel, which by its very nature, resisted traditional aesthetic regulation. The term novel describes not only its generic characteristics but also its content—news, quotidian reality, criminal biography, and travel stories. The fourth lecture in this group will examine these countertrends in the work of Daniel Defoe (1660–1731). Defoe fully exploited the public’s voracious appetite for new stories, publishing narratives about the sexual and commercial entrepreneurs of London, including Moll Flanders and Roxana, and that essential guide to empire building, Robinson Crusoe.

The next two lectures will suggest how Defoe’s literary antagonists counteracted his popular appeal. Alexander Pope (1688–1744) articulated the voice of the elite, of the preserver of classical values and forms, and bitterly satirized the writers of Grub Street, like Defoe, who catered to popular taste and spoke for the middling classes. Pope not only defined the aesthetic tastes that to him seemed the equivalent of civilization itself but also satirized his own social circle, arguing that its excessive concern with superficial manners undermined its intellectual and moral superiority. Part of that same social circle, Jonathan Swift (1667–1745), drew on the public’s appetite for news, and in a novel that might be considered an answer to Robinson Crusoe—Gulliver’s Travels (1726)—he satirized the failure of an apparently civilized society to pursue rational and morally virtuous behavior.

The seventh and eighth lectures in Part V of the course return us to France, where we will explore the work of one writer—Voltaire (1694–1778)—whose belief in social justice and freedom of thought exemplifies the values and ideas of the Enlightenment and another writer—Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712–1778)—whose work similarly articulates Enlightenment concerns, yet contains many of the ideas that would flourish under the auspices of another cultural movement, Romanticism.

We will then turn to two figures—one English and one French—whose work is exemplary of the Enlightenment belief that knowledge brings progress and that the republic of letters is finally more important and powerful than any specific political form of social organization: Samuel Johnson (1709–1784) and Denis Diderot (1713–1784). By collecting and categorizing knowledge in their Dictionary and Encyclopedia, respectively, they asserted that knowledge was a product of culture, rather than simply a body of dogma approved by religious or political authorities.
Finally, we will explore the work of two writers who were born into and matured in the Age of Enlightenment but experienced the aesthetic constraints and rational empiricism of that epoch as restrictive rather than liberating. William Blake (1757–1827) and Johann Wolfgang von Goethe (1749–1832) helped to transform that Enlightenment world into one recognizably modern, a world in which an ever-active imagination and a relentless search for its formal, aesthetic equivalent constructs reality.
Lecture Forty-Nine

Molière

Scope: In this lecture, we consider the general characteristics of Neoclassical and Romantic sensibilities, noting particularly how the latter movement was both a continuation of, and a reaction to, the former. We will then turn to Molière and explore, through Tartuffé (1664), his representation of Neoclassical values: the privileging of rational thought over emotional intemperance; the insistence that authority, particularly religious authority, is not to be preferred over rational, individual experience; and the belief that human beings can be improved through education and the development of their rational facilities.

Outline

I. The terms Neoclassical and Romantic cover complicated and often contradictory claims about the nature of reality and the role of humankind in constructing and reflecting that reality. I will use two major concepts to define the Neoclassical period: (1) the relationship between knowledge and truth and (2) the ideology of order and reason

A. First we will discuss the relationship between knowledge and truth.
   1. René Descartes’ Discourse on Method (1637) marked a new direction for philosophical inquiry, insisting on the value of mathematical reasoning in the inquiry into truth.
   2. Philosophy thus joined with the “new” sciences to answer fundamental questions about the relationship of individual consciousness to the world and its knowledge.
   3. Energized by the Reformation, the Scientific Revolution redefined the nature of knowledge and, specifically, the relationship of knowledge to theology.
   4. Thus, one quality intimately associated with Neoclassicism is, paradoxically, a break with the classical tradition—as far as that tradition was identified with a certain kind of inquiry into truth.

B. Let us turn now to the second concept, the ideology of order and reason.
   1. Endless war produced a longing for the rules and forms associated with peaceful periods in history, such as that of Caesar Augustus, patron of Virgil and Horace.
   2. In France, the age of Louis XIV (1638–1715) seemed an age as glorious as the reign of Augustus. Like Augustus, Louis was a patron of the arts and sciences, encouraging such artists as Molière and Racine.
   3. For the Neoclassicists, the arts were, at their best, an expression of balance, reason, and civic virtue, and their form followed ancient models.
   4. Order, however, never comes without its shadow—disorder—and rules imposed without subtlety limit art.

C. How can we define the Romantic period?
   1. If Neoclassicism turned to the ancient past for its models, Romanticism looked to the future.
   2. If Neoclassicism focused on the values of community, Romanticism focused on the exceptional, visionary individual.
   3. If Neoclassicism privileged order and reason, Romanticism praised the creation of new form out of disorder and the potential for revelation in madness.

D. Neoclassicism and Romanticism each contain elements of the other—neither is a “pure” aesthetic or cultural movement.

E. Neoclassicism is a term applied by the artists to themselves as an honorific, whereas Romantic was applied retroactively by those Victorians who wished to distance themselves from the Romantic sensibility.

II. Let us now turn to the biographical background of Molière (1622–1673).

A. Molière, whose given name was Jean Baptiste Poquelin, died in 1673, after performing in his own play, Le Malade Imaginaire (“The Imaginary Invalid”).

B. Such was the resentment of the Church against Molière for what it believed to be his anti-Church sentiments in his play Tartuffé (1664) that Louis XIV had to persuade the archbishop of Paris to allow Molière burial in sanctified ground.
C. From breakfast with Louis XIV to a secret burial: thus the fortunes of Molière fluctuated during his 26 years in the theater.

III. We will next explore the theatrical background of Molière.
   A. Molière left Paris with a troupe of half-amateur actors when he was 25 years old and spent about 12 years touring the provinces.
   B. The greatest influence on Molière’s theater came from his travels, especially the Italian *commedia dell’arte* troupes—a form of theater popular in 16th- and 17th-century Italy typified by stock characters, often wearing distinctive masks, who acted out stock plots.
   C. Molière wrote more than 30 plays, the most famous of which are his five-act philosophical comedies, of which *Tartuffe* is one of his best.
   D. These plays focus on general human nature rather than its individual aspects.

IV. Let us now turn to the play *Tartuffe* (1664).
   A. Tartuffe is a guest and virtual master of the house of his patron, Orgon. All in the house, except Orgon and his mother, Madame Pernelle, see through Tartuffe’s false claims to religious piety.
   B. We can organize the themes of the play around three concepts: order, reason, and the difference between the real and the illusory. The philosophical basis for these three principles is most directly articulated by Orgon’s brother-in-law, Cléante.
   C. Note one significant structural point: Tartuffe does not enter the play until the third act. The play is not about him but his vice—religious hypocrisy—and its consequences to the family with whom he lives and to society at large.

V. Act I: We see the effects of Tartuffe’s hypocrisy.
   A. Tartuffe’s hypocrisy disrupts the necessary order and hierarchy of the family and, thereby, of society.
   B. In situating herself with her son and an outsider, Tartuffe, against the rest of the family, Madame Pernelle confirms that there is some deep disturbance in the structure of family life.
   C. Her failure to distinguish between true piety and Tartuffe’s hypocrisy, a failure she shares with her son, suggests that the play will have to move toward the comic revelation of this inadequacy before order can be restored.
   D. Another site of disorder is in the father’s control of his daughter’s marriage. The plot thus involves more than the unmasking of Tartuffe—it must also conclude, as a comedy, with the happy union of the two lovers.
   E. Order is inextricably entwined with reason, and the consequences of the father’s irrational behavior are now evident: With Orgon’s return from a visit to the country, we see for the first time the extent of his foolishness.
   F. In this first scene of the play, we are also introduced to the two characters who stand as exemplars of reason and moderation: Orgon’s brother, Cléante, and the lady’s maid, Dorine.
   G. In response to his brother’s excessive praise of Tartuffe’s holy nature, Cléante describes the difference between true piety and hypocrisy, employing the conventional metaphor of the mask.
      1. Cléante concludes his speech to his brother by articulating a central Neoclassical belief: He believes in the natural reason of man when he acts, as nature does, with moderation and self-control.
      2. Cléante also applies this philosophical argument to false religious belief, arguing against these “hollow shows.” Molière draws attention to the illusionary nature of his work, for his play, too, might be called a “hollow show.”
   H. Cléante suggests that Orgon has transgressed “Reason’s laws,” and Dorine confirms Orgon’s transgressions when she challenges his paternal tyranny.
   I. The immoderation demonstrated by Orgon is also evident in his daughter, Mariane, who is excessively passive, and in his son, Damis, who is excessively aggressive. Both children are immoderate.
VI. Act III: Tartuffe seduces, is seduced, and wins all.

A. Dorine and Orgon’s wife, Elmire, two pragmatic and reasonable women, plan to trick Tartuffe to disclose his hypocrisy. They conspire to blackmail him into giving up his claim to Mariane.

B. Tartuffe’s first appearance in Act III, scene ii, then, is coincidental with the first step in his downfall, and his attempted seduction of Elmire occurs in Act III, scene iii—the climax of the ascending action of the play. From this point on, everything conspires to unmask Tartuffe.

C. Damis bursts in just as Elmire’s plan to blackmail Tartuffe is about to succeed. Once again, reason and pragmatism are contrasted with the immoderate approach.

D. Damis demonstrates the difference between doing what feels right (revenge) versus doing what is reasonable: The former is a product of passion; the latter, the product of judgment. The former is associated with Romanticism; the latter, with Neoclassicism.

E. Orgon enters and, with extraordinary self-deception, rejects Tartuffe’s confession as further example of his piety. Tartuffe’s confession is a stylized ritual—a piece of theater—and once again, the members of the audience are reminded that they, too, are being “deceived” by appearance.
   1. With supreme comic irony, Tartuffe insists that Orgon should trust his son rather than himself. But Tartuffe’s pleading for Damis only convinces Orgon of his son’s guilt. Orgon insists that Tartuffe marry Mariane, and Damis is disinherited in favor of Orgon’s new son, Tartuffe.
   2. The disorder in the family structure is complete with distressing implications for those other “fathers”—king and God.

VII. Act IV: Orgon sees at last, but too late.

A. Reasoned discourse has failed with Orgon; it will take empirical evidence to convince Orgon of the reality of Tartuffe’s hypocrisy.

B. With Orgon’s abnegation of his authority, the two women, Elmire and Dorine, must restore the house to order. Because only physical proof will convince Orgon, Elmire hides him under the table while she encourages Tartuffe’s attentions.

C. Orgon finally comprehends Tartuffe’s nature—but too late: His house and all in it belongs to Tartuffe, including incriminating evidence of Orgon’s involvement with an enemy of the king, which Tartuffe has turned over to the king.

VIII. Act V: The king saves the day.

A. Orgon now reviles Tartuffe as much as he had formerly adored him.

B. There seems no hope of any reasonable resolution to Orgon’s dilemma, but resolution does come from the king.

C. Forgiving Orgon his former betrayal, the king, acting as an enlightened monarch, sentences Tartuffe to prison and restores Orgon’s property to him.

IX. We have witnessed in the play the struggle between passion and reason, false piety and true faith.

A. In his defense of Tartuffe, Molière argued that he distinguished the hypocrite from the truly devout man and corrected men by amusing them.

B. His insistence that authority, particularly religious authority, must not be preferred over rational, individual experience, explains his popularity with the radicals of the French Revolution some 100 years later.

C. His insistence that literature can teach recalls Horace’s dictum that literature should be “utile et dulce”—that it should be “useful and delightful.”

D. Thus, Molière employs classical authority to satirize his own society, illustrating the balance achieved by many Neoclassical and Enlightenment authors between the traditional and the contemporary.

E. In Tartuffe, Molière explores the persistent struggle between passion and reason, as exemplified in the character of Orgon, and the anxiety of the age about the nature of authority—both secular and religious.

F. Tartuffe made enemies everywhere, and five years passed before Molière received permission from the Court to play the whole piece in public, but the resentment of the Church lingered until Molière’s death.
Essential Reading:

Recommended Reading:
Lionel Gossman, *Men and Masks: A Study of Molière*.

Questions to Consider:
1. How does Molière manage to stress both the artificiality of the theater and its value as an institution of reform?
2. What does Molière recommend as a method for judging the truly pious from the falsely religious? Do you think such a method can be trusted?
Lecture Fifty
Jean Racine

Scope: Jean Racine was the tragedian of French Neoclassical theater as Molière was its comedian. Despite, or perhaps because of, the severe limitations of 17th-century French theater—both physically and in terms of the aesthetic restraints imposed by Neoclassical theatrical proprieties—Racine’s recreations of classical Greek tragedy are profoundly moving representations of psychological conflict. In this lecture, we will study the tragedy Phèdre (Phaedra, 1677), an exemplar of Racine’s elegant simplicity of style and form and his investment in character as a way of probing moral and ethical complexities, rather than relying on intricate plots to reveal those problems.

Outline

I. Let us first look at the biography of Racine (1639–1699).
   A. Like Molière, Racine was the child of the upper-middle class, and he, too, was in exile from Paris after his first efforts in the theater failed.
   B. In fact, it was Molière’s troupe that produced Racine’s first play, The Thebans (1664). Racine quickly became famous with his second play, Alexander the Great, which was produced in 1665.
   C. Racine’s relationship with Molière deteriorated rapidly after he switched theatrical troupes, even as Molière’s troupe was rehearsing Alexander the Great.
   D. Racine successfully persuaded one of Molière’s leading actresses to quit Molière’s troupe and join that of a rival company that was performing Racine’s plays. Molière never spoke to Racine again.

II. Let us now consider the influence of Jansenism on Racine’s life and plays.
   A. Racine’s plays are increasingly influenced by the Jansenists, a strict Catholic movement, by whom he was educated from age 15 to 20.
   B. Jansenism drew on the teachings of a Dutch theologian, Cornelius Jansen (1585–1638), who resisted the humanist tendencies of the Renaissance, arguing that salvation was not within the reach of all Christians.
   C. Jansenists defended individual freedom of thought and conscience and insisted on reason as a defense against absolute authority, secular or religious.
   D. By the time Racine left the theater in 1677 after the production of Phaedra, we can see the effect of strict Jansenist theology: that salvation can come only to those predestined by God to receive it.
   E. Racine left the theater and Paris in 1677 and returned to the abbey of Port-Royal, where he had been educated.
   F. In his final years, he wrote two plays based on biblical characters that articulate a clear relationship to Jansenist belief. Phaedra was, thus, his last secular play.

III. Let us now look at the Neoclassical theater.
   A. The theatrical space was a long, narrow room with a raised stage at one end and a proscenium arch separating the stage from the audience, with a front curtain and painted scenery, representing a particular place, such as “a room in the palace.”
   B. The playwright, especially the tragic author, was bound to observe the three unities of time, space, and action, attributed to Aristotle.
      1. The unity of time insisted that the action take no longer than 12 or, at most, 24 hours; the unity of place dictated that the action take place in one location; the unity of action demanded that every speech and every action bear on the main plot.
      2. Neoclassical propriety also forbade the physical display of passion and violence.
      3. The playwright must depict noble characters.
      4. The playwright was further confined by the verse form—rhymed verse of 12 syllables (the Alexandrine line) delivered in long, declamatory speeches.
   C. Such conventions would have seemed artificial to the 17th-century audience, just as they do to us.
D. Racine employs classical conventions and reworks them to produce a play that reaches back into the past and is filled with the consequences of violence and lust. He takes the limitation of the verse form and illustrates the limitation of language to articulate passion.

E. Racine depicted the probable and the likely in the human condition, despite his reliance on mythic narratives for his plots.

IV. Before turning to the play itself, let us discuss briefly the preface to *Phaedra*.

A. Racine insists that he has been faithful to classical authorities in constructing his version of the story of Phaedra.
   1. He has borrowed the plot from Euripides’s play *Hippolytus* (428 B.C.) but has changed the focus of the plot from Hippolytus to Phaedra, as the change in title indicates.
   2. While Euripides shows us Hippolytus destroyed by Aphrodite because he refuses to fall in love, Racine concentrates on Phaedra and her incestuous love for her stepson.
   3. Euripides makes Phaedra another victim of Aphrodite’s power, whereas in Racine, Phaedra’s obsession with her stepson is the “monstrous” reflection of her mother’s own obsession with a white bull, from which encounter the monstrous Minotaur is born.
   4. Thus, Euripides’s play is about the relationship of the human world to the world of the gods, whereas Racine’s play, undermining the Renaissance belief in reason, is about the essentially human and arbitrary nature of passion.

B. Racine is also concerned in this preface to reconcile the subject of his play to his Jansenist faith and argues that his plays are as worthy as their classical sources to teach virtue.

V. Racine relies on his audience’s knowledge of the story of Theseus and the Minotaur.

A. Minos, king of Crete, had boasted that the gods would grant him any wish; he prayed to Poseidon that a bull would emerge from the sea. Miraculously, a beautiful white bull swam ashore. Instead of sacrificing this gift, Minos sacrificed a different one from his herd instead. Poseidon avenged the insult by causing Minos’s queen, Pasiphaë, to fall madly in love with the white bull, then give birth to the Minotaur, a creature with a man’s body but a bull’s head.

B. Minos confined the Minotaur to the center of the Labyrinth, where he is killed by Theseus with a sword supplied by Ariadne, Minos’s daughter. After fleeing Crete with Ariadne, Theseus abandons her and takes up with her sister, Phaedra.

VI. Now we will explore the structure of the play.

A. The play traces the course of two versions of “the love that dares not speak its name”—the first is Hippolytus’s for a woman his father hates; the second is Phaedra’s for her stepson, Hippolytus.

B. Throughout the play, Theseus’s reputation as a slayer of monsters and a philanderer is invoked repeatedly. Racine asks an essentially modern question: What is the nature of the monstrous?

C. The first act focuses on the relationship between the father, Theseus, and his son, Hippolytus.
   1. Hippolytus declares his intention to leave Troezen, his home, to search for his father, Theseus. When pressed by his tutor, Theramenes, Hippolytus admits that he is also leaving because of his love for Aricia, the daughter of one of Theseus’s enemies, whom Theseus has condemned to chastity to end her bloodline.
   2. For Hippolytus, Theseus is both the father who has slain monsters and the man who has betrayed and deceived women. Hippolytus resists the charms of love both because he does not wish to emulate his philandering father and because he has chosen a woman his father hates. For Hippolytus, the “monster” is filial disobedience.
   3. Another monster threatens Hippolytus—Phaedra’s illicit passion for her stepson.
   4. We are introduced to Phaedra through her nurse, Oenone, who describes Phaedra as dying from an unknown illness. Tormented by her passion, Phaedra has determined to die.
   5. Only when her nurse threatens to kill herself does Phaedra allow her “crime” to be known.
   6. Phaedra’s distress is interrupted by the news that Theseus is dead, and Oenone convinces Phaedra to reveal her love to Hippolytus.

D. In the second act, two loves are confessed.
1. First, Hippolytus comes to bid Aricia farewell. Hippolytus gives Aricia her freedom and takes up her cause against Phaedra’s son; Aricia’s amazement compels Hippolytus’s confession of love.
2. Second, Phaedra confesses her love to Hippolytus.
3. Phaedra’s confession of love is both monstrous (as is Theseus’s treatment of women) and heroic (like his slaying of monsters).
4. Phaedra demands that Hippolytus “rid the world, like your heroic sire, of one more monster.”

E. In Act III, the father and husband returns!
1. Unexpectedly, Theseus returns and reestablishes his law. Now Hippolytus becomes “a monster” to Phaedra.
2. Oenone persuades Phaedra to preempt any charge against her by charging Hippolytus first.
3. Both Phaedra and Hippolytus deny Theseus a proper welcome.

F. In Act IV, Theseus takes on the characteristics of the slayer of monsters—but now that monster is his son.
1. Oenone tells Theseus that Hippolytus has attempted to rape Phaedra and the sword—gift of Theseus to his son—is the evidence.
2. Theseus, now in the grip of a passion as monstrous as Phaedra’s for Hippolytus, condemns Hippolytus as “monstrous” and calls upon Neptune to avenge “a father’s wrong.”
3. Hippolytus reminds Theseus of Phaedra’s own mother’s adultery with the white bull.
4. After Hippolytus’s departure, Theseus mourns for his son and his “coming agonies.”
5. Phaedra, spurred by remorse, tries to lessen Theseus’s anger but then hears that Hippolytus is pledged to Aricia. She torments herself with imagining Hippolytus and Aricia together.

G. In the final act, both son and wife are dead and Theseus remains alone.
1. Theramanes enters and recreates for Theseus the death of Hippolytus. In imitation of his father, the slayer of monsters, Hippolytus destroys a sea monster sent by Neptune in answer to Theseus’s prayers.
2. He is finally dragged to his death by his own horses, with whom he is identified (Greek hippos = “horses”).
3. He dies, ironically, at the temple where he planned to wed Aricia.
4. Phaedra, too, is near death, having taken poison; she confesses her deceit and exonerates Hippolytus.
5. Theseus is left alone. Precisely that which made him the heroic slayer of monsters makes him the monstrous slayer of his own son. He takes Aricia as his daughter.

VII. The story of Phaedra and Hippolytus is an allegory of the monstrous power of love. It is a love that finds its articulation in the story of Phaedra’s mother’s passion for a bull; in Theseus’s passion for Phaedra’s sister, Ariadne, and many other women; and in Phaedra’s passion for Hippolytus.

A. We are left with the judgment of the gods—gods that seem remarkably like the severe God of Jansenist theology.
B. With the death of Neptune’s sea monster and Theseus’s rejection of the gods’ “high patronage,” we are left in a world unredeemed by any divine presence.

Essential Reading:
Jean Racine, Phaedra, Richard Wilbur, trans.

Recommended Reading:
Edward James and Gillian Jondorf, Racine: Phèdre.

Questions to Consider:
1. Does Racine’s representation of Phaedra mark a distinctively “modern” way of imagining women’s capacity for action in the world?
2. Can Aricia’s character offer any balance to the representation of Phaedra’s passion? If not, what constitutes the moral center of the play?
Lecture Fifty-One
Sister Juana Inés de la Cruz

Scope: The Enlightenment was not confined to Europe, nor was it a thoroughly masculine enterprise. The voice of women can be heard—in countries far from France or England—and in an occupation the least resembling the public intellectual. Sor Juana, a Mexican nun, claims for herself and other women the right to pursue an intellectual life, despite her recognition that such a pursuit may well conflict not only with her religious devotions but also with the social roles assigned to women. In this lecture, we will study Sor Juana’s “Reply to Sor Filotea de la Cruz” (1691), a text written in response to her bishop’s suggestion that she focus her learning on religious matters rather than on philosophical commentaries and other secular forms, such as lyric poetry and drama. Sor Juana’s insistence that she can be both the bride of Christ and a scholar prefigures the determination of many women, even into the 21st century, who confront a similar tension between their gender and their desire for knowledge.

Outline

I. What kind of life could an intellectual woman expect to lead in the 17th and 18th centuries?
   A. The 17th-century Mexican composer, poetess, dramatist, philosopher, feminist, and Catholic nun, Sister Juana Inés de la Cruz, represents both the fulfillment of, and the exception to, her culture’s expectations.
   B. All models of what constitutes excellence in literature (as in life) were drawn from classical traditions that specifically excluded women.
   C. Some exceptions existed, however: Restoration playwright Aphra Behn, or novelist Eliza Haywood, or feminist philosopher Mary Astell.

II. Sister Juana Inés was born in 1648, the daughter of a Spanish gentleman and an illiterate mother.
   A. She learned to read and write at age 3, read everything she could from her grandfather’s library, and when she found that the most desirable books were in Latin, mastered the language.
   B. Juana went to her uncle’s house in Mexico City, where she taught herself literature, science, mathematics, philosophy, theology, and languages. At 13, she was presented at the Viceregal Court, the cultural center of the New World, where she became the lady-in-waiting of the vicereine.

III. She refused to marry and entered the convent of San Jeronimo. Her cell soon became an academy and her library numbered 4,000 volumes.

IV. Sister Juana was ordered to refute an unorthodox sermon preached by a Portuguese Jesuit, a refutation applauded by many. The bishop of Puebla, however, qualified his praise with the suggestion that she wasted her talents on secular matters.
   A. Rather than become only a theologian, she sold her library and musical and scientific instruments and renounced the use of pen and ink.
   B. She contracted the plague and died in 1695.

V. In 1690, at the request of an unnamed theologian, Sister Juana wrote a commentary on a sermon delivered 40 years before by a Jesuit priest that had disputed the claims of St. Augustine and St. Thomas about the nature of Christ’s love.
   A. Sister Juana’s commentary was published without her permission by the bishop of Puebla, who titled it “Athenagoric letter,” that is, “letter worthy of the wisdom of Athena.”
   B. The bishop, using the pseudonym Sor Filotea de la Cruz, appended a letter to Sister Juana, advising her to focus less on secular and more on theological matters.
   C. It is in Sister Juana’s reply to this letter, published in 1691, that she articulates her right to a life of the mind.
VI. In her reply to Sor Filotea, Sor Juana asserts that she wishes to defer to Church authority, but she also wishes study in order to understand God.
   A. She is conflicted between the demands of the religious life and her thirst for knowledge, an inclination that she considers either “a gift or a punishment from Heaven.”
   B. The intent of her “Reply” is to show that neither her religious vocation nor her gender bars her from the pursuit of learning.
   C. She has to situate her learning in relationship to God’s wishes, and she has to represent herself both as a woman (and, therefore, not usurping men) but also as an intellectual woman.
   D. The very act of questioning God’s will might be seen as sacrilegious, but Sister Juana insists that it is the very intelligence that God has given her that allows her to question its value to God.
   E. Arguing from the authority of biblical and classical sources, Sister Juana confesses that she has often turned to secular matters because she dared not defy gender, age, and above all, custom.
   F. She does not wish to teach, nor to write—except when commanded to do so—but only to study.
   G. Sister Juana refuses to repudiate her studies, claiming them as appropriate to God’s work but recognizing that they distract her from the spiritual life of the convent.

VII. To emphasize the naturalness of her desire for learning, Sister Juana tells the story of her early life.
   A. She keeps the two competing claims in balance: The desire to learn is not to be condemned because it was natural, but at the same time, her own desire drove her to acquire more knowledge and, perhaps, to become “unnatural” in her desire.
   B. Sister Juana’s account of her progress as a scholar emphasizes this contrast between the natural and the unnatural located in her body: She wished to be dressed in boy’s clothing and sent to study in Mexico City; not learning Latin quickly enough, she cut her hair as punishment.

VIII. Entering religious orders, Sor Juana finds that convent life has its own distractions and that wherever she goes, her desire to learn accompanies her.
   A. She must understand sacred theology, but also she must learn all the other disciplines: logic, rhetoric, physics, music, arithmetic, architecture, civil law and canon law, history, astrology.
   B. The torment of desiring to study, yet also desiring to be part of her community condemns her to struggle against herself, like St. Jerome.
   C. Despite her great acclaim, she has been subject to the most painful persecution from those who love her and wish to save her soul. She is martyred to her own excellence, just as Christ was.
   D. To be forbidden her books, she insists, cannot dampen her natural curiosity. Even the kitchen and the preparation of food is to her a laboratory for experimental science. Had Aristotle had to prepare food, he claims, he would have written more.

IX. In the second half of her “Reply,” Sister Juana turns to history to support her claim that knowledge is appropriate for a woman, citing women from the Old Testament, from classical history and texts, as well as contemporary women scholars.
   A. To deny women learning just because they are women is to believe that men are wise just because they are men.
   B. All who are not capable of wisdom should be prevented from studying, writing, and teaching.
   C. What objection can exist, says Sister Juana, to letting older women teach young girls?
   D. The claim that biblical authorities support the prohibition against women teaching is the interpretation of the historical ignorant.

X. Sister Juana comes to the Atenagórica letter itself, insisting it was written with the permission of the Church.
   A. She disagreed with the Jesuit teacher, but his opinion is not a revelation that must be accepted blindly, and others may disagree with her.
   B. Even her verses, she claims, are not heretical but follow the model of verses in the Bible and classical texts.
C. She describes her work as if it were her child and laments that it has arrived like an orphan at the doors of Sister Filotea, who has had to name it.

D. It has other blemishes born out of haste, illness, and want of guidance, and thus, she has failed to include important evidence.

XI. Sister Juana’s struggle is unrelenting and unresolvable.

A. Despite her wish to be obedient and to curtail her intellectual inquiries, the scholar will out—even as she regrets that she wrote the letter, she wishes she had written a better one!

B. This is the same Sister Juana who, within two years, would sell her entire library and renounce the use of pen and ink; the same Sister Juana who was forced to use her fingernail to scratch her plea for salvation in her own blood.

Essential Reading:
Alan S. Trueblood, ed., A Sor Juana Anthology.

Recommended Reading:
Octavio Paz, Sor Juana; Or, The Traps of Faith.
S. Merrim, Early Modern Women’s Writing and Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz.

Questions to Consider:
1. Why was Sor Juana’s work lost for so long, even to the history of women’s struggle for equality?
2. Examine Molière’s L’Ecole des Femmes (“The School for Wives,” 1662), in which he satirizes the cloistered schooling recommended for young women: “She has no need, whatever she may think/Of writing table, paper, pen, or ink.” How would Molière have responded to Sor Juana’s argument?
Lecture Fifty-Two
Daniel Defoe

Scope: This lecture will situate Defoe’s best-known novel, *Robinson Crusoe* (1719), within its larger, early 18th-century culture. Specifically, we will identify in this text the tension between values associated with an aristocratic, hierarchically ordered universe and a culture that prized the individual agent capable of making his way in a market economy. *Robinson Crusoe* is a travel narrative and a story structured as a providential narrative, one that embodies the values of the Neoclassical world, and as a narrative of individual agency. We will explore the paradoxical structure of the novel, whose title character’s ingenuity in this “brave new world” of commercial enterprise brings him both great wealth and, simultaneously, great need of redemption.

Outline

I. Charles Gildon, a political pamphleteer, described Defoe as a “Fabulous Proteus,” one of the many attacks on Defoe for working for both the Whigs, the progressive party, and the Tories, the conservatives.

A. The characterization of Defoe as a shape-shifter also describes Defoe the novelist.
B. Perhaps it is precisely this ability to pass off the fictional as the real that made Plato so suspicious of writers and poets who remade the world as fantasy.

II. Where did this hugely popular and, therefore, potentially anti-establishment form of narrative entertainment come from? A complex set of social, economic, political, and religious circumstances gave birth to the novel. There are three general causes, however.

A. First, the success of the novel may be attributed to its ability to provide its audience with something people craved, something novel, or new.
   1. Driven by the forces of religious and scientific inquiry, the last decade of the 17th century and the first two decades of the 18th century are marked by a voracious desire for “news” or “the new.”
   2. Stories about criminals, accounts of ghosts and hauntings, tales of scandal and erotic adventure, travelogues, and autobiographical narratives, real or fictional—the consuming public couldn’t get enough of them.
   3. Just as we see with reality TV today, one story bred a hundred others, all imitating the conventions and form of the originals.

B. Second, readers were attracted to the novel’s representation of the real. The same empiricism that defined the nature of scientific experimentation and philosophical inquiry at this time helps to explain the attraction of the novel.
   1. Readers were curious about the material world and were unwilling to rely on received wisdom about causal relationships in the world of nature.
   2. The details of everyday life are examined for clues about the fate of the protagonists; natural phenomena are available as signs of moral and social success or failure.

C. Third, individuals claimed to be able to read the text or the world produced in the novel.
   1. Such a focus has its origin, in part, in the Protestant claim that the individual needs no mediator between himself and God.
   2. What such an individual wants in literature is a representation of the values of his or her life, rather than the expression of the values of a cultural elite.

D. These three ways of defining the novel’s generic qualities—a desire for novelty, a belief in empiricism as the preferred method for understanding everyday reality, and an emphasis on the individual as the producer and consumer of the culture—help to explain why Defoe was so enormously successful.

E. His own career as a spy and propagandist made him particularly suited to turning his powers of observation to the manners and values of his culture.
III. Defoe was the son of James and Anne Foe. His father was a City tradesman, a candle maker, and a member of the Butchers’ Company, one of the craftsmen guilds.

A. He was born in the year of the Restoration of Charles II to the English throne (1660) and witnessed Charles’s son, James II, deposed from that throne.

B. Defoe’s father was a Dissenter or Nonconformist; thus, Defoe was barred from attending university or holding public office and was subject to oppression for his religious beliefs.

C. His education at Dissenters’ schools stressed the new science and philosophy, rather than the traditional Latin and Greek, and focused on casuistry—the exploration of imagined moral and theological dilemmas.

D. Despite his father’s wishes that he become a Nonconformist minister, Defoe turned to trade, but his risky business ventures forced him into bankruptcy in 1692. He eventually turned to his pen to support his family.

E. Defoe produced more than 500 separate works, as well as several periodical series, for which he wrote two or three essays a week.

F. It was not until 1719, when he was 59 years old, that Defoe found a way of making money that released him from writing and working for both political parties: publishing the novel Robinson Crusoe.

IV. Robinson Crusoe is based on Scottish sailor Alexander Selkirk’s account of his five years on the island of Juan Fernandez.

A. Like Faust, Don Quixote, or Don Juan, Robinson Crusoe, the man, represents much more than his own story of shipwreck and survival.

B. The novel was enormously popular: Between April and August 1719, 80,000 copies were sold and four editions were published; the book was immediately translated into French and German; and by the end of the 19th century, more than 700 editions and translations had appeared.

C. According to French philosopher Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712–1778), Robinson Crusoe was the only book that afforded “a complete treatise on natural education.”

D. Even today, the mere image of a solitary foot in the sand or the name Friday will conjure up Crusoe’s narrative, most recently represented in the movie Cast Away (2000).

V. Despite its mythic quality, the story is emphatically English: The Life and Strange Surprising Adventures of Robinson Crusoe marks a moment in the history of English literature when a “true-born Englishman” represents something essential about the nation of his birth.

A. According to 20th-century Irish myth-maker James Joyce, Robinson Crusoe is the English Ulysses.

B. Crusoe’s insatiable desire for the sea and for making a fortune is a mark of his inappropriate longing for a condition other than that “middle State” into which he was born.

C. For Defoe and his readers, the social organization of 18th-century England has a design that reflects that of God’s universe. Crusoe’s desire to free himself from his middle station is a sign that he has not accommodated himself to God’s providence.

D. The journeys that Crusoe undertakes and the adventures that befall him on the high seas are not just another travel narrative but an allegory of the spiritual journey of the soul, the story of the prodigal son who learns to be content with his lot in life.

VI. Crusoe learns both how to come to terms with God’s plan and how to survive on his island.

A. Crusoe’s individual struggle to make a home for himself on the island is the struggle that his soul makes in accommodating itself to God’s providence.

B. Shaping his world comes to be seen as synonymous with the way the individual shapes his world to conform to God’s design.

C. Crusoe learns, as a social being, how to remake his deserted island into a familiar world, just as he learns, as a religious being, how to remake his faith in God.

D. In this way, the reader understands how the economic and the religious, the secular and the spiritual, were intimately connected for Defoe’s audience.
E. Crusoe is a product of both the Neoclassical world, with its belief in rational design and universal order, and the modern sensibility that insists upon the individual’s capacity to recreate himself.

VII. Crusoe’s struggle to understand his place in God’s plan begins nine months after his shipwreck, when he is taken ill and, in his fevered sleep, has a terrible dream.

A. Defoe’s description of Crusoe’s dream-vision recalls the language of John Bunyan’s *Pilgrim’s Progress* (1678).

B. Crusoe’s reaction to his dream is to reflect on the wickedness of his ways.

C. He speaks of the “Stupidity of his Soul, without desire of Good, or Conscience of Evil” that overwhelmed him.

1. When Crusoe speaks of acting like a “meer Brute,” guided only by the “principles of Nature and the Dictates of common Sense,” we should not confuse his language with that employed by the Romantics.

2. Crusoe is describing the response of an irrational creature, one who possesses only common, that is, uncultured, sense.

D. Overwhelmed with remorse, Crusoe recalls his father’s warning that if he rejected his place in God’s order, he would suffer God’s reproach. For the first time in many years, Crusoe prays.

E. Crusoe’s description of himself as a “meer Brute” foreshadows his discovery of a single footprint in the sand.

F. Crusoe’s fear that the print might be the mark of Satan or indicate the presence of cannibals temporarily deprives him of his faith, but upon reflection, he regains his confidence in God.

G. It is only after his faith has been tested by, ironically, the suggestion that he is not alone on the island, that Crusoe is able to pass that faith on to another.

H. When he rescues Friday from the cannibals, he is also rescuing himself from the state of animal desires.

VIII. Just as Crusoe has had to learn to honor both his earthly and heavenly father’s wisdom, so Friday learns to become the perfect child to his father, Crusoe.

A. Crusoe’s story is a story of a man who gradually learns to master his own self, his world, and other men. As such, it is the story of the presence of England in the New World, the story of colonization.

B. *Robinson Crusoe* is a narrative about the power of human reason to overcome the natural world and, thus, an embodiment of Enlightenment ideology, but not the embodiment of that version of freedom from enslavement that Voltaire, Rousseau, and Diderot would endorse.

C. When Crusoe is finally rescued and returns to England after a 35-year absence, he discovers that he is a rich man.

D. Thus, in good Puritan style, spiritual wealth and material wealth conform. Despite Crusoe’s insistence that he should have stayed at home like a solid, middle-class citizen, good stories are most often about those who don’t.

**Essential Reading:**
Daniel Defoe, *Robinson Crusoe*.

**Recommended Reading:**
Maximillian E. Novak, *Daniel Defoe—Master of Fictions: His Life and Ideas*.
Pat Rogers, *Robinson Crusoe*.

**Questions to Consider:**
1. What power does Robinson Crusoe, as emblematic of the self-made man, still hold over us today?
2. Why are there no women in Crusoe’s “empire” except those sent over from England later to populate the island?
Lecture Fifty-Three
Alexander Pope

Scope: When Pope was 29 years old, he published his collected Works. Despite his youth, Pope could already claim to have produced a body of material usually the result of a lifetime’s poetic labor: pastoral, mock-epic, heroic, elegiac, and didactic verse. He would grow rich from his translations of the Iliad and the Odyssey, draw criticism for his six-volume edition of Shakespeare’s works (1725), and finally settle his scores with his critics with the publication of The Dunciad (1728), a satire attacking hack writers and the debased values of popular culture.

This lecture will focus on two of Pope’s works—one a poetic essay asserting the aesthetic and moral values of Neoclassical culture, An Essay on Criticism (1711), and the other, a mock-epic satire on the manners and mores of his own social circle, The Rape of the Lock (1717). Both illustrate Pope’s reliance on classical themes and conventions, as well as his insistence that such topics and forms were essential to the maintenance of a civilized (that is, an aristocratic) society.

Outline

I. In Orlando (1928) by Virginia Woolf, Orlando speaks with Pope and concludes that only reading his poetry can explain why he both amused and frightened his audience.
   A. In poetry that spanned the genres—from pastoral verse to translations of the Odyssey and the Iliad—Pope defended the central values of Neoclassicism: a belief in the universal values of rational and moderate thought and action that would produce an orderly society, modeled on the natural world.
   B. Classical literature embodied these values.

II. Pope’s first collection of poems, the Pastorals, was published in 1709, when Pope was only 21, and eight years later, he published his collected Works.
   A. Pope articulated the voice of the elite: He saw himself as the preserver of classical values and forms and bitterly satirized hack writers, such as Defoe.
   B. But Pope was not merely oppositional: He also satirized the sometimes trivial values of his own society.
   C. Two poems central to Pope’s moral as well as aesthetic development are An Essay on Criticism (1711), which demonstrates Pope’s skill at philosophical poetry, and the mock-epic satire The Rape of the Lock (1717).

III. Pope was born into a Roman Catholic family in 1688, the year when James II was deposed and replaced by the Protestant William, Duke of Orange, son-in-law to James II.
   A. James II was deposed because of a longstanding suspicion of Catholics.
   B. After his deposition, Catholics would be disenfranchised until the Catholic Emancipation Act of 1829. Pope could not inherit or purchase land, hold public office, publicly practice his religion, attend university, or live within 10 miles of London.
   C. Pope also suffered crippling personal restrictions: Tuberculosis of the spine had left him deformed and stunted in growth.
   D. Pope belonged to one of the most famous of all the clubs: the Scriblerus Club, whose members included John Gay, who wrote The Beggar’s Opera, and Jonathan Swift of Gulliver’s Travels.
   E. Their contempt for popular writing is articulated in their satirical description of the birth of Martinus Scriblerus in The Memoirs of Martinus Scriblerus.
   F. In The Dunciad (1728), Pope rages against popular women writers, such as Eliza Haywood.
   G. The existence of the all-male Scriblerus Club points to the importance in 18th-century life of two public values: sociability and conversation.
IV. *An Essay on Criticism* (1711) belongs to the tradition of Horace’s *Ars Poetica* (c. 19 B.C.)—a verse-essay defining contemporary poetic and critical practice and articulating the poet’s poetic theories.

A. Pope engages in a conversation with the reader and, in so doing, trains the reader how to recognize good poetry from bad.

B. The poem both satirizes contemporary critics for their poor taste and suggests that the reader of the poem must be capable of more discerning taste precisely because he is reading Pope’s poem.

C. The poem also satirizes the poets and critics who lack poetic understanding and articulates the standards by which poets and critics should be guided.

1. Pope employs several key words as he moves through the poem: “Nature,” “Wit,” and “Judgment.”

2. *Nature* means God’s created world manifest in the divine order—the Great Chain of Being—through which the natural world functions. Individual human beings, thus, should strive to emulate this universal, ordered, and rational plan.

3. The true artist is one who “sees” the overall natural design with particular insight.

4. *Wit* means intellectual quickness and liveliness, inventiveness, and the capacity to see resemblances between unlike things. When wit becomes extravagant, judgment must be employed to discipline those excesses.

5. *Judgment* is the exercise of those critical faculties, both moral and aesthetic, that brings man into harmony with the universal principles of the natural world and with his fellow man.

D. Pope uses the heroic couplet or the pentameter couplet.

E. The heroic couplet consists of two lines that rhyme, each line always containing five feet, each foot usually containing one unstressed and one stressed syllable in that order.

F. The poem is not simply a series of rhyming couplets but a complex philosophical argument extended over many lines.

G. The brilliance of Pope is in the way he imposes the rhythm of the speaking voice on to the meter of the poem.

V. The poem is divided into three parts: The first sets the context and establishes the relationship between, on the one hand, the rules of judgment and, on the other, nature and the authority of the classics. The second part details the obstacles to reaching the standards defined in the first part. The third part argues for both a moral and aesthetic reformation, guided by general precepts but grounded in poetic genius and the imagination.

A. In the first part of the poem (lines 1–200), Pope defines and refines the key terms (*nature, wit, and judgment*). He begins with a simple opposition, then complicates that binary.

B. A close analysis of the first eight lines demonstrates Pope’s skill in complicating the simple oppositions he seems to have established.

C. What appeared in the first verse paragraph to be one category—bad writers and bad critics, one balanced against the other—now includes the author and the audience, because all poets and critics must exercise their judgment.

1. All writers and critics look to the same source for the “light” of judgment—Heaven, or divine reason.

2. Pope defines one of the central claims of Neoclassical critical theory: that the standard for what should be depicted in art and the rule by which that art should be judged can be found in the universal and the permanent, in other words, in nature.

3. Pope insists upon classical authors as the proper literary models for contemporary authors—thus distinguishing the “real” writers from the popular hacks who write “novels.”

VI. In the second part of the poem (lines 201–599), Pope discusses the obstacles to judgment, first addressing the pride in showing off one’s knowledge.

A. Pride corrupts right reason and obscures the truth.

B. Authors should not give in to the desire for fame, and critics should condemn the real vices of the age, the blasphemies of a liberated press.
VII. In the third part of the poem (lines 560–744), Pope describes the moral and aesthetic rules that produce good writing and good criticism.

VIII. *The Rape of the Lock* (1717) was occasioned by a quarrel between two prominent Roman Catholic families, brought on when Lord Petre (the Baron in the poem) cut a lock from the head of Arabella Fermor (the Belinda of the poem) without her permission. John Caryll, Pope’s friend and publisher and Lord Petre’s cousin, asked Pope to write a poem to make a joke of the affair and bring the families together through laughter.

A. The poem, a Horatian satire, is obsessively local in its details, yet it speaks to a larger culture of pleasure.

B. The poem’s genre is mock-epic, which employs the conventions of epic form and content but substitutes the contemporary world and its follies for the heroic actions of men and gods.

C. The poem contains many of the standard elements of the epic form, including a dream message from the gods and the act of arming for battle. In each case, however, Pope substitutes the events and moral values of his superficial society.

IX. In Canto I, Pope invokes the muse to help him in his epic task, an account of “mighty Contests” provoked by “trivial Things.”

A. Belinda’s “Morning Dream” introduces us to the supernaturals who will guide the action of the poem.

B. Belinda rises and elaborately prepares to attend a party, a satiric version of the arming for battle.

X. In Canto II, like Cleopatra on the Nile, Belinda journeys on the Thames to Hampton Court Palace, her beauty ironically set off by the cross she wears around her neck.

A. Her curls are the cause of man’s destruction and particularly ensnare the Baron, who has built an altar to love to implore help.

B. Ariel, Belinda’s chief protector, summons the fairy guardians and assigns them their duties.

XI. While the partygoers talk, take tea, and flirt, judges condemn men to death. Such is the context of this “heroic” contest.

A. After a game of cards and the taking of coffee—a luxury that depends upon the labor of slaves—the Baron takes up his scissors and cuts off the coveted lock.

