Arnold L. Weinstein, Ph.D.
Edna and Richard Salomon Distinguished Professor and
Professor of Comparative Literature
Brown University

Arnold Weinstein was born in Tennessee in 1940 and received his undergraduate degree in romance languages from Princeton University in 1962. He studied at Université de Paris in 1960–61 and at Freie Universität, Berlin, in 1962–63. He received his masters and his doctorate in comparative literature from Harvard University in 1964 and 1968 respectively.

Dr. Weinstein has been teaching courses on European, English, and American literature at Brown University since 1968. In addition, he is the sponsor of Swedish Studies at Brown. He has been the chairperson of the Advisory Council on Comparative Literature at Princeton University and is actively involved in the American Comparative Literature Association.

Among the many academic honors, research grants, and fellowships he has received is the Younger Humanist Award from the National Endowment for the Humanities, 1971–72. In 1983 he was visiting professor of American literature at Stockholm University where he received the Fulbright Senior Lecturer Award. He is currently a member of the Academy of Literary Studies and the director of a NEH-funded program in great books. In 1995 he received Brown University’s award as best teacher in the humanities.

Understanding Literature and Life:  
Drama, Poetry and Narrative  
Part I: Drama

SCOPE:
This course surveys some of the classics of Western drama, from *Oedipus the King* of Sophocles, written in the fifth century B.C., to Samuel Beckett’s *Waiting for Godot* of the mid-twentieth century. In starting with Sophocles, Professor Weinstein considers the creation of the tragic hero in a religious and ritual context. With Shakespeare’s *Othello*, on the other hand, we are introduced to a theater marked by sensual language and the machinations of power politics, a world far different than the Sophoclean universe of oracles and divinations. Next, Moliere will proceed to give us a taste of the comic in *Tartuffe*, a play that reveals a subversive threat to the social order of France’s Golden Age.

In the course’s second half, Georg Buchner introduces in his proletarian drama *Woyzeck* some of the thematic and structural innovations in Western theater that are with us still today. Continuing in the realist line of Buchner, August Strindberg describes in *The Father* the demise of marriage and manhood, a reflection of late 19th-century political movements. Finally, Samuel Beckett brings us into the 20th century, engaging an absurdist approach to examine a modern world adrift from its cultural moorings.

Professor Weinstein examines these texts as documents authored by individuals who are, to varying degrees, shaped by the culture of their origin and the various influences of religion, class, and gender.

OBJECTIVES:
Upon completion of this course, you should be able to:

1. Discuss the cultural milieu of each work and identify how it shaped the play under discussion.
2. Trace the evolution of the tragic hero, the *agon*, and the nature of purgative theater from the ancient Greeks to the modern age.
3. Compare and contrast the six plays under discussion using concepts employed in the study of drama: theme, setting, conflict, structure, character, performance.
Lecture One
Why Literature—Civilization and Its Discontents

Scope: The first lecture presents a rationale for why we study literature. Art is the product of a profound human struggle between natural instinct and rational law. Thus is the notion of conflict fundamental in the theater—an arena that harbors deceit and chaos as much as harmony and order.

Objectives: Upon completion of this lecture, you should be able to:
1. Explain the idea of literature in light of Sigmund Freud’s theory of the struggle between instinct and reason.
2. Define the meaning of agon in ancient Greece and summarize its role in the tradition of Western theater.

Readings:
Recommended: Freud, Civilization and Its Discontents.

Outline
I. The Study of Literature: A Rationale
   A. Literature is commonly misunderstood as a subject only for refined sensibilities.
   B. Instead, what literature offers is an “experiential entry” into other people’s lives.

II. Sigmund Freud: A Theoretical Framework
   A. According to Freud, civilization and human nature are incompatible forces.
   B. The internal struggle between instinct and law gives birth to art as a form of expression.
   C. Though Freud sees art as an evasion, art is a unique record of what people have felt over the centuries.

III. Art as a Site of Conflict
   A. Art embodies various primal struggles in human history.
      1. reason versus passion
      2. innocence versus experience
      3. body versus soul
   B. The nature of language in art is inherently ambiguous, creating further struggle over interpretation
   C. Art not only illuminates the world, but sometimes complicates our understanding of it.