B. Pope condemns the confusion of small matters with great and the subsequent confusion of moral responses.

XII. Belinda demands that her “knight,” Sir Plume, challenge the Baron and retrieve “the precious Hairs.”

XIII. Finally, in Canto V, Clarissa, who had helped the Baron to his prize, now tries to persuade Belinda to use humor and reason to end the battle. No one applauds Clarissa’s good moral sense, and Belinda takes up the battle.

A. In the confusion, the lock is lost and the poet consoles Belinda with the thought that it has been transformed into a constellation.

B. In this final reminder of the insignificance of the argument over the lock, the poet also reminds Belinda that even those who can “murder” with their eyes must themselves die at last.

Essential Reading:

———, *The Rape of the Lock*, Cynthia Wall, ed.

Recommended Reading:

Questions to Consider:
1. How does Pope’s poetry exemplify the values he promotes in his *Essay on Criticism*?
2. How does Pope reinforce Neoclassical universal values even as he focuses on specific contemporary events and characters in *The Rape of the Lock*?
Lecture Fifty-Four
Jonathan Swift

Scope: Swift composed his own epitaph, later rendered by fellow Anglo-Irishman W. B. Yeats as: “Savage indignation there/Cannot lacerate his breast.” One still feels, in reading Swift, that “savage indignation” directed at the hypocrisies and compromises of human society, as experienced by Gulliver (Gulliver’s Travels, 1726), or against the English for their profit-driven policies in Ireland in A Modest Proposal (1729). In this lecture, we will use these two texts to analyze the “other” side of Neoclassical thought: the extremism produced by the single-minded pursuit of the ideal of reason untempered by compassion and Swift’s rejection of the optimism and benevolence that Enlightenment thinkers championed.

Outline

I. Born in Dublin in 1667, Swift spent much of his early years moving between Dublin and London, hoping to rise in importance in both politics and the Church. His hopes for a position in the Church of England were disappointed, and he finally made his home in Dublin when he was appointed dean of St. Patrick’s in 1713.

II. While in England, Swift met Pope, and it was during his time as a member of the Scriblerus Club that he composed part of Gulliver’s Travels (1726).

III. Swift’s final trip to England took place in 1727. By 1735, when a collected edition of his works was published in Dublin, his memory was beginning to deteriorate. In 1738, he slipped into senility and finally suffered a paralytic stroke; in 1742, guardians were officially appointed to care for his affairs. He died three years later.

IV. Swift wrote vehemently in defense of the Irish, whom he felt were abused both politically and economically by the English.
   A. Swift’s satire is in the Juvenalian tradition, a harsh and accusatory kind of satire in which individuals are often pointedly attacked. Its intent is to ridicule society.
   B. Swift considered human nature to be fundamentally depraved and held out no hope that reasoned inquiry could improve that condition.
   C. In his satiric portrait of the Laputans in Gulliver’s Travels, Swift condemns the uselessness of purely abstract knowledge and the belief that modern science could advance the moral condition of the human race.
   D. Swift argued that man was not a rational creature but merely a creature capable of rational thought.

V. Like Defoe’s Robinson Crusoe, Swift’s Gulliver has become synonymous with a certain kind of Englishman. As his name suggests, Gulliver is gullible and, unlike Crusoe, is passive and unimaginative. He is, perhaps, an Irishman’s version of the English or, given Swift’s savage satire on the Irish in A Modest Proposal, a version of the Irish.
   A. Swift characterizes Gulliver as a plausible narrator of his adventures but also as somewhat gullible in how he reacts to those adventures. The reader, however, is skeptical of Gulliver’s account. The irony of the text lies in the difference between Gulliver’s reactions and our response. Swift offers a third overarching, satirical perspective on European claims to rationality and human progress.
   B. The various communities and political structures that Gulliver encounters provide models of both successful and corrupt versions of society. Gulliver’s Travels is modeled on both the travel narrative and the utopian narrative, following the tradition of Plato’s Republic and Thomas More’s Utopia.
   C. In Book I, Gulliver is surprised by the size of the Lilliputians but not incredulous. Like England in the world, the Lilliputians have a power over Gulliver that is incommensurate with their size. Gulliver encounters the arbitrary divisions in Lilliputian society—divisions that satirize factionalism in his own world. Thus, the quarrel between the Big-Endians and Little-Endians mocks the quarrel between religious groups about how to interpret the Bible.
   D. Gulliver’s size relative to the Lilliputians destabilizes the universal concepts that normally govern our view of the world. If Gulliver is a giant compared to the Lilliputians, might not he be a Lilliputan to another
race of men? If our customs are not universal, what other ways of conducting the affairs of man might be available to us?

E. Gulliver then travels in Book II to the kingdom of Brobdingnag, a land inhabited by giants, where many of the same issues raised in Book I are examined again, specifically, the relative nature of human culture. Gulliver becomes the sexual plaything of the women at court, whom he finds repulsive because of their smell and appearance. The same women in England would, of course, be attractive to him. Gulliver boasts of European civilization, but the king thinks of the English as “odious little vermin.”

F. In Book III, Gulliver travels to various islands, where he encounters theoreticians who engage in speculation and extravagant scientific experiments. While intellectuals play with words and ideas, their people starve in the streets. The proper study for the philosopher and scientist is the good of society—a maxim that allies Swift both with ancient philosophers and with Voltaire.

G. Finally, in Book IV, we meet the Houyhnhms, rational horses who rule over the debased and morally degenerate Yahoos. Gulliver is no longer in a human society, albeit one that is either much smaller or much larger than his own, but in a nonhuman world. The opposition between reason and passion, between sanity and madness, is here embodied in the difference between the horses and the human-like Yahoos—a strange way to represent the Enlightenment belief in the power of rational thought and human optimism.

H. Gulliver wishes to remain with the horses even though he recognizes his close resemblance to the Yahoos. He is forced to leave, however. When he returns to England, he finds his family disgusting and spends many hours conversing with his horses. He has, in other words, gone mad.

VI. Swift wrote *A Modest Proposal* (1729) after he left England disappointed that his career there had come to an end, and he was personally angry at the English. Even though he was himself Anglo-Irish and, thus, a member of the ruling class in Ireland, he speaks for the whole country in this pamphlet.

A. Ireland was a colony of England and depended entirely on England for its political, social, and economic prosperity. It was, however, in English interest to keep Ireland weak, given its natural alliance with France because of its large Roman Catholic population. England controlled the Irish parliament, and absentee landlords owned most of the land; the Irish were passive in the face of this historical oppression.

B. *A Modest Proposal* is an attack both on the English for exploiting the Irish and on the Irish for allowing themselves to be exploited. It also parodies the useful projects proposed for improving the situation.

C. Rhetorically, Swift asks the reader to accept the consequences of a premise apparently accepted by both the English and the Irish: that thousands of people can starve to death each year and no one seems to mind. The rational and eminently sensible narrator proposes a way of making economic and social sense out of this horror. Swift’s savage rage is contained within the persona of this shrewd businessman who advocates cannibalism.

D. The title of the essay informs the reader of the style of writing: modest, familiar, and plausible. The speaker proposes to resolve the problem of so many starving children with a sensible plan. The reader is fooled into anticipating a logical and sensible solution.

E. When the speaker offers his actual thesis, the horror of his proposal is both undermined and, paradoxically, intensified by the modest tone that he adopts.

F. With precision and relentless logic, the speaker lays out his plan as if he were speaking of livestock — and how, after all, Swift suggests, can we claim to think of them as anything more than animals, given the way they are treated?

G. Swift’s proposal ends with a list of reasonable suggestions to alleviate the suffering of the Irish.

H. Swift’s satire condemns the English for their economic greed and inhumanity and the Irish for their passivity — and, of course, the satire eventually must include the reader who can stand to read about such a solution but who is not driven by outrage to act to improve another’s misery.

Essential Reading:
Jonathan Swift, *Gulliver’s Travels and Other Writings*, Clement Hawes, ed.
Recommended Reading:
Carol Houlihan Flynn, *The Body in Swift and Defoe*.

Questions to Consider:
1. Contrast Gulliver’s voyages with those undertaken by Candide and his companions.
2. How does Swift’s representation of Enlightenment values contrast with that of his contemporaries, such as Pope?
Lecture Fifty-Five

Voltaire

Scope: French philosophe, poet, novelist, playwright, and frequent satirist of the political and religious authorities, Voltaire (1694–1778) insisted that the task of the intellectual must be to “Écrasez l'infâme”—“Crush infamy!” For Voltaire, infamy consisted of all forms of intolerance, and despite imprisonment and exile, he spent much of his life resisting the tyranny of religious and political repression. No single work or collection of texts can do justice to the range of Voltaire’s literary and philosophical achievements or to manner in which his endless social commentary in his letters, pamphlets, satiric dialogues, and tales helped to shape the central ideas of the Enlightenment. In this lecture, we will use one text, Candide; or, The Optimist (1759), to demonstrate the particular combination of wit, satire, and narrative skill that Voltaire employed to expose those self-deceiving dogmas, including the formal philosophy of optimism, that protect us from the knowledge of evil, especially of the evil that is the product of human cruelty and complacency.

Outline

I. The son of a minor bureaucrat, Voltaire was born in 1694 and grew up in a bourgeois milieu; he was educated by the Jesuits and took up the practice of law.
   A. He soon abandoned law for literature. He spent 11 months in the Bastille when he was in his early 20s for his satiric verses about the aristocracy.
   B. His imprisonment did not deter him from publishing works critical of social injustice and political inequality. Although his business speculations made him a rich man, his wealth did not protect him from further imprisonment. Finally, in 1726, Voltaire left France and spent three years in exile, mostly in England.
   C. His Philosophical Letters, originally called the English Letters, published in 1734, was the result of this time in England. After its publication, Voltaire was condemned by the Parliament of Paris as offensive to politics and religion.
   D. When he returned to France, Voltaire spent the next 15 years living on the estate of his wealthy mistress, studying and writing extensively.
   E. After her death in 1749, Voltaire lived at the court of Frederick the Great of Prussia until 1752.
   F. Voltaire finally purchased property of his own outside Geneva, the birthplace city of Rousseau.
   G. In the last year of his life, 1778, Voltaire, now famous, returned to Paris in triumph but died three months later.

II. Voltaire, along with Diderot and Rousseau, was one of the Enlightenment’s preeminent philosophes, French philosophers who believed in human perfectibility, religious tolerance, and deism.
   A. Like his exact English contemporary Samuel Johnson, Voltaire’s works spans the spectrum of literary genres and styles, from drama to history, philosophy, and the encyclopedic form. He is best remembered for his satirical works, including Candide.
   B. Candide, published anonymously in 1759 and distributed illegally, enjoyed instant success and condemnation.
   C. The satire works at the level of form, as well as content: Voltaire’s artificial narrative plot mocks the gullibility of readers of fiction who mistake the imaginary for the real. Voltaire also parodies the limitations of classical form in Candide’s epic (but futile) journey.
   D. Voltaire satirizes the optimistic philosophy of Leibniz, who like Alexander Pope, articulated a belief in a “pre-established harmony” in the world. For the purposes of satire, Voltaire reduces Leibniz’s philosophy to a simplistic formula: “Everything is for the best.”
III. The narrative of *Candide* follows the (mis)adventures of Candide, Voltaire’s naïve hero, whose name suggests his directness but also, in its Latinate form, means a *tabula rasa*. Candide believes in the tenets of optimism as taught by Pangloss.

A. Pangloss (*pan* = “all,” *gloss* = “language/talk”) is a metaphysicist who preaches Leibniz’s optimistic philosophy of “all is good in the world,” despite all evidence to the contrary.

B. Cunégonde, whose name is a pun on a well-known four-letter Anglo-Saxon word for women, is Candide’s love interest, and his search for her drives the narrative. Cunégonde was also a student of Pangloss.

C. Midway through Candide’s journeys, he meets Martin, who remains the hero’s travel companion and valet throughout the rest of the story. Martin is a pessimist who predictably sees the world in the inverse of Pangloss.

IV. In the first half of *Candide*, the hero’s journey is determined by chance and the ill or good will of others, rather than by his own free will. In the second half, Candide actively pursues his own choices (although doing so does not seem to offer him any advantage in dealing with the world).

A. In chapter 1, Candide is chased from his native Westphalia, an earthly paradise, after kissing the Baroness Cunégonde.

B. Candide innocently believes that life at the Baron of Thunder-ten-tronckh’s chateau is “the best of all possible worlds,” as Pangloss has taught him. He is physically and spiritually exiled from what he believes to be paradise.

C. Candide’s education about the real nature of the world begins as soon as he leaves Westphalia and finds himself alternately fleeing violence or persecution and being saved by the goodness of strangers.

D. When he flees to Holland to escape these horrors, he is reunited with Dr. Pangloss, who is at first unrecognizable because he is suffering the ravages of syphilis.

E. Pangloss and Candide travel to Lisbon, just in time to be injured in the terrible earthquake that devastated the city in 1755. Pangloss appears to die at the hands of the Inquisition, while Candide narrowly escapes death; is reunited with Cunégonde, miraculously recovered from the rape and disemboweling committed on her body by Bulgarian soldiers; by chance, kills her lover, the Grand Inquisitor; and flees with her to the New World, where Candide loses Cunégonde again to a lascivious colonial governor in Buenos Aires.

F. Candide once again escapes death by vengeful natives in Paraguay, and his prudent travel companion, Cacambo, concludes what the naïve hero cannot deduce for himself—that “This hemisphere is no better than the other.”

G. Giving themselves over entirely to fate, Candide and Cacambo take a small boat down river in Paraguay, where they discover the mythical city of Eldorado. Despite their contentment, Candide and Cacambo resolve not to be happy any longer and decide to leave this paradise to find Cunégonde.

V. In the second half of the narrative, Candide decides his own fate by choosing an itinerary with the goal of finding Cunégonde. Returned to the real world from Eldorado, however, Candide’s quest is thwarted by all the predictable villainies of mankind, already seen in the first half of the book.

A. Cunégonde, our hero’s only hope of happiness, remains elusive until late in the narrative, when Candide and company rescue her and the Old Woman, who has protected her, from servitude in Constantinople, but Cunégonde is no longer as Candide remembers her.

B. In the last chapter, Candide, Cunégonde, the Old Woman, Cacambo, Martin, and Pangloss settle together on a small plot of land in Turkey. When not arguing with each other, they inevitably encounter the last of human vices: boredom. They are tempted to rejoin the fray of humanity but consult some local elders first. An old farmer tells them not to concern themselves with public affairs and just to work their land. The six of them take this advice to “cultivate [their] garden” and find peace and happiness, if of an imperfect variety.

VI. Voltaire’s tale is a masterly example of the *conte philosophique*, the “philosophical tale,” which is a hybrid of philosophy and fiction.

A. The narrative structure relies on several popular genres for its shape:
   1. Morality or fairy tale
   2. Travelogue
3. Romanesque or narrative in the style of medieval romance

4. The picaresque—a narrative that recounts the adventures of the *picaro* (Spanish for a rogue or low-born adventurer) as he drifts from place to place and from one social milieu to another.

B. Realism is abandoned for hyperbole to underscore the absurd extremity of vice in the world, although Voltaire includes several real events in the story. The absence of realism extends to the depiction of characters: Like Molière’s characters, the actors are stereotypes.

VII. Voltaire wishes to engage with optimist philosophy in order to argue for the presence of free will in man.

A. Voltaire underscores his argument for free will by showing that the natives in Paraguay—that is, natives in the New World and, therefore, according to 18th-century philosophy, in a state of nature—are capable of being both good or bad, depending on the circumstances.

B. Voltaire blames people’s lack of will for society’s persistent corruption and complacency. He takes particular aim at certain philosophers for being rigidly ideological.

C. The overwhelming evidence in *Candide* is that people are corrupt, even if they were not born that way. This is a pessimistic view of the world, but even Martin admits, “It is always good to have hope.”

D. Even if the principal characters seem unable to alter their habits and opinions, Voltaire suggests that Candide might change. In the final exchange of the book, the naïve hero seems to move cautiously away from the pure optimism of his mentor.

Essential Reading:

Recommended Reading:
Haydn Mason, *Candide: Optimism Destroyed*.

Questions to Consider:
1. Aside from driving the narrative forward, why does Voltaire have Candide and Cacambo leave Eldorado? Is there something in Candide’s nature in particular, or in mankind’s nature in general, that would cause him to leave paradise?

2. If men are not born evil, then why is there more bad than good in the world as presented by Voltaire? Is there a difference between a penchant for evil and a penchant for *choosing* evil? According to Voltaire, are we born with any other proclivities besides choice?
Lecture Fifty-Six
Jean-Jacques Rousseau

Scope: Rousseau bridges the Neoclassical and Romantic periods—his work is an advance upon, and yet also a refutation of, the work of earlier French Enlightenment thinkers, with their passionate defense of reason and equality. At the same time, Rousseau prefigures the political and aesthetic concerns of the Romantics with their insistence on the value of individual subjective experience and the power of the imagination as a moral force, especially in its relationship to the natural world. We will study two of Rousseau’s most well-known political writings: The Discourse on Inequality and The Social Contract. Both texts became sources of structure, inspiration, and justification for the French and American revolutionary movements in the late 18th century and continue today to be outstanding references for democratic theory. We will also examine Reveries of the Solitary Walker and Confessions to shed light on Rousseau’s mysterious and often contradictory character.

Outline

I. Jean-Jacques Rousseau was born in 1712 in the Republic of Geneva to a master watchmaker. His mother died at his birth, and he was essentially abandoned by his father to relatives.
   A. His love for his country—the Republic of Geneva—and respect for its unique form of governance would be the inspiration for many of his political ideas and writings, and he signed himself in his published works as “A Citizen of Geneva.”
   B. He led a more or less vagabond life, finding employment as a tutor, engraver, music teacher, and lackey, until he discovered his talents for writing and joined the Parisian literary class in the 1740s.
   C. His rise to literary fame was firmly established when he was awarded first prize by the Academy of Dijon for his Discourse on the Arts and Sciences in 1750, when he was 38 years old.
   D. Like other writers and philosophes, Rousseau was engaged in all the great political debates of the day, but the mode of his political expression was limited by comparison, say, to Voltaire, employing mostly the essay and epistolary novel forms.
   E. Rousseau was famously sensitive, sometimes to the point of being paranoid and antisocial. His ideas were often attacked from both sides, sometimes for being too reactionary, sometimes for being too radical. Several of his most important friendships (notably with d’Alembert, Diderot, and Voltaire) ended in bitter disputes.

II. Rousseau’s Discourse on the Origin and Foundations of Inequality (1755) was written in response to a call for papers from the Academy of Dijon to answer the question: What is the origin of inequality among men; and is it authorized by natural law?
   A. The Academy rejected Rousseau’s unorthodox essay for being “too long and of a bad tradition”—presumably because he did not rely on traditional classical sources for his argument.
   B. Rousseau announces his approach to answering the Academy’s question in his preface, where he says he will attempt a kind of controlled experiment through conjecture: He will discover natural laws and their dictates by examining or imagining man in “his original constitution” (that is, pre-civilized man in a “pure state of nature”).
   C. Rousseau concludes that there are two types of inequality:
      1. Physical or natural inequalities (differences in age, health, strength, and intelligence)
      2. Moral or political inequalities (differences in privilege, wealth, honor, and power).
   D. Rousseau then attempts an imaginary reconstruction of that state of nature. Man is also morally distinct from animals in that he has three peculiar faculties: free will; “perfectibility,” that is, the desire and the ability to improve his condition; and a “sole natural virtue,” pity.
   E. This combination of instincts and sentiments predetermines two natural laws that guide savage man’s behavior:
      1. An impulse for self-preservation, amour propre
      2. A “natural repugnance to see any sensitive being perish or suffer.”
F. As micro-societies emerged from pure nature, the proximity of others causes natural, then social inequalities.

G. The political establishment and civil laws arise putatively to curb crimes and vices and to protect the weak, but tyranny immediately perverts this tentative civil society.

III. The Social Contract, published in 1762, fleshes out in more detail Rousseau’s formulation of an ideal government and his reflections on the nature of political will in civil society.

A. In the first sentence of Book I, Rousseau immediately and boldly asserts: “Man was born free and everywhere he is in chains.” Liberty, he claims, is an inalienable right of man, and no one can deprive him of this right. A government rules in the interest of the people, with the will of the people, and this is the “social contract.”

B. Book II describes how the general will of a sovereign people is expressed: by direct referendum in a small state or by just-minded representatives in a larger state. Liberty and equality are the guarantors of the people’s best welfare.

C. Book III compares three forms of governance: monarchy, aristocracy, and democracy. Rousseau proposes regular votes of confidence by the people to ensure a check on the power of the government.

D. In Book IV, Rousseau advocates a mandatory “civil religion,” in which citizens must pledge “faith” in civic “dogmas”: for example, law, justice, sovereignty, patriotic duty. There are ominous implications here for the limitations of individual freedom by the state.

E. The Social Contract was banned in France and burned in Geneva. Though Rousseau was directly influenced by Montesquieu, Locke, and others in formulating this manifesto, it is his quotable language (especially in its eloquent directness) that inspired the great social contracts of the 18th century, such as the American Declaration of Independence and Constitution and the French Rights of Man.

IV. The Confessions was begun in 1766, when Rousseau was 54 years old, and completed in 1770 but not published until after his death in 1778.

A. Rousseau begins his autobiography by claiming that his work has no precedent and will have no imitator. He was wrong on both counts.

B. Confessions focuses not on the social self but on intense personal experience and the constant assessment of an individual’s response to moral, emotional, and sensual dilemmas. The assessment is not philosophical but emotional, as in his account of his first sexual encounter. The issue for the narrator is truth to one’s feelings.

C. It is clear that this way of understanding how an individual grows, learns, and matures foreshadows psychoanalytical theory and the representation of the psychology of the self in the 20th century.

D. As Rousseau traces his life through the innocent days of childhood to his disillusionment, he is also tracing the development of the human race itself—from its pre-social state through the corruption and compromises of 18th-century Europe.

V. The Reveries of the Solitary Walker was written during the last two years of Rousseau’s life and published posthumously with his Confessions in 1782.

A. The Reveries is a series of 10 “Walks,” or chapters, composed more in the style of an introspective diary than that of an autobiographical history, such as The Confessions.

B. Rousseau’s reflections, like his daily walks, are ambling and ignore the specific confines of space or time.

C. The Reveries gives expression to the author’s fondness for solitude and communion with nature, and the uniformity of nature calms his passions.

D. Rousseau is also the prototypical Romantic hero. Here the world of nature becomes an exact objective correlative for the subjective state of the walker. The outside world and the imaginary landscape of the poet’s mind are interchangeable—one a product and a reflection of the other.

E. Rousseau reflects frequently on dying, yet seems happily indifferent toward his legacy as a person and writer. In these last meditations, he takes rare pleasure in writing and, even more so, in the simple botanical discoveries on his walks.
Essential Reading:

Recommended Reading:

Questions to Consider:
1. Could Molière or Racine have imagined a world of solitary individuals such as Rousseau describes? Why not?
2. Is it possible to draw a line between civic duty and “civic religion”? 
Lecture Fifty-Seven
Samuel Johnson

Scope: Essayist, literary critic, poet, philosopher, and lexicographer, Samuel Johnson embodies the spirit of the Enlightenment that produced such polymaths as Diderot in France and Goethe in Germany. Johnson began his career as a freelance journalist, writing anonymous essays, poems, short biographies, and reviews, primarily for the Gentleman’s Magazine. It was only with the publication of his two-volume Dictionary in 1755 that Johnson acquired his lasting reputation as a man of letters. In this lecture, we will first explore Johnson’s poetry, especially “The Vanity of Human Wishes” (1749), an imitation of a satire by Juvenal and an exploration of the necessity for faith in a world of unsatisfied desire. We will then examine some of his essays from The Rambler (1750–1752) and The Idler (1758–1760), into which Johnson poured the accumulated wisdom of years of reading and writing. Finally, we will turn to his “Life of Pope,” one of several prefaces he wrote for an anthology of English poets since the early 16th century and exemplary of the critical role Johnson played in the construction of literary taste in the second half of the 18th century.

Outline

I. Let us begin by examining Johnson’s life.

A. Johnson was born in 1709, the son of Michael Johnson, a bookseller in Lichfield. He contracted tuberculosis from his wet nurse and, as a result, was almost blind in his left eye and deaf in one ear, and his face was scarred. Perhaps as a result of this early infection, he later displayed symptoms of Tourette’s Syndrome, including compulsive nervous tics and muttering. Not an auspicious beginning for one who was to become famous for his conversation! At age 21, Johnson went to Pembroke College, Oxford, but a lack of money forced him to leave 13 months later.

B. In 1737, Johnson went to London with his pupil, David Garrick, the great actor, hoping to make a living as a writer. He wrote biographies, political satires, and fictional accounts of Parliamentary debates because actual transcriptions were illegal.

C. His success came in 1738—with a poem called London, an imitation of a satire by the Latin poet Juvenal—but he lived in poverty for many years, until he was commissioned to create a new dictionary of English in 1746. The dictionary would emulate the work of the French Academy, which had produced a dictionary of the French language in 1694. The dictionary did not appear until 1755, but it then secured Johnson’s reputation as a scholar and writer. Its commercial success demonstrates the value to the Enlightenment that such an assembly of knowledge held.

D. While working on the Dictionary, Johnson published The Vanity of Human Wishes (1749), another Juvenalian satire, and from 1750 to 1752, a twice-weekly essay called The Rambler on morality, social manners, and literary criticism. In 1759, Johnson published The History of Rasselas, Prince of Abyssinia, a philosophical fiction like Voltaire’s Candide, also published in that year. Johnson’s work follows the journey of Rasselas from his utopian existence of Happy Valley through the hopes and disappointments of life in the world.

E. The ministry of George III gave Johnson a pension of £300 a year in 1762, the year James Boswell came to London from Scotland and began the friendship that would generate one of the most famous biographies: Boswell’s Life of Johnson. Johnson and Boswell traveled briefly together in Scotland.


II. Let us now turn to specific examples of Johnson’s poetry and prose, beginning with Vanity of Human Wishes.

A. Johnson defines satire in his Dictionary as “a poem in which wickedness or folly is censured.” He disliked the satire of Swift and Pope but attempted his own in this poem, an imitation of Juvenal’s Tenth Satire. The 20th-century poet and critic T. S. Eliot thought the poem purer than anything written by Pope, because it was closer in spirit to the Latin.
B. Imitation occupies a middle ground between translation and original composition and relies, of course, for part of its effects, on the familiarity of the audience with the original texts—at least in their general sense. Juvenal’s poem satirized ambition and failure and drew its examples from history and contemporary Roman life.

C. Johnson similarly represents a world where there is little to be enjoyed, and the various historical and contemporary figures—including Cardinal Wolsey; Galileo; contemporary military heroes, such as the Duke of Marlborough; and writers, such as Jonathan Swift—are deluded, misguided, and rarely in control of their lives. Johnson suggests that only divine wisdom can guide us through the pains of this world.

III. Now we will turn to Johnson’s periodical essays.

A. “No man but a blockhead ever wrote, except for money,” said Johnson, but for his entire life, he supported himself with his writing. Johnson published three series of periodical essays. The Rambler, 208 periodical essays, was published every Tuesday and Saturday from 1750 through 1752. From 1752 to 1754, Johnson contributed 29 papers to The Adventurer, and from 1758 to 1760, he published The Idler, which appeared weekly in The Universal Chronicle.

B. In Rambler (No. 4), “On Fiction,” Johnson comments on the contemporary interest in novels “such as exhibit life in its true state;” that is, realistic novels. Such novels must both instruct and delight (Horace), and Johnson himself both instructs and delights us as he describes the dangers of such novels in the balanced prose typical of his style. Johnson also follows Pope in seeing the world of nature as capable of improvement by man.

C. In Rambler (No. 60), Johnson speaks of the value of biography—a genre that he would himself turn to in his later years. In this essay, Johnson argues for the moral value of imagining ourselves in someone else’s shoes. Every life, argues Johnson, can be made into a useful narrative, because there are universal hopes, dangers, and desires in the life of every man. Johnson articulates a central Neoclassical belief: The universal aspects of man’s life are worth speaking about. On the other hand, we can see the beginning of the Romantic tendency to make the poet’s life the subject of literature.

IV. Let us take a look now at Johnson’s “Life of Pope.”

A. The Lives of the Poets consists of more than 50 essays on male poets from 1660 to the 1770s. No living poets were included.

B. Johnson begins his biography with a brief account of Pope’s background, followed by a consideration of Pope’s major works and their critical reception. Interspersed throughout the latter section are Johnson’s critical comments on Pope’s poetry. This method is, in fact, the model for all of Johnson’s literary biographies, and his focus, first on the life, then on the work of the author, became the standard way of conducting literary criticism for the next 200 years.

C. Johnson gives considerable space to examining Pope’s character—one he suggests that was formed by his painful deformities. The method Johnson follows in judging the value of Pope’s poetry is the same as his method for examining his life—he is not concerned with “slight faults or petty beauties” but, rather, with the “general character and effect of each performance.”

D. Johnson acknowledges the universal praise for The Rape of the Lock and inquires into the sources of the pleasure the poem provides: The “new race of Beings,” says Johnson, is perfectly suited to making new things familiar and familiar things, new.

E. Literary activity—writing, reading, judging—is, in the end for Johnson, a thoroughly social activity. No writer can write and teach without knowing the human and natural world, having a deep moral sense of both, and a desire to communicate that sense to the reader; no reader can judge without having some experience of the life that the writer imitates and a moral sensitivity that produces the right response to the imitation.

Essential Reading:
Samuel Johnson, The Major Works.

Recommended Reading:
Walter Jackson Bate, Samuel Johnson: The Life of an Author.
Questions to Consider:

1. In what ways do Samuel Johnson’s writings embody essential Neoclassical concepts?
2. How does Samuel Johnson shape his own age and provide a body of work against which Romantic artists rebelled?

James Boswell, *Life of Johnson.*
Lecture Fifty-Eight
Denis Diderot

Scope: With Samuel Johnson, Diderot stands as the embodiment of the Enlightenment spirit: the collector, classifier, and preserver of knowledge as a way to transform the world. Diderot was responsible for soliciting articles from leading thinkers of his day on various subjects—scientific, religious, political, economic, and aesthetic—for his Encyclopedia, or Analytical Dictionary of the Sciences, Arts and Crafts, which he published between 1751 and 1772 and which diffused his ideas throughout Europe. In this lecture, we will explore some of the articles in the Encyclopedia, focusing in particular on those that attest to Diderot’s faith in reason and scientific progress and on those that articulate Diderot’s radical and anti-reactionary agenda—especially the promotion of toleration and equality before the law. We will also turn to one of Diderot’s dialogues, one of the many texts not published during his lifetime but only circulated in private.

Outline

I. Let us begin by exploring Diderot’s background.
   A. Denis Diderot was born in provincial Langres, the son of a master cutler, in 1713. Many of his writings throughout his life attest to his admiration for, and devotion to, his father, underscoring his respect for the emerging bourgeois values of the 18th century.
   B. Diderot’s philosophe comppeers, such as Rousseau and Voltaire, would garner public distinction early in their careers, but Diderot remained relatively obscure outside of his intellectual bohemian circle until his 30s. Early on, he made his living and reputation mostly as a translator. He published his first original work, Pensées Philosophiques, in the same year (1746) that he was commissioned to translate Chambers’s Cyclopedia.
   C. Though he helmed the Encyclopedia project for 20 years, Diderot found time to write and publish prolifically on a range of subjects so broad that his collected writings can only be described as encyclopedic. Epistemology, the creative impulse, the dramatic arts, evolution, and materialistic determinism were topics he returned to again and again. He was a master of the written dialogue and used this Socratic technique to communicate and, indeed, develop his own philosophies, notably in two texts, Rameau’s Nephew and D’Alembert’s Dream.
   D. Like other philosophes, Diderot was constantly threatened with imprisonment or exile for his subversive writings. His first three publications earned him three months’ confinement at Vincennes. Further, although there were more than 200 collaborators working on the Encyclopedia, Diderot was the chief writer and, therefore, bore the brunt of the Church and throne’s contempt.
   E. He was greatly respected by his intellectual peers for a “sparkling” mind, but Diderot was plagued with doubt for most of his life about his talents, fearing he lacked the innovation and craft of a creative genius. In his own lifetime, he was never held in so high a public esteem as Rousseau and Voltaire, but the 20th century rediscovered him and has resituated him as one of the greatest thinkers of the 18th century and an important contributor to 19th- and 20th-century thought.

II. Let us now look at the Encyclopedia, its chronology, and its collaborators.
   A. Diderot was first commissioned as the chief translator of the English Cyclopedia (1746). The original director abandoned his function as leader of the project in 1747, and Diderot and d’Alembert (who were originally responsible only for the arts and scientific articles, respectively) were promoted to co-editors.
   B. The project expanded in scope over the years. First, it was conceived as a translation of Chambers’s two volumes, then as a translation with original additions, presented in four volumes of text and one volume of figures. Then, Diderot’s Prospectus announced that the project would be mostly original work, complete with ten volumes of text and two of figures (1750). Volumes were published one at a time, nearly annually, and additional volumes were conceived along the way.
   C. More than 200 collaborators contributed to the Encyclopedia, including Voltaire and Rousseau. Many of them were “polygraphs,” like Diderot, who wrote on a range of topics, but a new practice of
commissioning “specialists” to write technical articles was employed, which later became the standard practice for future encyclopedias.

D. Diderot wrote the last ten volumes of text in haste between 1760 and 1763. The editors decided to print them all in one go (1765) and release them simultaneously (1766) to avoid further public controversy. However, the publisher took the precaution of editing out some subversive content before going to print, without Diderot’s knowledge.

E. Seven more volumes of figures remained to be published, but Diderot was essentially free of the project after writing the last volumes of text. The last two volumes of figures were published in 1772; the Encyclopedia, in its proper sense, was finally complete and comprised seventeen volumes of text and eleven volumes of figures in total.

F. The range of figures included in the Encyclopedia is enormous—from illustrations of footwear through the ages, to classical architecture, to representations of various expressions of passion, to a variety of different hands, as well as numerous plates that showed rural and urban crafts and workshops and illustrated accounts of cotton production, with black slaves and Chinese workers.

III. We will now explore the opposition to and success of the Encyclopedia.

A. The Jesuits, the Jansenists, the archdiocese of Paris, Parliament, and even the pope all condemned the Encyclopedia and/or its collaborators at one point or another during its many years of production. Chief among their complaints was its tendency to subvert royal authority, corrupt morality, and inspire skepticism.

B. The editors had rearranged the entire universe of knowledge, rejecting any absolute knowledge or institution that claimed to possess such knowledge and substituting a secular and “reasonable” system in its place.

C. The Encyclopedia was commercially successful, despite the many attempts by reactionaries to thwart its publication.

D. Encyclopedic projects had proliferated since the 17th century, but none came close to the ambitious enterprise of the French Encyclopedia in terms of its scope of content and breadth of collaboration. Therefore, it was audacious, not just in its controversial content (often subversive) but also in the immodesty of its intellectual ambition—boundless if not arrogant. More than just a “book” or “compendium,” it is often recognized as one of the great “intellectual events” in history, indeed, the defining one of the 18th century.

E. The aim of the encyclopedists’ enterprise was manifold: (1) to create a compendium of all available knowledge, (2) to serve as a reference and a means of the distribution of ideas, (3) to achieve practical and historical purposes, (4) to reform the public and its prejudices, (5) to make a more virtuous society by educating its members, and (6) to reveal the organizing principles of human knowledge.

F. The encyclopedists’ approach to compiling and presenting knowledge was innovative for three main reasons: First, they embraced empirical methods wherever possible; that is, they sought firsthand experience and/or analysis, rather than simply compiling received knowledge. Second, they made use of cross-references between articles to demonstrate the interrelationships of knowledge and, moreover, to obscure subversive content through distraction. Last, they believed in the instructiveness of everyday objects and professions and, thus, placed as much value on those entries as on philosophical/abstract content.

G. Moreover, they were advancing a radical political agenda: The Encyclopedia argued that the ordinary citizen could know what only the elite were supposed to know.

H. The encyclopedists’ theory of knowledge, or epistemological philosophy, was modeled after the experimental approach of Locke, Bacon, and Newton, rather than after the ontotheology of Leibniz, which organized and reduced all knowledge into a pre-established “system of systems.” The encyclopesists believed that knowledge and its acquisition were in a constant process of evolution and could not be confined to a closed system. The process of writing the Encyclopedia was itself an experiment in testing this philosophy of knowledge.
IV. Diderot was the chief architect, writer, and often scapegoat of the Encyclopedia, but it is difficult to distinguish his individual creativity within such a collaborative work. We must look to his individual works to discover his identity and personal preoccupations, specifically Rameau’s Nephew.

A. Ironically, those individual works, the ones for which he is known today, were unpublished during his lifetime. These include The Nun, an erotic, first-person narrative; a long series of critical essays on the Paris art salons that mark the birth of the specifically French genre of art criticism; dramatic criticism and a discussion of the art of acting; and a text that cannot be classified according to any recognizable genre, Rameau’s Nephew.

B. In this dramatic dialogue, two characters, Him (Rameau’s nephew) and Me (Diderot?), wander conversationally through various social, musical, literary, moral apolitical, and philosophical subjects.

C. It is possible to identify two distinct strains of argument that run through this dialogue:
   1. The debate over the moral purpose of art
   2. The debate over two fundamentally 18th-century beliefs: on the one hand, the emotional belief in perfectibility, moral progress, and the essential goodness of man and, on the other, the position of the absolute materialist, which eventually results in an amoral determinism and utter cynicism.

D. The debate opens with a solitary walker in the center of Paris. His intellectual life seems as cynical as that of Rameau’s nephew. What does separate the two exactly? How would one judge their relative value to society?

E. The conversation of the two characters is a kind of chess game, and this reminds us that their relative moral values are necessary to enable them both to be “players.” The ample evidence that Rameau’s nephew provides of his complete lack of moral or ethical standards is matched by the fact that his interlocutor, Me (Moi), finds him amusing at least as much as he finds him repulsive.

F. The conflict generated by Moi’s recognition that even the most despicable immorality is amusing does not lead him to rethinking his opening metaphor: that his thoughts are his whores.

G. Rameau’s nephew claims that he understands how literature teaches, as well as entertains: He has learned to be a hypocrite from Molière’s Tartuffe.

H. How does the artist control the consequences of his work in terms of its moral effect? And does he have any duty to attempt that control?

V. Finally, Diderot takes up the question of free will versus fatalism, or perfectibility and human goodness and cynicism. Rameau’s nephew tells the story of Bouret’s dog to illustrate the brilliance of one of his society’s cynics.

Essential Reading:
Denis Diderot, Jean d’Alembert, et al., Encyclopedia, or Analytical Dictionary of the Sciences, Arts and Crafts. Denis Diderot, Rameau’s Nephew.*

Recommended Reading:
Otis Fellows, Diderot.

Questions to Consider:
1. How are today’s encyclopedias different from the French Encyclopedia in content, aim, and style? What is the current value of an encyclopedia in intellectual endeavors?
2. Can we read Rameau’s Nephew as a morally instructive text?

Lecture Fifty-Nine
William Blake

Scope: Poet, engraver, visionary, William Blake called the God of institutionalized Christianity Nobodaddy and asserted that Newton’s scientific insights, unleavened by poetic inspiration, had produced a world of darkness. For Blake, the scientific rationalism of the Enlightenment and its belief in the idea of progress did not herald, as it did for Neoclassical writers, the dawn of a new age but the gradual dimming of the emotional and spiritual light (the “imagination”) that infused the material world with meaning. Newton’s “single vision,” argued Blake, was limited by logic and empiricism; Blake’s vision found its expression in both verbal and visual forms that pierced the mundane. In this lecture, we will study Blake’s *Songs of Innocence and Experience* (1794), deceptively simple and deeply ironic poems and their accompanying plates, that represent, on the one hand, a world that appears to know nothing of the oppressive weight of social laws or the restrictions of the rational and, on the other, the world that has been exposed to the corrupting influences of industry and an excessive reliance on reason.

Outline

I. We will first explore Blake and the Enlightenment.
   A. The difference between the Neoclassical view of scientific thought and reason and Blake’s view may be neatly summed up in the difference between Pope’s account of Newton and Blake’s.
   B. For Pope, Newton shined the light of science on the world of nature, whereas Blake condemned Newton’s “single vision” as like a sleep. The limitations and constraints of an over-reliance on mathematical and empirical reason are represented in Blake’s 1795 illustration of Newton, curled in on himself, backed against a rock, measuring reality. Newton’s science, like Locke’s and Bacon’s, threatened to deprive the world of mystery (God) and, thus, was Satanic.
   C. In his rejection of the precepts of order and rationality that typified Neoclassicism, Blake was the first major figure in the movement that would be retroactively designated as Romanticism, with its emphasis on the irrational, the imaginative, the personal, the spontaneous, the visionary, and the transcendent.

II. Now let us turn to Blake’s life.
   A. Blake’s lifetime is one of revolution—growing industrialization, political revolution in France and America, and the ongoing war with Napoleonic France that kept England in a state of unrest from 1789 until the Battle of Waterloo in 1815. Blake wrote explicitly about these events.
   B. Blake was born in 1757 in London, where his father ran a hosiery shop. William, the third of five children, went to school only long enough to learn to read and write, then he worked in the shop until he was 14, when he was apprenticed to an engraver.
   C. Blake completed his apprenticeship when he was 22 and, at 25, married Catherine Boucher, whom he taught to read and write and to help him in his work.
   D. Throughout his life, Blake struggled to produce his own work at the same time that he accepted commissions from others to support himself and his wife. Blake lived in near poverty and died unrecognized except by a few devoted students.

III. Let us now discuss briefly Blake’s artistic theory and practice.
   A. Blake’s poetry is multimedia, anticipating the technological production of hypertext. This combination of word and image would produce, Blake believed, a revolution of the imagination. The title page of the *Songs of Innocence and Experience* gives equal weight to the “Author” and “Printer,” William Blake.
   B. For his own politically satiric and poetically visionary works, Blake developed the “Illuminated Book” as a means of fusing the visual and the literary into a single form. Blake engraved both words and pictures on copper printing plates, and his wife made the printing impressions, hand-colored the pictures, and bound the books.
C. Each page of Blake’s Illuminated Book was produced by etching copper plates, with the aid of corrosive acids, with both text and designs. These plates would then be used to make prints, which would then be colored with watercolors.

D. Each of his books was a unique work of art and was produced by a radical new method. The form of the books thus embodied both a new poetical and philosophical discourse.

E. In his Illuminated Book *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* (1790), Blake articulates his insistence on the necessity of both good and evil to life, the necessity of co-present oppositions: “Without Contraries is no progression.”

F. Blake, therefore, distinguishes between:

1. “[W]hat the religious call Good & Evil,” where the good is associated with the soul and passivity and prohibition, and evil is associated with the body and energy and freedom
2. And the real good, which is the co-presence of desire and restraint, of energy and reason, of Hell and Heaven.

IV. Now we will consider *Songs of Innocence and Experience* (1794).

A. Blake refers to innocence and experience as “the Two Contrary States of the Human Soul.” Innocence is a state easy and relaxed, without the clash of contraries, and experience is a state of suffering and conflicting contraries. One will always be implied by the other; neither state can exist independently of the other.

B. These poems are deceptively simple but deeply ironic. With their accompanying plates, they represent, on the one hand, a world of innocence, one that appears to know nothing of the oppressive weight of social laws or the restrictions of the rational, and on the other, the world of experience, one that has been exposed to the corrupting influences of industry and an excessive reliance on reason.

C. In “Introduction” to the *Songs of Innocence*, the internal narrative of the poem moves from piping, to singing, to writing, that is, from artistic labor that is essentially the same as the body breathing to labor that can be taken away from the artist. Moreover, in asking the piper to make the same song again and again, the child is asking for a reproducible vision. But the repetition of past joys is a trap—there is no movement beyond the memory of that original joy and, thus, the state of innocence becomes a state of stagnation, of death.

D. In “The Lamb,” the child asks the lamb the same question he asks of himself: “Who made me?” Despite the apparent simplicity of the question, the curiosity of the child portends the adult interrogations that the child will make of his mature world—a world in which the lamb will be made to suffer for its innocence. The answer is produced by a series of complicated identifications among the lamb, Christ as the lamb, Christ as child, and Christ as the creating God who made both the lamb and the child. The companion poem in *Songs of Experience* is “The Tyger.”

E. In this poem, the tiger is depicted as a creature of God; thus, the answer to the question “Did he who made the Lamb make thee?” is a resounding “yes.” Notice that the same images of creation that describe the construction of the tiger—hammer, chain, furnace, anvil—can apply both to the work of the rural craftsman (the blacksmith, the ironworker) and the factories of the industrial revolution.

F. In “The Chimney Sweeper” from the *Songs of Innocence*, the speaker of the poem moves from being a child sold by his father to becoming the father of little Tom Dacre; then both become the children of God the Father and must do their duty—that is, sweep chimneys and risk disease and death.

G. In the companion poem in *The Songs of Experience*, the chimney sweeper articulates the logic of the world of experience: that the status quo is maintained by the hierarchy of God/king/priest/father—a patriarchal structure that benefits those in power and authority at the expense of the poor, the vulnerable, the children.

H. In one of Blake’s most memorable poems, “London,” the speaker walks through the city marking the way in which the architecture of the city replicates the structure of social relationships and the structure of individual feelings in this world of experience and industrialized production. Everything is marked and constrained, but the constraints are man-made—what Blake calls “mind-forg’d manacles”—not “natural.” Thus, man limits himself and produces the institutions that deprive him of freedom and life. This is especially true of the narrator, who ironically, can articulate how the world around him is corrupted by a lack of imagination but is unable to see how he himself is imprisoned.
I. Only through the power of the imagination—an imagination capable of breaking those mind-forg’d manacles with a visionary power and revolutionary vision—can the individual and his society be transformed.

Essential Reading:
William Blake, *Blake’s Poetry and Designs*, Johnson and Grant, eds.

Recommended Reading:
Peter Ackroyd, *Blake*.

Questions to Consider:
1. How does Blake’s poetry critique the consequences of Enlightenment belief in human reason?
2. In what way does Blake inaugurate the Romantic belief in the power of the human imagination to bring about social change?
Lecture Sixty
Johann Wolfgang von Goethe

Scope: We began this course with the French dramatist Molière, whose work embodied Neoclassical values and prefigured the rational and progressive claims of the Enlightenment. We end with a German writer, philosopher, and scientist who was born at the height of the Enlightenment and whose work has come to symbolize the literary and cultural values of Romanticism. From his early novel *The Sorrows of Young Werther* (1774), which drove men all over Europe to commit suicide in imitation of Werther’s despair, to his magisterial drama *Faust*, which preoccupied him his entire adult life, Goethe’s work is both intensely classical, yet quintessentially Romantic. His belief in a more organically structured and felt experience—as opposed to the formal aesthetic restraints of Neoclassicism—pervades his work, whether in lyric poetry, the novel, autobiography, or in his extensive writings on botany, geology, anatomy, optics, and psychology. We shall concentrate in this lecture on Goethe’s *Faust* as a way to understand the philosophical and aesthetic concerns that define late-18th– and early-19th–century Europe.

Outline

I. Goethe was born into the Frankfurt elite in 1749. His mother was the daughter of the mayor; his father was a wealthy private citizen.
   A. At an early age, Goethe studied several languages, as well as art and music. By his early teens, he was casting his school exercises in the form of an epistolary novel written in German, French, Italian, English, Latin (with occasional postscripts in Greek), and Yiddish.
   B. Goethe attributed great importance for his early development to the social and political situation in cosmopolitan Frankfurt.
   C. He studied law first in Leipzig, then in Strasbourg, where in 1770, he met Gottfried Herder, leader of the *Sturm und Drang* movement, which stressed subjectivity and the unease of man in contemporary society, as well the revolutionary man of genius in rebellion against conventional society.
   D. The aesthetic aims of *Sturm und Drang* were “Romantic” in that they intended:
      1. To make an iconoclastic break with received forms and values
      2. To use folk or “primitive” materials, ranging from ballads to puppet shows
      3. To engage literary ancestors outside the native tradition, that is, classical Greece and Renaissance Italy and England, especially Shakespeare.
   E. Out of an unhappy love affair came Goethe’s first success, *The Sorrows of Young Werther*, composed in four weeks and published in 1774. *Werther* is an epistolary novel, that is, a novel structured through letters and, therefore, a traditionally 18th-century kind.
   F. In 1775, Goethe moved to Weimar at the invitation of Charles Augustus, duke of Saxe-Weimar, and would live there more or less for the rest of his life.
   G. Goethe was one of the last great polymaths of European culture, like Leonardo da Vinci or John Milton or Adam Smith. Goethe served as chief minister to the duke of Saxe-Weimar, designed the Weimar theater, and was an important scientist.
   H. Goethe’s collected works of plays, novels, memoirs, and travel writing, including letters and diaries, run to 143 volumes, plus five additional volumes of “conversations” with various interlocutors.

II. Goethe’s lifetime artistic project, *Faust*, is like a Frankensteinian creature (but a beautiful and productive one).
   A. Goethe’s *Faust* is crafted to give men pleasure into the future precisely because it provides an ongoing source of wonder.
   B. *Faust*, a work in two parts, the second nearly twice as long and much more abstract in its action than the first, is written in the form of a play, but it is virtually unstageable.
   C. Goethe himself called *Faust* a tragedy, especially the second part, composed almost 40 years after he began work on the first part, although Faust is not condemned but saved.
D. The Faust legend was originally published in 1587 as a chapbook and was adapted to the Elizabethan stage by Christopher Marlowe. It had been kept alive in Goethe’s youth by the puppet theater.

E. Goethe makes several significant changes in the old legend of the scholar who makes a pact with the devil Mephistopheles, the most significant being that Goethe makes the second half of Part 1 into a love tragedy.

F. Critics have likened Goethe’s play more to Christian epic, such as Dante’s Divine Comedy or Milton’s Paradise Lost, than to drama.

III. Whatever else Faust may be, it is a German work, a celebration of German nationalism.

A. The roots of the story extend only as far as early modern German history. The historical Faust was a contemporary of Martin Luther, who died in the late 15th century.

B. Goethe’s desire to represent the range of human knowledge in German is captured in Faust’s debates with himself about how to translate into German the opening of the Gospel of St. John. He settles on Tat, or “act,” consistent with Goethe’s own definition of man as Tätigkeit, “activity.”

C. The play, an attempt to show that the German language is capable of as broad a range of lyric, narrative, dramatic, acoustical, and semantic effects as any other vernacular poetry, is almost an encyclopedia of poetic forms.

D. What Goethe is doing for the German language is similar to what Horace did for Latin: to show that Latin could express as well as Greek every lyric form.

E. Faust’s last vision is of a progressive future of scientific and technological marvels, a vision of Germanic solidarity and an ominous foreshadowing of German expansionism in the 20th century.

IV. The Faust of tradition is a quester after knowledge, and for the Renaissance mind, the Faust legend was a cautionary tale of pride or arrogance. Goethe’s Faust, however, longs for experience or, more precisely, human activity, comprised of a desire that can be satisfied only by more desire.

A. Some have called such desire the essence of Romanticism. The quest itself, the desiring for, now becomes the subject of art itself.

B. Faust’s idea of desire is also related to Blake’s notion that activity is good, the root of evil being a rationality that preempts desire.

C. Others have called such immodest or excessive desire the necessary condition of capitalism.

V. Two economic transactions condition all the other action in the play: a wager and a contract.

A. At the beginning of the play, Mephistopheles extracts a wager from God that he can “induce” the soul of Faust “to defect from its true source.” The Lord, in turn, agrees not to interfere.

B. Mephistopheles takes all this to mean—mistakenly, it turns out—that he will have access to Faust’s immortal soul in the end.

C. Mephistopheles and Faust also make a contract: Mephistopheles will serve Faust’s desires until the moment when Faust wishes an earthly bliss to become permanent and not to perish, at which time Faust will forfeit his life.

D. Mephistopheles also takes this contract to mean that Faust, if he breaks the contract, will forfeit his soul to the devil.

E. In the end, Faust does voice a vision of imperishable freedom, and he dies. Faust’s “immortal part” is snatched away, however.

F. For many readers, the final solution to the problem of Faust’s fate has seemed a kind of shaggy-dog story. God was in control all along.

VI. The play is not about either the wager or the contract. It is about the process of making desire processive, not terminal. This is a particular problem for Faust when his desire turns to libidinal desire.

A. Faust seduces Gretchen, impregnates her, and in addition to killing her brother in a duel, allows her to be condemned for infanticide. At the end of the play, he tries to get the nearly insane Gretchen to break out of prison and follow him. She, however, feels that the legal judgment against her is just.
B. In an earlier scene in a garden, when Faust is trying to woo Gretchen, she asks him whether he believes in God, an important question for the audience as well, if Goethe means salvation to be a serious theme of the play.

C. “Feeling is everything,” says Faust, declaring himself a true child of the anti-rationalist, sentimental discourse of the early 19th century prefigured in the Confessions of Rousseau.

D. The uneducated Gretchen answers that what Faust says is like the priest except not quite right. Gretchen’s innate but untutored insight is accurate: Faust is speaking the language of the Romantic priesthood.

E. This faith in the sacred power of desire itself is also why Faust survives Gretchen, why in fact, the play must go beyond the tragedy of Gretchen.

F. Why the play must go on is precisely the part of the Romantic priesthood that applies to Goethe’s own predicament as author: Goethe has committed himself to a compositional practice of making the drama itself processive.

G. Like his hero, Goethe must be forward-looking.

VII. In Part 2, Faust seduces another woman, this one the mythic figure of Helena, who arrives on stage believing that she has come from Troy to Sparta, her former home.

A. In every physical sense, however, she is in Germany.

B. Faust seduces Helena by teaching her end-rhyme, a feature of poetic language that is alien to her native Greek but is, of course, common in German.

C. As a result of their rhyming, a child, Euphorion, is conceived, whose historical identity Goethe elsewhere associated with Lord Byron.

D. By this mythic union of Germanic father and Greek mother, with its northern European offspring, Goethe seems to be not only marrying the classical and vernacular (that is, Romantic) literary traditions but also suggesting the possibility for a unified Europe.

E. Goethe was the exemplar of a specifically German literature in Germany’s pre-nationalist period, and for this reason, he was later lionized as the unifier of a “German sensibility” and demonized as the progenitor of the German “cultural industry” that produced the Third Reich a hundred years after his death.

F. In this respect, one simple piece of geography remains salient: The Nazi concentration camp at Buchenwald was only 15 minutes from Goethe’s beloved Weimar.

Essential Reading:
Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, Faust, Part One, Martin Greenberg, trans.; Faust, Part Two.

Recommended Reading:

Questions to Consider:
1. Identify the elements in Goethe’s Faust that seem paradigmatic of Romantic sensibility.
2. Consider why the Faust legend is so important to our understanding of the Romantic movement.
Timeline

1622.................................Birth of Molière
1626.................................Death of Bacon
1632.................................Birth of Locke
1637.................................Descartes’ *Le Discours de la Methode* (“Discourse on Method”)
1638.................................Death of Cornelius Jansen (Jansenism); Louis XIV becomes king of France; Galileo’s *Two New Sciences*
1639.................................Birth of Racine
1642.................................Birth of Newton; English Civil War begins (ending in 1648); Puritans close theaters
1646.................................Birth of Leibniz
1648.................................Birth of Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz; Peace of Westphalia ends Thirty Years’ War
1649.................................Charles I of England beheaded
1650.................................Cromwell crushes Irish rebellion
1651.................................Hobbes’s *Leviathan*
1660.................................Birth of Daniel Defoe?; restoration of Charles II; Royal Society founded; Samuel Pepys begins diary
1662.................................Boyle’s Law; Royal Society chartered
1664.................................Molière’s *Tartuffe*; Racine’s *The Thebans*
1665.................................Racine’s *Alexander the Great*; outbreak of plague in London
1666.................................Newton discovers spectrum and law of gravity; Great Fire of London
1667.................................Birth of Jonathan Swift; John Milton’s *Paradise Lost*; John Dryden’s *Annus Mirabilis*
1671.................................Milton, *Paradise Regained* and *Samson Agonistes*; Newton invents reflecting telescope; Leibniz makes calculating machine
1673.................................Death of Molière
1675.................................Spinoza’s *Ethics*; Greenwich Observatory founded; Roemer calculates the speed of light
1677.................................Racine’s *Phaedra*; Racine leaves the theater
1678.................................John Bunyan’s *Pilgrim’s Progress*; Huygens proposes the wave theory of light
1681.................................Dryden’s *Absalom and Achitophel*
1682.................................Halley investigates the comet that bears his name; Peter the Great becomes emperor of Russia
1683.................................Leeuwenhoek discovers bacteria
1685.................................Death of Charles II; James II becomes king
1687.................................Newton, *Philosophiae naturalis principia mathematica*
1688.................................Birth of Pope; James II deposed; Glorious Revolution; Locke’s *Two Treatises on Government*; Behn’s *Oroonoko*
1689.................................Accession of William III and Mary II; Montesquieu born
1690.................................Locke’s *Concerning Civil Government and Concerning Human Understanding*; William III defeats James II, Battle of the Boyne, Ireland
1691.................................. Sor Juana’s “Reply to Sor Filotea de la Cruz”
1692.................................. Salem witch trials
1694.................................. Birth of Voltaire; Astell’s *A Serious Proposal to the Ladies; Dictionnaire de l’Académie Française*; death of Mary II of England; Bank of England founded
1695.................................. Lapse of Licensing Act in England; Death of Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz; Birth of “Grub Street”
1696.................................. First practical steam engine
1699.................................. Death of Racine
1700.................................. Death of Dryden
1701.................................. James II dies in exile; Act of Settlement establishes Hanover succession
1702.................................. Death of William III of England; accession of Queen Anne of England; War of Spanish Succession begins (ending in 1713)
1704.................................. Death of Locke; Swift’s *Tale of the Tub* and *Battle of the Books* published anonymously; Newton’s *Opticks*
1706.................................. Birth of Benjamin Franklin; Halley predicts return of comet
1707.................................. Act of Union unites England and Scotland as Great Britain
1708.................................. First accurate map of China
1709.................................. Birth of Samuel Johnson; Pope’s *Pastorals*
1710.................................. Berkeley’s *Principles of Human Knowledge*
1711.................................. Addison’s *Spectator*; Pope’s *Essay on Criticism*
1712.................................. Birth of Rousseau; Handel visits London and stays
1713.................................. Birth of Diderot; Pope’s *Windsor Forest*; Scriblerus Club founded by Swift, Pope, Parnell, Gay, Arbuthnot, and Oxford; Swift appointed dean of St. Patrick’s; Treaty of Utrecht, end of the War of Spanish Succession
1714.................................. Death of Queen Anne; accession of King George I (Hanover); Mandeville, *Parable of the Bees*
1715.................................. Death of Louis XIV of France; regency of Louis XV
1716.................................. Death of Leibniz
1717.................................. Birth of D’Alembert; Pope’s *Rape of the Lock*
1718.................................. French found New Orleans; Halley discovers independent motion of stars
1719.................................. Haywood’s *Love in Excess*; Defoe’s *Robinson Crusoe*; Spain sends troops to Scotland on behalf of James III (in exile in France); Ireland declared inseparable from England
1720.................................. Swift begins *Gulliver’s Travels*; plague in Marseilles kills 40,000; South Sea Company collapses
1722.................................. Defoe’s *Moll Flanders*
1723.................................. Accession of Louis XV
1724.................................. Defoe’s *Roxana*
1725.................................. Death of Peter the Great; Vico’s *The New Science*
1726.................................. Swift’s *Gulliver’s Travels* (published anonymously)
1727.................................. Death of George I; accession of George II; death of Newton
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Event</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1728</td>
<td>Gay’s <em>Beggar’s Opera</em>; Pope’s <em>Dunciad</em></td>
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<td>1729</td>
<td>Swift’s <em>A Modest Proposal</em>; Bach’s <em>St. Matthew Passion</em></td>
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<tr>
<td>1731</td>
<td>Death of Defoe</td>
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<tr>
<td>1732</td>
<td>Death of John Gay; English found Georgia colony</td>
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<tr>
<td>1733</td>
<td>Pope’s <em>Essay on Man</em></td>
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<td>1735</td>
<td>Linnaeus’s <em>Systema Naturae</em></td>
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<td>1738</td>
<td>Johnson’s <em>London</em></td>
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<td>1739</td>
<td>War of Jenkins’s Ear</td>
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<td>1740</td>
<td>Richardson’s <em>Pamela</em>; War of the Austrian Succession</td>
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<tr>
<td>1741</td>
<td>Pope’s <em>Memoirs of Martinus Scriblerus</em>; Bering discovers Alaska; Celsius invents centigrade thermometer</td>
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<tr>
<td>1742</td>
<td>Pope’s <em>New Dunciad</em>; Fielding’s <em>Joseph Andrews</em>; Handel’s <em>Messiah</em></td>
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<td>1743</td>
<td>American Philosophical Society founded</td>
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<td>1744</td>
<td>Death of Alexander Pope; French naval attempt on behalf of James III</td>
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<td>1745</td>
<td>Death of Jonathan Swift</td>
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<td>1746</td>
<td>Battle of Culloden: final defeat of James III’s forces; Johnson commissioned to create the <em>Dictionary</em>; Diderot’s <em>Pensées Philosophiques</em>; Diderot commissioned to translate Chambers’s <em>Cyclopaedia</em></td>
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<td>1748</td>
<td>Bach’s <em>The Art of the Fugue</em></td>
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<td>1749</td>
<td>Birth of Goethe; Fielding’s <em>Tom Jones</em>; Johnson’s <em>The Vanity of Human Wishes</em></td>
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<td>1750</td>
<td>Death of J. S. Bach; death of Albinoni; Rousseau’s <em>Discourse on the Arts and Sciences</em>; <em>The Rambler</em> begins publication (Johnson); British raj in India</td>
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<tr>
<td>1751</td>
<td>Diderot’s <em>Encyclopédie</em></td>
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<tr>
<td>1752</td>
<td>Britain adopts Gregorian calendar, losing 11 days that year (September 2)</td>
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<tr>
<td>1753</td>
<td>Franklin adopts Gregorian calendar, losing 11 days that year (September 2)</td>
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<td>1755</td>
<td>Death of Montesquieu; Johnson’s <em>Dictionary</em>; Lisbon earthquake</td>
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<tr>
<td>1756</td>
<td>Birth of Mozart; Seven Years War begins (ending in 1763)</td>
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<td>1757</td>
<td>Birth of Blake</td>
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<td>1759</td>
<td>Birth of Robert Burns; death of Handel; Voltaire’s <em>Candide</em>; Johnson’s <em>Rasselas</em></td>
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<td>1760</td>
<td>Sterne’s <em>Tristram Shandy</em>; death of George II; accession of George III</td>
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<td>1762</td>
<td>Rousseau’s <em>Social Contract</em></td>
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<td>1763</td>
<td>James Boswell meets Johnson; Treaty of Paris, end of Seven Years War</td>
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<tr>
<td>1764</td>
<td>Voltaire’s <em>Dictionnaire Philosophique</em></td>
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<td>1765</td>
<td>Johnson’s edition of Shakespeare</td>
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<tr>
<td>1766</td>
<td>Cavendish identifies hydrogen as an element, analyzes carbon dioxide</td>
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<tr>
<td>1769</td>
<td>Birth of Napoleon</td>
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<td>1770</td>
<td>Birth of Beethoven; Cook explores the east coast of Australia; Boston Massacre</td>
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<tr>
<td>1774</td>
<td>Death of Louis XV; accession of Louis XVI; Goethe’s <em>The Sorrows of Young Werther</em></td>
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1776.......................... American Revolution; Paine’s *Common Sense*; Smith’s *Wealth of Nations*
1778.......................... Death of Rousseau; death of Voltaire; American Declaration of Independence
1779.......................... Johnson’s *Lives of English Poets*
1781.......................... Herschel discovers Uranus
1782.......................... Rousseau’s *Reveries of a Solitary Walker* and *Confessions* (both published posthumously)
1783.......................... Death of D’Alembert
1784.......................... Death of Diderot; death of Johnson
1788.......................... Birth of Byron; Kant’s *Critique of Pure Reason*
1789.......................... French Revolution begins
1791.......................... Paine, *Rights of Man*; Mozart dies
1793.......................... Louis XVI and Marie Antoinette guillotined in Paris
1794.......................... Blake’s *Songs of Innocence and Experience*
1803.......................... Great Britain declares war on France
1804.......................... Napoleon declares himself emperor of France
1805.......................... Battle of Trafalgar, Admiral Nelson defeats Napoleon
1815.......................... Battle of Waterloo at which Napoleon is defeated
1819.......................... Birth of Queen Victoria
1821.......................... Death of Napoleon
1824.......................... Death of Byron
1827.......................... Death of Blake
1832.......................... Death of Goethe
Glossary

Alexandrine: A line of 6 feet or 12 syllables, which in French is termed heroic verse and in English is used to vary the heroic line of 5 feet (pentameter).

Amour propre: Self-love, or vanity, that is eager to make claims for the self and easily takes offense.

Civil man: One who belongs to a community or civil society and, thus, assumes the rights and responsibilities of that role.

Commedia dell’arte: Italian, meaning “comedy of professional artists.” An improvisational theater that began in the 16th century and was popular from then until the 18th century. Performances were improvised around stock situations involving adultery, jealousy, old age, and love, with the characters identified by costume and mask.

Deism: The belief in the existence of a Supreme Being as the source of life. Deism rejects the supernatural or revealed nature of Christianity. In the 18th century, a popular metaphor for God was the watchmaker who has wound up the universe and thereafter takes no part in its activity.

Empiricism: A doctrine about the derivation of knowledge developed in reaction to the rationalism of Descartes and Leibniz, who argued for a priori knowledge in the form of innate ideas. British philosophers, such as Locke and Hume, argued instead that all knowledge came from experience.

Enlightenment: A term applied to an intellectual movement that flourished from the late 17th century to the late 18th century in Europe. Enlightenment thinking encouraged scientific inquiry, tolerance, and universal human rights. Its central belief was in the power of human reason to advance the human condition by rejecting prejudice, injustice, and superstition. Its proponents articulated the principles and philosophies that culminated in the political idealism of the American and French Revolutions.

Heroic couplet: Iambic-pentameter (5-stress) lines rhymed in pairs, usually end-stopped in the Neoclassical period and with the marked use of caesura (“pause”).

Imagination: In Neoclassical terminology, the imagination—that is, the capacity to create images of that which has not been experienced—is usually the equivalent of fancy and is, thus, either complementary or opposed to the faculty of reason. In the period of Romanticism, the imagination is a central faculty of the mind because of its creative and transformative power.

Jansenism: A rigorous Christian movement of the 17th and 18th centuries, based on the writings of the Catholic theologian Cornelius Jansen (1585–1638), who resisted the humanist tendencies of the Renaissance, arguing that salvation was not within the reach of all Christians.

Jesuits: Officially the Society of Jesus. A Roman Catholic religious order for men, founded by Saint Ignatius of Loyola in 1534 and owing allegiance only to their superior general in Rome and the pope.

Judgment: The exercise of those critical faculties, both moral and aesthetic, that brings man into harmony with the universal principles of the natural world and with his fellow man.

Lyric: Short poems directly expressing the poet’s own thoughts and sentiment.

Materialism: A philosophical system, formulated in the 4th century B.C. by Democritus, that explains the nature of the world as dependent on matter. Plato developed the contrasting philosophy of idealism.

Mock epic/heroic: A poem that uses the style and conventions of epic poetry to describe a trivial or unheroic event or person.

Natural rights: A central idea in Enlightenment political theory—and one that formed the basis of the Declaration of Rights in the American Revolution—that insists that human beings are naturally endowed with certain rights, derived from nature itself. Those rights are the right to life, liberty, property, and political equality.

Nature: In the Neoclassical period, nature refers to God’s created world made manifest in the divine order—the Great Chain of Being—through which the natural world functions. In Romanticism, nature becomes the source and symbolic expression of passion and feeling, and readers and viewers are encouraged to seek out the wild and sublime aspects of nature in order to provoke profound emotional experiences.
Neoclassical: A set of attributes that characterized the aesthetic, political, and moral laws of the period from the mid-17th century to the last third of the 18th century. These attributes were drawn from classical models and emphasized order, stability, universality, balance, and tradition.

Nonconformist: A member of a Protestant Church that dissents from the established Church of England.

Pastoral: Music, literature, or painting that idealistically depicts the life of shepherds or rural life.

Philosophes: The French word for “philosophers,” applied especially to those 18th-century thinkers who subjected the established institutions and beliefs of their time to rational criticism. Foremost among these philosophes were Voltaire and Diderot.

Reformation: Sixteenth-century European movement that sought reform of the universal Catholic Church and resulted in the development of Protestantism.

Romanticism: A philosophical and aesthetic challenge to Enlightenment beliefs in reason, classicism, and scientific knowledge. Romanticism valued feelings over reason, originality over tradition and the imitation of classical authors and genres, and the individual over the community.

Satire: A literary work in which human follies and institutions are mocked with the implied assertion of some standard of normality. The tone may vary from the harsh ridicule of Juvenalian satire to the playful tone of Horatian satire.

Scientific Revolution: The intellectual movement sparked by the scientific work of Bacon, Galileo, and Descartes and resulting in the scientific discoveries and inventions that mechanized labor in the 18th and 19th centuries.

Social contract: The political concept whereby an individual can enter into a contract with a ruler or state in which the individual gives up certain freedoms in exchange for personal security.

Socratic dialogue: Pertaining to the Greek philosopher Socrates (469–399 B.C.) and his method of cross-examination, that is, seeking the truth through questions and answers.

Sturm und Drang: German phrase meaning “storm and stress.” The term refers to a radical movement in German literature in the late 1770s characterized by the violent expression of emotion and the rejection of Neoclassical literary norms. Sturm und Drang was the title of a 1776 play by Friedrich Maximilian von Klinger (1752–1831).

Third Reich: The official Nazi designation for the regime in Germany from January 1933 to May 1945, as the presumed successor of the medieval and early-modern Holy Roman Empire of 800 to 1806 (the First Reich) and the German Empire from 1871 to 1918 (the Second Reich).

Wit: In Neoclassical terminology, the word means intellectual quickness and liveliness, inventiveness, and the capacity to see resemblances between unlike things—and, thus, to employ similes, metaphors, and playful language in conversation and art.
Biographical Notes

**William Blake** (1757–1827): Blake was born in London, where his father ran a hosiery shop. William went to school only long enough to learn to read and write; he worked in the shop until he was 14, after which he was apprenticed to an engraver, then studied at the Royal Academy of Art. Throughout his life, Blake struggled to produce his own work at the same time that he accepted commissions from others to support himself and his wife. Blake lived in near poverty and died unrecognized except by a few devoted students. Blake’s revolutionary methods for producing his Illuminated Books, such as *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* (1790) and *The Songs of Innocence and Experience* (1794), were physical manifestations of the mental revolution he hoped to produce in his readers. In his rejection of the precepts of order and rationality that typified Neoclassicism, Blake was the first major figure in the movement that would be retroactively designated as Romanticism—a term that describes an emphasis on the irrational, the imaginative, the personal, the spontaneous, the visionary, and the transcendent.

**Daniel Defoe** (1660–1731): Daniel Defoe was the son of James and Anne Foe (Defoe later added the French prefix to his family name), and his father was a City tradesman, a candle maker. His father was a Dissenter or Nonconformist, and his education at Dissenters’ schools stressed the new science and philosophy, rather than the traditional Latin and Greek, and focused specifically on that branch of moral philosophy termed *casuistry*—the exploration of imagined moral and theological dilemmas. Despite his father’s wishes that he become a Nonconformist minister, Defoe turned to trade, but his risky business ventures forced him into bankruptcy in 1692. His efforts to pay off the debt led to further business failures, and he eventually turned to his pen to support his family. Defoe was amazingly prolific, producing over his lifetime more than 500 separate works, as well as several periodical series, for which he wrote two or three essays a week. It was not until 1719, when he was 59 years old, that Defoe found a way of making money: publishing the novel *Robinson Crusoe*. During his remaining years, Defoe concentrated on novels rather than pamphlets, publishing the highly successful *Moll Flanders* (1722) and *Roxana* (1724).

**Sister Juana Inés de la Cruz** (1648–1695): Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz was a major literary and philosophical figure in 17th-century Mexico. In addition, she fervently advocated a woman’s right to education and the intellectual life. Born in 1648, Juana was the daughter of a Spanish gentleman and an illiterate mother and, early on, showed her insatiable desire for learning: Before she was 8, she could read and enjoy Plato, Aristophanes, and Erasmus. At the age of 13, she was presented at the Viceregal Court, the cultural center of the New World, and for the next three years, she wrote court verse in Castilian, Latin, and Nauhatl, the language of the Aztecs. At age 16, Juana decided to become a nun, and her cell soon became an academy, lined with books and filled with the instruments of music and mathematics. Juana learned to play several instruments, wrote a treatise on musical harmony, made a name as a miniaturist, and became proficient in moral and dogmatic theology, medicine, canon law, astronomy, and advanced mathematics. Eventually, increasing pressure to address only religious matters forced her to sell her library and renounce writing. She died after nursing her sisters with the plague.

**Denis Diderot** (1713–1784): Diderot was born in provincial Langres, the son of a master cutler. Diderot remained relatively obscure outside of his intellectual bohemian circle until his 30s. Early on, he made his living and reputation mostly as a translator. He published his first original work, *Pensées Philosophiques*, in the same year (1746) that he was commissioned to translate Chambers’s *Cyclopedia*. Though he piloted the *Encyclopedia* project for 20 years, Diderot found time to write and publish prolifically on a range of subjects so broad that his collected writings can only be described as encyclopedic. Epistemology, the creative impulse, the dramatic arts, evolution, and materialistic determinism were topics he returned to again and again. Like other Enlightenment philosophers, he was constantly threatened with imprisonment or exile for his subversive writings. His first three publications earned him three months’ confinement at Vincennes, and although there were more than 200 collaborators working on the *Encyclopedia*, Diderot was the chief writer and, therefore, bore the brunt of the Church and throne’s contempt. Like his famous contemporary Samuel Johnson, Diderot is said to have been more effective as a talker than as a writer.

**Johann Wolfgang von Goethe** (1749–1832): Goethe was born into a well-off family and studied law, first in Leipzig, then in Strasbourg, where in 1770–1771, he met Gottfried Herder, leader of the *Sturm und Drang* movement. Out of an unhappy love affair came Goethe’s first success, *The Sorrows of Young Werther* (1774), an epistolary novel composed in four weeks. It became an overnight bestseller and launched a string of teenage suicides imitating the death of the protagonist. In 1775, Goethe moved to the small town of Weimar at the invitation of Charles Augustus, duke of Saxe-Weimar, and would live there more or less for the rest of his life. By the time
Goethe arrived in Weimar at the age of 26, he had already begun work on the Faust drama, and he would continue to expand the text for the rest of his life. Goethe was one of the last great polymaths of European culture, like Leonardo da Vinci or John Milton or Adam Smith. Goethe served as the chief minister to the duke of Saxe-Weimar; he designed the Weimar theater and served as artistic director of it for many years; he did important work in optics and the theory of color; he made an important anatomical discovery about the human body; and he published significant research in the new scientific field of botany. Goethe’s collected works of plays, novels, memoirs, and travel writing, including letters and diaries, run to 143 volumes, plus five additional volumes of “conversations” with various interlocutors.

Samuel Johnson (1709–1784): Johnson, poet, critic, lexicographer, biographer, and conversationalist, was the son of Michael Johnson, a bookseller in Lichfield. At age 21, he went to Pembroke College, Oxford, but a lack of money forced him to leave 13 months later. In 1737, he went to London with his pupil, David Garrick, the great actor, hoping to make a living as a writer. He wrote biographies, political satires, and fictional accounts of Parliamentary debates. His success came in 1738 with a poem called London, but he lived in poverty for many years, until he was commissioned to create a new dictionary of English in 1746. The dictionary, which did not appear until 1755, secured Johnson’s reputation as a scholar and writer. While working on the Dictionary, he published The Vanity of Human Wishes (1749) and, from 1750 to 1752, a twice-weekly essay called The Rambler on morality, social manners, and literary criticism. In 1759, Johnson published The History of Rasselas, Prince of Abyssinia, a philosophical fiction like Voltaire’s Candide. Between 1779 and 1781, Johnson published a series of essays titled Prefaces, Biographical and Critical, to the Works of the English Poets, and his long-awaited edition of Shakespeare’s works appeared in eight volumes in 1765.

Molière (1622–1673): Molière (Jean-Baptiste Poquelin), the son of the king’s upholsterer, was educated at the finest schools, but in 1643, at the age of 21, he dedicated his life to the theater and founded a dramatic troupe called The Illustrious Theater. After 2 dismal years in Paris, the troupe toured the provinces. For the next 12 years, its members traveled and practiced their craft. The strongest influence on Molière’s theater came from the Italian commedia dell’arte troupes that he encountered during these travels. In 1658, Molière and his troupe returned to Paris, where they successfully performed one of Molière’s own plays before the court. Their success led eventually to the use of the Théâtre du Palais Royal, where Molière would perform for the rest of his life. Employing the stock characters of popular Italian farce to satirize contemporary hypocrisies and pretensions, Molière embodied a vice or folly in a single character: the miser, the hypochondriac, the religious hypocrite, the trickster. Molière left behind more than 30 plays that not only redefined French classical comedy but also influenced the work of other dramatists the world over. These plays include The School for Husbands (1661), The School for Wives (1662), The Misanthrope (1666), The Doctor in Spite of Himself (1666), Tartuffe (1664, 1667, 1669), The Miser (1668), and The Imaginary Invalid (1673).

Alexander Pope (1688–1744): Pope was born into a Roman Catholic family in 1688, the year when James II was deposed and replaced by the Protestant William, Duke of Orange, son-in-law to James II. As a Catholic, Pope could not inherit or purchase land, hold public office, publicly practice his religion, attend university, or live within 10 miles of London. Pope also suffered crippling personal restrictions: tuberculosis of the spine, which he contracted when he was 12, left him deformed and stunted in growth. Beginning with his first collection of poems, Pastorals, in 1709, Pope’s work was central to the development of Neoclassical aesthetics in the first half of the 18th century. His translations of the Iliad and the Odyssey made him a wealthy man, and his mock epic, The Rape of the Lock (1717), continues to be celebrated as the perfect exemplar of Neoclassical satire.

Jean Racine (1639–1699): Like Molière, Racine was a child of the upper-middle class, and he, too, was in exile from Paris after his first efforts in the theater failed. In fact, it was Molière’s troupe that produced Racine’s first play, The Thebans (1664). He quickly became famous with his second play, Alexander the Great (1665), and was the first French playwright to live almost entirely off his earnings. Racine’s plays were increasingly influenced by the Jansenists, a strict Catholic sect, by whom he had been educated from age 15 to 20 at the abbey of Port-Royal. He returned to Port-Royal in 1677, when he left the theater and accepted the post of royal historiographer of the reign of Louis XIV. In his plays, the gods and heroes struggle with the same passions and limitations as man; thus, his plays concentrate on character rather than event, focusing on the internal and the psychological rather than the heroic display of virtue in the public space of battle or court. He is best known for his plays that draw on classical mythology, such as Iphigenia in Aulis (1674), Racine’s version of the events leading to the sacrifice of Iphigenia to appease the gods, and his masterpiece, Phèdre (1677), based on Euripides’s Hippolytus.
Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712–1778): Rousseau was born in the Republic of Geneva, to a master watchmaker, and his love of his country and respect for its unique form of governance would be the inspiration for many of his political ideas and writings. He led a more or less vagabond life, finding employment as a tutor, engraver, music teacher, and lackey before discovering his talents for writing and befriending the Parisian literary class in the 1740s. His rise to literary fame was firmly established when he was awarded first prize by the Academy of Dijon for his *Discourse on the Arts and Sciences* in 1750. Apart from his major contributions to political theory, articulated in the *Second Discourse* (1755) and the treatise on *Social Contract* (1762), Rousseau exercised considerable influence over the Romantic movement with his final two publications: *Reveries of A Solitary Walker* (1782), which celebrated the individual and his emotional relationship to the natural world, and *Confessions* (1782). In the latter work, Rousseau, frankly and with detailed attention to his interior life, models the great autobiographical narratives of the 19th and 20th centuries, like Joyce’s *Portrait of An Artist as a Young Man* (1914).

Jonathan Swift (1667–1745): Born in Dublin in 1667, Swift spent much of his early years moving between Dublin and London, hoping to rise in importance in both politics and the Church. His hopes for a position in the Church of England were disappointed, and he finally made his home in Dublin, when he was appointed dean of St. Patrick’s in 1713. While in England, Swift met Pope, and it was during his time as a member of the Scriblerus Club that he composed part of *Gulliver’s Travels* (1726), a novel that exploited the public’s interest in travel narratives and political satire. After he settled in Ireland, Swift wrote vehemently in defense of the Irish, whom he felt were abused both politically and economically by the English. *A Modest Proposal* (1729), which is an attack on both the English for exploiting the Irish and the Irish for allowing themselves to be exploited, is a masterpiece of ironic satire.

Voltaire (1694–1778): François Marie Arouet (pen name, Voltaire) was the son of a fabric merchant who became one of the Enlightenment’s preeminent philosophers. His work challenged the political, religious, and philosophical establishment, and thus, he was often imprisoned or in exile. His collection of works spans the spectrum of literary genres and styles, from theatrical pieces to the encyclopedic form, and no single work or collection of texts can do justice to the range of Voltaire’s literary and philosophical achievements or to the manner in which his endless social commentary in his letters, pamphlets, satiric dialogues, and tales helped to shape the central ideas of the Enlightenment. Though he considered his finest work to be his tragedies, he is best remembered for his satirical works, including *Candide; or, The Optimist* (1759).
Bibliography

Essential Reading:


De La Cruz, Sor Juana Inés. Poems, Protest, and a Dream: Selected Writings. Margaret Sayers Peden, trans., with an introduction by Ilan Stavans. New York: Penguin Classics, 1997. An excellent introduction to Sor Juana’s life and work. This bilingual selection includes “Sor Filotea de la Cruz,” poetry, and two plays. The introduction places Sor Juana in her historical and cultural context.


Rousseau, Jean-Jacques. The Discourses and Other Early Political Writings. Victor Gourevitch, ed. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997. This volume and the next one contain comprehensive introductions, chronologies, and guides to further reading.


**Recommended Reading:**


Merrim, S. *Early Modern Women’s Writing and Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz*. Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 1999. Merrim situates the work of Sor Juana within its larger context as part of a European and American women’s movement to promote education and equality.

Novak, Maximillian E. *Daniel Defoe—Master of Fictions: His Life and Ideas*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001. This is a definitive study of the novelist, an in-depth examination of Defoe’s life and times. Novak views Defoe mainly in terms of his development as a writer and, thus, focuses on the religious, political, and social events in England that shaped him.


Trueblood, Alan S., ed. *A Sor Juana Anthology*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1988. A useful collection of Sor Juana’s religious and profane poetry, as well as the letter by Sor Philothea (Filotea) and Sor Juana’s reply. The translation is not the best, but the text prints the original Spanish and it comes with an introduction by Octavio Paz.


**Internet Resources:**


*Voltaire Association*. http://www.voltaire.ox.ac.uk/voltaire_english.html. For Voltaire and his age, the best place to begin your search is this Web site.
Great Authors of the Western Literary Tradition
Part VI:
Literature of the 19th Century
Professor James A. W. Heffernan
James A. W. Heffernan, Emeritus Professor of English and Frederick Sessions Beebe ’35 Professor in the Art of Writing at Dartmouth College, earned his A.B. cum laude from Georgetown University in 1960. With the aid of a Woodrow Wilson Fellowship, he then went on to Princeton University, where he earned his Ph.D. in English in 1964. After teaching briefly at the University of Virginia, Professor Heffernan joined the Dartmouth faculty in 1965. He chaired the Dartmouth English Department from 1978 to 1981 and has taught a range of courses there, including European Romanticism, English Romantic Poetry, Methods of Literary Criticism, and the Nineteenth-Century English Novel. From 1989 to 2002, he taught a senior seminar on Joyce’s *Ulysses* that was regularly oversubscribed, and in 2001, The Teaching Company recorded his 24 lectures on Joyce’s *Ulysses*, which are now available on videotape, audiotape, CD, and DVD.


Professor Heffernan’s other books include *Wordsworth’s Theory of Poetry* (1969); *The Re-Creation of Landscape: A Study of Wordsworth, Coleridge, Constable, and Turner* (1985); and (as co-author) *Writing: A College Handbook*, now in its fifth edition. He has also published nearly 50 articles on topics ranging from English Romantic poetry to the art of David Hockney.

Widely known for his work on the relation between literature and visual art, Professor Heffernan has lectured at international conferences in Israel, Sweden, Austria, Ireland, Holland, Germany, and Portugal, as well as in various parts of the United States.

His hobbies include dramatic reading. In recent years, he has organized and participated in staged readings of contemporary plays, including Michael Frayn’s *Copenhagen* and two plays by Yazmina Reza: *Art* and *The Unexpected Man*. He has lately been celebrating the birthday of James Joyce (February 2) by reading excerpts from *Ulysses* at specially arranged dinners—most recently at the Princeton Club of New York City.
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Great Authors of the Western Literary Tradition
Part VI: Literature of the 19th Century

Scope:

This section of the course introduces 12 major authors—poets, novelists, and playwrights—moving chronologically from Wordsworth in the English Romantic period at the turn of the 18th century to Thomas Hardy at the turn of the 19th century. Though the course begins and ends with two English authors, it ranges widely in 19th-century literature, turning to Russia for Tolstoy and Dostoevsky, to France for Stendhal and Flaubert, and to America for Melville, Whitman, and Twain. Although each lecture typically focuses on a single representative work by the author concerned—on Stendhal’s *Red and Black*, for instance, or Twain’s *Huckleberry Finn*—it also sketches enough of the author’s life to let the reader see what kind of experiences—personal, intellectual, and literary—the author brought to the work in question. In addition, each lecture aims to set the author and his or her work against the background of major intellectual currents, historical events, literary influences, and notable precedents.

Wordsworth, for instance, is presented not only as a progenitor of English Romanticism but also as a figure deeply influenced by the Enlightenment and the French Revolution, which at first inspired him with its promises of liberty, equality, and fraternity but then dismayed him by the ruthlessness of its violence at home and aggression abroad. In *Pride and Prejudice*, Jane Austen is shown rewriting the plot of the traditional fairytale in the hard, practical terms of socioeconomic realism, which may sometimes compel a young woman to choose between virtual destitution and marriage to anyone who can support her—whether or not she loves him. In *Great Expectations*, Charles Dickens works major changes in the familiar story of the foundling and what Freud would later call the family romance; when Pip discovers the identity of the benefactor who has plucked him from the grime of the blacksmith shop and financed his transformation into a gentleman, his dream of marriage to Estella—the would-be fairy princess—seems shattered, and he never fully recovers. In “Song of Myself,” Whitman is shown not only inaugurating the reign of free verse in American poetry but also as fundamentally reconceiving the tradition of autobiographical writing that runs from Rousseau’s *Confessions* through Wordsworth’s *Prelude* to Thoreau’s *Walden*; in the early editions of *Leaves of Grass* (first published 1855), he is also presented as a voice of brotherhood, love, and union at a time when the nation was fratricidally divided by the imminence of the Civil War.

Wherever possible, each new author in this series is linked by comparison and contrast to one or more earlier ones. Besides the example of Whitman and Wordsworth just cited, the eponymous heroine of Thomas Hardy’s *Tess of the D’Urbervilles* is shown to mark a major departure from the precedent set by Elizabeth Bennet, the heroine of Jane Austen’s *Pride and Prejudice*. While Elizabeth is the respectable, well-bred daughter of a gentleman living in comfortable circumstances, Tess is the daughter of a shiftless peddler who must earn her own living by hard labor. Further, while Elizabeth manages to marry a fabulously rich and handsome gentleman who conscientiously wins her heart, Tess’s dreams of a fairytale romance lead only to disaster. Likewise, if Dickens’s *Great Expectations* radically reworks the story of the foundling or poor boy miraculously reforged as a gentleman, Oscar Wilde’s *Importance of Being Earnest* wittily reconceives the whole idea that accidents of birth—including one’s own given name—should determine the rest of one’s life.

For all of their attention to plot, theme, intellectual currents, and historical context, the lectures never lose sight of their primary object: the richness, complexity, and literary brilliance of the works under discussion. To raise the curtain on each author, every lecture begins with a quotation that exemplifies or encapsulates his or her creative power: a quotation typically plucked from the middle of a major work, then carefully scrutinized for its meaning in context, its implications for the work as a whole, and its impact on the reader. The lecture on Dostoevsky, for instance, begins with the horrifying passage from *Crime and Punishment* in which Raskolnikov brutally murders Lizaveta with an axe just after killing her sister—an event on which the whole novel turns. Likewise, the lecture on Herman Melville’s *Moby Dick* begins with the passage in which Captain Ahab defies the rational arguments of Starbuck, his first mate, and vows everlasting vengeance on the great white whale that has devoured one of his legs.

As a whole, then, the lectures aim to place each author within the framework of a specific historical period, to sketch the intellectual and literary influences that shaped him or her, and where possible, to link the authors with one another. But just as important, each lecture aims to show what sort of excitement, surprise, and revelation each author can deliver to the reader.
Lecture Sixty-One
William Wordsworth

Scope: Deeply influenced by the outbreak of the French Revolution in 1789, Wordsworth imbied its egalitarian ideals as a young man in the early 1790s. But when the violence of the Revolution left him shattered and disillusioned, he tried to make a revolution of his own in the language of his poetry, wherein he aimed to speak “the real language of men,” and in the subject of his poetry, wherein he explored the depths of his own mind and heart and revealed the creative, transforming power of his imagination. This lecture briefly treats The Prelude, Wordsworth’s autobiographical epic, then moves on to examine at length his first major poem, “Tintern Abbey.” Meditating on the River Wye and on the changes that he has undergone between his first visit to the river and the second, the poet here demonstrates that nature has played a crucial role in shaping his mind, but also that he has been profoundly touched by the “still sad music of humanity.”

Outline

I. Deeply influenced by the ideals of the French Revolution, Wordsworth played a leading role in launching English Romanticism.
   A. His year in France in the early 1790s profoundly shaped his life and poetry.
      1. He had an affair with a French woman (Annette Vallon), who bore his child.
      2. Though he later married another woman, the memory of his passion for Annette survives in the later books of The Prelude, where he tells the story of his passion for the Revolution itself.
   B. The violence of the Revolution left Wordsworth shattered but nonetheless determined to make a revolution in poetry.
      1. To combat the sense of despair bred by the failure of the Revolution, he aimed to celebrate the restorative power of nature.
      2. To reaffirm the corresponding power of the human mind, he aimed to explore its depths and to show that it worked in collaboration with nature.