IV. The Agon as Foundation of the Theater
   A. Conflict, or agon, and its resolution is the central aspect of Western theater.
   B. The conflicts of the plays we will study are timeless but rooted in specific cultures:
      1. The power of the gods in ancient Greece (Oedipus)
      2. The new mercantile order of the English Renaissance (Othello)
      3. The power of obsession and the trappings of faith (Tartuffe)
      4. The coming of the Industrial Age (Woyzeck)
      5. The relation between marriage and patriarchy (The Father)
      6. The struggle between absurdism and meaning (Waiting for Godot)

V. Seeking an Interpretation of Art
   A. The interpretation of texts changes over time, illustrating the vital nature of literature.
   B. Literature frequently tackles taboo and forbidden subjects. Thus we should not expect these texts to be always happy or uplifting.
   C. Even with the darkest of texts, however, the purgative power of literature offers a unique way to know something without having to experience it directly.
Topics for Further Exploration:

1. Describe the advantages of art as a vicarious experience.
2. Summarize why art does not contain within itself a simple code of understanding or behavior.
Lecture Two

Oedipus the King
and the Nature of Greek Tragedy

Scope: This lectures discusses the religious nature of Greek drama, a ritualistic experience that reinforced the social order through collective catharsis. The stories narrated in such plays were often already familiar to the audience.

Objectives: Upon completion of this lecture, you should be able to:
1. Explain the purpose of “scapegoating” and how it applies to Oedipus.
2. Summarize the purpose and composition of the ancient Greek chorus.

Readings:
Essential: Sophocles, Oedipus the King.
Recommended: Sophocles, Antigone; Aristotle, Poetics;

Outline

I. The Theory and Origins of Greek Tragedy
   A. The Chorus, the foundation of tragedy, represents the Greek polis or community: conservative, traditional, tightly-knit.
   B. Greek tragedies evolved from a simple to complex form.
      1. They began as a conversation between one actor and the Chorus.
      2. Aeschylus added a second actor, making an agon, or struggle, more palpable.
      3. Sophocles added a third actor, further increasing complexity.
      4. Euripides further innovated by introducing more secular and psychological elements.
   C. Greek tragedy was enacted during the festival of Dionysus and thus was a religious, not a bourgeois, experience.
   D. According to Aristotle, tragedy performs a catharsis: a purging of pity and terror in the spectator.

II. Oedipus as Western Culture Hero
   A. Oedipus represents the burgeoning theme of Greek humanism: the impulse of the great individual who rises above the community.
   B. In this way, the Oedipus is a parable about the nature of human progress, revealed in metaphors that concentrate on human pursuits like sailing and agriculture.

III. Oedipus and the Reversal of Expectations: the Paradox of Irony
   A. Oedipus is a story in which the protagonist goes backward, not forward, in time.
   B. The hero realizes that, rather than the solution to the problem, he is the cause of the plague that threatens Thebes.
   C. The audience, which knew the story of Oedipus already, is a participant in dramatic irony: it understands more about the unfolding of events than the protagonist does.

IV. The Riddle of Oedipus
   A. How can an audience already familiar with the story of Oedipus indulge in Aristotle’s catharsis?
   B. Even Oedipus—“swollen feet”—is a clue to the play’s central mystery, a fact continually emphasized by Oedipus’s limp.
   C. Based on a riddle itself, the text of Oedipus is about the act of making meaning out of an enigma.
Topics for Further Exploration:

1. Compare and contrast how the audience at an ancient Greek tragedy would compare with a modern-day play-going audience.
2. Identify a ritualized setting in our own culture that might compare with an ancient Greek tragedy.
3. Define dramatic irony and how it applies to *Oedipus*. 
Lecture Three
Fate and Free Will—
Reading the Signs in Oedipus

Scope: In lecture 3 we consider the nature of the investigations that are at the center of Oedipus: the riddle of the Sphinx, the mysterious figure responsible for the plague, and finally, the hero’s search to ascertain his own origins. Oedipus, it turns out, is both the detective who will uncover the central crime of the plot and its perpetrator.

Objectives: Upon completion of this lecture, you should be able to:
1. Describe the role of the Delphic oracle in ancient Greek culture.
2. Summarize the conflict between the gods of Greek culture and the humanistic impulse represented by Oedipus.

Readings: Recommended: Sophocles, Oedipus at Colonus; Knox, Sophocles: The Three Theban Plays (introduction).

Outline
I. Oedipus as Investigation
   A. The major trope of blindness versus sight (Tiresias versus Oedipus) announces the theme of the search for knowledge.
   B. The presence of plague inspires a criminal investigation: one person’s crime has tainted an entire community.
   C. As in psychoanalysis, Oedipus undertakes a voyage into the past to discover his true nature.
   D. The riddle of the Sphinx, once solved by Oedipus, now reappears in the form of a riddle about his own origins.

II. The Delphic Oracle
   A. The voice of the gods, the oracle is a symbol of tradition built on the conservative principles of hierarchy and order.
   B. The rise of Greek humanism in the age of Sophocles calls into question this traditional obeisance to the gods.
   C. Most cultures, even ones that champion individualism such as our own, are possessed of oracular traditions.
      1. Cultural attractions like astrology and New Age crystals promise knowledge of and control over the future.
      2. Institutions like the NASDAQ index and the stock market offer the enticement of making a bundle.
   D. The oracle that sets the mold for Oedipus’s fate invites a fundamental question: does the world have to be guided by signs?