II. Working with Coleridge, Wordsworth developed a theory of poetry as something both imaginative and emotive.
   A. Good poetry, the two men agreed, must combine the truth of nature with the modifying colors of imagination.
      1. In Coleridge’s Rime of the Ancient Mariner, supernatural characters help to elicit familiar human feelings.
      2. In Wordsworth’s “My Heart Leaps Up,” the sight of a rainbow becomes an object of almost supernatural wonder.
   B. Poetry is the expression of feeling tempered by recollection.
      1. Wordsworth defines poetry as “the spontaneous overflow of powerful feeling.”
      2. But he also insists that it takes its origin “from emotion recollected in tranquility.”
      3. Time and memory play crucial roles in Wordsworth’s poetry.

III. In “Tintern Abbey” Wordsworth uses both common and elevated language to show how time has shaped his mind even while subduing his passions.
   A. Before writing “Tintern Abbey” in the summer of 1798, Wordsworth had already begun to make poetry speak “the real language of men.”
      1. In “Goody Blake,” for instance, he uses the sort of repetition we commonly find in spoken language.
      2. He also uses normal syntax and redundant pronouns.
   B. In “Tintern Abbey” itself, Wordsworth starts with simple language to tell the story of his relation to the River Wye—and thereby displace the history of the Abbey.
      1. The opening words (“Five years have past”) introduce the crucial theme of time, of present compared with past.
      2. Instead of writing about the history of the medieval abbey, he writes about his own history.
      3. He struggles to reconcile his sense of passion lost with his confidence in the value of wisdom gained.
To do so, he represents his youth as “thoughtless,” even though we know it was thoughtful.

He can’t afford to remember his youth as a time of complete perfection because that would threaten his scheme of progression.

C. Though in “Tintern Abbey,” Wordsworth seems to affirm his enduring love of nature, his complex response to his younger sister suggests that confidence in the effects of time may be undermined by doubt.

1. As his younger sister, Dorothy now embodies the passion of the poet’s younger self—the passion he has lost.

2. He aims to do two contradictory things with that passion.
   a. He will temper and educate it into a thoughtful maturity.
   b. He will use it as a means of keeping himself emotionally alive.

3. Just as the abbey itself was violently disturbed by the English Reformation, so, too, may all the perils that the poet foresees lying ahead for his and Dorothy’s well-being disturb their “cheerful faith” in the benevolence of the universe.

D. “Tintern Abbey” is a poem written in time—a poem whose moments of transcendental joy are followed by moments of mortal uncertainty.

IV. When Wordsworth returned from France to England, he returned to the origin of his imagination and the source of his poetic power.

A. When the Reign of Terror threw him into the depths of despair, nature helped him to recover his creative powers.

B. Reactivating his powers in the late 1790s with the help of Coleridge, Wordsworth dared to hope that poetry could once again reach the human heart.

Essential Reading:
William Wordsworth, Selected Poetry, edited by Stephen Gill and Duncan Wu

Supplementary Reading:

Questions to Consider:
1. How did Wordsworth’s experience of the French Revolution shape his development as a poet?
2. How do nature and imagination work together in Wordsworth’s poetry?
Lecture Sixty-Two
Jane Austen

Scope: As exemplified by *Pride and Prejudice*, Jane Austen’s fiction radically rewrites the traditional fairytale romance in the hard, practical terms of the socioeconomic conditions prevailing in early 19th-century England. While fairytale heroines simply wait for a prince charming to rescue them from poverty and endow them with wealth, Austen’s middle-class heroines are compelled to find and marry men of property and means if they hope to be financially secure. Turning partly on the contradiction between a woman’s economic need for a man and the social rules that forbid her to pursue one openly, *Pride and Prejudice* shows how one young woman negotiates her way through a series of proposals until she finds a man who can satisfy her both financially and emotionally. But the fairytale elements of the ending of this would-be “realistic” novel leave us wondering just how realistic it is. For all the brutality it reveals beneath the superficially decorous surface of its manners, it ends on an unmistakable note of wish fulfillment.

Outline

I. The opening sentence of *Pride and Prejudice* begins to reveal a great deal about the wants of single men and women in a world ruled by money, property, and social convention.

A. Unlike the hero of a fairytale, the hero of this one need only be a single man of means—whether or not he has any virtues.

B. The sentence tells us that we are in the world of the novel rather than the fairytale.
   1. Novels represent characters in realistic time and space who are regulated by socioeconomic conditions that we can recognize even now.
   2. In a novel, a single man who “wants” a wife may simply be shopping for one—as he might shop for a house.

C. The sentence also subtly reveals a single woman’s desire for a man—something Jane Austen knew only too well from her own experience.
   1. The presumption that a single man of means wants a wife subtly reveals the woman’s unspoken desire for a man to support her and prompts us to wonder if his desire for her will be matched by hers for him.
   2. Jane Austen herself became a spinster after wrestling with the conflict between her desire for a compatible mate and her need for financial security.
      a. At age 20, she fell in love with a handsome, witty Irishman who would have made a perfect mate, but she was taken from him because neither of the two had any money at the time.
      b. At age 26, she at first accepted, then rejected a proposal from a man of great property whom she found personally intolerable.
      c. At age 29, she rejected a proposal from a young, agreeable clergyman whose fortune was insufficient to tempt her.

II. The novel plainly reveals the conflict between social rules, which forbid a woman to pursue a man openly, and economic law, which compels her to find and marry one for the sake of financial security.

A. Because the Bennet family includes only daughters and their property is “entailed” to a male relative from another family, each daughter must find a financially secure husband to ensure her own well-being.

B. Though Mrs. Bennet strikes many readers as vulgar, her open pursuit of Mr. Bingley for one of her daughters simply reveals the brute facts of economic life in this society.
   1. Elizabeth’s embarrassment in the face of her mother’s tactics springs in part from the fact that Elizabeth herself shares her mother’s expectation that Jane—Elizabeth’s sister—will get a proposal from the wealthy Mr. Bingley.
   2. Mr. Bennet’s facetious comment on the Bennets’ inevitable loss of their property cannot hide the fact that the daughters all face destitution unless they make financially secure marriages.
III. In this novel, the business of finding a mate supersedes all other business that we might consider important, such as earning money or making war.

A. The novel has virtually nothing to say about the ways in which people earn a living.

B. Even though it is set at the time of the Napoleonic wars between England and France, it has virtually nothing to say about war.
   1. In 1813, when *Pride and Prejudice* was published, England was at war with France, which was then ruled by the Emperor Napoleon Bonaparte.
   2. But Jane Austen had no interest in treating the history of Napoleon or public events of any kind in her novels.
   3. Even the officers we meet in this novel are represented as chiefly concerned with meeting and marrying young women, not with making war.
   4. Jane Austen clearly believed that marriage and courtship were crucial to the business of life itself.

IV. Collins’s clumsy efforts at courtship—though grimly successful in the end—show that a suitor’s financial security is no guarantee of his compatibility with the woman he wants.

A. Though Collins offers a lifetime of financial security, especially since he will inherit the Bennets’ property, he’s a witless fool.
   1. Inviting himself to the Bennets, he offers his hand to Elizabeth as if she could not possibly refuse him.
   2. His obvious lack of feeling for her prompts her to refuse him absolutely.
   3. As the would-be knight in shining armor come to rescue a lady in financial distress, he’s a hopeless failure.

B. Collins wins the hand of Charlotte Lucas only because she is willing to make the compromise that Elizabeth rejects.
   1. Rejected by Elizabeth, the wife-shopping Collins promptly proposes to her friend Charlotte Lucas.
   2. Knowing full well that Collins is a crashing bore, the aging, plain, and impecunious Charlotte accepts him as her “preservative from want.”
   3. Their loveless union parodies the typical resolution of a romance plot—a marriage made for love—and exemplifies precisely what the heroine does not want because “her feelings forbid it.”

V. Darcy’s courtship of Elizabeth shows how each overcomes the resistance of the other: her prejudice against his pride, his proud disdain for her comparatively inferior social status.

A. Though Darcy’s proposal betrays his disdain for her relations, especially her mother, it differs from Collins’s proposal in expressing genuine passion.
   1. He has already begun to show that he admires her vitality and wit.
   2. Unlike any other man she has ever met, he knows how to make her laugh at herself.

B. Though Elizabeth rejects Darcy’s first proposal, his long letter to her afterwards begins to melt her prejudice against him and win her over.
   1. In explaining his treatment of Bingley and Wickham, he makes her see that she herself has been blind and prejudiced.
   2. He also learns to be considerate of her relations.
   3. As a result, she accepts his second proposal.

VI. For all its socioeconomic realism, this novel ends on a note of fairytale wish fulfillment.

A. As Mrs. Bennet says, Elizabeth’s marriage will make her “rich and great.”

B. Elizabeth has the pleasure of knowing that she has “humbled” and thus reformed a proud man and that he is now fully sensitive to her needs.

C. In Darcy, Jane Austen creates the ideal husband—the man she never found for herself.

**Essential Reading:**


David Nokes, *Jane Austen: A Life*. 

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Supplementary Reading:
Jane Austen, Sense and Sensibility, edited by Claudia L. Johnson.

Questions to Consider:
1. What does the friendship of Darcy and Bingley reveal about the relation between a member of the landed gentry and the heir of a wealthy merchant?
2. To what extent does Pemberley—Darcy’s estate—influence Elizabeth’s decision to marry him?
Lecture Sixty-Three
Stendhal

Scope: Born Henri Marie Beyle in Grenoble, France, Stendhal left school at the age of 16 and came to Paris just after Napoleon had seized power in a coup. After serving in a variety of Napoleonic campaigns, Stendhal turned from fighting to writing when Napoleon fell, but he remained a partisan of revolution well into the years of restoration, especially when the July Revolution of 1830 gave France a constitutional monarchy under Louis-Philippe. Not surprisingly, Red and Black tells the story of a handsome, talented young man—Julien Sorel—who is devoted to the memory of Napoleon and is fiercely ambitious. In his quest for advancement, he seduces a succession of increasingly rich and distinguished women: first Madame de Rénal, wife of the mayor of Verrières, then Mathilde de la Mole, daughter of a Parisian aristocrat. Though Madame de Rénal loves him like a mother, her apparent betrayal of him just as he has won the love of Mathilde goads him to attempt a murder; he does not kill her, but his ambitions are destroyed when he is sentenced to be executed. In the end, however, Madame de Rénal’s self-sacrificing devotion shows him what it means to be unconditionally loved.

Outline

I. Like Julien Sorel, whose life is a roller-coaster of triumphs and tribulations, Stendhal’s early years were marked by victories and setbacks.
   A. Born Henri Marie Beyle in Grenoble, France, Stendhal left school at 16 and continued his education under Napoleon.
      1. Arriving just after Napoleon had seized power in a coup, Stendhal landed a post in the Ministry of War.
      2. After serving in many of Napoleon’s campaigns and frequenting the theaters and drawing rooms of Paris, he became a sophisticated man of the world.
   B. When Napoleon fell in 1815, he became a writer—but with mixed success.
      1. Adopting his pen name (Stendhal), he wrote books on art and travel.
      2. Expelled from Italy in 1821 by the reactionary Austrian police, he returned to Paris and lived there—during the Restoration—for nine years on very little money.
      3. When the July Revolution brought a constitutional monarchy to France, he returned to Italy as a consul, which enabled him to write his two most well known novels.

II. In Red and Black, the hero is obsessed with the memory of Napoleon’s glory yet impelled to gratify his ambition by social rather than military triumphs.
   A. In Paris, Julien learns that the only profitable campaign to be fought must now take place in a drawing room.
   B. Like the real-life Antoine Berthet, Julien ends up by shooting the woman he loves, and the novel shows us what finally motivates him.
      1. Antoine Berthet, a young seminarian, seduced the mother of the two children he had been hired to tutor, mortally wounded her when she tried to stifle his clerical career, and was sentenced to death.
      2. Inspired by the story of Berthet, Stendhal’s novel shows how Julien is finally made to feel that he must kill the woman he loves.

III. From the start, Julien’s manner combines vulnerability with fierce military aggression.
   A. He presents himself to Madame de Rénal as a poor, sensitive boy who has been beaten by his brothers.
   B. In spite of the class barrier between himself and this fine bourgeois lady, he conceives the wild idea of kissing her hand—the first of his aggressive moves.
      1. His ambition to conquer Madame de Rénal becomes a campaign to take firm possession of her hand.
      2. By seizing her hand, holding it, and later regaining possession of it, he performs what he considers his “heroic duty.”
C. When Julien is scolded by Monsieur de Rênal but then forces him to back down by threatening to quit, he tells himself, “I’ve won a battle.”

IV. Julien’s battles in this novel are chiefly social.
   A. Just after threatening Mathilde with a sword drawn from the wall of the library of the marquis’s house, he can’t bring himself to use it and puts it back.
   B. Julien “fights” the bourgeois, reactionary Monsieur de Rênal not by physically attacking him but by making love to his wife.
      1. While Monsieur de Rênal rages against radicals one evening, Julien takes Madame de Rênal’s hand and kisses it.
      2. He thus turns a kiss into a political sign.

V. Though Julien thinks himself a radical revolutionary, he seems more resentful of the rich than sympathetic to the poor, and he aspires to join the aristocracy.
   A. He resents the rich.
      1. He resents even Madame de Rênal for her wealth.
      2. Ignoring a peasant girl at whom Monsieur de Rênal throws stones, he throws a look of contempt at Madame’s friend when she tries to calm him.
   B. He shows only limited sympathy for the prisoners in the poorhouse when he is invited to dine there.
   C. He has pretensions to aristocratic glory.
      1. He takes pride in riding with the honor guard for the king’s visit to Verrieres.
      2. He imagines himself the illegitimate son of an aristocrat.

VI. Julien is a fascinating amalgam of ambition, calculation, and impulse.
   A. While pretending to piety, he’s fiercely ambitious.
      1. He enters the seminary because he thinks the priesthood is the best route to advancement.
      2. In spite of his pious speeches, the Abbé Chêlan can see how ambitious he is.
   B. Though he plays the role of seducer as if it were his duty, his calculation is repeatedly threatened by his impulse to love.
      1. He falls desperately in love with Madame de Rênal after his second night with her.
      2. In his struggle to conquer Mathilde, he’s terrified of revealing his true feelings, lest she despise him.

VII. Julien’s final plunge from exaltation into murder epitomizes the instability of his condition.
   A. His joy knows no bounds when he thinks he has fulfilled his ambition.
      1. He is commissioned a lieutenant and given an aristocratic name.
      2. Mathilde will bear his child.
   B. Madame de Rênal’s letter to Mathilde’s father kills his prospects, goads him to attempt murdering her, and thus leads to his execution.
      1. Just as he nearly falls into the sawmill machinery at the beginning of the novel, so he plunges into the machinery of intrigue when a priest makes Madame de Rênal accuse him of seducing her.
      2. He therefore resolves to try to kill the only woman he has ever truly loved.
   C. Calling himself “a peasant in open revolt against his humble station,” he dares the jury to convict him, yet in the end, he feels profound gratitude to Madame de Rênal
      1. He defiantly demands that the bourgeois jury sentence him to death.
      2. In the end, he cares only for Madame de Rênal and her maternal devotion.

Essential Reading:

Supplementary Reading:
Emile J. Talbot, *Stendhal Revisited*.
Questions to Consider:
1. What is the significance of the title colors in *Red and Black*?
2. Given Julien’s obsession with military glory, why does he aspire to become a priest?
Lecture Sixty-Four
Herman Melville

Scope: At the age of 30, after braving the rigors of a whaling voyage and writing five novels about whaling ships and life in the exotic South Seas, Melville tackled what would prove to be his masterpiece: *Moby Dick*, first published in 1851. Revolving around the figure of Ahab, an old whaling captain who has lost one leg to the teeth of a great white whale named Moby Dick, the novel tells the story of Ahab’s obsession with vengeance on the beast—his determination to make this the chief object of a whaling voyage. Though criticized by Starbuck, the first mate, who calls his quest for vengeance on a dumb beast both irrational and blasphemous, Ahab swears his entire crew to vengeance and turns the voyage into a mythic contest of man against monster. Ahab himself is a knot of contradictions—by turns a dictator and a helpless pawn of fate, powerless to disobey its orders. Yet to the very end, he remains an indomitable personality, a sharp point of self-assertion aimed straight at the blank wall of an inscrutably menacing universe.

Outline

I. In leading his entire crew to swear vengeance on the great white whale, Ahab reveals both his obsession with vengeance and his almost magical powers of persuasion.
   A. Because one of Ahab’s legs has been chewed off by the whale, he’s determined to hunt and kill him—in spite of Starbuck’s objections.
      1. Starbuck denounces the quest as irrational and blasphemous.
      2. Ahab insists that the whale embodies an “inscrutable malice,” which he is determined to strike.
   B. In spite of his apparent madness, Ahab rouses the sympathy of Ishmael, the narrator, and probably of the reader as well.
      1. Ahab sounds crazy when he says that he’d strike the sun if it insulted him.
      2. But Ahab touches our sense of resentment at impersonal forces that sometimes menace and even injure us.
      3. He also succeeds in thrilling Ishmael, who has already proven himself to be an intelligent, educated man.

II. When Melville started writing *Moby Dick* at age 30, he was already well-known for his novels about sailing, whaling, and the South Seas.
   A. After dropping out of school at age 12, working at various jobs, and reading voraciously, Melville went to sea as a common sailor.
      1. He first crossed the Atlantic and back on a merchant ship.
      2. Then he joined a whaling ship bound for the Pacific.
   B. His experiences in the South Seas gave him materials for several novels.
      1. His first novel, *Typee*, sprang from several weeks spent with a savage tribe in the Marquesas Islands.
      2. A sojourn on Tahiti led to his second novel, *Omoo*.
      3. Then he wrote three more novels based on his life at sea.

III. Besides drawing on Melville’s whaleship experience, *Moby Dick* reflects the influence of Nathaniel Hawthorne.
   A. Settling on a farm in Pittsfield, Massachusetts, in the fall of 1850, Melville cultivated the friendship of Hawthorne, who lived nearby.
   B. Melville expressed his appreciation of Hawthorne by dedicating *Moby Dick* to him.
      1. Though *Moby Dick* seems quite different from Hawthorne’s best-known novel, *The Scarlet Letter*, Melville saw Hawthorne as much more than a cheerful, charming writer.
      2. He admired Hawthorne’s stories for displaying “the great power of darkness”—man’s capacity for evil.
      3. To express this power in his own novel, Melville stretched his creative powers to the limit.
IV. Ishmael goes to sea to escape the physical and intellectual constraints of the land and to experience the mystery and terror of the whale.

A. Depressed by the constraints of life on land, Ishmael opts for the freedom of the sea.

B. Like Melville himself, Ishmael seeks especially to know the whale firsthand—insofar as it can be known.
   1. The whale seems like one of the huge and terrifying creatures of ancient epic and fabulous tale.
   2. But Melville’s beast is a real one—as real as any fictional character can be.
      a. The great white whale in *Moby Dick* is based on factual reports about two actual whales.
      b. To authenticate his novel, Melville takes pains to classify and analyze whales in the course of the story.

C. Besides being witty and even sexy at times, the explanatory chapters on whales and whaling are essential to Melville’s enterprise in the book as a whole.
   1. Through Ishmael, Melville struggles to comprehend the vastness of the whale.
   2. All his efforts show that no one can truly know the whale without risking his life in firsthand experience of it.

V. The character of Bulkington epitomizes both the intellectual and physical daring celebrated by the novel.

A. Though Bulkington has just returned from a four-year voyage when Ishmael first meets him, he signs on to the *Pequod* for another voyage.

B. In Bulkington’s irresistible impulse to sail away again, Ishmael finds a symbol of immortal daring.
   1. Bulkington perishes with the crew of the ship when it goes down.
   2. In the eyes of Ishmael, Bulkington’s heroic commitment to “landlessness” makes him a demigod.

VI. However, because Bulkington is not psychologically dark enough to embody the “power of Blackness,” the protagonist of the novel is a figure of rich contradiction.

A. Ahab combines nobility and wickedness.

B. He’s a knot of contradictions.
   1. At times, he sounds like a dictator determined to have his way.
   2. But he also speaks of his soul as predetermined and of himself as the Fates’ lieutenant, helpless to disobey orders.

C. In spite of all his contradictions, Ahab epitomizes self-assertion: the undying defiance of impersonal forces.

Essential Reading:

Supplementary Reading:

Questions to Consider:
1. How does Queegueg affect Ishmael’s conception of cannibals?
2. Besides the fact that Captain Ahab outranks Starbuck, his first mate, what enables Ahab to overcome Starbuck’s objections to his mad and dangerous quest?
Lecture Sixty-Five
Walt Whitman

Scope: Born on Long Island, raised and schooled in Brooklyn, Whitman left school at age 12 to work at a succession of jobs, particularly as a printer and journalist in Brooklyn and New York. At the age of 34, while working as a homebuilder and running a printshop in Brooklyn, he published his first volume of poetry, *Leaves of Grass*. In “Song of Myself,” the first and longest of the 12 poems in this volume, he celebrates himself as a figure who can represent all of humankind because he can identify with people of every kind, high and low, male and female, good and vicious, free and enslaved. Whitman even prompts us to identify him with Christ because of his eagerness to consort with outcasts, his capacity to suffer, and his sympathy for all who are oppressed and abused. In light of this universal sympathy, Whitman presents a vision of poetry that is radically democratic, reaching out to all readers with his free verse: long, rhythmic lines unconstrained by meter or rhyme.

Outline

I. Whitman was a mechanic—a skilled laborer—as well as a poet.
   A. Son of a homebuilder, he prided himself on working with his hands as well as with his mind and soul.
   B. Having learned printing and journalism as a young man, he helped to set the type for his own first volume of poetry, *Leaves of Grass*.
      1. He worked beside a pair of brothers in their printshop.
      2. The meanings of the words *leaf* and *grass* in printer’s lingo may help to explain the title of his book.

II. But whatever they mean for printers, Whitman fully exploits the natural, primary meanings of the words *leaves* and *grass*.
   A. Like Keats, Whitman thought poetry should bloom as plants do.
   B. For Whitman a single leaf of grass—meaning a single grass shoot—could symbolize the individual citizens of a democracy.

III. The phrase “journey-work of the stars” exemplifies Whitman’s fusion of the mechanical and the visionary.
   A. *Journey-work* is the day’s work of a journeyman.
      1. A journeyman was a laborer who had completed his apprenticeship and achieved competence, if not mastery.
      2. Whitman respected a good day’s work and workingmen.
   B. Because Whitman thought workingmen were just as glorious as the gods of ancient myth, he thought the stars were the product of a good day’s work.

IV. Whitman’s way of defining *grass* exemplifies his transcendentalism.
   A. Not knowing what grass is, he offers a series of guesses.
      1. It is the “flag” of the poet’s disposition—meaning banner and also a plant with a long, bladelike leaf.
      2. It is “the handkerchief of the Lord,” then a child, then a kind of picture-writing that grows all over the country and, thereby, signifies union.
   B. In calling grass “the beautiful uncut hair of graves,” Whitman evokes a transcendental faith in the permanence and pervasiveness of life.
      1. Emerson defined transcendentalism as idealism—the belief in the power of the mind and its thoughts.
      2. Transcendentalists believed that every material object in the world symbolized the mind or the relation between the world and the individual center of consciousness.
      3. They also believed in a spirit that transcends or crosses the border between life and death.

V. Though it may sound self-important, Whitman’s “Song of Myself” is really a song of all humankind.
   A. Although Whitman’s opening lines are the antithesis of Emily Dickinson’s self-effacing poem “I’m nobody! Who are you?” the self that Whitman sings about is a universal one.
1. Whitman differs in this respect from such autobiographers as Rousseau, Wordsworth, and Thoreau. He says almost nothing about his personal life.

B. He claims to identify himself with every man and woman on earth.
   1. He is the kept-woman, the sponger, the thief.
   2. He is the sea captain and the hounded slave.
   3. He feels himself connected with everyone who ever lived.

VI. Even while projecting a mood of careless assurance, Whitman associates himself with Christ—as some earlier poets had.

   A. Before Whitman, Shelley and Wordsworth both aligned themselves with Christ.
      1. In some of his poems, Shelley claimed to bleed and suffer like Christ.
      2. Wordsworth placed himself and Coleridge firmly in the prophetic tradition.

   B. The photograph on which the frontispiece to *Leaves of Grass* is based suggests Christ.
      1. The light around the head of Whitman in the 1854 photo suggests a halo.
      2. The lightly bearded man with a sympathetic gaze looks like Christ.

   C. Suppressing the evocation of Christ, the open-shirted figure of the frontispiece projects a mood of careless assurance.

VII. Whitman’s careless stance in the frontispiece prefigures the freedom of his verse.

   A. Shunning rhyme and meter, Whitman made his verse as free as nature and democracy.
      1. As a radical democrat, he disdained any artificial barriers that might separate the language of poetry from ordinary language.
      2. He thought poetry should have the free rhythm of the wind and the waves.
      3. Taking his cue from the raw cry of the spotted hawk, Whitman sounds his untamed “barbaric yawp.”

   B. But Whitman’s verse also evokes the parallel structure of the language of Hebrew poetry.
      1. The Old Testament often uses parallel phrasing to achieve freedom of expression in a flexible framework.
      2. Whitman uses parallel structure to describe—among other things—his Christ-like sufferings.
         a. Though this may sound presumptuous, we must remember Whitman’s conviction that divinity animates all human beings.
         b. In “Crossing Brooklyn Ferry,” he sees spokes of light around the reflection of his head.
         c. Like Christ, who befriended outcasts, he invites everyone to his feast.

VIII. While Whitman is unusually frank about sexual relations—homosexual as well as heterosexual—he ultimately aimed to preach a gospel of love in time of war.

   A. In “Song of Myself,” he describes a young woman gazing with desire on the young men bathing.

   B. In spite of Emerson’s objections, Whitman insisted on including sexually suggestive poems in the third edition of *Leaves*.

   C. Though the “Calamus” poems in particular have prompted readers to infer that Whitman himself was homosexual, what finally matters is that Whitman sought to celebrate brotherhood in the face of the Civil War.
      1. In the late 1850s, America was fratricidally divided, with war apparently imminent.
      2. Whitman felt the country needed a new gospel of love.
      3. In the poem eventually called “Starting from Paumonok,” he envisions “a new ideal of manly friendship” to unite “these states.”

   D. During the Civil War, he tended wounded men in Washington hospitals.

   E. Out of his all-embracing love, he composed his great elegy for Lincoln, “When Lilacs Last in the Dooryard Bloomed.”

Essential Reading:
Supplementary Reading:
James E. Miller, Jr., *Walt Whitman: Updated Edition*.

Questions to Consider:
1. Addressing himself to a nation girding for war, how does Whitman express his pacifism?
2. Is Whitman a poet of the city, the country, or both?
Lecture Sixty-Six
Gustave Flaubert

Scope: Born in Rouen (Normandy) in 1821, Flaubert was the second son of a wealthy doctor. Though his father wished him to study law, he began to write at a very early age and all he truly wanted to be was a writer. After writing a long book about the temptation of St. Anthony that his closest friends thought an utter failure, he decided to write a novel about a domestic character—a novel based on the true story of a public health officer whose second wife committed adultery, fell into debt, and then poisoned herself. Writing about ordinary life, Flaubert struggled to make his prose as poetic as possible without sacrificing factual accuracy. He also juxtaposed the soaring language of passion and longing with the boredom of a conventional marriage and the framework of a commonplace event, such as an agricultural fair. Madame Bovary places Emma among a variety of characters who speak in a great diversity of voices. In cutting back and forth between one kind of speech and another, Flaubert anticipates the techniques of Joyce and of such film directors as Alfred Hitchcock and Robert Altman.

Outline

I. The conversation between Emma and Rodolphe at the fair exemplifies Flaubert’s technique.
   A. Two different kinds of speech compete for our attention.
      1. The public official exhorts the farmers to work for the good of the country, where order and monarchy have been restored.
      2. Rodolphe tries to seduce Emma.
   B. Though Flaubert was tried for outraging morality with his book, the seduction scene is a work of complex art.
      1. Rodolphe’s soul-stirring speech alternates with the stale rhetoric of politics.
      2. This juxtaposition of the two raises questions that will be answered shortly.

II. Flaubert brought extensive literary experience to the task of writing Madame Bovary.
   A. Like Jane Austen, he began to write early in his life.
      1. He was writing plays by the age of 10.
      2. At 15, he published a story.
      3. By age 20, he had written two autobiographical narratives.
   B. Though he studied law in Paris for a time at his father’s insistence, he left law school at age 23 to travel, gain experience, and write—largely in seclusion at his parents’ house.
      1. Traveling with his parents in Italy, he saw a painting that led to his first major book, The Temptation of St. Anthony.
      2. The idea of temptation fascinated him because he himself had been seduced by several older women.
      3. Though he had a long-running affair with Louise Colet, his first love was always his work.
   C. After he labored for more than a year to produce 500 pages on the temptations of St. Anthony, his closest friends thought the book a failure.
      1. Flaubert read the whole book aloud to them over a period of four days.
      2. Afterwards, they told him to throw it in the fire.
   D. Dismayed by their criticism, Flaubert resolved to choose a subject from domestic bourgeois life—the true story of an adulteress.
      1. At his friends’ urging, he agreed to turn his fiction back to his native ground, his own time and place.
      2. A friend proposed that he write about the adulterous wife of a public health officer, and soon after, he started work on this subject.

III. In writing the novel, Flaubert struggled to make prose about ordinary events poetic.
   A. He took five years to write the novel.
      1. He struggled to find the right word and the right place for it.
      2. He rewrote obsessively.
B. He thought of his book as “a great and original experiment” in writing poetically about ordinary life.
   1. He felt that he was both a lyricist and a digger for truth.
   2. He felt that in writing, he was walking a hairline between lyricism and vulgarity.

IV. In the seduction scene at the fair, Flaubert’s technique lets us see the lovers in a rich social context that prompts us to be skeptical of Emma’s dreams.
   A. Knowing that Emma is bored to tears with her husband, we see how readily she can be enchanted by Rodolphe’s talk of souls in torment.
      1. She stares at him as if he were an exotic traveler.
      2. He implicitly promises her happiness.
   B. The surrounding context sets this lyrical dialogue in a world of reality.
      1. We already know that Rodolphe has a mistress in Rouen.
      2. Even as we hear Rodolphe’s enchanting words, we also hear the stale rhetoric of the public official.
      3. Even as Rodolphe squeezes Emma’s hand, we hear about the hands of a little old woman awarded a medal for 54 years of service: hands so filthy they can never be cleaned.
   C. We hear many different voices in the chapter—all of which shed some light on Emma’s situation.

V. Like the chapter on the fair, Flaubert’s organization of the novel as a whole allows us to see many different relationships as well as the complexity of the heroine’s situation.
   A. Cutting back and forth between one conversation and another, Flaubert anticipates modern fiction and even cinema.
      1. Flaubert used this kind of jump-cutting to combat his own tendencies toward Romantic subjectivity.
      2. He thought the author should be like God, omnipresent and invisible.
   B. The novel juxtaposes the sacred with the sexual and the profane.
      1. At one point, Emma prays to God as if he were her lover.
      2. While Leon waits for Emma in church, the church seems to him like a gigantic boudoir.
      3. As he gets into a cab with Emma to seduce her, a guide begs them to see the biblical sculptures on the north door, including, ironically, the Last Judgment.

VI. Emma’s death reveals the helplessness of doctors and the absence of any assurance of salvation but also—once again—the intermingling of dreams and ordinary life.
   A. When Emma poisons herself, not even the best doctor available can cure her.
   B. Emma’s death is described with a combination of lyrical poignancy and clinical precision.
   C. As Emma dies, she overhears a bawdy song that suggests the grim reaper.
      1. The song is sung by a blind man she has seen on the road earlier.
      2. She sees the beggar’s face as a figure of terror.
      3. Her final dream springs not from something fantastic but from her response to the ordinary life around her.
   D. Thus, Madame Bovary fuses the Romantic imagination with the commonplace facts of ordinary life.

Essential Reading:
Gustave Flaubert, Madame Bovary, translated by Francis Steegmuller.
———, The Temptation of St. Anthony, translated by Lafcadio Hearn.

Supplementary Reading:
Herbert Lottmann, Flaubert: A Biography.
Mario Vargas-Llosa, The Perpetual Orgy: Flaubert and Madame Bovary, translated by Helen Lane.

Questions to Consider:
1. What is the relation between Emma’s piety and her adulterous urges?
2. How does her affair with Leon differ from her affair with Rodolphe?
Lecture Sixty-Seven
Charles Dickens

Scope: Though Dickens’s many novels treat various parts of the world, including France and America, as well as England, the center of his fictional universe is the city of London. And his cast of characters includes figures from virtually every station in life, with a particular focus on children raised in poverty and hardship, as he himself was, but yearning for the advantages of gentility. In Great Expectations, Dickens tells the story of a sensitive boy named Pip, who is being raised by his tyrannical sister; early on, however, Pip learns that a mysterious benefactor will enable him to become a gentleman and thus—he thinks—to marry a beautiful young woman he has met. In a variety of ways, the novel shows how this fairytale dream of wealth and romance collides with reality and compels Pip to recognize painful truths: the truth of his own identity and the true natures of Miss Havisham and Estella, both of whom he has miserably misjudged.

Outline

I. As Great Expectations shows, Dickens never forgot the sufferings and humiliations of his childhood.
   A. Though formally schooled in his early years, he had to go to work in a factory at the age of 12 when his father was imprisoned for debt.
      1. The work filled his soul with “secret agony.”
      2. The memory of that agony prompted him to conceive the story of Pip.
   B. As a common laborer working in a blacksmith shop, Pip—the hero of Great Expectations—yearns for the beautiful Estella but fears she will despise him.

II. The hardships of Dickens’s life, his methods of publishing, and the subject matter of his novels all sharply contrast him with Jane Austen.
   A. Unlike Jane Austen, who was largely home-schooled in comfortable circumstances, Dickens was self-schooled while he earned his own living.
      1. He supported himself as clerk and reporter before he was out of his teens.
      2. In his spare time, he read at the British Museum.
   B. While Jane Austen took years to perfect her books before they were published, Dickens launched his fame with a book published in serial installments as he wrote it—The Pickwick Papers.
      1. Each installment was priced at a shilling.
      2. By publishing each of his novels in cheap serial form before it appeared as a whole, Dickens sustained his popularity.
   C. While Jane Austen wrote about genteel society in rural England, Dickens wrote chiefly about life in London and the hardships of children raised in poverty, as he had been.
      1. London was the product of the Industrial Revolution and the capital of the nascent British Empire.
      2. Dickens made his readers see the cruel disparity between the lives of the rich and those of the poor in London.

III. Great Expectations is a work of fictional autobiography published at a time when other new novels challenged Dickens’s powers of invention and composition.
   A. Like Wordsworth’s Prelude, Dickens’s novel draws on memories of the author’s childhood.
   B. But Great Expectations is a work of fiction.
   C. Shortly before it appeared, new work by other novelists, such as Emily Bronte and George Eliot, challenged Dickens to test the powers of his art in new ways.
      1. Unlike Pride and Prejudice, with its omniscient narration, Great Expectations has a first-person narrator.
      2. Unlike the hero of Dickens’s own David Copperfield, Pip tells a story of how he has monumentally deceived himself.
IV. First of all, *Great Expectations* is a story of Pip’s quest for identity.

A. Not knowing who he is, Pip is made to feel wicked, monstrous, and bestial.
   1. Mr. Hubble says that boys are “naterally vicious.”
   2. Estella calls him “a little coarse monster.”
   3. Pumblechook compares him to a pig, and Estella feeds him like a dog.

B. While those identities are fanciful, Pip feels trapped in his identity as a common laboring boy—and thus forever denied any hope of winning Estella.
   1. Estella herself calls him “a common labouring boy.”
   2. He’s horrified to think that she might see his grimy figure through the window of the blacksmith shop.

C. Pip’s visits to Satis House fill him with dreams of great expectations.
   1. Exposure to the wealth of Miss Havisham and the beauty of Estella make Pip a figure of the family romance.
      a. He feels alienated from his tyrannical sister and intellectually superior to his foster father, Joe, a blacksmith.
      b. He is led to believe that his visits to Satis House may make his fortune.
   2. Even though he has been told to expect nothing from Miss Havisham after he leaves her house, he thinks that she is the mysterious benefactor who will enable him to become a gentleman.
      a. With her, he behaves “naturally” like a prince.
      b. He also imagines that she must intend him to marry her adopted daughter, the beautiful Estella.

V. What Miss Havisham offers Pip, however, is not the promise of a dream come true but the prospect of a nightmare.

A. Jilted by her lover years ago, she herself lives in a museum of frustrated expectations.
   1. She lives in a great dark house where the clocks are all stopped to mark the moment when her wedding was called off.
   2. She still wears her now-faded wedding dress and keeps the wedding cake—all covered with cobwebs.

B. Miss Havisham takes a malicious delight in frustrating the expectations of others.
   1. She manipulates Sarah Pocket in particular, making her jealous of Pip’s expectations.
   2. On his first visit to Satis House, Pip overhears her telling Estella to break his heart.

VI. Just as Miss Havisham is the dark, vengeful double of the beautiful Estella, Magwitch is the criminal double of the would-be innocent Pip.

A. Pip steals on behalf of Magwitch, who rewards him.
   1. He steals food and a file to aid Magwitch’s escape.
   2. He later takes money from a stranger sent to him by Magwitch.

B. He has murderous impulses that he never admits—even to himself.
   1. During his first visit to Satis House, he hallucinates the hanging of Miss Havisham, whom he unconsciously sees as the witch guarding the princess.
   2. He feels guilty of the brutal attack on his sister.
      a. She was struck by the leg iron that Magwitch removed by means of the file that Pip stole for him.
      b. The attacker has gratified Pip’s unspoken wish to punish his sister for her abusive treatment of him.

C. Pip must eventually learn that his dream of rising to wealth and becoming a gentleman cannot be separated from the nightmare of Miss Havisham’s quest for revenge or from the taint of criminal behavior.

**Essential Reading:**

**Supplementary Reading:**
Fred Kaplan, *Dickens: A Biography*.
Peter Brooks, *Reading for the Plot: Design and Intention in Narrative*.
Questions to Consider:
1. What prefigures the revelation of Pip’s benefactor?
2. Which of the two endings of the novel do you prefer, and why?
Lecture Sixty-Eight

Fyodor Dostoevsky

Scope: In his first novel, Poor Folk, Dostoevsky won the admiration of a prominent critic by revealing the depth of his compassion for characters living in poverty and deprivation in the fetid, teeming, junk-cluttered slums of St. Petersburg. Dostoevsky’s first novel not only reflected the realism of the French social novel but also proved him a realist of the soul. Then, after years spent in prison for his agitation on behalf of political reform under the czar, Dostoevsky emerged with renewed faith in the teachings of Christ and the value of common people. Both of these principles inspire and inform Crime and Punishment, the story of a man who believes that his special exemption from moral law gives him the right to murder an old woman for her money. The novel traces the process by which the murderer—Raskolnikov—not only comes to admit his guilt and take his punishment but also gradually discovers that he is inextricably bound to those who love him, above all to Sonia, who offers him both love and faith.

Outline

I. Crime and Punishment turns on the paradoxical character of a thoughtful, sensitive young man who commits a brutal murder.
   A. In a crucial passage of the novel, Raskolnikov murders two women with an axe.
   B. Though he seems a brutal murderer, he’s a philosophic young man who radically challenges our basic assumptions about good and evil.

II. By the time he wrote this novel (published in 1866), the 45-year-old Dostoevsky had lived an extraordinary life.
   A. Though raised under poor conditions, he made himself a writer by the age of 23.
   B. With his first novel, he established himself as a truly original writer.

III. In 1849, Dostoevsky was imprisoned and then made to serve as a common soldier, but he emerged with a renewed faith in Christianity and the value of common people.
   A. He was punished for working on behalf of political reform.
      1. While working with a group that planned to publish articles calling for political reform, he was arrested, imprisoned, and sentenced to be shot by firing squad at age 28.
      2. Pardoned by the czar at the last minute, he was sentenced to four years of hard labor in Siberia, then five years’ service as a common soldier.
   B. In spite of the hardships of prison, Dostoevsky reforged his own soul there.
      1. In prison, he endured filth, stench, chains, cockroaches, and the loathing of his fellow prisoners.
      2. But he emerged from prison with renewed faith in the teachings of Christ, in the souls of the oppressed, and in the creative process.

IV. After returning to St. Petersburg in 1859, he wrote extensively and absorbed the intellectual influences that led him to conceive the protagonist of Crime and Punishment.
   A. He helped to found a new journal, then published two notable books.
   B. Though saddled with debt and often ambushed by epileptic seizures, he built a masterpiece around the character of a humanitarian murderer: his answer to the philosophic theories of his day.
      1. Dostoevsky conceived his novel as the study of a young man who embraced dangerous new theories.
      2. In light of these theories, Dostoevsky’s novel asks, in effect, “How would a humanitarian murderer conceive his crime, commit it, then live with the consequences?”

V. Raskolnikov kills an old woman pawnbroker because he thinks he can use her money to benefit humanity at large.
   A. Raskolnikov publishes an article arguing that extraordinary men, such as Napoleon, have the right to kill people—even innocent people—for the common good.
B. While drinking tea at a tavern, he overhears a student whose comments on a rich old pawnbroker lead him to plot her murder.
   1. The student says the woman—who has left all her money to a monastery—should be killed and her money devoted to the service of all mankind.
   2. Though the student would never dare to act on his own advice, Raskolnikov decides to take it.
   3. As he explains later on to Sonia, the poor young woman who loves him, he aimed to use the woman’s money to relieve his widowed mother and sister from the burden of supporting him.

VI. Immediately after committing his crime, Raskolnikov wrestles with self-loathing—a result of the ambivalence toward the crime that he has felt from the start.
   A. Even before committing the crime, he’s repelled by the thought of it.
      1. He begs God to deliver him from the nightmare of his own intentions.
      2. He commits the crime only because he feels predestined to do so.
   B. After killing the old woman, he must also kill her innocent sister, Lizaveta, because she sees the corpse.
   C. After avoiding detection by any other witnesses, taking the woman’s valuables, and stuffing them into a hole behind the wallpaper in his garret, he decides to turn himself into the police—then changes his mind.
      1. A summons to the police station makes him think he’s been found out as the murderer, and he resolves to “tell them everything.”
      2. But when he learns that he’s been summoned only for nonpayment of debt, he forgets about confessing and readily persuades the police to give him more time with the debt.
   D. Raskolnikov’s urge to confess his crime remains nearly as strong as his determination to hide it, and he can’t explain his motives to himself.
      1. He stashes the old woman’s loot in a small hole in a deserted lot.
      2. Then he realizes that he doesn’t even know how much money is in the woman’s purse that he stole or what he would do with it.

VII. He’s an isolated figure who nonetheless reveals himself to the police investigator.
   A. When his mother and sister come from the country to see him, he realizes that he can’t talk to them at all.
   B. But by questioning Raskolnikov about his article, the police inspector (Porfiry) nearly gets him to admit his guilt.
      1. When Porfiry asks Raskolnikov if he considers himself one of the “extraordinary” people who have the right to break laws, Raskolnikov says it’s possible.
      2. When Porfiry asks Raskolnikov if he himself would kill and rob, Raskolnikov says only that he would not tell Porfiry if he did.

VIII. Suffering throughout the novel, Raskolnikov learns to love.
   A. Exemplifying the psychology of guilt as Dostoevsky conceives it, Raskolnikov’s conscience demands that he be punished for his crime.
   B. He feels keenly the sufferings of others.
      1. He tries to comfort the drunken young girl that he sees on a bench early in the novel.
      2. He befriends the shiftless Marmeladov and his destitute family by giving them most of his money.
   C. His generosity to the Marmeladov family wins the love of Sonia, Marmeladov’s daughter, who has been supporting the family with her earnings as a harlot, but who sets out to keep Raskolnikov spiritually, physically, and emotionally alive.
   D. Raskolnikov cannot bear to see his sister, Dounia, sell her soul for a loveless marriage.
      1. To him, such a marriage is no better than harlotry.
      2. Raskolnikov steers Dounia away from the exploitative Luzhin and into a marriage with his own friend Razumikhin.

IX. Sonia finally offers the despairing Raskolnikov the gift of faith.
   A. She gives him a copy of the New Testament brought to her by the murdered Lizaveta.
   B. Reading together the story of Christ’s raising of Lazarus, she and Raskolnikov experience a kind of epiphany.
C. Sonia commits herself to follow Raskolnikov wherever he goes.
   1. She follows him to prison in Siberia.
   2. In the light of her devotion, he sees “the dawn of a renewed future.”

Essential Reading:

Supplementary Reading:
James P. Scanlan, *Dostoevsky the Thinker*.

Questions to Consider:
1. How does the Marmeladov family shape the character of Raskolnikov?
2. Why doesn’t Raskolnikov spend the old woman’s money instead of just hiding it away?
Lecture Sixty-Nine
Leo Tolstoy

Scope: Raised in the Russian province of Tula on a family estate that he inherited at the age of 19, Tolstoy started writing in his early 20s, witnessed Russian troops battling Chechen tribesmen, and commanded a battery at Sevastopol when it was under siege by the British and French in the mid-1850s. In this way, he gained material for *War and Peace*, his epic about Russia’s struggle to survive the Napoleonic invasion. In *Anna Karenina*, a novel of domestic life, Tolstoy tries to show why a lovely, socially distinguished woman who has left her unfeeling husband for Count Vronsky—a dashing man who loves her devotedly—should finally take her own life. Ultimately, Anna kills herself to punish her lover for his supposed infidelity and to regenerate his love for her. She succeeds only too well, for her death leaves Vronsky a broken man who can hardly wait to die himself. But the regeneration that Anna sought to awaken in Vronsky may be found in Levin’s marriage to Anna’s sister-in-law, Kitty, who is spurned by Count Vronsky at the beginning of the novel, yet finally won at the end by the patient, modest, worthy Levin.