III. Interpreting Oedipus
   A. Freud studied poets in order to shape his own theories about psychoanalysis; Marx consulted the novels of Balzac. Literature offers a deep well of experience for the social sciences.
   B. The efforts of formal criticism bear out how many times we can go back to the Oedipus and find something new. Few critics, for example, have bothered to consider the plight of Jocasta in the story.

Topics for Further Exploration:
1. Summarize how literature can be fecund material for scholars in the social sciences.
2. Estimate the importance of oracles and soothsaying traditions in our culture and whether they are as important as they were in ancient Greece.
3. Describe how Oedipus might have been different if told from the point of view of Jocasta.
Lecture Four

Self-making vs. Self-discovery in Oedipus

Scope: We consider in lecture 4 the motion of the play as it extends backward in time: such is the only way that Oedipus can discover the truth of what he has become. Also at issue is the question of how the ancient Greeks presented violence on stage in a ritualistic medium like the tragedy.

Objectives: Upon completion of this lecture, you should be able to:
1. Define what Professor Weinstein means when he describes Oedipus’s return to his past as “exploratory.”
2. Describe how Oedipus refutes the traditions of classical tragedy.

Readings:
Recommended: O’Brian, Twentieth-Century Interpretations of Oedipus Rex.

Outline

I. Oedipus and the Oracular Tradition of Greek Drama
   A. The Greek tragedians and Aristotle have been ascribed “oracular”—or absolute—status in configuring the roots of Western drama.
   B. But Oedipus, though a classical tragic hero, also displays a human emotion heretofore unknown in Greek drama.
   C. Oedipus, in short, represents not just the fulfillment of the oracle but a human response to it that embraces tenderness and courage.

II. The Journey of Self-Discovery
   A. The main events of the Oedipus narrative are already over when the play begins. The drama is essentially a way of recounting what has already transpired.
   B. The role of literature parallels this structure: it reshapes an experience that has already occurred to make us ponder its meaning. In this sense, Oedipus is a shadow of his “creator,” Sophocles.
   C. The past is rediscovered by retelling it. Only by recounting what has already happened does Oedipus learn what he has always been ignorant of.

III. The Violence of Sophocles
   A. The decorum of ancient Greek drama forbade the enactment of graphic violence on stage.
   B. While acts of violence are only reported, they can still be ferocious, as with Oedipus’s recounting of the death of Jocasta.
   C. Not only is the violence graphic, but it casts a reflection on the rest of the play. The incestuous relationship between Oedipus and Jocasta is alluded to in Oedipus’s recounting of how he found her corpse.

IV: Free Will and Determinism
   A. Though guided by the oracle, Oedipus is also an agent of free will.
      1. He prescribes and enacts his own punishment.
      2. He converts his heinous crimes—dictated by fate—into a gesture of personal responsibility.
      3. His very search for the truth is itself an act of free will.
   B. The struggle of Oedipus is a symbolic moment in Western literature. He not only discovers the divine plan of his life, but shapes it to his own fashion. He surrenders to fate while making a personal declaration of independence from it.
Topics for Further Exploration:

1. Explain whether *Oedipus* argues that we are victims of a deterministic fate or are capable of shaping our own destinies.
2. Summarize what, if any, virtues motivate the actions of Oedipus.
3. Explain the role of the messengers in *Oedipus*. 
Lecture Five

The Interpretive Afterlife of Oedipus

Scope: In lecture 5 we consider the range of critical interpretations inspired by Oedipus: the prototype of the modern-day scientist (Nietzsche); the symbol of repressed libido (Freud); and the symbol of the ritual scapegoat (Girard). We also examine some of the modern incarnations of the oedipal tragedy.

Objectives: Upon completion of this lecture, you should be able to:

1. Explain the basic assumptions of Freud’s oedipal complex.
2. Summarize why ritual scapegoating would be practiced by any culture.

Readings:
Recommended: Nietzsche, The Birth of Tragedy; Girard, Violence and the Sacred; Freud, The Interpretation of Dreams.

Outline

I. Nineteenth-Century Attitudes Toward Oedipus: Frederic Nietzsche
   A. Oedipus breaks the seal of divine secrets—he invades nature, violating an ancient taboo.
   B. Oedipus is a prototype of the modern scientist, an insatiable seeker of knowledge.