Outline

I. The suicide of the heroine of *Anna Karenina* at the end of the novel raises questions that the novel as a whole tries to answer.
   A. As early as 1870, Tolstoy conceived the idea for a novel about a high-society lady who would ruin herself in some way.
   B. The actual suicide of a woman who lived near him gave him the key to her character.
   C. But he still needed to show just what led his heroine to kill herself at the end.

II. Heir to a family estate, which he inherited at the age of 19, Tolstoy brought to the writing of *Anna Karenina* a variety of experiences in both literature and life.
   A. Raised by various aunts (his parents both died during his childhood) and educated for a time at Kazan University, he dropped out at 19 to settle on the family estate but set out in his 20s to become a writer.
      1. During a visit to Moscow in the winter of 1849–1850, he partied hard but also managed to write a fragment about an aimless young man—a fragment that nonetheless reveals the writer’s own quest for an aim.
      2. At age 23, he witnessed Russian soldiers fighting in the Caucasus and thereby gained material for a short story about a raid that raises fundamental questions about the justification for war.
   B. After commanding a battery at Sevastopol during a siege, he wrote *Sevastopol Sketches*, with vivid word-pictures of the dead and wounded, and prepared himself to write *War and Peace*.
      1. *War and Peace* is an epic about Russia’s survival of the Napoleonic invasion.
      2. It is also a study of two distinguished families.

III. *Anna Karenina* is a novel of domestic life that turns on a special kind of unhappiness in marriage.
   A. While Jane Austen’s novels turn on matters of courtship, many 19th-century works turn on questions rising out of adultery.
   B. Given that each unhappy family is unhappy in its own way, the unhappiness of Anna’s marriage emerges, first of all, by contrast with the unhappiness of her brother Stephen’s marriage to Dolly Oblonsky.
      1. Dismayed to learn that Stephen has been having an affair with their former French governess, Dolly threatens to leave him and tell the world he’s a scoundrel.
      2. But she doesn’t because she wouldn’t know what to do with their five children.
      3. We’re soon made to feel that Dolly and Stephen will somehow make up their differences.
   C. Ironically, in coming from St. Petersburg to Moscow to help mediate the quarrel between her brother Stephen and his wife, Anna meets the man who will destroy her own marriage and, ultimately, lead to her suicide.
      1. Young, handsome, rich, and charming, Vronsky wins the heart of Kitty, Dolly’s sister, but nonetheless falls in love with Anna at first sight.
2. Moments after she meets him for the first time at the railroad station, Anna is startled to learn that a woman has been run over by a train, which she calls "a bad omen."

3. When Vronsky follows Anna to St. Petersburg and courts her there, his ardor makes her feel anew the ice of her husband’s self-righteousness.

IV. In threatening Anna with punishment if she breaks the bond of marriage, Karenin actually comes close to articulating the moral of the whole novel.
   A. In Tolstoy’s moral universe, adultery is a crime.
   B. When Anna and Vronsky first consummate their love, her joy is nearly strangled by feelings of guilt.
   C. Anna knows that she cannot leave her husband without also abandoning her beloved little boy, Serezha.
      1. Karenin coldly warns her that she will lose her son if she leaves him.
      2. She agrees to go on living with Karenin and pretending to be his wife.

V. But after surviving a nearly fatal sickness that follows her childbearing, she decides to leave both her husband and her son.
   A. When her sickness brings both men to her bed, she demands that Karenin forgive Vronsky—which he tearfully does.
   B. Humiliated by Karenin’s magnanimity, Vronsky shoots himself but fails to kill himself.
   C. As he and Anna both recover, she decides to leave her family and go with him to Italy.

VI. But lovely as it is, not even life with Vronsky can altogether compensate for the pain of being rejected by society or stifle Anna’s longing to see her son again.
   A. In Italy, the possession of Vronsky is a constant joy to Anna.
   B. But his boredom with life in Italy prompts him to return with her to Russia, where she must face again all the problems she has tried to escape.
      1. As an openly adulterous wife, Anna cannot be received in any respectable house until she gains a divorce.
      2. Longing to see her son, she believes that she cannot share her feelings with Vronsky—the first real sign that she cannot trust him.
   C. After visiting her son secretly, she must endure again the pain of separation—and of loneliness.

VII. Gradually, Anna comes to believe that no good choices remain open to her.
   A. Unless she gets a divorce, her baby girl and any other children she has by Vronsky will legally belong to Karenin.
   B. Though Dolly tries to persuade her to get a divorce, she won’t do it because it would mean giving up her son.
   C. Even after she agrees to request a divorce, Karenin refuses.
   D. Waiting in vain to hear from Karenin, she blames Vronsky for all her sufferings and convinces herself that he loves someone else.

VIII. Though in the end she believes that by killing herself she can punish Vronsky and regenerate his love for her, she destroys him and leaves the reader with only the promise of a happy marriage between Kitty (whom Vronsky once rejected) and Levin.

Essential Reading:

Supplementary Reading:
John Bayley, *Tolstoy and the Novel*.
A. N. Wilson, *Tolstoy*.

Questions to Consider:
1. Why does Tolstoy juxtapose the story of Anna Karenina with the story of Levin and Kitty?

2. Tolstoy takes his epigraph for Anna Karenina from Paul’s Epistle to the Romans: “Vengeance is mine; I will repay, says the Lord” (12:19). How does this epigraph apply to the novel?
Scope: Born in Florida, Missouri, but largely raised in Hannibal, Missouri, on the banks of the Mississippi, where much of his fiction is set, Twain left school at age 12. Then, after working as a printer’s apprentice and later as a Mississippi steamboat pilot, he focused his efforts on journalism and the writing of humorous sketches, followed by travel books and novels. In Huckleberry Finn, his masterpiece, Twain fuses the story of a boy’s rafting adventure with the history of the struggle to break the chain of slavery in America. In the story of Huck’s attempt to run away with Miss Watson’s slave Jim, Twain dramatizes the conflict between northern morality and southern morality: between the Southern principle that a slave is an item or property that cannot be legally stolen and the northern principle that every human being has the inalienable right to be free. But when Tom Sawyer contrives an elaborate and dangerous method of freeing Jim after he has already been freed by Miss Watson, the novel as a whole springs a joke on us and thus exposes the shortcomings of northern morality.

Outline

I. Huck’s struggle with his “conscience” at a crucial point in Huckleberry Finn dramatizes a central conflict in the novel.
   A. Huck first decides to escape his abusive father and the “sivilizing” constraints of life with the Widow Douglas by paddling off in a canoe down the Mississippi River.
   B. When Huck meets Jim (Miss Watson’s slave) on an island in the river and learns that he has run away, the two decide to ride a raft together down the river.
      1. They plan to ride the river down to Cairo, Illinois, and from there, take a steamboat up the Ohio River to the free states.
      2. Though Jim is eager to reach Cairo, Huck is conscience-stricken at the thought that he is aiding and abetting a thief by helping Jim to run away.
         a. Bound to the assumptions of slave-holding, Huck’s “conscience” tells him that a slave is a piece of property.
         b. But Huck’s heart beats in sympathy for Jim.

II. By the time Twain started writing Huckleberry Finn, he was already well known as a humorist.
   A. After schooling in Hannibal, Missouri, and a succession of jobs, including riverboat piloting, he focused his efforts on journalism and humor.
      1. Moving to San Francisco in 1864, he started writing humorous sketches for literary weeklies.
      2. A year later, Twain began to make his name with a nationally circulated story called “The Celebrated Jumping Frog of Calaveras County.”
   B. From 1867 to the early 1870s, Twain burnished his growing reputation with a succession of mostly humorous books.
      1. On a trip to Europe and the Middle East, he gathered material for an irreverent book called Innocents Abroad.
      2. He then produced a humorous book about the West and a satirical novel.
         a. Roughing It is a droll re-creation of his years in the Nevada Territory.
         b. He wrote The Gilded Age, a satirical novel, with Charles Dudley Warner.
   C. In The Adventures of Tom Sawyer, Twain reshaped boyhood memories in ways that reflect a wide variety of literary influences.
      1. Tom and Huck reenact the relation between the fantasizing knight and his down-to-earth squire in Cervantes’s Don Quixote.
      2. Twain also draws on his own earlier burlesques of Sunday-school stories about the Good Boy and the Bad Boy.

III. Huckleberry Finn differs in many ways from Tom Sawyer.
   A. While the dangers in Tom’s adventures are largely imaginary, Huck is truly in danger.
1. Tom’s adventures are quixotic and playful—not at all risky.
2. Huck risks losing his life on the river and defies the law by helping a slave run away.

B. While Tom Sawyer is narrated in standard American English, Huck Finn is narrated by Huck himself—in ungrammatical vernacular.
   1. Huck’s vernacular speech helps to establish his own kind of tough-minded authority, which disdains artifice of any kind.
   2. Huck comes across as a narrator who knows the difference between truth and lies.

IV. Nevertheless, Huck himself is caught up in duplicity.
   A. In some ways, he plays the role of Don Quixote to Jim’s Sancho Panza.
      1. He tells fabulous stories while Jim keeps a grip on the facts.
      2. He tries to make Jim believe that Jim simply dreamed of their being separated in the fog, when in fact they were separated.
   B. Never telling Jim about his misgivings, Huck makes him think that he wholeheartedly backs Jim’s quest for freedom.
   C. The duplicity persists because the two runaways miss the gateway to freedom.
      1. Passing Cairo, they miss the chance to catch a steamboat to freedom for Jim.
      2. They ride further south—into a world of cruelty, hypocrisy, and violence.

V. Huck’s sojourn with the Grangerford family exemplifies this world.
   A. Separated from Jim by an accident on the river, Huck is taken in by an aristocratic family and is treated kindly in a genteel house.
   B. But the family is caught up in a murderous feud with the Shepherdson clan.

VI. The reappearance of Tom Sawyer turns Huck’s agonizing struggle to free a runaway slave into a cruel joke.
   A. Reunited with Jim again, Huck has a fresh struggle with his conscience.
      1. When Jim is caught and turned over to a farmer who expects a reward, Huck feels duty bound to write a note to Miss Watson telling her to reclaim her property.
      2. But then he tears up the note, telling himself that he’ll “go to hell.”
   B. Learning that Jim has been captured, Tom conceives a wildly dangerous plan to set him free.
      1. Tom’s chief aim is to have as much excitement as possible.
      2. In the process, he doesn’t care at all how much he frightens or humiliates Jim or endangers the boys themselves.
   C. When Tom reveals that Jim has been legally free for months, he makes us realize that not even the liberal northern conscience is entirely perfect.
      1. Since the book was published almost 20 years after slavery was abolished, it gives readers the pleasure of witnessing a moral battle that has already been won by northern morality.
      2. But because northern morality required a war that took three-quarters of a million lives, it may not be entirely humane.
      3. Beneath the humor of this book lies its merciless revelation of all the harm we may do in the name of good.

Essential Reading:
Andrew Hoffman, Inventing Mark Twain: The Lives of Samuel Langhorne Clemens.

Supplementary Reading:
James M. Cox, Mark Twain: The Fate of Humor.

Questions to Consider:
1. How does Twain’s portrayal of Huck and Jim complicate or revise your conception of the relation between whites and blacks during the time of slavery?
2. If you could change the ending of *Huckleberry Finn*, how would you end it?
Lecture Seventy-One
Thomas Hardy

Scope: Born and schooled in Dorset, England, Thomas Hardy started training to be an architect at the age of 16 and at 22, went to work for a London firm that kept him busy restoring Gothic churches. But his heart never left the rural life of Dorset, and after writing poems about it that failed to get into print, he tried writing novels about it. By 1883, the great success of such novels as *Far from the Madding Crowd* enabled him to return to Dorset, where he started writing *Tess of the d’Urbervilles* in 1888. In the subtitle to this novel, Hardy calls his heroine a “pure woman,” even though she loses her virginity to a man she does not love, and—though she later marries another man—eventually becomes the mistress, then the murderer of the first. The novel as a whole tries to show just how such a conventionally impure woman can be both truly pure and tragic in her sufferings.

Outline

I. The accident that kills the Durbeyfields’ horse Prince shows how Tess is caught up in circumstances beyond her control.
   A. A dreadful accident befalls Tess one night.
      1. While driving a horse and wagon in the middle of the night, she falls asleep.
      2. With the lantern on the wagon unlighted, the horse is fatally struck by the pointed shaft of the speeding mail cart.
   B. The accident can be traced to the irresponsibility of Tess’s parents.
      1. Having learned on the previous day that he may be descended from Norman nobility, her father, a shiftless peddler, has celebrated this news by getting drunk in the tavern.
      2. Because he is too drunk to drive a load of beehives to a distant town in time for the opening of the Saturday market there, Tess must drive the horse and wagon instead.
      3. At the moment of the accident, Tess is dreaming of a gentlemanly suitor because her parents believe that her noble ancestry will lead to a grand marriage for her.

II. By the time he started writing *Tess*, Hardy had established himself as a novelist of rural English life.
   A. Schooled in Dorset, Hardy studied and practiced architecture from age 16 to his early 30s.
      1. He moved to London at age 22.
      2. There he worked for a firm specializing in restoring Gothic churches.
   B. But the success of his novels enabled him to become a full-time writer in his native Dorset.
      1. After writing poems about Dorset that failed to get into print, he tried writing novels.
      2. By 1883, the great success of such novels as *Far from the Madding Crowd* enabled him to return to his native town of Dorchester, Dorset.
      3. There he started writing *Tess* in 1888.

III. Hardy’s claim that Tess is “pure” prompts us to consider just what this term means in light of her experiences and actions.
   A. She is hardly pure in a conventional sense because she loses her virginity to a man that she later serves as a mistress, then murders.
   B. As the accident with the horse reveals, Tess’s life is governed not by divine providence but by the cruel indifference of fate.
      1. As already noted, the irresponsibility of Tess’s parents exposes her to an accident on the road at night.
      2. By an unbroken chain of causes, one accident leads to another.
   C. Yet Tess struggles to be self-reliant.
      1. Instead of asking for help when she learns that her father cannot drive the wagon, she volunteers to drive it herself.
      2. When the horse is killed, she assumes responsibility for the accident.
   D. In spite of the fairytale elements in Tess’s story, she has no protector.
1. The only prince in her life is a nag named Prince who is killed.
2. Without knowing anything of the d’Urberville family, her parents send her off to claim kinship with them.
3. When Tess comes home to report that she has met only Alec, her mother urges her to go back in hopes that Tess can use her sexual favors to make him propose.
4. Though she returns to the d’Urbervilles only to earn the money to buy a new horse, she loses her virginity there.

IV. Contrary to what some critics say, Tess is seduced, not raped.
   A. Hardy makes it plain that she is the victim of “seduction pure and simple.”
      1. After having Alec trick her with a fake marriage in the first version of the novel and drug her in the second, Hardy cut both the mock marriage and the drugging from the 1892 version.
      2. At one point, Tess explicitly perceives Alec as “her seducer.”
      3. In reviewing her experience with Alec, Tess plainly recalls being sexually aroused by him.
   B. Like Eve in the Book of Genesis, Tess is victimized by diabolic temptation.
      1. In the fruit garden, Alec persuades a reluctant Tess to eat strawberries.
      2. When her husband, Angel, leaves her for an indefinite period, she’s compelled to work in miserable conditions—while Alec tempts her with material comforts.
      3. Because of Alec’s “cruel persuasion,” she finally returns to him as his mistress.

V. In murdering Alec, she desperately tries to free herself from a man whose diabolic manipulation of her motives and impulses threatens to make her his “creature.”
   A. To assume the status of a tragic heroine, Tess must also assume responsibility for her actions.
      1. She’s not just a victim who dies for the amusement of a wanton God.
      2. Her murder of Alec cannot be justified by self-defense or the threat of rape.
         a. At the time Tess murders Alec, he is supporting both her and her family.
         b. She has chosen to live with him as his mistress.
   B. Alec repeatedly demonstrates how he can manipulate Tess’s motives and impulses.
      1. He knows how to take “adroit advantage…of her helplessness.” In taking her up on his horse when she’s physically threatened by other women, he plays the would-be rescuer.
      2. In the woods on the fateful night she is seduced, he tells her that he has given her father a new horse—and thus compels her to feel grateful.
      3. He breaks her faith in the return of her long-absent husband.
      4. He bribes her to return to him with offers of material help for her destitute mother and siblings.
   C. Tess kills Alec—and precipitates her own execution—because she sees no other way of breaking his possession of her soul.

Essential Reading:

Supplementary Reading:
Paul Turner, *The Life of Thomas Hardy.*

Questions to Consider:
1. Is Angel justified in rejecting Tess on their wedding night?
2. When Hardy calls Tess “a pure woman,” what does he mean by the word *pure*?
Lecture Seventy-Two

Oscar Wilde

Scope: Born in Dublin and educated—at Oxford, Wilde distinguished himself for his dandified dress, flamboyant behavior, contempt for conventional morality, and command of classical literature. After publishing a volume of poems and a novel and writing several plays about London society, as well as one about Salome, he wrote his wittiest play, The Importance of Being Earnest, which opened in London in the winter of 1895. In this play, Wilde puts his own special twist on a theme long established in English literature: the theme of the foundling. Though Jack Worthing is a foundling with no idea who his parents are, he’s fabulously rich and, by the middle of the play, freshly engaged to the young woman he wants to marry. His only problem lies in his name, which is not Ernest—until a last-minute revelation shows that it really is Ernest, which makes his marriage possible and punningly demonstrates, at the very end of the play, “the vital Importance of Being Ernest.” But Wilde’s own end was anything but witty. Arrested, tried, and convicted for homosexual activity, he was sentenced to two years at hard labor, and not long after his release, he died a broken man.

Outline

I. Lady Bracknell’s interrogation of Jack in the first act of The Importance of Being Earnest shows how Wilde puts his own special twist on the well-established theme of the foundling.
   A. Interviewing Jack Worthing, who hopes to marry her daughter, Lady Bracknell is dismayed to learn that he is a foundling.
      1. He has no idea who his parents are.
      2. He knows only that he was found in a handbag left at London’s Victoria Station.
   B. In the classic version of the foundling story, a child of obscure parentage who has been humbly raised turns out to come from noble parents and is eventually recognized as such.
      1. In one twist on the foundling story, the poor Pip is “found” and turned into a gentleman by a mysterious benefactor who turns out to be a convict.
      2. In another twist on the foundling story, Tess of the d’Urbervilles is led to believe she’s descended from Norman knights, but the belief leads only to disaster.

II. Jack’s name game subverts the Victorian ideal of high earnestness.
   A. Though christened John by his charitable benefactor, he calls himself Jack in the country and Ernest in town.
      1. Jack feels obliged to take a high moral tone with his young ward, Cecily, in the country.
      2. But he has invented a black-sheep younger brother named Ernest who lives in town, gets into trouble, and needs his older brother to rescue him.
   B. The invented brother “Ernest” is an irresponsible playboy; Wilde thus spoofs the ideal of high earnestness nurtured by sages of the Victorian period, such as Matthew Arnold.

III. Turning the whole notion of seriousness upside down, Wilde’s play is “a trivial comedy for serious people.”
   A. Wilde’s play mocks the seriousness that Arnold finds in all great literature.
      1. In many ways, it’s about the importance of being playful.
   B. Gwendolyn seems infatuated with the name Ernest.
      1. She can’t imagine marrying anyone not named Ernest.
      2. She’s attracted to Jack because she thinks he’s named Ernest.

IV. By the winter of 1895, when Earnest opened in London, Wilde had achieved fame as a poet, playwright, novelist, and dandy.
   A. Educated at Oxford, he soon distinguished himself for his dandified dress, classical learning, flamboyant manner, and contempt for conventional morality.
B. By 1895, he had published a wide variety of works and was also known for his lecturing.
   1. His first volume of poems appeared in 1881.
   2. In his late 20s, he made a highly successful lecture tour of the United States.
   3. In 1891, he published his only novel, *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, an acute critique of the very aestheticism that he is thought to have espoused.

V. Wilde then wrote a series of plays that question conventional morality, yet stop well short of the boldness manifested by the plays of Ibsen and Shaw.

   A. *Salome* retells the biblical story of Herod’s daughter by making her the necrophilic lover of John the Baptist.

   B. Of the four plays Wilde wrote about London society, the first three all involve threats to marital fidelity and raise questions about conventional morality.
      1. In *Lady Windermere’s Fan*, a puritanical wife who suspects her husband of keeping a mistress and is being pursued by the “wicked” Lord Darlington is persuaded not to run off with him—by the very woman whom she wrongly suspected of being her husband’s mistress.
      2. In *An Ideal Husband*, Lady Chiltern learns to forgive a husband who has misbehaved, thereby trading her ideal husband for a real one.

   C. But comparison of *An Ideal Husband* with Ibsen’s *A Doll’s House* (written 15 years earlier) shows that Wilde is anything but a feminist.
      1. Unlike Ibsen’s Nora, none of Wilde’s married woman ever walks out on her husband.
      2. At the end of *An Ideal Husband*, the would-be enlightened Lord Goring (who surely speaks for Wilde himself) preaches to Lady Windermere the gospels of submission and forgiveness.

   D. While the fallen women of Wilde’s plays keep their sexual indiscretions from their children, Shaw’s Mrs. Warren is a prostitute who openly defends her way of life to her daughter.

VI. Nonetheless, Wilde’s *Earnest* is rich in wit.

   A. In this play, such words as *earnest* and *trivial* change places.
      1. It takes a serious eater to be deep.
      2. A philosopher who skimps on meals would be shallow.

   B. Bored with the “very serious” Jack, Cecily is eager to meet the “really wicked” Ernest.

   C. Both men play games with their names and offer to change them when their “real” identities are exposed.
      1. Algernon pretends to be Ernest when proposing to Cecily.
      2. Gwendolyn is furious to think that her Ernest has proposed to another woman.
      3. When the two women learn that their suitors are actually named Algernon and Jack, they refuse to marry either of them.
      4. When the men propose to get themselves christened, the women gasp in admiration.

   D. Cracking the mystery of Jack’s parentage, Lady Bracknell discovers that Jack’s real name is Ernest, thus paving the way for his marriage to Gwendolyn and demonstrating—in the punning last words of the play—“the vital Importance of Being Ernest.”

VII. Wilde’s own end was grim.

   A. Arrested, tried, and convicted of homosexual behavior, he was sentenced to two years’ imprisonment with hard labor.
      1. Near the end of his imprisonment, Wilde wrote to his young and cruelly ungrateful lover, Bosie, a long, soul-searching letter eventually published under the title *De Profundis*.
      2. In this letter, Wilde takes full responsibility for ruining himself and forgives Bosie.

   B. Released from prison in 1897, Wilde wrote scarcely more than a single poem before he died.
      1. From his memories of prison, he wrote “The Ballad of Reading Gaol.”
      2. Like Jack’s imaginary brother, Ernest, in Wilde’s play, Wilde himself died in a Paris hotel.

Essential Reading:
Richard Ellmann, *Oscar Wilde*.

**Supplementary Reading:**
Rupert Hart-Davis and Merlin Holland, *The Letters of Oscar Wilde*.

**Questions to Consider:**

1. To what extent does Wilde’s homosexuality influence his fiction and drama?
2. What do you think Wilde means by calling *The Importance of Being Earnest* “a trivial comedy for serious people”? 
Timeline

14 July 1789 ......................... Storming of the Bastille ignites the French Revolution.

1793 ...................................... Execution of Louis XVI in January prompts England’s declaration of war against France. Except for the brief Peace of Amiens in 1802, war continues until 1815.

1798 ...................................... First edition of Lyrical Ballads, with poems by William Wordsworth and Samuel Taylor Coleridge, appears in one volume.

1799 ...................................... By means of a coup, Napoleon seizes power in France.

1801 ...................................... Second edition of Lyrical Ballads appears in two volumes, with a new preface.

1805 ...................................... Wordsworth completes the first full-length draft of The Prelude, his poetic autobiography, much revised later on but not published until the year of his death.

1807 ...................................... Wordsworth’s Poems appears in two volumes.

1811 ...................................... Jane Austen’s Sense and Sensibility is published. George, Prince of Wales, becomes prince regent, assuming the powers of his debilitated father, George III.

1813 ...................................... Jane Austen’s Pride and Prejudice is published.

1814 ...................................... Wordsworth’s The Excursion (in nine “books”) is published. Jane Austen’s Mansfield Park is published.

1815 ...................................... Duke of Wellington and his European allies defeat Napoleon at Waterloo and restore the Bourbon monarchy in France.

1816 ...................................... Jane Austen’s Emma, dedicated to the prince regent, is published.

1817 ...................................... Death of Jane Austen.

1818 ...................................... Jane Austen’s Northanger Abbey and Persuasion are published posthumously.

1820 ...................................... Death of George III.

1825 ...................................... Succeeding Alexander I as czar of Russia in December, Nicholas I promptly crushes the rebellion of the Decembrists, liberal Russian officers advocating representative democracy.

1830 ...................................... July Revolution: In France, an ultra-royalist attempt to restore the laws of the old, pre-Revolutionary regime provokes the liberal middle class to overthrow King Charles X and replace him with Louis-Philippe as a constitutional monarch. Stendhal’s Red and Black is published.

1836 ...................................... Charles Dickens’s first book, Sketches by Boz, is published.

1836–1837 ............................. Serial publication of Dickens’s Pickwick Papers launches his lifelong popularity.


1839 ...................................... Stendhal’s The Charterhouse of Parma is published.

1842 ...................................... Death of Stendhal.

1843 ...................................... Dickens’s A Christmas Carol is published.

1846 ...................................... Fyodor Dostoevsky’s first published story, Poor Folk, gains him instant recognition.
1848............................... Karl Marx’s *The Communist Manifesto* is published. In the wave of democratic revolutions sweeping Europe, Louis-Philippe is driven from the throne of France and Louis Napoleon becomes president of its Second Republic.

1850............................... Death of Wordsworth. *The Prelude* is published.

1851............................... Herman Melville’s *Moby Dick* is published.

1852 (November) ................. Louis Napoleon becomes Napoleon III, emperor of France.

1855............................... First edition of Walt Whitman’s *Leaves of Grass*.

1857............................... Flaubert is tried and acquitted of “offenses against morality and religion” in *Madame Bovary*, which achieves a *succès de scandale*.

1860–1861........................... Dickens’s *Great Expectations* is published.

1861............................... Emancipation of the serfs in Russia.

1866............................... Dostoevsky’s *Crime and Punishment* is published.

1869............................... Final part of Tolstoy’s *War and Peace* is published.

1870............................... Death of Dickens.

1877............................... Final part of Tolstoy’s *Anna Karenina* is published.

1880............................... Death of Flaubert.

1881............................... Death of Dostoevsky.

1885............................... Mark Twain’s *Huckleberry Finn* is published in America.

1891............................... Death of Melville. Thomas Hardy’s *Tess of the D’Urbervilles* is published.

1892............................... Death of Whitman.

1895............................... Oscar Wilde’s *The Importance of Being Earnest* opens in London. Wilde is prosecuted, convicted, and sentenced to two years’ imprisonment for homosexuality.

1900............................... Death of Wilde.

1910............................... Death of Tolstoy, death of Twain.

1928............................... Death of Hardy.
**Glossary**

**Double**: A device by which one character in a work of fiction reflects or embodies the potential of another—even though they may seem on the surface quite different. In *Great Expectations*, for instance, Magwitch is the double of Pip because Magwitch plainly embodies the criminal potentiality of Pip’s aspirations for wealth.

**Enlightenment**: A period of intellectual, scientific, and philosophic inquiry chiefly manifest in England and France from the late 17th century to the end of the 18th century. By means of experiment and rational analysis, it not only made fresh discoveries in various fields but also challenged traditional beliefs in the authority of Scripture, the Christian Church, and the monarchy. Its highlights include Newton’s *Principia Mathematica* (1687), John Locke’s *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* and *Two Treatises of Civil Government* (both 1690), Jean-Jacques Rousseau’s *The Social Contract* (1762), and Denis Diderot’s *Encyclopédie* (1751–1776).

**Entailment**: A law that restricts the inheritance of property to the eldest male descendant of its owner. If the property is entailed and the owner dies without leaving a son, the property passes to the eldest male member of a collateral branch of the family.

**Family romance**: Sigmund Freud’s name for a condition in which the subject (typically male) imagines that he was not born of the poor or common people who claim to be his parents but is, rather, a foundling separated at birth from his real parents, who are noble.

**First-person narration.** See *Narration*.

**French Revolution**: The collective term for a series of events that began with the storming of the Bastille (a Parisian fortress and prison) on July 14, 1789, and ended with the defeat of Napoleon by the allied monarchies of England, Austria, and Prussia at the Battle of Waterloo (near Brussels, Belgium) on June 18, 1815. Virtuallyabolishing both the aristocracy and the church in the name of equality and rationality, the Revolution replaced the monarchy with a Republic that turned into a bloodthirsty Reign of Terror under Robespierre and his Jacobin party (in 1794) and under Napoleon (starting in 1799) became an empire.

**July Revolution**: In French history, the revolution of July 1830 that replaced the traditional monarchy of King Charles X with a constitutional monarchy under King Louis-Philippe, the bourgeois king.

**Narration, types of**: An omniscient narrator—such as the unnamed narrator of Thomas Hardy’s *Tess*—knows everything about every character in a story and can, therefore, enter the mind of any character at will and see through his or her eyes. Typically, an omniscient narrator writes of everyone in the third person (“he,” “she,” or “they”) and never appears as a character in the story, never refers to himself or herself as “I.” A first-person narrator—such as Pip in Dickens’s *Great Expectations*—is a character in the story, knows only what he or she can learn by observation, and therefore speaks from a strictly limited point of view. Between these two types of narration falls omniscient narration with a single character point of view. The third-person narration of Jane Austen’s *Pride and Prejudice*, for instance, is dominated (though not wholly controlled) by the viewpoint of Elizabeth.

**Nihilism**: A term with various applications in metaphysics, ethics, and politics. Among Russian intellectuals of the 1860s, when Dostoevsky wrote *Crime and Punishment*, it denoted the rejection of all authority in favor of individual action. As represented in Dostoevsky’s novel, it stipulated that a few privileged individuals may ignore all laws and principles—nullify all prohibitions, even against murder—to serve the interests of humankind at large.

**Novel**: Usually dated from the publication of Samuel Richardson’s *Pamela* in 1740, the novel—so called to distinguish it from earlier forms of literary narrative—is a long fictional prose narrative normally representing events that are linked by a chain of causality and characters who are realistically situated in space and time.

**Omniscient narration**: See *Narration*.

**Restoration**: In French history, a term referring to the restoration of the Bourbon line of kings, who, with one notable interruption, ruled France from 1589 to 1830, when Charles X was deposed. The execution of Louis XVI in 1793 interrupted the Bourbon reign, which was succeeded by the Napoleonic empire. The Bourbons were restored in 1815 after the allied monarchies of England and Europe defeated Napoleon.
Romanticism: A cultural movement in England and Europe that began in the late 18th century and lasted well into the 19th. Manifest in art and music as well as literature, it sought to promote a reverence for nature, to challenge the authority of reason by celebrating the powers of imagination and passion, to ignite revolution in the arts and in politics, to privilege self-consciousness and self-exploration over social consciousness, and to articulate a yearning for eternal truths in a world of finite space and time. Though Romanticism was adumbrated in Germany by Goethe’s *Sorrows of Young Werther* (1774) and in France by Rousseau’s *Confessions* (which began to appear in 1782), English Romanticism is commonly thought to have begun with Blake’s *Songs of Innocence* (1789) or with the *Lyrical Ballads* of Wordsworth and Coleridge (1798) and to have ended with the death of Byron (1824).

Single character point of view: See Narration.

Transcendentalism: A philosophic doctrine espoused by Ralph Waldo Emerson and his followers in early 19th-century America. As defined by Emerson in a lecture of 1842, it derives from Immanuel Kant, the German philosopher of the late 18th century who argued that some vitally important ideas—such as the idea of existence—do not come from sensory experience but from the mind itself, as intuitions transcending all material form. Emerson identifies the doctrine with idealism, by which he meant a refusal to be bound by the material facts of life and a profound faith in the power of thought, will, and inspiration. Inherent in this faith is the belief that every material thing in the universe may be construed as a symbol of the mind or the individual consciousness.

Utilitarianism: A moral concept introduced in the late 18th century by Jeremy Bentham and refined in the early 19th century by John Stuart Mill. Making utility the touchstone of moral value, Bentham stipulated that action is good insofar as it tends to promote the greatest happiness of the greatest possible number. In Mill’s socialist version of the doctrine, a morally good action must promote the welfare of the people as a whole, including women and workers.
Biographical Notes

Austen, Jane (1775–1817). Born December 16 in Steventon, Hampshire (England), Jane Austen ended her formal schooling at age 9 and was then mainly educated at home by her father, George, an Anglican clergyman. At 11, she started writing stories and burlesques and at 15—as a self-confessed “partial, prejudiced & Ignorant historian”—produced a history of England in which women play the leading roles. In the 1790s, she wrote “Lady Susan,” later published as Northanger Abbey (1818); “Elinor and Marianne,” the original version of Sense and Sensibility (published in 1811); and “First Impressions,” which later became Pride and Prejudice (published in 1813). In 1801, her father retired and moved his family to Bath, where they lived until shortly after his death in 1805. In 1806, Jane and her mother and sister, Cassandra, settled in Chawton, Hampshire, where they lived in a small cottage on a modest income. Her first two published novels (cited above) were followed by two more that appeared in her lifetime: Mansfield Park (1814) and Emma (1816). She died in Winchester at the age of 42, leaving one novel (Sanditon) unfinished and two more to be published posthumously in 1818: Northanger Abbey and Persuasion.

Dickens, Charles (1812–1870). Born February 7 in Portsmouth, England, Dickens was the eldest son of a naval clerk. At age 15, after a few years of formal schooling in Chatham and London cut short by his father’s financial reverses, he worked first as an office boy, then as a reporter in London, where he began publishing his own stories in 1833. In April 1836, shortly after publishing his first book, Sketches by Boz, and the first of 19 monthly installments of The Pickwick Papers, he married Catherine Hogarth, who bore him 10 children; they were separated in 1858, not long after Charles met a young actress named Ellen Ternan, who would become his mistress. After completing The Pickwick Papers in October 1837, Dickens steadily produced a series of novels in monthly parts, including Oliver Twist (1837–39), Nicholas Nickleby (1838–1839), The Old Curiosity Shop (1840–1841), Martin Chuzzlewit (1843), David Copperfield (1849–1850), Great Expectations (1860–1861), and Our Mutual Friend (1864–1865). He also ran two popular magazines (first Household Words, then All the Year Round); traveled widely, including two visits to America, the first of which led to his American Notes (1842); produced a series of Christmas books starting with A Christmas Carol in 1843; and gave numerous public readings from 1858 to 1870 in both Britain and America. He died near Rochester at Gad’s Hill Place, the mansion he had bought in 1856, and is buried at Westminster Abbey.

Dostoevsky, Fyodor (1821–1881). Born on October 3 to a middle-class Moscow family (his tyrannical father, formerly an army surgeon, was a physician), Dostoevsky was educated at a private boarding school before being sent at age 17 to study in St. Petersburg at the Military Engineering College, from which he graduated as an officer in 1843. In 1846, he won critical acclaim for his first novel, Poor Folk, but three years later was arrested for political activities and sentenced to be shot in December 1849. Saved at the very last moment by a pardon from the czar, he was sentenced to four years at hard labor in Siberia, followed by service in the ranks as a common soldier. Returning to St. Petersburg in 1859 as a free man, he launched a new journal, Vremya (Time), with his brother Mikhail; wrote The House of the Dead (1862), an account of his life in prison; traveled abroad; and returned to write Notes from Underground (1864), followed by Crime and Punishment (1866). After writing The Gambler and marrying Anna Snitkina, his young stenographer, in 1867, he wrote The Idiot (1868–1869), The Possessed (1871), and finally, The Brothers Karamazov (1880). He died at the height of his fame in 1881.

Flaubert, Gustave (1821–1880). Born in Rouen, France, where his father was chief surgeon at the Hotel-Dieu, Flaubert got his elementary and secondary education at Rouen’s Collège Royal. Having written plays by the age of 9, he produced stories and an autobiographical narrative (Memoirs of a Madman) in his teens. After he reluctantly studied law in Paris from 1841 to 1844, an epileptic seizure prompted him to give it up and settle with his parents in Croisset (near Rouen), where he lived and wrote for the rest of his life. After finishing the first version of The Temptation of St. Anthony in 1849, he spent five years writing Madame Bovary, first published in the Revue de Paris in 1857. The following year, he was tried and acquitted of committing outrage against morality and religion in this novel, which promptly achieved a succès de scandale when it appeared in book form. He then produced Salammbô, a novel of ancient Rome and Carthage (1863); Sentimental Education (1869); and a third version of The Temptation of St. Anthony (1874). He died at Croisset on May 8, 1880.

Hardy, Thomas (1840–1928). Son of a stonemason, Hardy was born in Higher Bockhampton, a village in the southwest English county of Dorset. After schooling in Bockhampton and nearby Dorchester up to age 16, he started training to be an architect at a Dorchester firm, then at 22, took a job with a London firm that kept him busy restoring Gothic churches. After writing poems about the rural life of Dorset, he turned to novels, which brought
him growing acclaim. Desperate Remedies (1871) drew mixed notices; Under the Greenwood Tree (1872) fared better. In 1874—the year he married Emma Gifford—he achieved a major success with Far from the Madding Crowd, followed by Return of the Native (1878) and The Trumpet-Major (1880). Three years later, he built a house in Dorchester, where he produced The Mayor of Casterbridge (1886), Tess of the d’Urbervilles (1891), and Jude the Obscure (1895). He then returned to poetry, publishing Wessex Poems (1898), Dynasts (1904–1908), and various other volumes of poetry up through 1925. He died of a heart attack in 1928 and is buried in Westminster Abbey.

Melville, Herman (1819–1891). Born in New York City, Melville was the initially privileged second son of an importer of French dry goods, but at the age of 12, when his father died in debt, Herman had to leave school and go to work for five years. After resuming school for just one more year, he taught school himself, read voraciously, then crossed the Atlantic and back as a common sailor on a merchant ship in 1839. On a whaling voyage to the South Seas in 1841, he deserted in the Marquesas Islands, spent several weeks with a savage tribe in the Typee Valley, and thus gathered material for his first novel, Typee (1846). A sojourn in Tahiti led to his second novel, Omoo (1847), followed quickly by three more novels based on his life at sea: Mardi, Redburn (both 1849), and White-Jacket (1850). In the autumn of 1850, three years after marrying Elizabeth Shaw, he settled on a farm he had bought near Pittsfield, Massachusetts, where he finished his masterpiece, Moby Dick (1851). After producing two more novels—Pierre (1852) and The Confidence Man (1857), along with a collection of stories called The Piazza Tales (1856), including “Benito Cereno” and “Bartleby the Scrivener,” Melville wrote only poetry. Though his first two books had made him famous, his later work—including Moby Dick—was unappreciated, and by the time of his death (after a long sickness), he had sunk into an obscurity from which only posthumous fame could rescue him. Billy Budd, his novellete, was published in 1924.

Stendhal (1783–1842). Born Henri Marie Beyle in the city of Grenoble, France, Stendhal was the son of a rich, solidly bourgeois lawyer and a mother who died when he was just 7. Educated at the Ecole Centrale, he left Grenoble in 1799, when he was 16, and reached Paris just after Napoleon seized power in a coup. After landing a post in the Ministry of War through an influential relative, he served as an aide-de-camp in Napoleon’s campaigns in Italy, Germany, Austria, and Russia. In between wars, he frequented Parisian drawing rooms, kept journals of his love affairs and travels, and tried his hand—unsuccessfully—at play writing. When Napoleon fell in 1815, Stendhal left the army and settled in Milan, where he produced books on music, Italian painting, and Italian cities and first used Stendhal as his pen name. Suspected of subversive activity, he was expelled from Italy in 1821 by the Austrian police. Returning to live in Paris, he published a series of books culminating in his first major novel, Red and Black (1830). Following the July Revolution of 1830, he was appointed consul to the port of Civitavecchia, 40 miles from Rome, and thereafter divided his time between Italy and Paris. In 1838, after producing several more books—including his autobiography, The Life of Henry Brulard, posthumously published in 1890—he dictated his last great novel, The Charterhouse of Parma (published 1839). He died of apoplexy on a Paris street in 1842.

Tolstoy, Leo (1828–1910). Born on the family estate in the Russian province of Tula, Tolstoy was educated by private tutors and at Kazan University, where he read law and Oriental languages but did not earn a degree. In 1851, he traveled to the Caucasus, joined an artillery regiment, and launched his literary career with The History of Yesterday, followed by the autobiographical trilogy Childhood (1852), Boyhood (1854), and Youth (1856). In the Crimean War, he commanded a battery during the long siege of Sevastopol (1854–1855), which inspired his Tales of Army Life and Sketches of Sevastopol (1855–1856). After leaving the army, savoring the admiration of the St. Petersburg literati, and marrying Sophie Andreyevna Behrs, who would bear him 13 children, he settled down on his Volga estate to educate and emancipate his peasantry and to produce the great works for which he is best known: War and Peace (1865–1869) and Anna Karenina (1875–1877). In later works, such as The Fruits of Enlightenment, a play (1891), and Resurrection (1899–1900), he flouted orthodoxy so much that the Holy Synod excommunicated him in 1901, and he denounced the worship of Christ as blasphemy. In What Is Art? (1898), he argued that art includes only simple works that can be easily read by ordinary people and he condemned all sophisticated fiction, including his own, as worthless. One night in October 1910, after quarrelling with his wife, he left home secretly with only his daughter and a personal physician. On November 7, he died of a chill in the Astapovo railway station.

Twain, Mark (1835–1910). Born in Florida, Missouri, and christened Samuel Langhorne Clemens, Twain was the sixth child of a lawyer. When the boy was 4, the family moved to Hannibal, Missouri, where Twain grew up. Leaving school not long after his father’s death in 1847, he worked first as a printer’s apprentice, then as assistant editor of a Hannibal newspaper. In 1861, after four years as a steamboat pilot on the Lower Mississippi, which gave him material for many of his later books as well as his pen name (mark twain means two fathoms of water), he
moved to Nevada and edited a newspaper in Virginia City. In 1864, he took a job as a reporter in San Francisco. Late the following year, he published a story that was widely reprinted and led to his first book, *The Celebrated Jumping Frog of Calaveras County and Other Sketches* (1867). He then traveled to Europe to gather material for *Innocents Abroad* (1869). After editing a newspaper in Buffalo, marrying Olivia Langdon, and moving to Hartford, Connecticut, he wrote *Roughing It* (1872), a droll re-creation of his years in Nevada; *The Gilded Age* (1873), co-authored with Charles Dudley Warner, a novel of greed and corruption after the Civil War; and his two most famous novels, *Tom Sawyer* (1876) and *Huckleberry Finn* (1885). He then produced such books as *A Tramp Abroad* (1880), *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur’s Court* (1889), *Pudd’nhead Wilson* (1894), and *The Mysterious Stranger* (1916).

**Whitman, Walt** (1819–1892). Born in Huntington, New York (on Long Island) as the second son of a housebuilder, Whitman was raised and schooled in Brooklyn until 1830 (age 11), when he began a succession of jobs in Brooklyn and New York: office boy, compositor, teacher, newspaperman, occasional speechmaker. After publishing some poetry, a novel—*Franklin Evans* (1842)—and more than 15 stories and sketches, he worked for two Brooklyn newspapers, left in February 1848 to edit the New Orleans *Daily Crescent*, then returned soon after to found the *Brooklyn Freeman*, a “free soil” newspaper. While running a printing office, a bookstore, and a housebuilding business, he wrote and published his first volume of 12 poems, *Leaves of Grass*, in 1855. A second edition (1856) contained 33 poems and a congratulatory letter from Ralph Waldo Emerson, and a third edition—including sexually suggestive poems that Emerson thought should be cut—appeared in 1860. From 1863 to 1865, he tended the sick in Washington hospitals, then worked for the Department of the Interior and the Attorney General. Along with several further editions of *Leaves of Grass* that appeared from 1867 to 1891 (the 1881 edition was banned in Boston for its alleged obscenity), his later work includes the pamphlet *Democratic Vistas* (1871) and *Specimen Days* (1882), a collection of memoranda drawn from various experiences, especially his work with the war wounded. He died in Camden, New Jersey, where he is buried in Harleigh Cemetery.

**Wilde, Oscar** (1854–1900). Born in Dublin, son of a distinguished surgeon and a poet (Lady Jane Francesca Wilde) who kept Dublin’s best-known salon, Wilde was first educated in Ireland, then at Oxford, where he distinguished himself for his classical learning and won the Newdigate prize for poetry in 1878. After publishing his first collection of poems in 1881 and making a lecture tour of the United States, he wrote *The Duchess of Padua*—his first play, a verse tragedy—in 1883; married Constance Lloyd in 1884; wrote a collection of fairytales for their two little boys (*The Happy Prince and Other Tales*, 1888); and created a sensation with his first novel, *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1890–1891). Besides essays, he then wrote *Salome* (first published in English in 1894) and a series of domestic plays culminating in his comic masterpiece, *The Importance of Being Earnest*, which opened in London on Valentine’s Day 1895. In the same year, Wilde was convicted of “gross indecency” for his homosexual activity and sentenced to two years’ imprisonment with hard labor. On his release in 1897, he moved to France, wrote a little (chiefly “The Ballad of Reading Gaol”), and died in a Paris hotel.

**Wordsworth, William** (1770–1850). Born in Cockermouth, West Cumberland (England), to a family of the professional class, Wordsworth was educated at the Hawkshead Grammar School and at Cambridge University, graduating in 1791. After spending a year in France, he returned to England in late 1792 and published his first two books of poetry—*Evening Walk* and *Descriptive Sketches*—in 1793. In collaboration with Samuel Taylor Coleridge, whom he met in the mid-1790s, he produced the first edition of *Lyrical Ballads* (published 1798) and late the following year, moved with his sister, Dorothy, to Grasmere, near his birthplace. There, he published the second edition of *Lyrical Ballads* with a new preface (1801) and wrote most of his best-known poems, including the “Intimations” ode and his autobiographical *Prelude*. After marrying Mary Hutchinson in 1802, he lived with her and his sister, Dorothy, in Grasmere until 1813, when he moved to nearby Rydal Mount. He became poet laureate in 1843.
Essential Reading:


Dickens, Charles. *Great Expectations*, edited by Edgar Rosenberg. New York: Norton, 1999. Meticulously edited with the aid of Dickens’s manuscripts and corrected proofs as well as the early editions of the book, this volume presents not only the text but a large number of critical and explanatory essays on it.


———. *The Temptation of St. Anthony*, translated by Lafcadio Hearn. New York: Random House, 2002. This is the book that Flaubert first drafted before he wrote *Madame Bovary*, and then, after much cutting and polishing, finally published in 1874. Hearn’s translation is introduced by Michel Foucault.


Loving, Jerome. *Walt Whitman: The Song of Himself*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999. Drawing on previously unknown archival evidence as well as on many years of Whitman scholarship, this richly comprehensive critical biography shows how Whitman’s free verse revolutionized American poetry and how he prevailed over reviewers and detractors who found his work obscene.


Whitman, Walt. *Complete Poetry and Collected Prose*, edited by Justin Kaplan. New York: Library of America, 1982. Lightly but usefully annotated, this large single volume includes the first edition of *Leaves of Grass* (1855), the final or “deathbed” edition of it (1891–1892), *Complete Prose Works* (1892), and some additional prose works.


**Supplementary Reading:**


Cox, James M. *Mark Twain: The Fate of Humor*. Columbia, MO: University of Missouri Press, 2002. First published almost 40 years ago, this recently reissued study of Twain’s life and work remains brilliantly provocative and clear—a classic in its own right.


Lottman, Herbert. *Flaubert: A Biography*. Boston: Little Brown, 1989. Contesting several of the myths about Flaubert—such as his supposed identification with Madame Bovary—this book lucidly presents the facts of his life as a man and a writer.

Miller, James E., Jr. *Walt Whitman: Updated Edition*. Boston: Twayne, 1990. This is an admirably compact study focusing chiefly on the poetry, particularly strong on the growth and structure of *Leaves*.


Scanlan, James P. *Dostoevsky the Thinker*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2002. Recognizing that Dostoevsky’s fiction turns quite as much on the clash of ideas as it does on the clash of characters, this book examines the philosophic questions and principles that drive Dostoevsky’s work.


**Internet Resources:**


www.wwnorton.com/nael/victorian/welcome.htm. Run off the Norton Anthology of Literature: Norton Topics Online, these sites give reliable information, but only on English authors from the late 18th century to the modern period.

*Classic Authors.net*. http://www.underthesun.cc/Classics. This site includes ancient as well as modern authors and includes European as well as English and American writers. However, it is not comprehensive, and the quantity and quality of information vary considerably from one author to another.
Great Authors of the Western Literary Tradition
Part VII:
Modern Literature
Professor James A. W. Heffernan
James A. W. Heffernan, Emeritus Professor of English and Frederick Sessions Beebe ’35 Professor in the Art of Writing at Dartmouth College, earned his A.B. cum laude from Georgetown University in 1960. With the aid of a Woodrow Wilson Fellowship, he then went on to Princeton University, where he earned his Ph.D. in English in 1964. After teaching briefly at the University of Virginia, Professor Heffernan joined the Dartmouth faculty in 1965. He chaired the Dartmouth English Department from 1978 to 1981 and has taught a range of courses there, including European Romanticism, English Romantic Poetry, Methods of Literary Criticism, and the Nineteenth-Century English Novel. From 1989 to 2002, he taught a senior seminar on Joyce’s *Ulysses* that was regularly oversubscribed, and in 2001, The Teaching Company recorded his 24 lectures on Joyce’s *Ulysses*, which are now available on videotape, audiotape, CD, and DVD.


Professor Heffernan’s other books include *Wordsworth’s Theory of Poetry* (1969); *The Re-Creation of Landscape: A Study of Wordsworth, Coleridge, Constable, and Turner* (1985); and (as co-author) *Writing: A College Handbook*, now in its fifth edition. He has also published nearly 50 articles on topics ranging from English Romantic poetry to the art of David Hockney.

Widely known for his work on the relation between literature and visual art, Professor Heffernan has lectured at international conferences in Israel, Sweden, Austria, Ireland, Holland, Germany, and Portugal, as well as in various parts of the United States.

His hobbies include dramatic reading. In recent years, he has organized and participated in staged readings of contemporary plays, including Michael Frayn’s *Copenhagen* and two plays by Yazmina Reza: *Art* and *The Unexpected Man*. He has lately been celebrating the birthday of James Joyce (February 2) by reading excerpts from *Ulysses* at specially arranged dinners—most recently at the Princeton Club of New York City.
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Great Authors of the Western Literary Tradition

Part VII: Modern Literature

Scope:

Starting with Henry James’s *Portrait of a Lady* (1881), this section of the course considers how the literature of the late 19th and early 20th centuries reflects the gradual disintegration of the institutions, social structures, and assumptions that once sustained individual men and women. In James’s novel, where a bright but innocent young American woman seeks to complete her cultural education in Europe, it proves to be a garden teeming with venomous snakes. In Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness* (1899), a high-minded European trader who hopes to civilize the natives of Africa while collecting ivory there turns into a rapacious monster. In raising fundamental questions about the value and virtue of European culture, these two late-19th-century novels point the way to 20th-century Modernism, which radically questions traditional beliefs—especially when confronted by the unprecedented specter of worldwide war.

Bereft of traditional support structures, Modernism spotlights the isolated self, as in Joyce’s autobiographical *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (1916) or Marcel Proust’s exhaustively introspective *À la Recherche du Temps Perdu* (1913–1927). In the wake of World War I (1914–1918) and the run-up to World War II (1939–1945), poets and novelists in America and Europe express a sense of radical displacement, disorientation, and deracination. In “The Second Coming” (1920), Yeats sees nothing but “mere anarchy” as he surveys the wreckage wrought by World War I, the outbreak of the Russian Revolution, and the imminence of yet another bloody Irish revolt against English rule. In Kafka’s *The Trial* (1925), a perfectly respectable young banker is arrested for no reason, subjected to endless delays by a totally incomprehensible legal system, and finally executed—all without ever being tried. In Virginia Woolf’s *Mrs. Dalloway* (also 1925), an elegant evening party organized by a well-to-do London matron is invaded by the news of a suicide: A young man who has been incurably traumatized by the wartime death of a dear friend and who is offered nothing more than “rest” by way of treatment cannot bear to live any longer. In Faulkner’s *As I Lay Dying* (1930), the various members of a rural Southern family are so deeply divided psychically that they each take turns narrating the novel from their own idiosyncratic points of view. Held together by little more than their sense of obligation to a dying—then dead—woman who cared almost nothing for any of them, they feel bound to haul her steadily decomposing corpse for days until they can bury her in her native town.

The last three writers grapple in different ways with the horrors of World War II. Just after the outbreak of the war in September 1939, Bertolt Brecht wrote *Mother Courage and Her Children*, a play that shows how the Thirty Years’ War (1618–1648) shattered Germany in general and one family in particular. In 1947, Camus published *The Plague*, a novel he wrote during the Second World War. Telling how an utterly unexpected outbreak of bubonic plague struck the Algerian city of Oran in the 1940s, how the whole city was placed under quarantine for 10 months, and how a dedicated doctor fought the plague with nothing but the weapons of healing, Camus symbolically represents the plague of war. Finally, in *Waiting for Godot* (1953), a play with no action at all in the conventional sense of the word, Samuel Beckett represents the human condition as one of interminable waiting for something that never comes.

Throughout these lectures, we will see how a succession of writers at first anticipates, then articulates the dilemmas of Modernism, which chronologically coincides with modernity but is quite distinct from it. While modernity is a condition largely created by technological advances, such as the invention of the automobile and the telephone, Modernism is a cultural condition characterized by a sense of isolation, collapsing social structures, and exploded assumptions. It culminates, we shall see, in the existentialism of the mid-20th century, when such writers as Jean-Paul Sartre claim that all we know for certain is our existence, and Camus movingly argues that a Sisyphean life of struggle—regardless of its outcome or ultimate goal—must be its own reward.

For all of their attention to Modernism and the historical contexts of modern literature, the lectures never lose sight of their primary object: the richness, complexity, and literary brilliance of the works under discussion. To raise the curtain on each author, every lecture begins with a quotation that exemplifies or encapsulates his or her creative power: a quotation typically plucked from the middle of a major work, then carefully scrutinized for its meaning in context, its implications for the work as a whole, and its impact on the reader. After backing up to sketch the author’s early life and explain what he or she brought to the writing of the work first quoted from, the lecture returns to that work and reexamines it. In general, the lectures aim to place each author in the framework of a
specific historical period, to sketch the intellectual and literary influences that shaped him or her, and to link the authors with one another. But just as important, each lecture aims to show what sort of excitement, surprise, and revelation each author can deliver to the reader.
Lecture Seventy-Three

Henry James

Scope: Born in New York City but extensively educated in Europe, Henry James wrote a series of novels that chiefly aim to dramatize the interaction of American energy and innocence with the sophisticated but often duplicitous culture of the old European world. In *The Portrait of a Lady*, a young American woman of limited means is adopted by a wealthy and eccentric aunt, taken to England, courted in vain by two extremely eligible men, and left with a fortune by her wealthy uncle. Free of any obligation to marry, free to make her whole life a project of self-realization in the garden of European culture, she marries an expatriate American whose years of living abroad have seemingly endowed him with the best taste in the world. Isabel’s rude awakening to the true nature of her husband illustrates the complexity of James’s treatment of the relation between the new world and the old.

Outline

I. Isabel’s insistence on doing what she chooses and judging everything for herself exemplifies her spirit of independence.
   A. She rejects two highly eligible suitors.
      1. Shortly after settling with her aunt and uncle in England, she rejects a marriage proposal from a fabulously wealthy English lord.
      2. She also rejects an American businessman who crosses the ocean to make his proposal.
   B. Though she recalls in some ways the heroine of Jane Austen’s *Pride and Prejudice*, she differs from Elizabeth Bennet in one crucial respect.
      1. Like Elizabeth, she speaks her mind fearlessly.
      2. Like Elizabeth, she is not afraid to reject proposals.
      3. Unlike Elizabeth, she does not wish to marry anyone at all.
   C. In refusing to marry anyone, Isabel overhauls the plot of romance.
      1. Courted by a handsome, wealthy English lord, she feels like a romantic heroine.
      2. But she rejects marriage in order to fulfill herself by roaming freely through the old world of Europe.

II. Born in New York but extensively educated in Europe, Henry James set out in his novels to treat the experience of Americans living abroad.
   A. His background and early education prepared him to treat the international theme.
      1. Born to wealth in New York City, he was privately educated there until age 12.
      2. After six years of study and travel abroad with his parents, he started writing stories and reviews.
      3. In 1876, he settled in London and started writing a series of novels about Americans in Europe.
   B. Although many of his international novels have male protagonists, James soon discovered the advantages of organizing them around the experience of a woman.
      1. Such novels as *The American* and *The Ambassadors* revolve around the experiences of American men.
      2. But the great success of his short story “Daisy Miller” in 1878 led James to write more about American women.
      3. In “Daisy Miller,” he raised the question he further pursues in *Portrait*: What will a free-spirited American woman do in the old European world of high culture and sometimes low intrigue?

III. In rejecting Warburton, Isabel Archer takes a major step beyond the self-assertive heroines who came before her.
   A. Unlike Dorothea Brooke of George Eliot’s *Middlemarch*, she has no desire to serve a great cause or a great man.
      1. Dorothea rejects a man because he can’t satisfy her spiritual aspirations.
      2. But she marries a clergyman to help him with his book.
      3. Isabel seeks only “a general impression of life.”
B. Isabel is given enough money to live completely on her own, without having to work or find a husband to support her.
   1. Unlike her friend Henrietta, Isabel never holds a job of any kind.
   2. When her uncle dies, he leaves her a fortune big enough to support her for the rest of her life.
   3. Given such freedom, the novel asks of Isabel, “What will she do?”

IV. What she does depends on what she sees and how she interprets her relation to others.
   A. Unlike George Eliot, James makes one character his center of consciousness.
      1. In novels such as Eliot’s *Middlemarch*, an omniscient narrator tells the story from a variety of perspectives.
      2. But James tells Isabel’s story chiefly from her point of view.
   B. Though Ralph Touchett claims to be fundamentally American, his leisurely life presents a striking alternative to the American work ethic, and thus sets Henrietta’s view of him against Isabel’s.
      1. Like his father, who has no wish to “disamericanize” himself, Ralph claims to be still an American, even after years of living abroad.
      2. Though his idleness appalls Henrietta, who works hard as a journalist and prides herself on her industry, she is little more than a gossip columnist.
         a. Ironically, she personifies the kind of writer James himself chose not to be.
         b. Eschewing the quest for gossip that newspapers want and Henrietta avidly collects, James sought to represent the “inner life” of Americans abroad.
      3. While Henrietta scorns Ralph as an idler and deplores his influence on Isabel, Isabel admires him as a cosmopolite—a citizen of the world.

V. After seeing Isabel reject her suitors, Ralph does everything he can to encourage her independence.
   A. Isabel rejects Warburton because she feels that she cannot be part of his “system.”
      1. She feels that she has a system of her own.
      2. Even though she knows that 19 out of 20 women would have taken his offer, she feels her identity threatened by it.
   B. Though Henrietta worries about where Isabel is going with her life, Isabel is determined to choose her fate or, paradoxically, to accept her fate.
      1. After rejecting both of her suitors, Isabel is excited by her power.
      2. Dismissing Henrietta’s warnings, she is determined to go her own way.
      3. But she admits that she can’t escape her fate—or unhappiness.
   C. Greatly impressed by Isabel’s independence, Ralph gives her the financial means to exercise it.
      1. Because he’s dying of tuberculosis, he persuades his father to leave her a fortune.
      2. He hopes only to live long enough to see what Isabel will do.

VI. Thus freed of all obligations, Isabel is dangerously captivated by two expatriate Americans who seem to her supremely cultivated.
   A. Madame Merle enchants her.
      1. Though born in Brooklyn, she’s been thoroughly Europeanized and seems a paragon of social perfection.
      2. On meeting her at the Touchetts’ house, Isabel is enchanted with her.
      3. Speaking slightingly of Ralph, she contrives to make herself Isabel’s new mentor.
   B. She leads Isabel into the hands of Osmond, who charms her purely by his taste.
      1. Introduced to Osmond—another expatriate American—by Madame Merle, Isabel is drawn to him precisely because he has nothing but taste.
      2. Unlike Warburton and Goodwood, he’s “a perfect nonentity” by conventional standards, which makes her want to help him with her money.
   C. Only after her marriage to Osmond does she learn his true nature.
      1. Too late, she learns that his superficially cultivated world is a fallen and corrupt garden ruled by his egotism.
      2. She learns that he will do everything to keep her trapped.
VII. Having come to Europe in quest of life, experience, and culture, Isabel succumbs to the ideal of taste; only then she discovers that to endure the treachery of the old world, she will need all the moral strength she brought with her from the new one.

Essential Reading:
Leon Edel, *Henry James: A Life*.

Supplementary Reading:

Questions to Consider:
1. Given Isabel’s intelligence, why does she fail to see the true character of Osmond before she agrees to marry him?
2. Does Henrietta Stackpole offer us anything more than comic relief?
Lecture Seventy-Four
Joseph Conrad

Scope: Born in Poland, Conrad went to sea in his late teens, learned English in his early 20s, started writing fiction in English at about the age of 30, then settled down to live in England and produce the novels that would make his name. This lecture focuses on a short novel called *Heart of Darkness*, first published in 1899, which is based on Conrad’s experiences in the Congo and on the Congo River in 1890. In Conrad’s story, a Belgian company that trades with African natives for ivory is represented by a superficially eloquent and high-minded agent named Kurtz, who supposedly personifies the company’s ambition to civilize and enlighten the natives. The story is narrated by Marlow, who recalls hearing about Kurtz and developing a great curiosity to see how this would-be paragon of wisdom will conduct himself among the natives—with no other white man to check his impulses. When he finally reaches Kurtz in the heart of the jungle, Marlow discovers that the true heart of darkness lies within the insane, murderous rapacity of Kurtz himself.

Outline

I. Telling the story of a voyage up the Congo River in *Heart of Darkness*, Marlow presents himself as a man bursting with curiosity but also deeply bewildered.
   A. In childhood, maps fired his imagination.
      1. He wanted to explore the world.
      2. Blank spaces on the map fascinated him.
      3. The blankest space on the map was, paradoxically, “a place of darkness” in Africa.
   B. While listening to an agent scorn the idealistic aims of Kurtz, Marlow wonders at the inscrutable immensity of the forest.
      1. The muteness of the jungle mystifies him.
      2. He wonders whether or not mere men can “handle that big dumb thing.”

II. By the time he wrote *Heart of Darkness*, Conrad had become “a Polish nobleman, cased in British tar.”
   A. Born in Poland as Józef Teodor Konrad Korzeniowski, he was educated largely by his father, then placed with various guardians—most importantly, his Uncle Tadeusz.
   B. Though his family was descended on both sides from Polish aristocracy, Conrad’s childhood was complicated by the exile of his father (who took the family with him) and the early death of his mother.
   C. In spite of these hardships and a series of illnesses, Józef learned a great deal from his father, a highly literate man who may even have introduced him to English.
   D. After the death of his father when Józef was not yet 12, he was placed with a series of guardians, leading up to the most important of all: his Uncle Tadeusz, who bankrolled the boy for many years.

III. Starting his life at sea just before he turned 17, Conrad rose through the ranks to become a master mariner and learned English at sea before starting to write fiction.
   A. While based for several years in Marseilles, France, he worked on a series of voyages in French ships, spent money recklessly, and at the age of 20 tried to take his own life.
      1. After losing nearly 4,000 francs and finding no job, he shot himself in the chest.
      2. Luckily, he survived and was promptly cared for by his uncle.
      3. In spite of all his faults, his uncle believed that he might become “a real man.”
   B. In the summer of 1878, he went to work on an English schooner and started learning English.
   C. By 1895, he had become a master mariner, quit the life of the sea, and established himself as a British writer.
      1. At age 29, he qualified as a master mariner, became a British subject, and started writing fiction.
      2. Three years later, he started work on his first novel.
      3. In 1895, two years after he quit the sea, *Almayer’s Folly* appeared under his new pen name, Joseph Conrad.
IV. Conrad’s experience in the Congo in 1890 laid the groundwork for *Heart of Darkness*.

A. Like his character Marlow, Conrad as a boy hoped that he could explore the unknown territory of Africa when he grew up.

B. As a young man in 1890, Conrad voyaged by steamboat to Stanley Falls, the highest navigable point on the Congo River, where the Belgian company that employed him ran a trading center for allegedly noble purposes.
   1. Supposedly, King Leopold II of Belgium aimed to liberate the Congo natives from enslavement by Arabs and to civilize them.
   2. The Belgians actually sought to colonize the Congo, monopolize its trade, and exploit its resources.
   3. But in Conrad’s story, Kurtz fascinates Marlow because—by reputation at least—he promises to “redeem” the sordid enterprise of conquest by acting on his “moral ideas.”

C. During his own time in the Congo, Conrad quickly discovered that there was nothing noble about the Belgians’ work there.
   1. He was ravaged by sickness for much of his time there.
   2. Even when healthy, he loathed most of the people he met for their greed, stupidity, and duplicity.
   3. He bitterly regretted going to the Congo,
   4. He deplored the clumsiness of the natives.

V. Though Conrad’s ignorant contempt for native rituals has provoked the charge that he is racist, his story chiefly aims to expose the hypocrisy of European colonizers.

A. Although Marlow—like Conrad himself—affirms the humanity of African natives, he believes they display a primitive state of humanity.
   1. The “prehistoric” men he saw on a riverbank struck him as “not being inhuman.”
   2. Embodying “truth stripped of its cloak of time,” they manifest the primitive condition from which—according to Darwin—civilized humans evolved.

B. Conrad’s treatment of the natives in his story has provoked the charge that he is racist.
   1. The natives never speak a language that is said to be comprehensible.
   2. Marlow makes no effort to understand tribal culture and at one point calls native rituals fiendish.

C. But Conrad chiefly aims to expose the savagery latent in “civilized” men.
   1. In the natives, primitivism can take the form of an exhilarating vitality.
   2. But the underside of this wild vitality is the uninhibited savagery of murderous aggression.
   3. Marlow discovers this kind of savagery in Kurtz.
   4. By exposing the savagery of Kurtz, his story implicitly attacks the whole imperial project and the globalizing assumption that “developed” nations are uniquely equipped to civilize the world.

VI. Taking a steamer up the Congo to the Inner Station (the fictional counterpart of Stanley Falls), Marlow learns that Kurtz’s grand design of civilizing the natives has somehow led him to barbarous acts.

A. While the natives are pitiable and at times touching, Kurtz is powerful.
   1. For the most part, Marlow treats the natives not as brutes but as victims of white colonizers and even, at one point, partners in Marlow’s own work.
   2. But in the eyes of Marlow, Kurtz combines the greatest hope of achieving good with the greatest capacity for doing evil.

B. Before meeting Kurtz, Marlow comes to think of him as remarkable.
   1. He sends in as much ivory as all the other agents put together.
   2. He supposedly combines the sensitivity of an artist with the learning of a scholar and the eloquence of an orator.
   3. In spite of another agent’s contempt for Kurtz’s idealistic aims, Marlow wants to see what will become of them in the jungle.

C. Though Kurtz controls others chiefly by his “civilized” eloquence, which is underscored by the voice of the narrator in this story, Kurtz reveals the savagery beneath his eloquence.
   1. While Dickens’s Pip writes the story of *Great Expectations*, Marlow tells his story to listeners that he can see and hear.
2. In his report on savage customs, Kurtz writes at length about what should be done for the African natives but undercuts his own grandiloquence at the end with the blunt exclamation: “Exterminate all the brutes!”

3. When he at last reaches Kurtz, Marlow finds that he has become insatiably hungry for ivory and power, that he has “taken a high seat among the devils of the land.”

VII. In lying to Kurtz’s intended about his last words, Marlow implicitly confirms that no one else can know “your own reality.”

A. Kurtz’s final words—“The horror! The horror!”—may be read as his own commentary on man’s capacity to delude himself, to sabotage his own noblest ideals, and to undo the work of civilization even as he claims to be spreading it.

B. But Marlow considers the task of telling the whole truth about Kurtz to be virtually impossible.
   1. He tells Kurtz’s intended that his final words were her name.
   2. In the middle of telling the story, he says, “we live, as we dream, alone.”

C. Marlow’s words on the isolation of the self might be taken as the creed of Modernism.
   1. Modernism challenges the authority of all assumptions and conventions that traditionally regulate our lives and bind us together.
   2. It treats the individual as a creature of radical subjectivity caught up in a sense of unreality or absurdity.
   3. We’ll see more of this condition in the works of Franz Kafka, Virginia Woolf, and Samuel Beckett.

VIII. By telling a story about a “civilized” man who discovers his own barbarity while cut off from the support systems of his culture, Conrad initiates us into the world of Modernism.

Essential Reading:
———, *Collected Letters*, edited by Frederick R. Karl and Laurence Davies.

Supplementary Reading:
———, *Conrad in Perspective: Essays on Art and Fidelity*.

Questions to Consider:
1. In one of the essays included in Robert Kimbrough’s edition of the *Heart of Darkness*, the Nigerian writer Chinua Achebe argues that Conrad’s novel proves him “a thoroughgoing racist.” Given the passages that Achebe quotes to support his point, do you agree with him?
2. How does Conrad treat women in this story?
Lecture Seventy-Five
William Butler Yeats

Scope: Born in Dublin, Yeats was raised by turns in London, Dublin, and his parents’ native county of Sligo, in northwest Ireland. As a young man, he settled in London, where he launched the first phase of his poetic career. Radiating nostalgia and a fascination with Celtic myth and folklore, Yeats’s early poems seek to reconfirm “the ancient supremacy of the imagination.” Though he soon realized that poetry of this kind was escapist and that he had to shed the “old mythologies” like an old coat, he could never forsake aesthetic ornaments altogether, and like the women of “Adam’s Curse,” he knew that a poet “must labor to be beautiful”—even though labor alone could not ensure either beauty or art. In his plays and theater management, as well as in his poetry, Yeats labored to inspire the Irish through times of bitter conflict with England; much as he hated violence, he saluted the “terrible beauty” of the Easter Rising in 1916, which led, in turn, to the bloody revolution that liberated southern Ireland from British rule. In his late work, Yeats became a visionary struggling to make order out of the “mere anarchy” that he saw loosed upon the world by war.

Outline

I. In “The Lake Isle of Innisfree” (1888), the city-bound Yeats voices nostalgia for his ancestral county of Sligo.
   A. When he conceived the poem, he was 23 and living in London.
      1. Walking through Fleet Street one day, he noticed a little fountain in a shop window.
      2. It reminded him of lake water—specifically of a small island called Innisfree in a lake in County Sligo, Ireland.
      3. He resolves in his poem to go there, build a cabin, plant beans, keep honeybees, and live alone.
   B. Unlike Thoreau in Walden, however, Yeats expresses a mood, not a practical plan of action.
      1. About 40 years earlier, the American writer Henry David Thoreau actually built a cabin on Walden Pond, planted beans, and lived there for more than a year.
      2. Instead of explaining just how the speaker will live on Innisfree, Yeats’s poem expresses a mood of nostalgia—a desire to revisit a place that lies as much within his heart as in a distant lake.
      3. The final words of the poem evoke the ending of a poem by Wordsworth that is likewise filled with yearning.
   C. Rather than actually going to Innisfree himself, Yeats creates a “speaker” who resolves to go in the future, but in the last lines, the tense becomes present and the speaker merges with the poet.
      1. The “speaker” of a poem is a character distinct from the author—as a character in a play is distinct from the playwright.
      2. For much of the poem, the speaker tells us what he will do.
      3. In the final lines, the speaker merges with the poet, who tells us what he feels in time present.

II. After a childhood spent by turns in England and Ireland, Yeats settled in London and launched the first phase of his poetic career by mining Celtic legend and myth.
   A. After a few years of early childhood in London, two years in Sligo, and four years’ schooling in London, Yeats finished his education in Dublin.
   B. Returning to settle in London, he launched the first phase of his poetic career.
      1. Challenging scientific rationalism, his early poems use Celtic myth and legend to reconfirm “the ancient supremacy of imagination.”

III. Though Yeats strove to shed his aesthetic ornaments and move beyond the escapism of his early poetry, he knew that he could not make poetry without some resort to artifice; yet he also realized that labor alone would not produce a great poem.
   A. In “Adam’s Curse” (1902), the poet speaks to Maud Gonne, the love of his life, and meditates on the love and labor demanded by art.
1. Maud Gonne was a beautiful Irish nationalist whom Yeats had known and loved for more than 10 years, but she had repeatedly refused to marry him.

2. The poem explores the paradox that all the labor of poetry is wasted unless the poem sounds improvised and spontaneous.

3. Maud’s sister Kathleen observes that women “must labor to be beautiful.”

4. Just as Adam was cursed, she says, all men and women must toil for anything they seek—including love.

B. But the poet is deeply troubled by the thought that even great labor does not guarantee success in the making of art—or in love.

1. Recalling old lovers who courted ladies with phrases plucked from books, the poet feels that both he and Maud are “weary hearted.”

2. While no fine thing can be made without much laboring, it is equally true that love alone cannot ensure the creation of any fine thing.

IV. When Maud Gonne married another man, Yeats wrote no poetry for five years and buried himself in action—specifically, in founding and managing Dublin’s Abbey Theater.

A. In 1899, he caused a stir with his play *The Countess Kathleen*.

1. Maud Gonne played the title role brilliantly.

2. Her character sells her soul to the devil in order to buy food for the starving poor.

B. Though the play provoked outrage, Yeats did not shrink from lighting more dramatic fires at the Abbey.

1. John Millington Synge’s *Playboy of the Western World* (1907) sparked riots.

2. Yeats denounced the hidebound thinking of the Irish middle classes.

V. Yeats thought his mercenary contemporaries had forsaken old Irish ideals.

A. In “September 1913,” he laments the death of John O’Leary.

1. O’Leary was a great Irish nationalist whom Yeats greatly admired.

2. He was also Yeats’s political mentor.

B. Yeats’s poem ties O’Leary’s death to the death of Irish nationalism.

1. In mourning the death of “Romantic Ireland,” the poem seems to display the nostalgia of Yeats’s early poems—the nostalgia he once put behind him.

2. But instead of flying to the Celtic past, this poem grips the Ireland of the poet’s own time in gritty, mostly monosyllabic words.

3. Rather than taking us back to the ideal glory of the past, the poem confronts the grim reality of the present.

VI. The blunt language of “September 1913” exemplifies Yeats’s poetry in his “naked” second phase.

A. In “A Coat,” he speaks of his earlier poetry as a coat that had to be discarded.

1. He had once used “old mythologies” to make his poetry.

2. But another Irish writer named George Moore ridiculed his Celtic ornaments, which is what Yeats means by saying “the fools caught” his embroidered Celtic “coat.”

3. Now the poet resolves to walk “naked.”

B. Ironically, however, Yeats’s ambition to walk naked of myth recalls a passage in which Blake evokes the oldest myth we have in Western culture.

1. In one of Blake’s “prophecies,” the outbreak of the French Revolution prompts him to say he is stripping off his old beliefs, casting off old doctrine in order to proclaim “the return of Adam into Paradise.”

2. Blake thus evokes the Book of Genesis and its ancient myth.

VII. Even though “A Coat” may evoke an ancient myth, it also marks Yeats’s entry into the world of Modernism.

A. Modernism spotlights the isolated self and strips away layers of sentiment and abstraction.

1. In the fiction of such writers as Conrad, Faulkner, Kafka, and Woolf, Modernism spotlights the isolated self cut off from traditional beliefs and institutions.

2. In poetry, Modernism spotlights the naked object stripped of rumination and sentiment.

3. Yeats came to poetic Modernism through the urging of the young Ezra Pound.
B. Modernism in poetry also shucked the corset of regular versification.
   1. Some Modernist poetry is written in free verse.
   2. Though Yeats never went this far, he definitely loosened the stays of rhyme and meter in “A Coat.”

C. Reinforcing the Modernist focus on naked objects, Yeats’s poetry now grapples directly with the political upheaval of his own time.
   1. In the spring of 1916, he was electrified by the Easter Rising, when militant Irish nationalists announced the birth of the Irish Republic.
   2. They held out for six days before surrendering to British forces, who executed their leaders.
   3. Though Yeats hated violence, he could not help saluting the boldness of the rebels in his poem “Easter 1916.”
   4. He firmly believed that Britain could not kill the “terrible beauty” of the Irish revolution.

VIII. Frustrated by his failure to win the hand of either Maud Gonne or her daughter, Yeats wrote “The Wild Swans at Coole.”

A. Written in 1916, the poem was inspired by the swans at Coole Park.
   1. Coole Park was the country estate of Lady Gregory.
   2. She was his longtime friend and patron.

B. Seeing a large flock of swans paddling around the pond at Coole Park, the 51-year-old poet painfully recalls an earlier experience.
   1. He first saw and counted them there 19 years earlier.
   2. He remembers the sight of them suddenly flying up and wheeling in great broken rings.
   3. Now, the persistence of the swans’ vitality makes him feel that he has totally changed since he first saw them; he is now heartsick and weary.

IX. But at this nadir of emotional exhaustion, Yeats contrived to rejuvenate himself and his imagination.

A. In 1917, he married a woman less than half his age, George Hyde-Lees.
   1. She introduced him to “automatic writing,” wherein the hand is supposedly moved by forces beyond control of the conscious mind.
   2. Inspired by this method of writing, Yeats created a system of symbolism, and his poetry gained a new imaginative power.

B. Though he bought a tower and considered the artist as a being apart from the masses, he did not return to the Celtic myths of his first phase; he used his newfound vision to see the present world in all its rage and chaos and to seize the meaning of its moment in the great cycles of history.
   1. Refusing to become a propagandist for any side, Yeats believed that the poet makes poetry out of a quarrel with himself.
   2. To make poetry in a time of violence, he had to quarrel with his own impulse to join the fight for Irish independence.
   3. In “The Second Coming,” written in 1920, he reads this conflict as a sign that a great cycle of history—a “gyre”—is coming to an end.
   4. As prophesied by John’s Book of Revelation, the second coming of Christ is a time of destruction and renewal heralded by the advent of a gigantic beast—the beast of the apocalypse.

C. The Byzantium poems and such poems as “The Circus Animals’ Desertion” further demonstrate the power of Yeats’s vision in the later years of his life.
   1. In “Sailing to Byzantium,” (1927), Yeats imagines leaving behind the sensual music of “these dying generations” and losing himself in “the artifice of eternity”—works of mosaic art.
   2. In “The Circus Animals’ Desertion,” he chides himself for the vanity of his poetic metaphors and freshly resolves to school himself in the gritty facts of life here on earth.

X. In the body of work Yeats has left us, he reveals the undying life of his self-renewing imagination.

Essential Reading:
Supplementary Reading:

Questions to Consider:
1. Taken together, what do “September 1913” and “Easter 1916” tell us about Yeats’s response to Irish nationalism?
2. What do Yeats’s late poems reveal about his conception of himself?
Lecture Seventy-Six
Marcel Proust

Scope: Son of a distinguished Parisian doctor, nurtured by his highly literate mother and grandmother, Marcel Proust started writing in his teens and at 24 produced his first book, *Pleasures and Days* (1896). But not until he was nearly 40 did he start work on his semi-autobiographical masterwork of fiction, *In Search of Lost Time*. In *Swann’s Way*, the first of its many volumes, the deeply introspective narrator—based on Proust himself—meditates at length on memories of his childhood, especially on his sojourns at the house of his grandparents in the fictional town of Combray. There, he remembers, he spent evenings waiting anxiously in his bedroom for his mother to come up and kiss him goodnight; there too he first encountered a seemingly inconsequential friend of his grandparents named Charles Swann, who would later be known to the narrator as one of the most elegant members of Parisian high society. But for all his social success, Swann will also prove to be a man of deep sympathy and sensitivity, which will endear him to the narrator even as it distinguishes him from the grand, aristocratic family of the Guermantes. Swann’s way, therefore, will sharply diverge from the Guermantes way.

Outline

I. In the first volume of Proust’s *In Search of Lost Time*, the passage on the taste of the madeleine shows the narrator at his most introspective.
   A. The passage explains how the taste of a madeleine dipped in tea recalled for the narrator an earlier experience that he had in his childhood.
      1. He first tasted a tea-dipped madeleine while staying at the house of his grandparents in the country town of Combray.
      2. On tasting a tea-dipped madeleine in Paris, where he lived with his parents for most of the year, he felt a delicious sensation—but at first couldn’t explain what made it so thrilling.
      3. Eventually, he remembered where he first tasted a tea-dipped madeleine and with this memory came the whole town of Combray from his cup of tea.
   B. The passage is part of a section in which the narrator recalls the drama of his bedtime at Combray.
      1. As a child, the narrator craved a goodnight kiss from his mother before going to bed.
      2. One night, he is dismayed when his mother sends him off to bed without a kiss because she and his father are occupied with dinner guests.
      3. Though he makes his mother furious by waylaying her in the hall when she finally comes up to bed, his father responds with surprising sympathy; he asks her to comfort him by spending the night in his room.
   C. The narrator’s journey into his past recalls and reworks the rich tradition of autobiographical narrative.
      1. Like Wordsworth in *The Prelude*, Proust uses the imagery of depth to represent the past that he seeks to recover.
      2. But Proust shows how a material object can lead us back to a visual memory that is otherwise irretrievably lost.
      3. Also, Proust’s experience with the madeleine differs from recognition because the taste of it stirs him for reasons that at first he cannot fathom.

II. When Proust started writing *Swann’s Way*, he was a fashionable Parisian of middle age who had so far displayed his talents but had not yet done anything remarkable with them.
   A. Born and raised in Paris by wealthy, cultured parents, he was the literary equivalent of a hothouse flower.
      1. Like Flaubert, he was the son of a distinguished doctor.
      2. His highly literate mother and grandmother carefully supervised his early education.
   B. In his teens, he started writing and meeting a number of distinguished people.
      1. He wrote for school magazines at the Lycée Condorcet.
      2. Through the mother of a school friend, he met a galaxy of Parisian stars, including a fashionable man named Charles Haas, who would later be his model for the titular hero of *Swann’s Way*.  

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3. Proust studied Haas assiduously.

C. Up to his late 30s, Proust worked hard while masquerading as a dilettante.
   1. His first book, a collection of sketches, criticism, and word-portraits called *Pleasures and Days*,
      sounds trifling.
   2. But before it appeared, he had already started work on his first novel, *Jean Santeuil*, which he set aside
      after writing more than 1,500 pages.
   3. Though unpublished in Proust’s lifetime, this work’s treatment of such subjects as jealousy and self-
      absorption anticipates some of the themes of *In Search of Lost Time*.

III. Written in a cork-lined bedroom at his Parisian apartment, Proust’s great novel reworks the events of his past
    life and the personalities of many people he knew.

   A. Proust wrote in a cork-lined bedroom because he was a longtime sufferer from asthma.
      1. He nearly died of asthma at age 9.
      2. He craved the security of enclosed, insulated spaces.

   B. Starting with the narrator, who is several times identified as Marcel, virtually all his main characters spring
      from figures that Proust knew.
      1. Swann is based on Charles Haas.
      2. The narrator’s scandalous Uncle Adolphe is based on Proust’s great uncle Louis.
      3. Swann’s daughter Gilberte is based on a girl that Proust loved in his schoolboy days.
      4. The Baron de Charlus derives from a titled, literary, homosexual friend of Proust named Count Robert
         de Montesquiou.
      5. Oriane, Duchess of Guermantes, is based on a beautiful, aristocratic young woman with whom Proust
         was briefly infatuated.

   C. In *Swann’s Way*, Proust remakes the people, places, and episodes of his past.
      1. The young woman who led Proust to create the character of Oriane struck him as irritating and
         coquettish—nothing like the sparkling, witty figure of Proust’s novel.
      2. The fictional town of Combray combines the Parisian suburb of Auteuil and the little town of Illiers.
      3. Though the madeleine story has some basis in Proust’s own experience, what little Marcel actually
         dipped in his tea was a bit of dry toast, and all he linked to the taste of it was the memory of morning
         visits to his grandfather.
      4. In replacing the memory of the grandfather with the memory of the whole town of Combray, Proust
         brilliantly prefigures the detailed account of Combray that follows.

IV. Combray bulks so large in a novel about Parisian society because it evokes a great deal of the narrator’s
    childhood and introduces him to the difference between Swann’s way and the Guermantes way.

   A. Combray is inseparable from the childhood of the narrator, whose whole life is just as important as Parisian
      society in the world of the novel.

   B. Combray offers two walks—two quite different “ways” of exploring its surroundings.
      1. To walk by way of Swann’s house is to experience the beauty of a plain.
      2. To walk in the direction of the estate of the Guermantes, which later proves to be the grandest family
         in the whole novel, is to see a typical river landscape.

   C. As the narrator grows up to follow the ways of the world, he will come to know both of these ways in a
      social sense.
      1. He will come to know Swann’s way of life, especially his love life.
      2. He will see how the Guermantes family uses and abuses its immense social power.
      3. He will see the two ways joined when Swann’s daughter Gilberte marries a member of the Guermantes
         clan.

V. Though *In Search of Lost Time* is an immense and richly complicated novel, a good deal can be learned about it
   by closely reading the first section of *Swann’s Way*.

   A. Though it may seem soporific on first reading, the first section represents an experience that most of us
      have every night of our lives and that plays a major part at the end of Joyce’s *Ulysses*.
      1. Before sleeping, we usually let our thoughts roam.
2. Now and then, they revert to our past.
3. In the last chapter of Joyce’s *Ulysses*, Molly Bloom reviews her whole life while lying in bed.

**B.** The very first sentence of the novel illustrates the disorienting effect of sleep.
1. On the one hand, the first sentence seems to refer to an extended period; on the other hand, it seems to designate a particular point in time.
2. The jerky effect of the sentence plunges us into the layers of time that make up the narrator’s mental world.
3. The “I” of the sentence is a grown man reflecting on some earlier period of his adult life, and he realizes that his sense of identity is bound to his recollection of where he slept at various times of his life.

**C.** But in this first section of the book, the memory of his bedroom at Combray trumps all others.
1. It’s tied to his memory of waiting anxiously for his mother’s goodnight kiss.
2. It’s tied to his earliest memories of Swann, who plays different roles in Combray and Paris.
   a. In Combray, the narrator’s parents considered him a witty but inconsequential man of no particular social importance.
   b. But the narrator later learns that Swann is one of the most fashionable members of high Parisian society.
   c. Most important, the Swann whom the narrator comes to know is precisely the kind of man who would understand a little boy’s desperate longing for a kiss from his mother.

**VI.** In this opening section of the first volume of Proust’s great novel, Swann emerges as a man of many sides.

**Essential Reading:**
Marcel Proust, *Swann’s Way*, translated with an introduction and notes by Lydia Davis.

**Supplementary Reading:**

**Questions to Consider:**
1. What evidence of his wit does Swann display to the narrator’s family?
2. What does Swann’s obsession with Odette reveal about him?
Lecture Seventy-Seven  

James Joyce

Scope: Born in Dublin as the eldest son of a large family that gradually sank from solvency to poverty as he grew up, Joyce was well educated in a series of Jesuit schools that are represented in his autobiographical first novel, *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*. Though young Joyce was spunky, foul-mouthed, and athletic, he represents his boyhood self—here named Stephen Dedalus—as a delicate, vulnerable, innocent victim of bullying schoolmates and one tyrannical teacher who beats him unjustly. After successfully protesting against this treatment, Stephen grows into adolescence, has his first sexual experience in the arms of a prostitute, turns back to the arms of Holy Mother Church, then discovers his vocation—symbolized by the vision of his namesake, the mythic Dedalus, the fabulous winged artificer of ancient Crete. Inspired by this vision, Stephen resolves to take literary flight beyond the nets of language, religion, and nationality and “to forge in the smithy of my soul the uncreated conscience of my race.”

Outline

I. In the first chapter of *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, the passage describing the beating of Stephen exemplifies the contrast between the frail, vulnerable innocence of the boy and the brutality of the world around him—which he successfully challenges.
   
   A. Before the episode, Stephen has been knocked down on the cinderpath.
      1. As a result, his glasses have been shattered.
      2. For this reason, his Latin teacher has excused him from writing with the rest of the class.
   
   B. Rejecting his excuses, Father Dolan beats him for being idle.
      1. Though Stephen explains why he can’t work, Father Dolan suspects him of playing a trick.
      2. He calls him a loafer and beats him.
      3. Stung with pain and humiliation, Stephen gets his first bitter taste of injustice.
   
   C. Unlike Rousseau, Stephen successfully protests against being beaten.
      1. In *The Confessions*, Rousseau recalls being mercilessly beaten in childhood for refusing to confess to something he didn’t do.
      2. After Father Dolan threatens to beat Stephen every time he fails to do his lessons, Stephen stops the beatings by protesting to the rector of the school.

II. By the time *Portrait* appeared, Joyce was fully committed to the life of writing.
   
   A. Born in Dublin, he was educated in a series of schools run by Jesuit priests.
      1. Though his family sank into debt as he grew older, Joyce received a good education.
      2. He made his way partly by winning prizes and scholarships.
      3. He attended the same schools that the fictional Stephen Dedalus attends in *Portrait*—right up through University College.
   
   B. On January 7, 1904, he wrote the autobiographical essay that became the germ of *Portrait*.
      1. In the years that followed, it was first rewritten as a bulky, unfinished story called *Stephen Hero*.
      2. He then cut and reshaped it into the five-chapter *Portrait*.
   
   C. Meanwhile, Joyce settled in Europe with Nora Barnacle and produced other work.
      1. After meeting Nora on a Dublin street in June 1904, he eloped with her to the Continent four months later.
      2. They settled in Trieste, Italy, where Joyce taught English and where they lived for most of the next 10 years.
      3. During this time, he finished *Portrait*, published a volume of poetry, completed the stories in *Dubliners* (published in 1914), and started writing *Ulysses*.

III. Taking its place in the great tradition of autobiographical writing, Joyce’s *Portrait* closely follows the events of his own life.
   
   A. Like Wordsworth’s *Prelude*, this is the story of the making of a writer at a time of political ferment.
1. Starting with his infancy, Wordsworth tells how he came to write poetry as the French Revolution was breaking out.