II. Sigmund Freud and the Oedipus
   A. For Freud, Oedipus is a “tragedy of destiny,” the result of a complex response known as the “Oedipal complex” in which sons typically—if unconsciously—wish to murder their fathers and sleep with their mothers.
   B. According to Freudian psychology, the messengers of the story symbolize “the return of the repressed” from the individual’s unconscious.
   C. The Freudian schema is largely provided to understand the motivation of males, not females.
   D. As with Marxist, structuralist, and feminist schools of thought, Freudian interpretation suggests a deep structure to human life that we cannot fully grasp.

III. Anthropology and the Oedipus
   A. Claude Levi-Strauss sees Oedipus in “structural” terms, as a variant of many stories to be found around the world.
      1. Oedipus is about the slaying of monsters so man can be born from the earth.
      2. It is a story, common to many cultures, about the relative value of blood relations.
   B. Rene Girard views the play as embodying the principles of ritual sacrifice.
      1. Organized religion is an attempt to contain human violence through the use of human and animal sacrifices.
      2. Because sacrifice cleanses a community of sin, the search for a scapegoat (often a foreigner) is undertaken to absolve the rest of the community of infection.

IV. Later Incarnations of the Oedipus
   A. The artistic tradition of the Sophoclean hero has continued.
      1. Shakespeare later incarnated Oedipus in Hamlet, a young prince sworn to kill his stepfather.
      2. Roman Polanski uses the Oedipus myth in his film “Chinatown.” The elements of drought, incest, and hidden transgression are all present.
   B. The search for the ritual scapegoat also has its 20th century analogues.
      1. Scandals like Watergate, Iran gate, and the bombing of the World Trade Center call forth a public demand for meting out justice.
      2. Oedipus, to conclude, is the first detective story in the West.
Topics for Further Exploration:

1. Give examples of modern-day ritual scapegoating and how they are similar to the original quandary of Oedipus.
2. Explain the shortcomings of one of the followers interpreters of Oedipus: Nietzsche, Freud, and Girard.
3. Explain whether Oedipus has an Oedipal complex.
Lecture Six
Shakespeare’s Othello—
Tragedy of Marriage and State

Scope: We turn to the world of Elizabethan England in lecture 6 to consider a play by Shakespeare that traces the rise of a Machiavellian villain and the downfall of a tragic hero. In the domestic tragedy of Othello we examine the presence of the Turk—the barbarian Other that lingers at the edge of the play and, to be sure, in the character of its very hero.

Objectives: Upon completion of this lecture, you should be able to:
1. Compare and contrast the culture of Shakespeare’s England with the society that produced the Oedipus of Sophocles.
2. Compare the theme of civic disorder in Oedipus and Othello.

Readings:
Essential: Shakespeare, Othello.
Recommended: Bradley, Shakespearean Tragedy.

Outline
I. Othello and the Changing of the Guard
   A. The pagan context of Oedipus changes, in Othello, to that of a Christian culture imbued with strong notions of charity, guilt, and sin.
   B. Though charged with the struggle between Protestantism and the Counter-Reformation, Elizabethan England is a more secular culture than the one that produced Oedipus.
   C. Othello must be seen in the context of the rising nation-state and the expanding colonial ventures of the early 17th century.

II. Othello and the Source of Disorder
   A. The Other in Othello, never overtly glimpsed but alluded to, is the Turk. He is savage, barbarian, and deceitful, the sworn enemy of Christian Europe.
   B. The civic disorder of Venice is tied to sexual libido and racial taboos. That Othello allegedly makes “the two-backed animal” with Desdemona is enough to start an urban riot.
   C. The plunge into confusion in Othello is abetted by the change in locale: the story moves from the urbane precincts of Venice to the uncivilized hinterlands of Cyprus.

III. The Heroic Stuff of Othello
   A. Though African—and, as such, suspect as an outsider—Othello is a trusted defender of Christian culture.
   B. Othello’s noble deeds in battle recall the exploits of the classical hero.
   C. Othello embodies the aristocratic ideals of Elizabethan England: honesty, friendship, fidelity, chivalric love.
   D. But in light of contemporary values, does such a figure seem noble—or naïve?

Topics for Further Exploration:
1. Identify in what ways the tragic hero fulfills the role of the Turk in Othello.
2. Discuss the various ways in which sexual desire drives the plot of Othello.
3. Summarize how the setting of Othello has symbolic significance.
Lecture Seven
Poison in the Ear, or the Dismantling of Othello

Scope: In lecture 7 we take stock of the role of evil in Othello, and how Iago represents the contemporary figure of the Machiavel. We consider how the theme of investigation is paramount in Othello, just as it was in Oedipus—though with different repercussions and results.

Objectives: Upon completion of this lecture, you should be able to:
1. Summarize how Iago is the symbol of “intelligence” in the play.
2. Infer how much of Othello’s predicament is owing to his status as an outsider in his adopted culture.

Readings:
Recommended: Shakespeare, Hamlet; Greenblatt, Renaissance Self-Fashioning.

Outline
I. Iago, Man of Intelligence
   A. Iago embodies the Machiavel, member of a new social order that is cynical, self-interested, and entirely materialist.
   B. Ruled by “the governing ethos of a secular society,” Iago is endowed with some of the wisest and wittiest lines in the play. His character is not entirely repulsive.
   C. His apparent motives for ruining Othello are stated: he is passed up for a promotion in favor of Cassio, and he believes that Othello has cuckolded him. But neither seems to account for his depravity, what Samuel Taylor Coleridge referred to as his “motiveless malignity.”
   D. Iago is the quintessential man of theater, a personification of the triumph of appearance over reality.

II. The Character of Othello
   A. Though of noble bearing, Othello is a black hero. As an outsider marked by his race, he is a vulnerable man in Renaissance Europe, a continent already engaged in the African slave trade.
   B. Othello is tainted by his origins in yet another way, his own mother a practitioner of pagan witchcraft.
   C. Othello the outsider uses the “witchcraft” of language to seduce Desdemona.
   D. Language, as witchcraft, has many uses. While Othello employs words as a means of seduction, Iago engages them as a potent poison.

III. The Fall of Othello
   A. Iago’s poison is first poured in Act III, scene iii, the key transitional point in a play that moves from the stable order of Venice to the less certain ground of Cyprus.
   B. The animal imagery in Iago’s speeches in this scene suggest that baser instincts have won out; this further anticipates the violence and animality of the play’s conclusion.
   C. In Act III, scene iv, Iago tells Othello that his wife has been sleeping with Cassio. At this point, Othello degenerates before our eyes, reduced to a blabbering, sub-human state.
   D. While Oedipus concerns the establishment of law after a transgression fated by the oracle, Othello depicts a man who descends to brutality from the advice of a trusted friend.

Topics for Further Exploration:
1. Describe the ways in which witchcraft is an important theme in Othello.
2. Compare and contrast the idea of self-discovery as manifested in Oedipus and Othello.
3. Explain how Iago is a “quintessential man of theater.”

©1995 The Teaching Company Limited Partnership
Lecture Eight
Rethinking Othello—
Race, Gender and Subjectivity

Scope: In this lecture we look at Othello in light of various cultural schools of criticism, those focusing on the larger implications of race, class, and gender. We take a more deliberate look at the role of women in these tragedies, especially since their tragic heroes are men, making it easy to overlook the critical roles of Jocasta and Desdemona.

Objectives: Upon completion of this lecture, you should be able to:
1. Explain the limitations of Aristotle’s prescription for tragedy.
2. Discuss how issues of race, class, and gender might be applied to Othello.

Readings:
Recommended: Shakespeare, King Lear; Kott, Shakespeare Our Contemporary; Newman, Fashioning Femininity and English Renaissance Drama.

Outline

I. The Role of Culture in Creating the Tragic Hero
   A. Though jealousy (Othello) and arrogance (Oedipus) are identifiable failings, to understand these figures in terms of a single tragic flaw is insufficient.
   B. Shakespeare’s play deals with cultural attitudes that do not reside in the tragic hero alone.
      1. Othello, even more than Oedipus, is a stranger in a strange land, an outsider whose very origins link him to the barbarian Turk.
      2. An older man, Othello suffers from the sexual anxiety of having married a young woman. He indicates a fear of female sexuality that is common in Shakespeare.

II. Alternatives to the Tragic Flaw as An Explanation of Motive and Character
   A. Class: Iago is a social climber in a society increasingly mercantile in its orientation.
   B. Race: Iago’s resentment of Othello is inextricable from his racist opinion of Africans.
   C. Gender: Honor and fidelity in the play are defined in a patriarchal context; Desdemona is the legal property of first her father, then Othello.

III. Women in the Shadow of the Tragic Hero
   A. The extent of Desdemona’s subjugation is signaled by the prop that comes to signify her: a handkerchief, a minor accessory.
   B. Emilia—and other women in the play—are accorded a station in society defined by their desirability, or lack thereof. A woman’s subservience to men is assumed; when this relationship is broken, as when Emilia reveals Iago’s plot—she pays for it dearly.
   C. The stories of tragic heroes obscure those of heroines. Sophocles doesn’t plumb Jocasta’s suffering—nor highlight her courage in finally becoming independent of the oracle. Similarly, Othello has typically been viewed from the point of view of the Moor.