2. Starting likewise in infancy, Joyce tells how Stephen—his fictive self—comes to be a writer as Ireland was struggling to free itself from the British Empire.

**B.** Resenting British imperialism but also distrusting Irish nationalism, Stephen yearns to fly past the nets of language, religion, and nationality.

1. As the mythic son of Dedalus, the winged artificer of ancient Crete, Stephen seeks a deeply personal kind of freedom.
2. Though raised as a Catholic, he renounces the faith at about age 19—as Joyce himself did.
3. Unlike Wordsworth, Stephen breathes no patriotic fever for his native land—or for Irish nationalism.

**IV.** But Joyce reworks the events of his life to create a carefully organized story.

**A.** Small, weak, and vulnerable, Stephen scarcely resembles the spunky, foul-mouthed, athletic boy that was the young James Joyce.

1. Joyce’s story requires a boyhood of sensitive innocence.
2. Punished by a tyrannical priest, Joyce’s Stephen quietly triumphs over injustice.
3. Then he becomes a young man bold enough to declare his independence.

**B.** Though Joyce himself had a number of friends, Stephen is represented as a brooding loner.

1. Like the prophets of old, Stephen feels singled out for his artistic mission.
2. Joyce’s brother scarcely appears in the novel and his friends become Stephen’s rivals and adversaries.
3. Stephen feels that he’s not really a part of his family.
4. He gradually turns from his biological father to his mythic father, Dedalus, for inspiration.

**C.** He feels that he must create his own order in his art.

1. He cannot bear to be part of any order or community.
2. He won’t sign a peace petition or join the Irish nationalists.
3. He won’t even learn the Irish language.

**V.** Stephen distrusts Irish nationalists because Ireland has repeatedly betrayed its own champions.

**A.** The Catholic priests of Ireland denounced Charles Stewart Parnell.

1. Parnell was a great champion of home rule for Ireland in the late 19th century.
2. But the scandal of Parnell’s affair with a married woman roused the Catholic priests against him, and he was politically ruined.
3. His fall provokes a heated debate on Christmas day at the Dedalus house during Stephen’s childhood.

**B.** Explaining to Davin why he won’t support the nationalists, Stephen echoes Mr. Casey’s Christmas speech about Ireland’s betrayal of its champions.

1. Stephen scathingly calls Ireland “the old sow that eats her farrow.”
2. He thus recalls the biblical Stephen, who—before he was stoned by order of the Jewish elders—argued that the Jewish people had repeatedly rejected their own prophets—right up to Christ.

**VI.** Like the biblical Stephen, a man of eloquence, Joyce’s Stephen aims to master language—in his case, the English language.

**A.** His response to the opening words of the story shows his creative mind at work early.

1. Language instantly takes a place in his mind.
2. He sings a song that creatively transposes the words he has heard.
3. He uses language to create a world around him.

**B.** Words can be frightening, mystifying, or stimulating.

1. Such words as “lazy, idle loafer” and “Foetus” menace him.
2. Such phrases as “Tower of Ivory” mystify him until they stimulate him to discover their meaning.

**VII.** Though Eileen’s hands and hair suggest the Virgin Mary, they also initiate a process that brings Stephen to sexual experience.

**A.** Approaching his first sexual experience, Stephen feels a paradoxical combination of reverence, aggression, and passivity.

1. He envisions the moment as a “holy encounter” wherein weakness and timidity will fall from him.
2. He sees himself as a sexual aggressor.
3. He sees himself as the passive, virginal object of lust.
4. At the moment he’s taken by a prostitute, he feels like a child in the arms of its mother.

B. The sexual experience that marks the end of chapter 2 takes its place in a traditional pattern of innocence, fall into sin, and repentance.
   1. As we move from chapter 1 to chapter 2, Stephen moves from boyhood innocence to lust.
   2. But in chapter 3, after hearing a hair-raising sermon on the tortures of the damned, he decides to confess his sins and take communion, thus returning to the order of the Catholic faith.

C. Though this sequence roughly reenacts the pattern of Augustine’s Confessions, Joyce’s novel evokes this pattern only to break it in pieces by creating a new religion of art.
   1. Even after repenting and confessing his sins, Stephen declares in chapter 3 that he “will not serve” the Church.
   2. Instead, turning Catholic ritual into metaphors for artistic creation, he will become “a priest of eternal imagination,” transforming ordinary experience into lasting art.
   3. For instance, at the end of chapter 4, he sees a wading girl as “a strange and beautiful seabird”—a “mortal” version of the Virgin Mary.
   4. She provokes in him an “aesthetic” emotion, raised above desire and loathing.
   5. When Stephen hears his mythic name “Dedalus” shouted by other young men, he hears it as a prophecy of his artistic career.

VIII. The mythic Dedalus symbolizes Stephen’s aspiration to soar as an artist. Having begun with a picture of his biological father reading to him, he ends by invoking his mythical father—father of the artistic identity he has discovered within himself.

Essential Reading:
James Joyce, A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man, edited by Chester G. Anderson.
———, Ulysses, edited by Hans Walter Gabler with Wolfhard Steppe and Claus Melchior.

Supplementary Reading:
Richard Ellmann, James Joyce, rev. ed.
Don Gifford with Robert J. Seidman, Ulysses Annotated: Notes for James Joyce’s Ulysses.

Questions to Consider:
1. Do you find Stephen Dedalus consistently likeable? Why or why not?
2. How does the Stephen presented in the first three chapters of Ulysses differ from the Stephen depicted in Portrait?
Lecture Seventy-Eight
Franz Kafka

Scope: Born in Prague as the eldest son of an upwardly mobile Jewish couple, Kafka was rigorously educated in German, studied law, and went to work for an insurance company, where he rose to become vice secretary of the company at age 30—just before starting work on his most famous novel, *The Trial*. In this novel, he tells the story of a highly respectable young banker named Josef K, who turns 30 on the day the novel begins but, for no apparent reason, is also arrested on that day. As he struggles in vain to learn why he has been arrested, when he will be tried, and what he can do to extricate himself from the tangle of endless delays in the hearing of his case, Josef exemplifies the Modernist focus on the isolated self, cut off from all traditional sources of support—emotional, institutional, legal, moral, or spiritual. Helpless, vulnerable, and finally compelled to submit to execution without ever learning what crime he has committed, he resembles, in some ways, the pathetic title figure of T. S. Eliot’s “The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock.” In the dreamlike world of Kafka’s novel, Josef’s fate reveals how inscrutable, irrational, and implacable the law can be.

Outline

I. In a revealing passage from Kafka’s *The Trial* (first published 1925), a lawyer named Huld tries in vain to dissuade Josef K—the protagonist—from dismissing the lawyer.
   A. By the time this scene takes place, Josef K has become totally frustrated with the lack of progress in his case.
      1. He has been waiting six months for his lawyer to do something.
      2. He decides to dismiss him.
      3. Warning Josef not to be too hasty, Huld shows him how he treats another defendant—the client named Block.
   B. Sitting in bed in his gloomy apartment, Huld summons a client named Block—just to humiliate him.
      1. Block is a grain dealer who has been awaiting trial for more than five years; Huld summons him to teach Josef a lesson in patience.
      2. From the moment he arrives, Huld twists Block like a pretzel.
         a. Though Block comes promptly at his summons, Huld complains that he has come at an inopportune time.
         b. When Huld tells Block that he has discussed his case with a judge, Block begs to know what was said.
         c. Huld crushes Block by telling him the opening bell for his trial hasn’t yet rung.
      3. Seeing that Huld is treating Block like a dog, Josef can’t imagine how this whole performance would impress him with Huld’s concern for his clients.

II. Kafka started writing fiction even as he rose through the ranks of an insurance company.
   A. Born to upwardly mobile Jewish parents, he was rigorously educated in German schools.
      1. He studied law at German University in Prague and earned a doctorate in law in 1906.
      2. Shortly after, he went to work for an insurance company and rose to vice secretary of the company in 1913—the year before he started writing *The Trial*.
   B. Though he seemed, at 30, all ready to follow the script written for him by his bourgeois parents, he could never forget his Jewishness or forsake his ambition to write.
      1. He wrote in a German language salted with Yiddishisms as well as with Czech idioms.
      2. By age 30, he had written several stories and started a novel.

III. Kafka’s first efforts at autobiographical fiction broke down in the face of Modernism.
   A. In earlier examples of fictive autobiography, a young protagonist rebels against one or more authority figures but eventually “grows up” into marriage or a career.
   B. Modernism complicates this process by spotlighting the isolation of the self.
1. Unlike modernity, which is a historical condition defined by technical advances and changes in fashion, Modernism is a way of thinking and feeling that emerged in the first part of the 20th century.
2. It spotlights the isolated self, cut off from all traditional sources of support.
3. Unlike the heroically self-confident Romantic self, the Modernist self is helpless and vulnerable—like the title figure in T. S. Eliot’s “The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock.”
4. Exemplifying the Modernist self, Josef K feels radical subjectivity in a dreamlike world and a wrenching sense of dislocation.
5. As shown by the novels of Joyce and Virginia Woolf, the Modernist self can be lonely, suicidal, or both.

IV. The outbreak of World War I accentuated Kafka’s personal sense of isolation.
A. Politically, Jewish Czechs had no place to go.
   1. Kafka couldn’t qualify for the army and could scarcely have found his identity by fighting for Austria and Germany against Russia and the Serbs.
   2. When the Czechs formed their first republic in 1918, they were virulently anti-Semitic.
B. Though he never went to war, Kafka resembles, in some ways, Septimus Smith, the suicidal war veteran in Virginia Woolf’s Mrs. Dalloway.
   1. Though highly regarded by the company that hired him, Septimus feels suicidally traumatized by the war.
   2. Like Septimus, Kafka was highly regarded by his company but unable to take any solace in marriage and so alienated from bourgeois respectability that he felt drawn to suicide.

V. As an isolated character, Josef shows no real interest in women, but at times an aggressive lust breaks through his respectability.
A. He shows no interest in or concern for his mother or his girlfriend, Elsa.
B. But some of his encounters with women are clearly erotic.
   1. The sexual passages in this novel underscore its Freudian theme—exploration of the unconscious.
   2. Though Josef is outwardly very proper, he pesters a woman who lives next door to him.
      a. Ostensibly to apologize for the disturbance made in her room by the men who came to arrest him, he gets himself invited into her room late at night.
      b. Though she says she’s sure he hasn’t committed any “serious” crime, his treatment of her is hardly proper.
      c. As he finally leaves the room, he seizes and kisses her like a thirsty animal—or a vampire.

VI. Kafka wrote the novel to liberate his own psyche—to portray his dreamlike inner life.
A. The story of Josef resembles a nightmare from which one cannot awake.
   1. It recalls what Conrad’s Marlow said of Kurtz.
   2. Marlow felt that his story of Kurtz was dreamlike in its sense of being “captured by the incredible.”
B. Josef feels radically displaced.
   1. Like an abstract painting, Josef’s world is full of blanks, with no name for the city or any of its monuments.
   2. Courts of inquiry and legal consultations are held in totally unsuitable places, including cramped bedrooms and stuffy attics.
C. Josef’s crime is never specified—merely hinted at.
   1. Unlike Wordsworth and Dickens’s Pip, who both remember feeling guilty for specific reasons, Josef cannot recall doing anything wrong—not the slightest thing.
   2. Yet he comes near to slandering Fraulein Burstner.
   3. Also, even after vowing to “fight corruption in the legal system,” he tries to bribe the flogger into sparing two men who are being flogged because Josef complained of their behavior.
D. Though Josef is obviously flawed, like all human beings, he is victimized by a legal system that indefinitely defers any chance of a fair trial—much less an acquittal.
   1. In Kafka’s vision of the world, guilt is an inescapable part of the human condition.
   2. Kafka himself felt guilty for breaking his engagement with Felice Bauer, disappointing his father, and failing to write at more than a crawl.
VII. Though Josef is nowhere called Jewish, he was conceived by a Jewish writer, and the burden of unspecified
guilt that he bears may signify the guilt that has been placed for centuries on the backs of the Jewish people. In
any case, his fate reveals how inscrutable, irrational, and implacable the law may be.

**Essential Reading:**

**Supplementary Reading:**
Frederick Karl, *Franz Kafka: Representative Man*.

**Questions to Consider:**
1. To what extent does Josef K reflect the life of Kafka himself?
2. What is the role of sex in the legal system portrayed by *The Trial*?
Lecture Seventy-Nine
Virginia Woolf

Scope: Born and raised in London as the daughter of a well-to-do literary critic named Leslie Stephen, educated at home by her parents and governesses, Virginia Woolf started writing as a child. Though periodically attacked by suicidal depression throughout her life, which ended when she drowned herself in 1941, she produced a remarkable body of fiction, essays, and criticism. In Mrs. Dalloway (published 1925), her fourth novel, she tells the story of a day in the life of Clarissa Dalloway, wife of a member of Parliament, who gives a grand party that evening attended by the prime minister. For Clarissa, the day is charged with memories of her earlier self; of her relations with a man named Peter Walsh, who wanted to marry her; and with the irrepressibly vital Sally Seton, who once kissed her passionately. Furthermore, the glittering party is shadowed by the news of a suicide. Incurably traumatized by the war and by the death of a man he loved, a young man named Septimus Smith has thrown himself from a window. Reflecting on this news, Clarissa feels at once the emptiness of her life and the daring of the young man’s death.

Outline

I. In Mrs. Dalloway, Clarissa’s disappointment at the news that her husband is lunching out reveals the sense of death and chill that underlies her apparent vitality.
   A. Though she’s a fashionable, well-married London hostess who has just been out to buy flowers for her own grand party, she is disappointed to learn that her husband will not be home for lunch.
      1. As she returns to her house, she learns from her servant Lucy and from a note that her husband will be lunching with Lady Bruton, who has not invited Clarissa herself.
      2. Because the lunch party promised to be “extraordinarily amusing,” she feels a chill of disappointment—something like the chill of death.
      3. Lucy shares her disappointment.
   B. This little episode reveals the sense of death that shadows Clarissa on this day.
      1. The fact that she is very pale, has gray hair, suffers from a heart condition, and sleeps apart from her husband may help to explain why the pain of missing out on a lunch party makes her feel “suddenly shrivelled.”
      2. Though this novel follows the life of a gracious, lively woman on a bright June day in London, it will end by presenting her response to the news of the death of a young man irretrievably traumatized by the war.

II. Virginia Woolf presents the mind of Clarissa as something through which a stream of memories flows continuously.
   A. In the mind of Clarissa, memories can be just as vivid as anything that happens to Clarissa in time present.
      1. On the very first page of the novel, she remembers the morning air at her parents’ country house when she was a girl.
      2. She also remembers Peter Walsh, a young man who once passionately loved her and will actually come to see her on this very day.
   B. Though characters created by such writers as Dickens and Proust have powerful memories at certain privileged moments, Woolf’s characters experience memory as a vital part of their everyday lives.
      1. Almost every character in the novel has an inner world of thoughts, feelings, and memories that are relayed to us by the omniscient narrator.
      2. For instance, just as Clarissa returns to her house, we move inside the head of her servant Lucy.
      3. By entering the mind and heart of a servant, Woolf democratizes the novel—even though she represents a socially stratified world.

III. Born to the upper middle class and raised by governesses and her parents, including a highly literary father, Woolf gradually developed her own distinctive way of telling a story.
   A. Though periodically attacked by bouts of depression, culminating in her suicide in 1941, she read voraciously, wrote prolifically, and lived fully.
1. She enjoyed a circle of highly stimulating friends known as the Bloomsbury Group.
2. They included Leonard Woolf, a writer and politician, whom she married in 1912.

B. In *Mrs. Dalloway*, Woolf perfects the new way of storytelling that she had developed in her earlier novels.
1. After publishing her first two novels, she used in her third, *Jacob’s Room*, the innovations that she refines in *Mrs. Dalloway*.
2. In *Mrs. Dalloway*, she represents the mind as a conduit for memories and impressions that flow through it constantly, yet capriciously.
3. This technique is well illustrated by what goes through Clarissa’s head just before she learns about Lady Bruton’s lunch.
4. Virginia Woolf challenged the conventions of realism by showing something new about the way human beings actually think.

IV. Though strikingly parallel in many ways to Joyce’s *Ulysses*, *Mrs. Dalloway* is a distinctively original novel.
   A. In spite of Woolf’s disdain for *Ulysses*, her own novel—published three years later—resembles it in several ways.
      1. Each novel tells the story of what three characters do on a single day in the middle of June in a capital city.
      2. In each novel, the two chief male characters spend most of their time wandering around a city whose streets and monuments are carefully specified.
      3. Though Clarissa has little in common with any of Joyce’s characters, some of her actions recall, by turns, both Leopold Bloom and his wife, Molly.
   B. But Woolf copies Joyce no more than Joyce copies Homer.
      1. Clarissa differs sharply from anyone we meet in *Ulysses*, especially Molly Bloom.
      2. While Molly is hungry for sex and self-absorbed, Clarissa is frigid and preoccupied with planning a party—to bring together people who might otherwise never meet. She cultivates the art of being a hostess.

V. Though party-giving can be a superficial ritual of the privileged classes, Woolf shapes her story of this hostess by means of a democratic vision.
   A. Clarissa herself realizes that parties can be superficial.
      1. She knows that Peter Walsh finds them nonsensical.
      2. Her own words of greeting to each guest are mechanically repetitive.
      3. The guests at her predominantly upper-class party include no one below the middle class.
      4. All this seems to confirm Woolf’s own determination to “criticize the social system” of her time.
   B. Nevertheless, Woolf’s democratic vision shows itself in her narrative technique, which guides us instantly from one character’s viewpoint to another, moving up and down the sociopolitical scale.
      1. We see the prime minister not just through the eyes of Clarissa the hostess but also through the eyes of her poor cousin Ellie.
      2. Though dazzled at first by the prime minister’s rank, Ellie is amused by his ordinary appearance, then stirred to pity by the constraining effect of his fancy clothes, then impressed by his poise.

VI. The party is shadowed by news of a suicide that reflects the devastating consequences of the recent world war and profoundly stirs Clarissa.
   A. Septimus Smith, who committed suicide, survived the First World War, the bloodiest war that Britain had ever fought.
      1. It took a million British lives.
      2. Earlier, when Peter Walsh sees a uniformed troop of boys marching to the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier, we are reminded of the cost of war.
   B. In this novel, the new fashions and habits of the early 1920s reflect the impact of the war by showing the impossibility of recovering the period that came just before it.
      1. The sudden freedom from old conventions and proprieties—illustrated by girls putting on make-up in public—shows the impact of the war on all traditions.
      2. Though the name of Septimus recalls the era of Edward the Seventh—the Edwardian age of light and elegance—nothing could be less Edwardian than this traumatized survivor of the war.
C. Because Septimus has lost his dearest friend in the war, he believes that he has lost the capacity to feel.
   1. As a result, he loathes himself.
   2. He thinks human nature itself has sentenced him to death.
   3. When a distinguished psychologist named Bradshaw says that Septimus simply lacks a “sense of proportion,” and his wife insists that he “has done nothing wrong,” both of them fail to see that his anguish springs from his incapacity to grieve for his friend.
      a. At this time in England, society forbade love between men.
      b. Society thus dams up his tears.
   4. But for Septimus, as for Camus’ Meursault in The Stranger, failure to grieve is just as intolerable as murder—or homosexuality.
   5. Hence, Septimus feels compelled to take his own life.

VII. When Clarissa learns of Septimus’s death from Bradshaw, who turns up as a guest at her party, she feels deeply touched.
   A. Withdrawing from her guests to a little empty room, she thinks about Septimus’s suicide and is fascinated by its daring.
      1. While she and her girlhood friends (Sally and Peter) would grow old, the young man made his death an act of defiance—an attempt to communicate.
      2. Though she has achieved a social triumph at her party, Clarissa feels at once the emptiness of her life and the power of his death.
   B. Though Clarissa herself was to commit suicide in Woolf’s original plan for this novel, she survives as a witness to the meaning of another’s suicide.
      1. At the end, she is left alone with Peter Walsh, who is filled with excitement at the prospect of speaking to her.
      2. Poised between life and death, the novel thus ends on a note of suggestive indeterminacy.

VIII. Woolf not only argued eloquently for the rights of women, including their right to a place at the table of literary distinction, but she also made at that table a lasting place for herself.

Essential Reading:
Virginia Woolf, Mrs. Dalloway.
———, To the Lighthouse.

Supplementary Reading:
Hermione Lee, Virginia Woolf.
Nicholas Marsh, Virginia Woolf: The Novels.

Questions to Consider:
1. Mrs. Dalloway is set in 1923, when India was still part of the British Empire. To what extent does the novel reflect this period of British imperial history?
2. The ending of the novel makes it quite clear that Peter Walsh is excited by the prospect of speaking to Clarissa alone, at the end of her party. How do you think she feels about him at this point?
Lecture Eighty
William Faulkner

Scope: Born and raised in Mississippi, Faulkner grew up with horses and books. Nurtured by his well-read mother and inspired by stories of his great-grandfather, who not only served as corps commander in the Confederate Army but also published a bestselling novel, Faulkner early on decided to become a writer. After briefly serving in the Canadian Royal Air Force, spending some time at the University of Mississippi, and managing the post office there, Faulkner published his first book—a collection of poems—in 1924. In his fifth novel, *As I Lay Dying* (1930), the “I” of the title is a woman who dies shortly into the book, leaving her husband and children the task of transporting her body from rural isolation to the town of Jefferson, where she was born and wishes to be buried. Narrated from 15 points of view, with every character of any importance given narrative charge of at least one chapter, the story shows how deeply fractured her family is and how deeply irrational is the whole project of laboriously hauling her rotting corpse under the midsummer sun. Together with the deep pathos underlying it, the bitter comedy of its ending exemplifies the power of Faulkner’s work.

Outline

I. In *As I Lay Dying*, the passage describing Cash’s work on Addie’s coffin illustrates the strangeness of the relations between a dying woman and her family.
   A. As a man named Cash saws the boards for a coffin, his dying mother watches him from the window of her isolated rural house.
      1. Showing her how the boards will fit together, he is evidently proud of his work.
      2. She watches with “neither censure nor approbation.”
      3. The coffin he’s making is for her.
   B. Knowing she’s going to die, Addie Bundren—the “I” of the title—asks her family to bury her in the town of Jefferson, where her relatives all lie.
      1. Her husband, Anse, a toothless and shiftless farmer, has promised to bury her there.
      2. But because of various mishaps and delays, the journey takes nine days in the punishing July heat.
      3. Because Addie tells her own story in just one chapter, this novel is chiefly the story of what her death reveals about the strange combination of characters who make up her family.

II. Born and raised in Mississippi, nurtured by his highly literate mother, and inspired by stories of his great-grandfather, Faulkner soon resolved to become a writer and pursued his ambition by a circuitous route until he published his first book in 1924.
   A. Stories of Faulkner’s great-grandfather, W. C. Falkner (spelled without the *u*) inspired him.
      1. He was a bestselling novelist as well as a corps commander in the Confederate Army.
      2. Motivated by stories about this man, Faulkner resolved by the age of 9 to become a writer when he grew up.
      3. His great-grandfather eventually became the model for a Faulknerian character named Colonel John Sartoris, legendary progenitor of the Sartoris line.
   B. Faulkner found his way to fiction by a circuitous route.
      1. After quitting high school in the middle of his senior year, he moved in and out of high school and the University of Mississippi without ever graduating from either one.
      2. But after traveling, working at various jobs, and getting himself fired from the postmaster’s job at the University of Mississippi, he published his first book—a collection of poems called *The Marble Faun* (1924).

III. After meeting Sherwood Anderson in New Orleans and traveling to Europe in 1925, he published his first two novels and, for the third, created the fictional county of Yoknapatawpha.
   A. His first two novels were *Soldier’s Pay* and *Mosquitoes*.
   B. For his third novel, *Sartoris* (1929), Faulkner created the family of Sartoris, the mythical county of Yoknapatawpha, and the fictional town of Jefferson.
1. Thomas Hardy based the imaginary region of Wessex on the English county of Dorset.
2. Faulkner likewise based Jefferson and Yoknapatawpha on Oxford, Mississippi, and the surrounding Lafayette County.

C. In *Sartoris*, a young man who has just returned from service with the British Air Force in the First World War reenacts the violent lives of his ancestors.
   1. Young Bayard Sartoris inherits a family tradition made up of violence, aristocratic grandeur, and reckless heroism.
   2. He indulges in daredevil driving and riding, injuring himself and causing at one point the death of his grandfather.
   3. His wild driving becomes a kind of heroism in the eyes of Narcissa Benbow, who marries him.
   4. Even though his death in a plane crash seems to end the Sartoris line, she keeps his name alive by producing a child at just about the time he dies.

IV. In late October 1929, four months after marrying Estella Franklin and just after publication of his fourth novel, *The Sound and the Fury*, Faulkner started writing *As I Lay Dying*.
   
   A. At the time, he was working a 12-hour night shift at the University of Mississippi power station.
      1. He learned that he had nothing to do between midnight and 4:00 A.M.
      2. He decided to write during those hours.
   
   B. By this means, he wrote *As I Lay Dying* in just six weeks.
      1. He knew beforehand just where he was going.
      2. He resolved to write a book that would make his reputation if he never again touched pen and ink.

V. *As I Lay Dying* is a novel with a bizarre format: The central figure is a corpse traveling to a burial ground on a journey menaced by fire and flood and narrated from 15 different points of view, including that of the corpse itself.

   A. Like Joyce in *Ulysses*, which he very much admired, Faulkner creates distinctive narrators with severely limited points of view.
      1. He sometimes enters a character’s head to give the reader all that passes through it in a stream of consciousness.
      2. This technique exemplifies Modernism, which spotlights the radical subjectivity of the isolated self.
   
   B. But rather than using distinctive narrators for just some of the chapters, Faulkner makes his characters do all of the storytelling from their mutually exclusive points of view.
      1. Paradoxically, the family is mostly composed of tight-knit loners who don’t understand each other.
      2. The only one who understands the others is Darl, who is finally sent to a lunatic asylum.

VI. Though its title recalls the word of a betrayed husband in Homer’s *Odyssey*, the counterpart of that husband in Faulkner’s novel is an adulterous wife.

   A. In Book 11 of *The Odyssey*, when Odysseus visits the realm of the dead, the shade of Agamemnon says that his murderous, adulterous wife would not even close his eyes “as I lay dying.”
      1. Addie’s life with her husband, Anse, was so miserably dull that she took a lover, a preacher named Whitfield whom she met in the woods and by whom she had a child named Jewel.
      2. But unlike Agamemnon’s wife and unlike Hawthorne’s Hester Prynne, who has a woodsy affair with a preacher and begets a child named Pearl, Addie sins just to keep herself alive.
   
   B. She dies with no regrets—merely with a request that her body be taken to Jefferson for burial.

VII. Ironically, Anse’s stubborn determination to keep this promise leads to the dishonoring of her corpse.

   A. They carry her through fire and flood—what Faulkner called “the two greatest catastrophes which man can suffer.”
      1. They nearly lose their wagon and the coffin while crossing a river in a driving rainstorm, but Jewel rescues both.
      2. When Darl sets a barn on fire with the coffin inside, Jewel rescues it.
   
   B. Like so much else that happens in the novel, Jewel’s actions are at once heroic and ironic.
      1. He saves his mother from fire and flood.
      2. But he preserves her body only to rot for another day beneath a steady circling of buzzards.
3. Even Cash thinks it would have been better for the body to be taken “outen our hands” by God.

VIII. In their own strange ways, each character tries to do something for the dead woman.
   A. Cash builds her coffin.
      1. Though Jewel finds him heartless in this project, Darl admires him for it.
      2. Darl sees that the coffin is the work of a conscientious carpenter.
   B. Vardaman, her youngest son, does what he can for her.
      1. Enraged by the thought that the doctor has killed her, he drives the doctor’s horses away.
      2. He also drills holes in the coffin so that she can breathe.

IX. But some of the characters are chiefly out for themselves.
   A. Though she fans her dying mother, Dewey Dell’s main purpose for making the trip to Jefferson is to get an abortion.
      1. She can’t bring herself to ask for help from the doctor who comes to see her dying mother.
      2. She pins her hopes on the $10.00 that her boyfriend has given her to buy something at the drugstore.
      3. Tricked into having sex with a drugstore clerk as a way of aborting her child, Dewey ruefully tells herself afterwards, “It ain’t going to work.”
   B. Anse wants a new set of teeth and a new wife.
      1. After the burial of his wife, Anse returns with a new set of teeth.
      2. Appearing with an odd-looking woman, he introduces all of them to her with the words, “Meet Mrs. Bundren.”

X. With his very last words, Anse brutally erases all memory of the first Mrs. Bundren. Together with the deep pathos underlying it, the bitter comedy of the ending exemplifies the power of William Faulkner’s work.

Essential Reading:
William Faulkner, *As I Lay Dying*.
———, *The Sound and the Fury*.

Supplementary Reading:
Andre Bleikasten, *The Ink of Melancholy: Faulkner’s Novels, from The Sound and the Fury to Light in August*.

Questions to Consider:
1. Given that Addie speaks in just one section of *As I Lay Dying* while other characters speak in several of them, why is she the “I” of the title?
2. What does Faulkner gain by telling the story of *As I Lay Dying* with the aid of so many narrators (15) instead of just one?
Lecture Eighty-One
Bertolt Brecht

Scope: Born in the Bavarian city of Augsburg to solidly middle-class parents, Brecht wrote his first play at the age of 16 and scarcely stopped writing thereafter. His best known works include The Threepenny Opera, which he wrote in the late 1920s with the composer Kurt Weill, and Mother Courage, which he wrote just after the Second World War broke out in the fall of 1939. In 12 scenes, this play stages a dozen years sliced from the middle of the Thirty Years’ War in the early 17th century, when the Catholic forces of the Holy Roman Empire fought the Protestant nations of the north. The title figure is a canteen woman named Mother Courage who profits from the war by selling goods from a covered wagon that she hauls around behind the troops. But as one after another of her three grown children are drawn into the war and killed, we see how futile are her hopes of gaining anything but misery from the war. As a confirmed Marxist, Brecht sought to show not just the folly of trying to profit from small trading during the war but also the dehumanizing effect of a preoccupation with business.

Outline

I. In resorting to bribery to save the life of her son, Mother Courage shows that she has the heart of a trader.
   A. In this play about the Thirty Years’ War, Brecht focuses on the characters that history typically overlooks.
      1. In the early 17th century, the Catholic forces of the Holy Roman Empire fought the Protestant nations of the north for 30 years.
      2. The title character in Brecht’s play is a canteen woman who follows the troops with her goods in a covered wagon and who worries about what the war is doing to her three grown children.
   B. She’s torn between running her wagon business and helping her children.
      1. She doesn’t want the army recruiter to take her two sons.
      2. When both of them join anyway and one is captured, she sends another woman to the soldiers to find out how much she’ll have to pay to free him and thus save him from execution.
      3. She bets her hope on bribery rather than mercy.

II. Brecht made his name as a playwright in his 20s.
   A. After writing his first play at age 16, he won a prize for two of his plays at age 24.
      1. Born to middle-class parents in the Bavarian city of Augsburg and nurtured by his Protestant mother, who steeped him and his brother in the Lutheran Bible, Brecht wrote his first play, The Bible, at age 16.
      2. In 1922, he won the Kleist Drama Prize for two plays: Baal and Drums in the Night.
   B. In the late 1920s, he wrote The Threepenny Opera with the composer Kurt Weill.
      1. It was based on The Beggar’s Opera, an 18th-century English opera by John Gay.
      2. First performed in Berlin in 1928, the work made Brecht internationally famous.

III. After Brecht fully embraced communism and the gospel of Marx, his plays came to reflect Marxism, yet also refract it through his own idiosyncratic imagination.
   A. Though Brecht thought “epic” theater should keep the audience from identifying with the main character, three of the plays he wrote in the 1930s aim to make us identify with revolutionary heroes fighting capitalism and fascism.
      1. In St. Joan of the Stockyards (1930–1931), the heroine finally proclaims her faith in the gospel of violent resistance.
      2. In The Mother (1931), set in czarist Russia, the title character undergoes conversion to the revolutionary cause.
      3. In Señora Carrar’s Rifles, the title character joins the fight against fascism in the Spanish Civil War of the late 1930s.
   B. But in plays such as A Man Is a Man and Life of Galileo, Brecht creates “a new human type” who survives by adapting to circumstance.
1. In *A Man Is a Man* (1925), written before Brecht embraced communism, a wacky Irish porter named Galy Gay survives by lying and superficially complying, rather than openly resisting oppression.
2. In *Life of Galileo* (1938), the title character declines to be a hero, saving his life by pretending to submit to the authorities while covertly pursuing and disseminating his work.

IV. After fleeing Hitler’s Germany in 1933 and learning of the brutality of Soviet communism, Brecht resolved to write an antiwar play in the fall of 1939, when the Second World War broke out.
   A. In the 1930s, Brecht hated Nazi Germany and learned to distrust Soviet Russia.
      1. He voiced his hatred of Hitler and the Nazis in such sketches as *Fear and Misery in the Third Reich*, written in March of 1938.
      2. Though for a time Brecht thought Moscow the “only” theatrical city in the world, he learned by June of 1938 that a number of Moscow theater professionals whom he knew had been brutally crushed.
   B. As an antiwar play written at the start of World War II, *Mother Courage* takes its place with two other pacifist works written in time of war.
      1. In Joyce’s *Ulysses*, written during the First World War, Leopold Bloom denounces war as the enemy of life itself.
      2. In Camus’ *The Plague*, also written during the Second World War, the plague is implicitly compared to war and fought with nothing but the weapons of healing.
   C. In spite of her name, Brecht’s Mother Courage views death-defying courage as simply foolhardy.
      1. She doesn’t want her children to fight.
      2. When her two sons join the army anyway, she slaps one of them for not surrendering when he was surrounded by four peasants.
      3. She insists that survival is more important than heroism.

V. But as a war profiteer, Mother Courage exemplifies the alienating effect of Brecht’s “epic” theater.
   A. Mother Courage is a figure we normally detest—a war profiteer.
   B. But as such, she demonstrates Brecht’s determination to deflect our sympathy from his main character.
      1. Brecht disliked what he called “Aristotelian (empathy) drama,” which aims to make us identify with the protagonist.
      2. His “epic” theater seeks to detach us from the emotional life of the main character.
      3. Unlike Aristotelian tragedy, wherein the hero discovers his own flaw, Brecht says that Mother Courage never grasps the lesson of the play because she never stops trying to make money from the war.
   C. In writing about the Thirty Years’ War, Brecht seeks not only to show that war can devastate Germany but also to expose the unholy alliance between war and business.
      1. Mother Courage herself says that the religious pretexts for the Thirty Years’ War scarcely hide its commercial aims.
      2. But in commending the intelligence of those who make war for profit, she fails to realize that no ordinary person can profit from it.

VI. Though Brecht has carefully explained the lesson that he wanted his audiences to take from the play, it moves us precisely because it fails to do exactly what Brecht said he wanted it to do.
   A. Dismayed by reviews of the first (Zurich) production that praised the “vitality” of Mother Courage, Brecht himself directed the Berlin production to stress her mercantile craftiness.
      1. She blindly believes in the profit to be made from the war.
      2. In seeing only her sufferings (according to Brecht), the Berlin audience failed to see her crimes—her participation in war profiteering—and her failure to learn anything from the war.
   B. In blaming the audience for misunderstanding his title character, Brecht presses us to adopt the “intentionalist fallacy.”
      1. This is the belief that we can judge a work of literature according the author’s intention.
      2. Normally, we have trouble getting access to that intention outside the work itself.
      3. Because Brecht wrote at length about his intentions, he challenges us to judge his stated aims against our own experience of the play.
C. The sheer complexity of the title character resists any formula that would categorize her as a “battlefield hyena.”
   1. On the one hand, she deplores peace because it may ruin her business, and she won’t give linen to bind up the wounds of bleeding peasants.
   2. On the other hand, she’s dismayed by what the war does to her children.
   3. On the one hand, she fails to save the life of her son by haggling over the size of the bribe she offers for him, and she denies that she knows him when his body is brought to her.
   4. On the other hand, given that she may be killed if she admits knowing him, must we conclude that her “hardness” destroys her humanity, or does it subtly lead us into the unspeakable depths of her anguish?

VII. In Brecht’s Mother Courage, the title figure herself becomes a battlefield where the struggle for profit and the need to survive wage endless war with maternal solicitude.

**Essential Reading:**
Ronald Hayman, *Brecht: A Biography*.

**Supplementary Reading:**
Eric Bentley, *Seven Plays by Bertolt Brecht*.

**Questions to Consider:**
1. To what extent do Brecht’s plays reflect his Marxism?
2. Explain why you agree or disagree with Brecht’s assessment of Mother Courage.
Scope: Raised and educated in Algeria, Camus by his mid-20s was already displaying his talents in drama, philosophy, journalism, literature, and political action. After publishing a novel called The Stranger at the age of 28 and soon after, a philosophic essay, “The Myth of Sisyphus,” he spent the years of the Second World War writing his next novel, The Plague, published in 1947. In this novel, the plague—which may be taken to symbolize war—is a relentlessly murderous force that attacks the Algerian port city of Oran for 10 months in the 1940s. The novel is narrated by a 35-year-old doctor named Bernard Rieux, who leads the fight against the plague by insisting first of all that the authorities recognize it and then that they take all necessary steps to contain it by closing the gates of the town. The doctor does his utmost to heal the victims of the plague, even though he sees hundreds of them die and knows that the plague may come again. His account records what had to be done and what must be “done again in the never-ending fight against terror and its relentless onslaughts.”

Outline

I. In Camus’ The Plague, the closing of the gates of the plague-stricken city of Oran turns it into a giant prison from which no one can be sure of getting out alive.
   A. The city is invaded by rats from ships docked just outside it.
      1. They enter the city and die.
      2. Before dying, they transmit a highly contagious bacillus that strikes human beings with buboes: the mark of bubonic plague.
   B. Recognizing the plague as such, Dr. Bernard Rieux convinces the authorities to close the town.
      1. Because many people in Oran consider pestilence “a mere bogey of the mind,” they can’t believe it has struck their town.
      2. But when Rieux shows that the disease could kill off half the town in two months, the authorities close the gates so that no one can leave.
      3. By this means, the town becomes a prison of infection from which no one can be sure of escaping alive.

II. Born into poverty, Camus made his name as a philosopher and novelist by the time he was 30.
   A. Though born and raised in poverty, he thrived in school.
      1. His father died less than a year after Albert’s birth, and he was raised in Algeria by his illiterate mother, who worked as a cleaning woman.
      2. Recognizing Albert’s potential, a teacher at his primary school gave him extra instruction and helped him win a scholarship to secondary school.
      3. At age 23, he completed a diploma thesis in philosophy and had already begun to display an astonishing variety of talents in politics, journalism, philosophy, drama, and literature.
   B. In 1942, Camus published his second novel and a philosophic essay that may be read as the key to the meaning of the novel.
      1. In “The Myth of Sisyphus,” Camus writes that the plight of Sisyphus exemplifies absurdity—in the sense of profound irrationality—and, thus, prompts the question of whether or not life is worth living; in answer, Camus argues that a lifetime of struggle must be its own reward.
      2. In The Stranger, a man named Meursault kills another man for no apparent reason; he’s condemned to death not simply for murder but also for refusing to mourn the death of his mother.
      3. Emptied of hope at the end, he opens his heart to the indifference of the universe, happy only in the sense that Sisyphus is content with his resolution to face the futility of hope.

III. Writing The Plague during the years of the Second World War, Camus implicitly treats the plague as a symbol of war.
   A. Although the word plague is often used as a metaphor for war, here it serves as a symbol of war.
1. A metaphor is a lens through which we are able to see something in a particular way, but a symbol demands to be looked at first on its own terms.

2. By showing how pervasive and relentless a plague can be, Camus implicitly represents the effects of war.

B. War furnishes the context for Camus’ novel.
1. Starting it in the summer of 1941, when much of Europe was already occupied by German troops, Camus published *The Plague* in 1947, barely two years after the war ended.

2. Explicitly comparing plagues to wars, the narrator says at one point that both can take us by surprise and both commonly last longer than we expect them to.

IV. Because the plague suggests that the universe is totally indifferent to humankind, or even malevolent, the novel asks whether or not human beings can do anything effective against it.

A. The authorities’ first steps seem only to aggravate the misery of the plague.
1. In closing the gates, they turn all the town’s inhabitants into prisoners or exiles.

2. In forbidding letters, which may spread infection, they cut off the inhabitants from virtually all communication with those they love.

B. Rather than sounding anguished, the narrator seems to be the detached author of a “chronicle,” but his detachment seems only to intensify our pain.

C. In treating the individual inhabitants of the city as potential victims of a common fate, the novel challenges the basic tenets of Modernism.
1. Modernism spotlights the lonely desperation of the isolated self.

2. This novel dramatizes a plight shared by all members of a community.

3. In doing so, it offers each one at least the solace of knowing that he or she does not face the plague alone.

V. Struggling against the plague, the doctor inspires others to join the battle against it, even as he rejects both despair and the solaces of Christianity.

A. Rieux inspires others to join the battle against the plague.
1. When a journalist named Rambert begs for permission to leave the town, the doctor tells him, “…we’re all involved in it and we’ve got to accept it as it is.”

2. Later in the novel, having tried again and again to get himself smuggled out of Oran, Rambert finally agrees to stay and help the doctor. “This business,” he says, “is everybody’s business.”

B. Rieux cannot accept the plague as the will of an inscrutable God.
1. When a child dies of the plague after a getting a serum that merely prolongs its final agony, a priest tries to explain the death as the will of a God whose wisdom passes human understanding.

2. Refusing to believe in a God who would torture children to death, the doctor struggles only to save lives by fighting disease.

VI. If providence in this novel works through disease, its hand becomes a brutal fist.

A. Though we might be tempted to see the hand of providence in the survival of Rambert, many other good people die.
1. The plague kills a number of people who worked hard to help others.

2. In spite of all his labor and devotion, the doctor learns at the end that his wife—though safely removed from the city—has died of an illness.

B. Even though the plague ends after 10 months, it may come again.
1. Its deadly bacillus may rise again.

2. In this respect, too, it resembles war.

VII. Striving to heal in a time of plague, the doctor stands for the novel itself, which attempts to show that a common affliction can lead us to work together against plagues of all kinds and recognize all that we share.

**Essential Reading:**


———, *The Plague*, translated by Stuart Gilbert.
———, The Stranger, translated by Stuart Gilbert.

**Supplementary Reading:**
Oliver Todd, *Albert Camus: A Life*, translated by Benjamin Ivry.
Steven G. Kellman, *The Plague: Fiction and Resistance*.

**Questions to Consider:**
1. Does Camus’ interpretation of the myth of Sisyphus convince you that Sisyphus’s task is anything more than an infinite exercise in futility?
2. To what extent can *The Plague* be read as a symbolic story of the war against terrorism?
Lecture Eighty-Three
Samuel Beckett

Scope: Born of well-to-do parents in a fashionable suburb of Dublin and educated at private schools, Beckett graduated with honors from Trinity College, taught literature in Paris and Dublin, and by his late 20s settled down to write in Paris. After writing a first novel that would not see print until after he died, he published a collection of stories (More Pricks Than Kicks) in 1934 and a second novel, Murphy, in 1938. In 1941, when France was occupied by German troops, Beckett joined a resistance network. When the Gestapo shredded the network, he fled to a village in Provence, where he worked as a laborer by day and at night produced his third novel, Watt. In the fall of 1948, in the midst of writing four more novels and four novellas, he created what became his most famous play, Waiting for Godot, written in French and first staged in Paris in the winter of 1953. This play dramatizes a process in which nothing—in the conventional sense—happens. But in absurdly waiting for a character who never arrives, the two old tramps of Beckett’s play perform a continuing act of faith in the possibility of hope.

Outline

I. In their conversations, the two old tramps of Samuel Beckett’s Waiting for Godot repeatedly enact the absurdity of waiting for someone who never comes.
   A. First performed in Paris in the winter of 1953, this play contains no action of the kind we typically expect to see in plays.
      1. Though one tramp—Estragon, or Gogo—sometimes says, “Let’s go,” and though the play is set on a country road, he never goes anywhere.
      2. He and his friend Vladimir (nicknamed Didi) can’t go because they’re “waiting for Godot.”
   B. Because Godot never comes, the two men are caught in an endless cycle of repetition.

II. When Beckett wrote this play in the fall of 1948, he was extensively published but still unknown as a playwright; he turned to drama because it enabled him to reach an audience visually as well as verbally.
   A. Born in Dublin and very well educated, Beckett was fully committed to writing by his early 30s.
      1. In 1934, after producing a critical study of Proust (published 1931) and a novel that would not be published until after he died, he published his first collection of stories, More Pricks Than Kicks.
      2. His second novel, Murphy, appeared in 1938.
   B. In the next decade, Beckett produced a formidable body of fiction.
      1. After briefly working for a French resistance network during the German occupation of France, he escaped with his wife to a village in Provence, where he worked as a laborer by day and at night wrote his third novel, Watt.
      2. From 1946 to 1950, writing all in French, he produced four novellas and four novels, including the trilogy Molloy, Malone Dies, and The Unnamable.
   C. Having written a parody of Pierre Corneille’s El Cid in college, Beckett returned to the writing of drama in the late 1940s.
      1. In 1947, he wrote Eleutheria, a parody of bourgeois drama.
      2. In 1948, he wrote Godot “as relaxation, to get away from the awful prose I was writing at that time,” but also because theater gave him the chance to achieve both a visual and a verbal impact on his audience.

III. The first appearance of Lucky and Pozzo in the play brilliantly illustrates its visual impact.
   A. Just after Gogo and Didi agree that they are “tied to Godot,” Lucky enters with a rope around his neck.
      1. The free end of the rope is held by Pozzo, who enters behind him.
      2. Pozzo makes Lucky stop by jerking the rope.
   B. When this play was performed for the convicts of San Quentin prison in 1957, they instantly saw what the rope around Lucky’s neck signified.
      1. It staged the idea of being tied to someone—the very idea that the tramps have just been discussing.
      2. Bound to their wardens, the convicts recognized themselves in Lucky.
IV. In its very absence of completed action, the play stages the experience of waiting.

A. The play shows that drama is uniquely equipped to represent waiting.
   1. Unlike a novel, which may squeeze a lifetime into a book that can be read in hours, a play represents
      an action that lasts just as long as it takes to present it.
   2. Typically, the main character of a play is introduced by other characters who talk about him and stir
      our interest in him.
   3. By talking about someone they expect to appear, the tramps make us identify with their expectation.

B. As we wait with the tramps for Godot to come, we gradually discover—as they do—that he’s not coming
   at all.
   1. At the end of Act I, a boy delivers a message that Mr. Godot can’t come that evening “but surely
      tomorrow.”
   2. At the end of Act II, the boy says essentially the same thing.
   3. Doomed in this way to endless waiting, the tramps “do not move.”

V. By detonating the basic principles of dramatic structure—conflict, suspense, and resolution—the play raises
   fundamental questions about the significance of waiting and about the purpose of life itself.

A. We all know how frustrating it can be to wait.
   1. It’s especially frustrating to wait for an indefinite period.
   2. In Kafka’s *The Trial*, Josef K cannot endure the frustration of waiting endlessly for court proceedings
      in his case to begin.

B. Waiting is an escapable part of the human condition.
   1. Virtually all religions promise an afterlife of some kind that we must wait to experience.
   2. By promising an afterlife of reward for virtue and punishment for evil, Christianity tries to compensate
      us for our suffering and thus, give meaning and purpose to our lives.

C. But if nothing awaits us in the afterlife, the act of waiting is absurd.
   1. Philosophically, absurd means irrational—a nut that cannot be cracked.
   2. According to Jean-Paul Sartre, the founding father of French existentialism, waiting is absurd if the
      object waited for—God, revelation, or salvation—is suppressed.

VI. Though it teases us with references to Christian faith, the play represents human existence as a condition of
   radical uncertainty.

A. At certain points, the play suggestively refers or alludes to Christianity and divinity.
   1. Didi tells Gogo at one point that they made “a kind of prayer” to Godot, who promised only to think it
      over.
   2. The tramps discuss the two thieves who were crucified along with Christ, one of whom was saved.

B. But the references are made to signify despair as much as hope.
   1. Beckett told his first director that he took the name Godot from *godillot*, the French word for
      hobnailed boot; the name may be Beckett’s subtle way of kicking us all in the teeth with the promise
      of a God who makes us wait forever.
   2. Because only one of the four evangelists says that one thief was saved, the tramps take no comfort
      from the Gospel story and instead propose to hang themselves from the one thing available: a tree.

C. Caught between despair and hope, Didi and Gogo stand on the brink of uncertainty.
   1. Beckett took his cue for the play from a statement about the two thieves that he attributes to
      Augustine.
      a. “Do not despair: one of the two thieves was saved.”
      b. “Do not presume: one of the two thieves was damned.”
   2. Paradoxically, Didi and Gogo talk of hanging to keep their spirits up.
      a. Nietzsche once observed that the thought of suicide has enabled many a good man to get through
         the night.
      b. Didi tells Gogo that while they might have jumped from the Eiffel Tower 50 years ago, when they
         were “respectable,” they wouldn’t even be allowed to climb it now—as if suicide were a genteel
         pursuit.
VII. The jokes about suicide exemplify the tragicomic mood of the play.

A. The tramps display the kind of humor we typically get from such clowns as Charlie Chaplin.
   1. Chaplin’s portrayal of a sadly funny clown on the silent screen first captivated Beckett in his teens.
   2. Like Chaplin, all the characters in the play wear bowler hats—a relic of their faded gentility—and at one point, they restlessly pass them back and forth.
   3. When Gogo says that Pozzo’s description of the evening is “tray bong,” he echoes the bad French title of one of Chaplin’s music-hall acts.

B. This play is a tragedy played for laughs, a play that dares to laugh at anything and everything.
   1. The “scandal” of Pozzo’s treating Lucky like a dog turns into a joke when Lucky kicks Gogo in the shins as Gogo tries to comfort him.
   2. When Gogo learns that hanging might give them an erection, he excitedly says, “Let’s hang ourselves immediately!”

VIII. Yet for all their talk of suicide, the tramps choose to remain alive, to help each other, and to go on waiting.

A. Because they aren’t sure that they can both hang themselves from the tree, they decide not to do anything.
   1. Nothing is certain in this play—not even the relative weights of the tramps.
   2. Because neither one knows for certain which of them is heavier, they don’t know which one of them might break the tree bough by hanging from it—leaving the other one alone.
   3. Their conversation on this point shows that they are friends for life.

B. In spite of their differences, they depend on each other and thus, take a quiet stand against despair.
   1. Their differences—such as the sleepiness of Gogo and the nervousness of Didi—help define them as a comic pair, a music-hall team.
   2. But their interdependence keeps them alive.
   3. In presenting a pair who cling to each other as faithfully as they wait for Godot, the play takes a quiet stand against despair and the Modernist preoccupation with the isolated self.

IX. Even though it dramatizes the experience of waiting for a Godlike would-be benefactor who never comes, *Waiting for Godot* becomes an act of faith in the possibility of hope.

**Essential Reading:**
———, *Molloy, Malone Dies, The Unnamable.*

**Supplementary Reading:**
James Knowlson, *Damned to Fame: The Life of Samuel Beckett.*

**Questions to Consider:**
1. How does Beckett complicate our impulse to condemn Pozzo for abusing Lucky?
2. Instead of just waiting for Godot to arrive, why don’t Didi and Gogo seek him out?
Lecture Eighty-Four

Conclusion

Scope: Looking back on 3,000 years of literary history, what can we conclude? Is there any way of making coherent sense out of all these literary works? This lecture treats several ways of doing so. If we focus on recurrent, enduring themes of literature, three stand out. First, from the Bible to Beckett, literature tells a story about the gradual disintegration of humankind’s faith in the benevolence and wisdom of God. Second, from Homer’s Iliad to Camus’ The Plague, the history of literature steadily reflects the persistence of war as an inescapable fact of human existence. And third, starting with Homer’s story of Odysseus’s homecoming to his beloved wife, literature continually tells stories of love. As an alternative to the study of these enduring themes—God, war, and love—we may consider literary works in terms of literary form. After first distinguishing literature from other kinds of writing, such as history, this lecture argues that three basic forms are embedded in its history: lyric, narrative, and drama. In their remarkable persistence over the centuries, these three forms help us to understand why, in the words of Ezra Pound, “Literature is news that stays news.”

Outline

I. As applied to literature, the historical sense entails a consciousness of the past and of its persistence into the present.
   A. What T. S. Eliot calls “the historical sense” requires a knowledge of literature from Homer to our own time.
      1. You can’t inherit this knowledge.
      2. You must work hard to earn it.
   B. To write or read with the historical sense also means grasping all of Western literature as a coherent whole.
      1. You must understand how the past survives in and permeates the present.
      2. You need more than the gist of each work in your head.

II. To grasp the history of literature as a coherent whole, we might consider the persistence of three great themes: God, war, and love.
   A. Literature tells a continuing story about humankind’s relation to God.
      1. Although classical literature gives us a murky picture of divinity, Judeo-Christian literature from the Old Testament through Milton’s Paradise Lost chiefly represents God as a wise, just ruler.
      2. But literature of the 19th and 20th centuries gradually traces the disappearance of God and of faith in divine providence.
   B. Humankind’s addiction to war plays a central role in the history of literature.
      1. Like the epics of Homer and Virgil, the earliest works of history spring from war.
      2. Fighting never dies as a topic of literature
      3. Starting in the 18th century, faith in the glory of war starts to disintegrate, right along with faith in divine providence.
      4. Some of the greatest works written during the last two centuries have resolutely exposed the brutality and viciousness of war.
   C. From Homer’s epics to Joyce’s Ulysses, love remains an enduring topic of literature.
      1. Love drives the great epics quite as much as war does.
      2. In the 19th century, such novelists as Jane Austen radically rewrite the plot of romance; mating is regulated by socioeconomic conditions that may ultimately frustrate desire.
      3. Adultery drives the plot in several of the great novels of the last two centuries.

III. Great writers often re-create past works of literature.
   A. Joyce’s Ulysses re-creates Homer’s Odyssey.
      1. Though Joyce’s Leopold Bloom differs radically from Homer’s Odysseus, he emerges from Joyce’s novel as the reincarnation of Homer’s hero.
2. If you know Homer’s *Odyssey*, you can see that the events of Bloom’s day in *Ulysses* reenact the episodes of Homer’s epic.

B. Every writer has to work with an inherited literature and inherited language—partly as a principle of organization.
   1. For instance, at the end of the first chapter of *Ulysses*, the single word “usurper” evokes both Homer’s *Odyssey* and Shakespeare’s *Hamlet*.
   2. In taking the plot of the *Odyssey* as a template for the action of his novel, Joyce uses Homer’s epic structure to help him shape the story of Bloom’s day.

IV. The study of literature leads to a recognition of literary form.
   A. It is no easy task just to fix the boundaries of all literature.
      1. Much of ancient literature, including the Bible, straddles the border between history, literature, and myth, and early histories have fictive elements.
      2. Plato puts philosophy into the form of dramatic dialogues.
      3. Autobiography, philosophical essays, and encyclopedia articles can be difficult to classify.
   B. But with the help of Stephen Dedalus, we can still focus on three basic kinds of literature.
      1. In *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, Stephen divides literature into three categories: lyric, narrative, and dramatic.
      2. Originating in the 7th century B.C., the lyric typically voices the feeling of the author or of just one person; it remains alive in such 20th-century poems as Robert Frost’s “Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening.”
      3. From ancient Greek drama and Shakespeare to such plays as Brecht’s *Mother Courage*, drama speaks with many voices and thus tends to obscure or hide the personality of the author.
      4. Narrative is storytelling, probably the oldest and most enduring literary form of all.

V. A literary narrative may be classified according to the power of action exercised by the main character.
   A. In epic or high-mimetic literature, the hero is superior to other men and capable of extraordinary feats.
   B. But as the epic gives way to the novel in the history of literature, the hero’s power diminishes.
      1. In the novel, where the fabulous plots of epic and romance are ground up by socioeconomic realism, the protagonist becomes no more powerful than the rest of us.
      2. In some 20th-century novels, the protagonist may be weaker than the rest of us—caught in a net of frustration.

VI. Because every author grapples with the literature of the past even as he or she tries to forge something new, literature is news that stays news.

Essential Reading:

Supplementary Reading:
Harold Bloom, *The Western Canon: The Books and School of the Ages*.

Questions to Consider:
1. Does literature progress in anything like the way that the physical sciences do?
2. If you had to name the single most important theme that permeates the history of literature, what would it be, and why?
## Timeline

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Event</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1875</td>
<td>Publication of Henry James’s first novel, <em>Roderick Hudson</em>.</td>
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<td>1881</td>
<td>Publication of James’s <em>Portrait of a Lady</em>.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1889</td>
<td>Publication of Yeats’s <em>The Wandering of Oisin and Other Poems</em>, his first volume of poetry.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1895</td>
<td>Publication of <em>Almayer’s Folly—A Story of an Eastern River</em>, a first novel by the Polish-born Józef Korzeniowski, who adopts “Joseph Conrad” as his pen name.</td>
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<td>1899</td>
<td>Conrad’s <em>Heart of Darkness</em> first appears in a magazine.</td>
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<td>1904</td>
<td>The Abbey Theatre opens in Dublin with Yeats as producer and manager.</td>
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<td>1913</td>
<td>Publication of Marcel Proust’s <em>Du côté de chez Swann</em> (<em>Swann’s Way</em>), the first part of <em>À la Recherche du Temps Perdu</em> (<em>In Search of Lost Time</em>).</td>
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<tr>
<td>1914</td>
<td>Outbreak of World War I; Joyce’s <em>Dubliners</em> is published.</td>
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<td>1915</td>
<td>Virginia Woolf’s first novel, <em>The Voyage Out</em>, is published.</td>
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<td>1916</td>
<td>Death of Henry James; Joyce’s <em>A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man</em> and Franz Kafka’s “Die Verwandlung” (“Metamorphosis”) are published.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1917</td>
<td>Publication of T. S. Eliot’s first volume of poetry, <em>Prufrock and Other Observations</em>.</td>
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<td>11 November 1918</td>
<td>Armistice ends the war.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1919</td>
<td>Proust’s <em>À L’Ombre des Jeunes Filles en Fleurs</em> (<em>In the Shadow of Young Girls in Flower</em>) is published, winning the Prix Goncourt.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1920</td>
<td>Publication of Proust’s <em>Le Côté de Guermantes I</em> (<em>The Guermantes Way I</em>).</td>
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<td>1921</td>
<td>Publication of Proust’s <em>Le Côté de Guermantes II</em> (<em>The Guermantes Way II</em>) and <em>Sodome et Gomorrhe I</em> (<em>Sodom and Gomorrah I</em>).</td>
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<tr>
<td>1923</td>
<td>Publication of Proust’s <em>La Prisonnière</em> (<em>The Prisoner</em>). Yeats wins the Nobel Prize for Literature.</td>
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<td>1924</td>
<td>Death of Conrad, death of Kafka.</td>
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<td>1925</td>
<td>Publication of Kafka’s <em>Der Prozess</em> (<em>The Trial</em>), Proust’s <em>Albertine Disparu</em> (<em>The Fugitive</em>), and Woolf’s <em>Mrs. Dalloway</em>.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1927</td>
<td>Publication of Proust’s <em>Le Temps Retrouvé</em> (<em>Finding Time Again</em>) completes the publication of <em>À la Recherche du Temps Perdu</em>.</td>
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<td>August 1928</td>
<td>Bertolt Brecht’s <em>Die Dreigroschenoper</em> (<em>The Threepenny Opera</em>), with music by Kurt Weill, opens in Berlin.</td>
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<td>1929</td>
<td>William Faulkner’s <em>The Sound and the Fury</em> is published.</td>
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<td>1930</td>
<td>William Faulkner’s <em>As I Lay Dying</em> is published.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1939</td>
<td>Joyce’s <em>Finnegans Wake</em> is published. Death of Yeats. German invasion of Poland ignites the Second World War.</td>
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<tr>
<td>April 1940</td>
<td>Brecht’s <em>Mutter Courage und ihre Kinder</em> (<em>Mother Courage and Her Children</em>) opens in Zurich.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1941</td>
<td>Deaths of James Joyce and Virginia Woolf.</td>
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</table>
1942 ................................................ Publication of Albert Camus’ *The Stranger* and “The Myth of Sisyphus.”
1945 ................................................ End of the Second World War.
1947 ................................................ Publication of Camus’ *The Plague*.
1949 ................................................ Faulkner wins the Nobel Prize for Literature.
1956 ................................................ Death of Brecht.
1957 ................................................ Camus wins the Nobel Prize for Literature.
1960 ................................................ Death of Albert Camus.
1962 ................................................ Death of William Faulkner.
1965 ................................................ Death of T. S. Eliot.
1969 ................................................ Beckett wins the Nobel Prize for Literature.
1989 ................................................ Death of Beckett.
**Glossary**

**Absurd**: A term used by Jean-Paul Sartre and other French existentialists to designate the basic irrationality of life—the impossibility of finding its meaning or purpose, the futility of struggling toward a goal, expecting salvation, or waiting for a revelation that is endlessly deferred. Starting with Samuel Beckett’s *Waiting for Godot*, plays that reflect this condition exemplify what Martin Esslin called the “Theater of the Absurd.”


**Center of consciousness**: Exemplified by the fiction of Henry James, this term designates the mind of the central character when the events of a novel are chiefly seen from his or her point of view and consistently registered as impressions on that mind. Unlike a first-person narrator, the character whose mind becomes the center of consciousness does not tell his or her own story; he or she is overseen by a narrator who is technically omniscient, but who largely tells the story from the viewpoint of one character.

**Dada or Dadaism**: An international nihilistic movement started in Zurich in 1916 by the French poet Tristan Tzara and brought to Paris in the early 1920s. Dada performers—or performance artists—set out to provoke their audiences by deriding their faith in the value and meaning of art. They treated artistic creation as something absurd and unpredictable.

**Dedalus (also Daedalus)**: Mythic artisan of ancient Crete, he built the labyrinth in which King Minos placed the man-bull monster called the Minotaur. When Dedalus and his son Icarus were placed in the labyrinth, he made wax-and-feather wings for himself and Icarus to fly away, but when Icarus flew too close to the sun, his wax wings melted and he fell into the sea.

**Easter Rising**: On Easter Monday in 1916, a force of about 900 Irish nationalists announced the birth of the Irish Republic. Seizing the post office and other key sites in Dublin, they held out for six days before surrendering to British forces, who then executed 15 of their leaders. In spite of its temporary failure, the Easter Rising led the way to the independence of the Irish Free State in 1922 and eventually to the Irish Republic in 1937.

**Evolution**: As formulated by the Englishman Charles Darwin in two major books, *The Origin of Species* (1859) and *The Descent of Man* (1871), the theory of evolution posits that all existing organisms descended from a common source: a simple protoplasmic mass that led, in time, to all living forms that came after it. Darwin’s theory of evolution is based on the principle of natural selection, which makes the survival and reproduction of species depend on their capacity to adapt to the environment in which they live.

**Existentialism**: A general term for a group of philosophic systems that stress the radical subjectivity of the individual as the prime condition of our existence. In the mid-19th century, the Danish philosopher Søren Kierkegaard argued that the individual comes to God not by reason but by means of “existential dialectic” and a “leap of faith.” In *Being and Time* (1927), the German philosopher Martin Heidegger—who rejected the label “existential”—nonetheless helped to found 20th-century existentialism by arguing that to be is simply to be thrown into the world in which we live, caught up in time. Building on Heidegger’s work, Jean-Paul Sartre launched French existentialism by arguing in *Being and Nothingness* (1943) that we have no essence, merely existence. Unlike Aristotle and Aquinas, who taught that human beings are stamped by nature with the essence of humanity, Sartre claimed that man is totally free, wholly responsible for his fate, absolutely unbound by any predetermined nature or ultimate design. Though Albert Camus is often considered an existentialist, he also rejected the label and never fully agreed with Sartre. In “The Myth of Sisyphus” (1942), Camus struggled to explain the purpose of life by answering this question: if we can no longer put our faith and trust in eternal values and the wisdom of God, why should we not commit suicide?

**Family romance**: Sigmund Freud’s name for a condition in which the subject (typically male) imagines that he was not born of the poor or common people who claim to be his parents but is, rather, a foundling separated at birth from his real parents, who are noble.

**Fenians**: Originally called the Irish Revolutionary Brotherhood, this was a group of militant Irish nationalists founded in 1859 and bent on the violent overthrow of British rule.
**Fergus**: Featured in the early poetry of William Butler Yeats, Fergus was a legendary Irish poet and king who gave up his throne at the behest of a Druid to spend his time hunting in the woods.

**Free verse**: Verse without rhyme or meter—that is, with no consistent number of syllables or pattern of stresses in each line.

**Iambic meter**: Meter consisting of two-syllable units or metrical feet with the first of the two syllables unstressed and the second stressed. When Yeats writes, “I MADE/my SONG/a COAT,” he uses three iambic feet—called iambic trimeter.

**Intentionalist fallacy**: First identified by a pair of critics named William Wimsatt and Monroe Beardsley, this is the notion that we can judge any work of literature by seeing how well it fulfills the author’s intention. The problem with this way of proceeding is that we seldom have access to the author’s intention stated outside the work, and not even the author’s stated intention may be a fully reliable guide to the meaning expressed by the work, which—say the critics—is available only by inference from the work itself.

**Marxism**: Propounded by Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels in *The Communist Manifesto* (1848), then by Marx alone in *Das Capital* (1867–1894), Marxism treats the history of society as the history of the struggle between the capitalist class, which replaced the feudal nobility, and the proletariat or working class, which will ultimately revolt against the capitalists and seize the means of production.

**Modernism**: Arising in the first decades of the 20th century, partly in response to the devastation wrought by the First World War and manifest in the work of such writers as Conrad, Kafka, Faulkner, and Woolf, Modernism is a way of thinking and feeling that spotlights the individual, isolated self cut off from traditional beliefs, institutions, and social support structures. Modernism rejects certainty, sentiment, and conventional assumptions about the individual’s place in the world, the existence of God, and the meaning of life. As applied to poetry, Modernism spotlights the naked object, stripped of sentiment and abstract thought, and eschews traditional ornaments of verse, such as regular rhyme and meter.

**Prozess**: A German word commonly translated as “trial” in the title of Kafka’s novel about Josef K, it actually means many things besides a formal event in a court of law. In Kafka’s novel, it means, among other things, a long ordeal of pseudo-legal complication and frustration, leading finally to the death of the protagonist.

**Romance**: In literary history, this term typically designates a kind of story in which a young knight goes to make his name by slaying a dragon or some other monster and thus, wins the hand of a beautiful young lady. In the novel, this quest romance is often reconfigured as a process of mating regulated by socioeconomic forces or radically rewritten as the story of a single woman’s quest for a husband.

**Second Coming**: As prophesied by John in the biblical Book of Revelation, the Second Coming of Christ to the Earth is a time of judgment, destruction, and renewal heralded by the advent of a gigantic beast: the beast of the apocalypse.

**Sinn Féin**: Meaning “we ourselves” in the Irish Gaelic language, this was the motto that Irish patriotic groups adopted in the 1890s for their movement to revive Irish culture. In 1903, Arthur Griffith took the motto as the name for a political party that is still fighting for the complete independence of Ireland to this day.

**Speaker**: As applied to poetry, this term designates the “I” of a poem, whoever appears to be speaking it—in the way that a dramatic character speaks for himself or herself, not necessarily for the playwright. Though we may be tempted to identify the “I” of a poem with the poet, the two are not identical.

**Stephen, Saint** (namesake of Stephen Dedalus, protagonist of Joyce’s *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*): A Greek-speaking Jew who was appointed by the apostles to care for the widows of Greek-speaking Jews in and around Jerusalem, Stephen was “a man full of faith and of the holy spirit” who spread the teachings of Christ. Arrested by the Jewish elders and brought before the Jewish Sanhedrin (“tribunal”), he was charged with saying that Jesus would destroy Judaism. In response, Stephen accused the Jewish people of repeatedly persecuting their own prophets—including Christ. Enraged, his hearers dragged him out of Jerusalem and stoned him to death, making him the first Christian martyr. See Acts of the Apostles, Chapters 6 and 7.

**Stream of consciousness**: A technique of representing the inner world of a character by recording his or her thoughts as if they were words silently flowing through the character’s mind.
**Surrealism:** A literary and artistic movement that aimed to express the imagination as dreams do, free of inhibition and conscious control. Influenced by the 19th-century poetry of Rimbaud and Baudelaire, by Dada, and by the dream theories of Sigmund Freud (see Unconscious), it was founded in Paris by Andre Breton with his *Manifesto of Surrealism* (1924). In visual art, its exponents included Salvador Dali, Max Ernst, and Rene Magritte.

**Szlachta** (pronounced SCHLACHta): The Polish word for landed Polish aristocracy—the class to which Joseph Conrad’s forebears belonged.

**Unconscious:** As defined by Sigmund Freud, the unconscious is that part of the psyche that is not directly observable by the conscious mind but may be studied in its indirect effects, particularly in dreams. In *The Interpretation of Dreams* (1900), Freud contends that dreams express the fulfillment of our unconscious wishes: wishes that the conscious mind cannot acknowledge because of its inhibitions.

**World War I:** Ignited on June 28, 1914, when a Serbian nationalist assassinated Archduke Francis Ferdinand, heir to the throne of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, this war chiefly pitted Germany and Austria against Russia, the Serbs, France, Great Britain, and America. Out of the 65 million men who served in the armies, an estimated 8.5 million were killed—many of them at Verdun and in the Somme offensive of 1916. The war ended when the Austro-Hungarian emperor surrendered on November 11, 1918.

**World War II:** Precipitated by Germany’s invasion of Poland on September 1, 1939, this war pitted the Allies (chiefly Great Britain, France, the United States, and the Soviet Union) against the Axis powers (Germany, Italy, and Japan). It ended in Europe on May 7, 1945, when Germany surrendered unconditionally, and in Japan on August 14, 1945, when Japan announced its surrender after the atomic bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Thus ended the costliest war ever fought up to that time.

**Yoknapatawpha:** According to William Faulkner, this is a Chickasaw Indian word meaning “water runs slow through flat land.” Starting with his third novel, *Sartoris* (1929), Faulkner used this word to designate a fictional region based on Lafayette County in his native state of Mississippi.
Biographical Notes

Beckett, Samuel (1906–1989). Born near Dublin, Beckett was the second son of a well-to-do Protestant family. In 1923, after private schooling in Dublin and Enniskillen, he entered Dublin’s Trinity College, where in 1927 he earned first-class honors in French and Italian. He then spent two years as a lecturer in English at the Ecole Normale Supérieure in Paris, returned to Trinity as a lecturer in French, and left after little more than a year to settle in Paris. There he wrote his first novel, *Dream of Fair to Middling Women* (posthumously published in 1993) and came to know James Joyce. In 1933, the deaths of his beloved cousin Peggy Sinclair and of his father plunged him into prolonged depression. On recovering, he produced his first collection of stories, *More Pricks Than Kicks* (published 1934) and his second novel, *Murphy* (published 1938). In 1938, while recovering from stab wounds inflicted by a total stranger on a Paris street, he was visited by a pianist named Suzanne Dumesnil, who soon became his partner for life, though they did not marry for 23 years. In 1939, the outbreak of the Second World War prompted him to join the French Resistance, and he spent much of the war as a farm laborer in the unoccupied Vaucluse; in 1944, writing only at night, he produced his second novel, *Watt* (published 1953). Returning to Paris at the end of the war, he burst into creative action. From 1946 to 1950, writing in French, he produced four novellas, two plays (including *Waiting for Godot*), and the trilogy of novels known in English as *Molloy, Malone Dies,* and *The Unnamable* (first published in English together in 1958). After *Godot* (first staged in Paris in 1953), Beckett wrote a number of other plays, including *Fin de Partie* (1956), translated as *Endgame* in 1958; *Krapp’s Last Tape* (1958); *Happy Days* (1961); *Play* (1962); and *Not I* (1972). In 1969, he was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature.

Brech, Bertolt (1898–1956). Born Eugen Berthold Brecht in the Bavarian city of Augsburg, he was the first child of a paper factory clerk newly married to the daughter of a stationmaster. After early schooling in Augsburg, Brecht started writing plays at 16, studied medicine and philosophy at the universities of Munich and Berlin, and in 1922 (at age 24) won the Kleist Drama Prize for his first two expressionist plays, both published that year: *Trommeln in der Nacht* (translated and published as *Drums in the Night*, 1966) and *Baal* (translated and published in 1964.) Then came *Mann ist Mann* in 1926 (translated and published as *A Man Is a Man* in 1964). Eager to combine drama and music, he collaborated with composer Kurt Weill in turning John Gay’s 18th century *Beggar’s Opera* into the work that made his international reputation, *Die Dreigroschenoper* (1928), known in English as *The Threepenny Opera* (1958). When Hitler rose to power in 1933, Brecht fled to Scandinavia, traveled across Russia and Persia, and in 1941 came to Hollywood, where he wrote film scripts. In the meantime, he had written *Galileo* (1938) and *Mutter Courage und Ihre Kinder* (1941), translated as *Mother Courage and Her Children* in 1961. His hatred of Nazism also led him to compose a series of short plays that appeared under the titles *Furucht und Elend des Dritten Reiches* (1945) and *Der Aufhaltsame Aufstieg des Arturo Ui* (1957; translated as *The Resistible Rise of Arturo Ui*, 1976). In 1948, Brecht moved to East Germany, where the Berlin Ensemble produced, under his direction, his later plays, including *Der Kaukasische Kreidekreis* (1947; *The Caucasian Chalk Circle*, 1948) and *Der Gute Mensch von Setzuan* (1943; *The Good Woman of Setzuan*, 1948). Though he was awarded the Stalin Peace Prize in 1954, his work embarrassed the East German communist authorities, who sometimes suppressed it.

Camus, Albert (1913–1960). Younger son of an Algerian worker who was fatally wounded in battle less than a year after Albert’s birth, he was schooled in Algiers and worked his way through the University of Algeria, where at age 23, he completed his diploma thesis on Christianity and Greek philosophy. By then, he had already started work on his first book, a set of essays and sketches published in 1937 as *L’Envers et l’Endroit* (*The Wrong Side and the Right Side*). In his mid-20s he also cofounded a theater company in Algiers, toured Algeria as an actor for Radio Algiers, started writing for a new liberal newspaper, and started work on his first novel, *The Happy Death*. Never published, it was followed by his second novel, *The Stranger* (1942), and by a philosophic essay, “The Myth of Sisyphus” (also 1942), which explains the myth that informs his work as a whole. After working for a Parisian newspaper in 1940, Camus married Francine Faure, taught in Oran (Algeria), and wrote his third novel, *The Plague*, which appeared in 1947. In the meantime, he had returned to France to work for the underground newspaper *Combat*, becoming editor in 1944. After making common cause with Jean-Paul Sartre and other Marxist intellectuals in the early 1940s, he broke with them—especially Sartre—after publishing *The Rebel* in 1951. Starting in 1953, when he became director of the Festival of Angers, Camus staged a number of plays (including some of his own adaptations), continued his journalism, and published several more books, including *La Chute* (*The Fall*, 1956) and *L’Exil et Le Royaume* (*The Exile and the Kingdom*, 1957). In 1960, three years after receiving the Nobel Prize
for Literature, he was killed in an automobile accident. The First Man, an autobiographical novel discovered in the wreckage, was published by Alfred A. Knopf in 1994.

Conrad, Joseph (1857–1924). Born in Berdichev, in the Polish Ukraine, and christened Józef Teodor Konrad Nalecz Korzeniowski, Conrad was the son of a revolutionary Polish patriot and translator who—for his underground activities—was imprisoned in Warsaw by Russian police, then exiled to Vologda, in northern Russia, in 1862. After his father died in Cracow in 1869 (following his release from Russia the year before, when he returned to Poland with his son), Józef left Poland for Marseilles, where he joined his first British ship in 1878. Having become a British subject and an ordinary master of the British merchant marine in 1886, he worked in the Belgian Congo, ended his sea service in 1894, and had his first novel—Almayer’s Folly—published in London in 1895. The following year, just after An Outcast of the Islands appeared, he married the 23-year-old Jessie George. He then produced a steady stream of novels and other books, including The Nigger of the “Narcissus” (1897), Tales of Unrest (1898), Heart of Darkness (a novella first published in a magazine in 1899), Lord Jim (1900), Youth and Two Other Stories (1902), Nostromo (1904), The Secret Agent (1907), Under Western Eyes (1911), Chance (1913), Victory (1915), and The Rover (1923). On August 1, 1924, he died of a heart attack at his home near Canterbury.

Faulkner, William (1897–1962). Born in New Albany, Mississippi, as the eldest son of a railroad official, businessman, and (eventually) livery stable owner, Faulkner was raised in nearby Oxford and educated there until reaching the final grade of high school, which he quit in December 1914, reentered the following September, then soon quit again for good. After a brief job as a bank clerk, a stint with the Canadian Royal Air Force in Toronto, travel to Memphis and New Orleans, a year of study at the University of Mississippi, a few months as a bookstore clerk in New York, and two years as university postmaster, Faulkner had his first book—a collection of poems titled A Marble Faun—published in 1924. Then, after several months in Europe, he produced seven novels in rapid succession: Soldier’s Pay (1926), Mosquitoes (1927), Sartoris (1929), The Sound and the Fury (1929), As I Lay Dying (1930), Sanctuary (1931), and Light in August (1932). Meanwhile, after marrying Estelle Franklin in 1929 and starting to publish stories in national magazines, he bought a derelict Oxford house that he named Rowan Oak and set to work rebuilding it. Thereafter, while periodically working on film scripts in California, he produced—among other works—Pylon (1935), Absolom, Absolom! (1936), The Hamlet (1940), Go Down, Moses (1942), and Intruder in the Dust (1947). In 1950, Faulkner won the Nobel Prize for Literature. He died of a heart attack on July 6, 1962, and is buried in Oxford.

James, Henry (1843–1916). Born in New York City as the second son of a well-to-do lecturer and writer on religion, James was tutored at home until the age of 12, then taken abroad with the rest of the family for five years of travel and study. Two years after returning, he entered Harvard Law School but soon decided to make a career in writing. By 1875 he had resolved to work in Europe, moving first to Paris (where he met Flaubert, Zola, and Turgenev, among others), then in 1876 to England, where he would make his home for the rest of his life. Though his voluminous writings include travel essays, extensive literary criticism, and plays, he is best known for his novels about Americans living abroad. Those of his first phase (1875–1889) include The American (1877), The Portrait of a Lady (1881), The Bostonians (1886), and The Princess Casamassima (1886). Dispirited by the tepid response to the last two, James decided that The Tragic Muse (1890) would be his last long novel and turned to writing plays, such as Guy Domville (1895), a spectacular flop, and short novels, such as The Spoils of Poynton and What Maisie Knew (both 1897). In the last phase of his career, he produced three large-scale novels: Wings of the Dove (1902), The Ambassadors (1903), and The Golden Bowl (1904). Never married (except to his art), James became a British subject in 1915 and died the following year, shortly after receiving the British Order of Merit.

Joyce, James (1882–1941). Born in Rathgar, a suburb south of Dublin, Joyce was the eldest son of a Dublin tax collector whose fiscal irresponsibility gradually led his large family into poverty and debt. Nevertheless, with the aid of the prizes and scholarships he won, James was well educated by Jesuit priests, and in 1902, he graduated from Dublin’s University College with a degree in modern languages. After a few months in Paris in early 1903, he was called home in April to attend his gravely ill mother, who died in August. On January 7 of 1904, he wrote an autobiographical essay that eventually became A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man, first published in full in 1916. Meanwhile, after a number of his reviews, stories, and poems appeared in various Dublin periodicals, he eloped to the Continent with Nora Barnacle in October 1904. A few months later they settled in Trieste, Italy, where Joyce taught English and where—except for a brief period in Rome—he lived and worked until 1915, when he moved to Zurich for the duration of World War I. In 1914, after seeing his first and only volume of poetry into print (Chamber Music, published 1907), reworking his material for Portrait, and completing the stories for Dubliners (published 1914), he started work on Ulysses, which he finished in 1921. The book was published in February 1922.
by Sylvia Beach in Paris, where Joyce and his family had settled in 1920. His last novel—begun in 1923—was *Finnegans Wake*, published in 1939. After leaving an embattled France for Switzerland in late 1940, Joyce died in Zurich on the following January 13 and is buried there.

**Kafka, Franz** (1883–1924). Born in Prague, he was the eldest child of a prosperous Jewish fancy-goods merchant. After a rigorous early education in two of Prague’s German schools, Kafka studied law at Prague’s German University, gained a doctor of law degree, and went to work for an insurance company, where he became vice secretary in 1913. Meanwhile, he was writing fiction, beginning with “Description of a Struggle” in 1904, and he started keeping diaries in 1909. In 1912, after producing two stories and starting work on his first novel (eventually called *Amerika*), he gave his first public reading. He then wrote most of *The Trial* in 1914–1915, saw “The Metamorphosis” into print (1915), wrote the stories collected in *A Country Doctor* (published 1920), and in 1922 started work on his third and final novel, *The Castle*. Though he was engaged three times to two different women and spent the last part of his life with a young woman named Dora Diamant, Kafka never married, and at the age of 40, he died of tuberculosis at a sanatorium near Vienna—while correcting galleys for his final collection of stories, *A Hunger Artist* (1924). His three novels—all left unfinished in the care of his friend Max Brod—were published posthumously, starting with *The Trial* in 1925 and followed by *The Castle* (1926) and *Amerika* (1927). He is buried in Prague-Strasnice.

**Proust, Marcel** (1871–1922). Born in the Parisian suburb of Auteuil, he was the elder son of a distinguished doctor and a wealthy, highly cultivated Jewish mother who nurtured his love of reading and music and who became the single most important influence on his life. Raised in Paris, Proust was educated at the Lycée Condorcet and the Sorbonne, where he studied law and earned a philosophy degree at the age of 24. In the meantime, starting in 1892, he published sketches, literary criticism, and verbal portraits in *Le Banquet* and *La Revue Blanche*, the Symbolist journal. In 1896, he collected these with a few other pieces and made a book of them, published as *Les Plaisirs et Les Jours (Pleasures and Days)*. In the same year, he started work on his first novel, *Jean Santeuil*, but left it unpublished after turning out 1,500 manuscript pages over a period of eight years. In 1908, after recovering from a nervous breakdown precipitated by the death of his mother, Proust moved into 102 Boulevard Haussmann, where he lived and worked for the next 13 years, and started planning his masterwork, *À la Recherche du Temps Perdu (In Search of Lost Time)*. It came out originally in eight parts over a period of 14 years. *Du côté de chez Swann (Swann’s Way)* appeared in 1913, followed in 1919 by *À L’Ombre des Jeunes Filles en Fleurs (In the Shadow of Young Girls in Flower)*, winner of the Prix Goncourt; then *Le Cri de Guermantes I (The Guermantes Way I)* in 1920, when he received the Légion d’Honneur; *Le Cri de Guermantes II* and *Sodome et Gomorrah I* in 1921; and *Sodome et Gomorrah II (Sodom and Gomorrah II)* in 1922, the year he died. After his death came *La Prisonnière (The Prisoner)* in 1923, *Albertrine Disparu (The Fugitive)* in 1925, and *Le Temps Retrouvé (Finding Time Again)* in 1927. Proust is buried where he died, in Paris.

**Woolf, Virginia** (1882–1941). Born and raised in London’s Hyde Park, daughter of a scholar and writer named Leslie Stephen, Woolf was educated at home by her parents and governesses. At the age of 9, she and her siblings started the *Hyde Park Gate News*, which included her first attempts at fiction and appeared weekly until 1895. In the same year, her mother’s death led to her first mental breakdown, and another followed the death of her father in 1904. The Stephen family then moved to the Bloomsbury section of London and gathered about them a set of writers, artists, and philosophers who came to be known as the Bloomsbury Group. In 1915, three years after Woolf married Leonard Woolf and while she continually fought suicidal depression, Duckworth published her first novel, *The Voyage Out*, which was cordially received. She and Leonard then moved to Hogarth House in Richmond, where they founded the Hogarth Press in 1917; among other books, it published T. S. Eliot’s *Poems* (1919) and *The Waste Land* (1922). Woolf’s second novel, *Night and Day* (1919), was largely realistic, like her first; however, in the language and narrative technique of *Jacob’s Room*, her third novel (1922), she deployed the kind of innovations that made her a celebrity in her own time and have since marked her as a quintessential Modernist. She then produced four more novels—*Mrs. Dalloway* (1925), *To the Lighthouse* (1927), *The Waves* (1931), and *The Years* (1937)—as well as two landmark books on the professional rights of women, *A Room of One’s Own* (1929) and *Three Guineas* (1938). In 1941, after she drowned herself, her final novel, *Between the Acts*, was published posthumously.

**Yeats, William Butler** (1865–1939). Born in Dublin, he was the eldest child of a well-to-do Protestant landowner who briefly practiced law before giving it up to study art. After two boyhood years in Sligo (the Irish county of his ancestors), plus schooling in London and Dublin, William himself briefly studied art before settling down in London to write. His first book of prose was a collection of Irish fairy and folk tales published in 1888. Then came
his first book of poems, *The Wanderings of Oisin and Other Poems* (1889). Six years later, after he had published a play, *The Countess Kathleen* (1892), and co-edited *The Works of William Blake* (1893), his second book of poems appeared as simply *Poems* (1895). In 1899, when *The Countess* was produced in the first season of the Irish Literary Theatre, its highly unorthodox heroine (played by Maud Gonne) sparked angry protests. Shortly afterward, Yeats coauthored *Cathleen ni Hoolihan* with his friend and patron Lady Gregory, and it was produced in Dublin in 1902. In 1904, after a lecture tour in America, Yeats founded the Abbey Theatre, which he ran for the next several years. Then, turning back to poetry, he produced a steady succession of volumes: *The Green Helmet and Other Poems* (1910), *Responsibilities* (1914), *The Wild Swans at Coole* (1917), *Michael Robartes and the Dancer* (1921), *The Tower* (1928), *From the Winding Stair and Other Poems* (1933), *A Full Moon in March* (1935), *New Poems* (1938), and finally, *Last Poems* (1939). He also produced a two-volume autobiography (published in 1916 and 1922) and a number of critical essays. In 1917, after trying in vain for more than 25 years to marry Maud Gonne, then unsuccessfully courting her daughter, Yeats married the 25-year-old George Hyde-Lees. In 1923, he was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature. He is buried in Drumcliff, Sligo.
Essential Reading:


Brecht, Bertolt. *Collected Plays*, vol. 5, edited by Ralph Manheim and John Willet. London: Methuen, 1970-2001. Starting with a highly informative account of Brecht’s “crisis years” of 1938 and 1939, this volume of the *Collected Plays* includes three notable works that Brecht wrote in those years: *Life of Galileo* (translated by Manheim and Wolfgang Sauerlander), *The Trial of Lucullus* (translated by Frank Jones), and *Mother Courage* (translated by Manheim). It also includes variant versions of these plays, plus Brecht’s own extensive notes on them.


Conrad, Joseph. *Heart of Darkness*, 3rd ed., edited by Robert Kimbrough. New York: Norton, 1988. The carefully edited text of the 1902 version (with all variations from the manuscript and 1899 magazine version noted) is accompanied by an excellent collection of background material on the Congo, as well as important critical essays.


———. *The Sound and the Fury*. New York: Vintage, 1956. This includes Faulkner’s own appendix explaining the most important characters in the novel; some of the entries—such as those on Caddie and Jason—are micro-novels in themselves.


Proust, Marcel. *Swann’s Way*, translated with introduction and notes by Lydia Davis. New York: Viking Penguin, 2003. Based on the latest and most authoritative French edition of *À la Recherche du Temps Perdu* (published by Gallimard in 1987), this new and admirably accurate translation of *Du côté de chez Swann* is the first part of the new translation of *À la Recherche* commissioned by Penguin UK Modern Classics. This volume includes a helpful synopsis of *Swann’s Way*, along with informative notes on it.

———. *Remembrance of Things Past*, 3 vols., translated by C. K. Scott-Moncrieff, Terence Kilmartin, Stephen Hudson, and Andreas Mayor. New York: Random House, 1981. Until all seven parts (in six volumes) of the new Penguin translation appear in America (they are now available in Britain), this will remain the best translation for American readers. It includes notes and addenda, as well as synopses.


———. *To the Lighthouse*. New York: Random House Everyman’s Library, 1992. First published in 1927, this is the novel that followed the publication of *Mrs. Dalloway*. Its heroine is again a married woman, but its action takes place on the seashore far from London and extends over a period of many years.

Yeats, William Butler. *Yeats’s Poetry, Drama, and Prose*, edited by James Pethica. New York: Norton, 2000. The best one-volume selection of Yeats’s work available, this includes his most important poems (some in different versions), four of his plays, a generous collection of his prose, critical essays on his work, and a detailed chronology of his life.

**Supplementary Reading:**

Bentley, Eric. *Seven Plays by Bertolt Brecht*. New York: Grove, 1961. This volume includes—among others—*Galileo, Mother Courage, The Caucasian Chalk Circle*, and *The Good Woman of Setzuan*. Though its translations are not always reliable and it includes no notes or variant versions, Bentley’s introduction is comprehensive and informative.

Bleikasten, Andre. *The Ink of Melancholy: Faulkner’s Novels, from The Sound and the Fury to Light in August*. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1990. This is a thorough, probing study of the novels Faulkner wrote during his most productive period.
Bloom, Harold. *The Western Canon: The Books and School of the Ages.* New York: Harcourt Brace, 1994. At once idiosyncratic and prodigious in his range, Bloom insists that there is such a thing as a canonical list of great works in Western literature (not a point universally accepted now), and he sets out to show what makes them great.


Brod, Max. *Franz Kafka: A Biography,* translated by G. Humphreys Roberts and Richard Winston. New York: Schocken Books, 1960. Written by a lifelong friend of Kafka who was also his literary executor and editor, this is an indispensable source of firsthand information about Kafka’s life and character.


Todd, Olivier. *Albert Camus: A Life,* translated by Benjamin Ivry. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1997. This is a lucid, richly informative study of Camus’ life and work as a journalist, playwright, novelist, and philosopher fully engaged with the great questions of his time.


**Internet Resources:**

“Twentieth Century.” www.wwnorton.com/nael/20thcentury/welcome/htm. Run off the *Norton Anthology of Literature: Norton Topics Online,* this site gives reliable information, but only on English authors from the late 18th century to the modern period.

*Classic Authors.net.* http://www.underthesun.cc/Classics. This site includes ancient as well as modern authors and includes European as well as English and American writers. However, it is not comprehensive (e.g., no Beckett, Brecht, or Camus), and the quantity and quality of information vary considerably from one author to another.