IV. The End of Othello
   A. Like Sophocles, Shakespeare believes the tragic hero must ultimately come to recognize his failure.
   B. While Othello locates the evil within himself, even calling himself the “Turk,” critics like T.S. Eliot have claimed that his is a self-serving confession to the end.
   C. Othello is never able to use his past as a source of strength, allowing his marginality to be a liability instead.
Topics for Further Exploration:

1. Describe how the roles of various women in *Othello* are dictated by cultural attitudes toward gender.
2. Explain whether or not Othello is a victim of racial prejudice.
3. Give examples of how Othello seems threatened by Desdemona’s sexuality.
Lecture Nine
French Theater and Molière’s Comedy of Vices

Scope: The Molière comedy discussed in lecture 9 is a reflection of the rising bourgeois sensibility of the French Golden Age. Though cautionary and pessimistic, however, Tartuffe, a play which borrows from the tradition of the commedia dell’arte, is also a vehicle of physical comedy. Slapstick with a message, Tartuffe exposes the theme of religious hypocrisy in a society where the Church is a powerful force.

Objectives: Upon completion of this lecture, you should be able to:
1. Summarize why Tartuffe would have produced a political scandal in its day.
2. Explain various ways in which the style and subject of Tartuffe reflect a conservative social order.

Readings:
Essential: Molière, Tartuffe.

Outline
I. The French Shakespeare and the age of Louis XIV
   A. Moliere, often called the French Shakespeare, writes plays that test the boundaries of classical comedy: he employs a mixture of farce, manners, and philosophical meditations.
   B. Tartuffe is written in an age of political strife, the uprising of nobles in La Fronde (1648) forcing King Louis XIV to break the power of the aristocracy.
   C. Louis XIV, the patron of Moliere, reigns as a divinely ordained monarch in a golden age of French culture.
   D. This social order is maintained through a powerful class structure that prizes the virtues of moderation, reason, and balance.

II. Moliere’s Theater of Secular Equilibrium
   A. The stability of the social order is represented in Moliere by the bourgeois family.
   B. In the typical Moliere play, the family is beset by an illness or obsession, thus upsetting the order.
   C. The hero of the Moliere play is frank, reasonable, unpretentious, and secular—l’honnete homme. In Tartuffe, this role is filled by Cleante.
   D. Though the honnete homme is solidly bourgeois, the servants in Moliere’s comedies often display wisdom and common sense. Together, these respectable and folk versions of wisdom provide a satisfying balance.

III. The Grandeur of VICE in Moliere
   A. Vice in Moliere is a threat to the social and moral order—it amounts to whatever suggests a mad appetite or sense of abandon.
   B. Vice is also a creative force in Moliere; it liberates the culture to take stock of itself and recognize the values it is built on.

IV. Tartuffe and the Traditions of the Stage
   A. Orgon, confirmed boor and family tyrant, is typical of the comic tradition. His comic refrain, “Yes, and Tartuffe?” recalls the mechanical, repetitious nature of comic shtick.
   B. Such is Orgon’s obsession for religious approval that he undertakes a relationship with Tartuffe more reminiscent of a star-crossed lover than a discriminating employer.

V. The Explosive Theme of Religious Hypocrisy
   A. Written in 1664, Tartuffe was banned several times before Moliere changed it in 1669.
   B. For a society secure in its religious beliefs, Tartuffe suggested a potentially sinister theme.
   C. As Iago was a duplicitous figure, so is Tartuffe the consummate fraud, an emblem of the theater and the act of staging.
Topics for Further Exploration:

1. Discuss how vice is a creative force in the drama of Moliere.
2. Identify ways in which the relationship between Orgon and Tartuffe resembles that between Othello and Iago.
3. Give examples of some of the comic elements that typically characterize a Moliere play.
Lecture Ten

*Tartuffe* and Varieties of Imposture

**Scope:** We consider in lecture 10 the traditional implications of comic theater: it results in marriage and therefore proclaims the virtues of love, moderation, and family. But the play is also replete with references to false love, as in the pretensions of Tartuffe as he “woos” Orgon and family to the point of disaster.

**Objectives:** Upon completion of this lecture, you should be able to:

1. Explain the dramatic reasons that the entrance of Tartuffe is postponed until Act Three.
2. Give examples of dramatic irony in *Tartuffe*.

**Readings:**

**Outline**

I. *Tartuffe* and the Purpose of Comedy
   
   A. The equilibrium of Moliere’s comedies points to a culture that values a comfortable social order more than Machiavellian ambition (*Othello*) or the authority of divine oracles (*Oedipus*).
   
   B. The comic rhythm of Moliere is life-affirming; at play’s end, the finale of a wedding affirms that life wins out over death.
   
   C. Given the grave threat posed by Tartuffe, however, this “happy ending” is kept in doubt until the very end.

II. The Rising Action of *Tartuffe*—Act III
   
   A. Moliere cleverly holds off Tartuffe’s actual appearance until Act III, a ploy to build suspense and reveal him first through the words of others.
   
   B. When Elmire and Tartuffe are alone together (Act III, scene iii), Tartuffe finally commits a false step: he tries to seduce Orgon’s own wife, laying bare his false character to the audience.
   
   C. Unknown to Tartuffe, Elmire’s son Damis listens in hiding to the conversation, an act that renders Tartuffe’s private proposal public, a graphic example of the theater’s ability to create a “stage within a stage.”
   
   D. The power of sexual appetite is bound up with the lofty tenor of religious rhetoric and courtly love, thus inviting a question: is Tartuffe really an honest man after all?
   
   E. With Damis as witness, finally Tartuffe’s monstrous appetite for scandal is set loose.

III. Instant Replay—Tartuffe and Elmire Redux
   
   A. The charade is repeated in Act IV, scene v, when Elmire seduces Tartuffe into the same proposal, this time with Orgon in the wings.
   
   B. As Elmire draws out Tartuffe, we are left to wonder what is real and what is feigned: everyone in the play seems to be, to some degree, an impostor.
   
   C. Orgon finally sees the error of his ways. He exposes Tartuffe.
   
   D. “This house belongs to me,” responds Tartuffe, caught red-handed. The plot has taken a further turn, ratcheted up for another comic climax.

**Topics for Further Exploration:**

1. Summarize the tragic theme that undergirds the comic method of Moliere in *Tartuffe*.
2. Interpret whether the ending to *Tartuffe* is in keeping with the tone of the rest of the play.
3. Identify how different characters in *Tartuffe* are guilty of hypocrisy.
Arnold L. Weinstein, Ph.D.
Edna and Richard Salomon Distinguished Professor and
Professor of Comparative Literature
Brown University

Arnold Weinstein was born in Tennessee in 1940 and received his undergraduate degree in romance languages from Princeton University in 1962. He studied at Université de Paris in 1960–61 and at Freie Universitat, Berlin, in 1962–63. He received his masters and his doctorate in comparative literature from Harvard University in 1964 and 1968 respectively.

Dr. Weinstein has been teaching courses on European, English, and American literature at Brown University since 1968. In addition, he is the sponsor of Swedish Studies at Brown. He has been the chairperson of the Advisory Council on Comparative Literature at Princeton University and is actively involved in the American Comparative Literature Association.

Among the many academic honors, research grants, and fellowships he has received is the Younger Humanist Award from the National Endowment for the Humanities, 1971–72. In 1983 he was visiting professor of American literature at Stockholm University where he received the Fulbright Senior Lecturer Award. He is currently a member of the Academy of Literary Studies and the director of a NEH-funded program in great books. In 1995 he received Brown University’s award as best teacher in the humanities.

Lecture Eleven
Religious Hypocrisy—Beyond Comedy

Scope: In lecture 11, we examine Moliere’s theater in light of comic obsessives—characters smitten with singular faults who threaten the orderly world of Louis XIV. We also take up the strong anticlerical emphasis of the play, a harbinger of things to come in the Enlightenment of the eighteenth century.

Objectives: Upon completion of this lecture, you should be able to:
1. Explain what is meant by Moliere’s “stereophonic” view of the world.
2. Identify the differences between the rex ex machina of Moliere and the deus ex machina of Greek theater.


Outline
I. Moliere and Obsession
   A. Though now apprised of Tartuffe’s duplicity, Orgon’s blindness hasn’t abated by Act V; he now assumes everyone is out to dupe him.
   B. Moliere’s plays, in fact, are filled with maniacal types who are locked into private worlds, constantly threatening to undermine the stability of society. Like Shakespeare, Moliere thus fashions a kind of “stereophonic” view of the world.

II. Tartuffe and the Darkness of Comedy
   A. In the final act, Orgon endures a political and economic disaster: exposed by Tartuffe as having made politically compromising acts, Orgon and family are to be evicted from their home.
   B. The king is given the last say—hardly surprising, since he’s Moliere’s real-life patron. His eventual arrest of Tartuffe proves he has seen through his ploys as Orgon could not.
   C. The happy ending runs counter to the logic of the play. The king’s interference is a kind of “rex ex-machina,” a variation on the Greek “deus ex-machina” which permitted superficially pat endings through the intervention of the gods.
   D. Comedy, then, is not to be considered a lighthearted jest or a trifle, but can “flirt with disaster” in a powerful, meditative way.

III. Moliere and the Enlightenment
   A. Though Moliere is not doctrinaire, his Tartuffe calls into question the integrity of the Church, the central institution through much of Western history.
   B. Moliere’s moderate world proposes a kind of secular humanism as its center. The fount of reason and moderation is not an institution like the Church, but the good sense of l’honnête homme.
   C. Moliere’s bourgeois comedy of good sense anticipates the Enlightenment of the next century, a movement which conceived a rationale for the democratic revolutions of the United States and France.
   D. Per Aristotle’s explanation of the purpose of theater, Moliere offers a comic catharsis—not purging us of pity and terror, but using laughter as a force to correct social excesses.

Topics for Further Exploration:
1. Contrast the role of royal authority in Tartuffe with that in Oedipus.
2. Explain why or why not Tartuffe is an attack on the Church rather than an expose of a fraud.
3. Assess whether the theme of using spiritual rhetoric for personal gain is as powerful an issue in our own culture as it was in Moliere’s
Scope: In the figure of Georg Büchner we find one of the fathers of modern theater and its emotional angst, its obsession with the everyday, its fascination with the limits of reason. Woyzeck, replete with working class “heroes” and apocalyptic visions, is the beginning of “documentary literature,” a media-inspired view of art.

Objectives: Upon completion of this lecture, you should be able to:
1. Explain how the organizational structure of Woyzeck departs from the standard established by earlier playwrights.
2. Identify the typical source material of documentary literature and give some twentieth-century examples of the same.

Readings:
Essential: Büchner, Woyzeck.
Recommended: Lindenberger, Georg Büchner; Büchner, Danton’s Death.

Outline

I. Literature After the French Revolution
   A. The political upheaval of the French Revolution inspired the development of democratic ideals and reinforced the role of theater as a social art form.
   B. Shakespeare and Moliere, while making a spectacle of political and religious abuses, never questioned the underlying social order of their times. In the nineteenth century, however, plays will begin to take as their subjects “ordinary people” and their struggle against great institutions.
   C. In Georg Büchner’s world, “there are no kings and queens.” The heroes of classical theater—Oedipus and Othello among them—are replaced in Woyzeck by a troubled proletarian.

II. Georg Büchner: A Life
   A. Büchner’s play, like his own life, seems to have been delivered prematurely. The play went through several drafts and was never finished; the author died at the age of twenty-three.
   B. A confirmed political activist, Büchner edited an anti-aristocratic journal disseminated among the peasantry.
   C. His multiple interest in philosophy, literature, and medicine bodes a strange intellectual makeup: Büchner will be capable of an expressionistic subjectivity combined with a scientific curiosity about social environment.

III. Woyzeck As Proletarian Drama
   A. Woyzeck is considered the first proletarian drama, a genre devoted to underlining the living conditions of the poor, if not intended to be read by them.
   B. The plot of Woyzeck is based on a composite of true stories lifted by Buchner from periodicals and newspapers of the day. As such, Woyzeck is the beginning of a documentary literature that is still popular.
   C. Büchner will explore the issue of personal responsibility from a modern perspective. He will analyze murder—or any social transgression—as an act caused by environmental conditions as much as by any moral failure.

Topics for Further Exploration:
1. Explain how Büchner’s personal life is reflected in the style and content of Woyzeck.
2. Summarize how Büchner’s idea of personal responsibility is distinctly modern.
3. Outline the evolution of the tragic hero from Oedipus to Othello to Woyzeck.
Lecture Thirteen

Woyzeck the Proletarian Murderer—
“Unaccommodated Man”

Scope: In Lecture 13, we see how Buchner has transformed the proletarian or servant roles, formerly of secondary status in traditional theater, with central importance. Through the process of “pseudo-speciation,” Woyzeck comes to be regarded as a sub-human specimen by other characters in the play.

Objectives: Upon completion of this lecture, you should be able to:
1. Explain the meaning of “pseudo-speciation” and how it applies to Woyzeck.
2. Give examples of how Buchner’s Woyzeck is modeled on the plot of Othello.

Readings:
Recommended: Brecht, Mother Courage; Büchner, “Lenz.”

Outline

I. Class Struggle and Pseudo-Speciation
   A. Woyzeck, a poor and ostracized hero, is a servant figure usually invisible in the traditional theater.
   B. The very humanity of Woyzeck is called into question: he is an erratic drifter, a subject for scientific experiments.
   C. Woyzeck is the object of what a social scientist might call pseudo-speciation: the denial of humanity to another person from an ethnocentric belief in superiority.
   D. Caught between the prescriptions of morality (the Captain) and the jargon of science (the Doctor), Woyzeck is reduced from the experience of a man to the role of a commodity.

II. The Beast—and the Beautiful—Within
   A. The imagery of animal desire is prominent throughout Woyzeck.
   B. In spite of such evident brutality, however, poetry and poverty are a common pair in the play: Woyzeck notes, “If we were in heaven, we would be called upon to make the thunder.”

III. Murder in Woyzeck
   A. As in Othello, the play on which Woyzeck is loosely based, a murder is the end result of an obsessive passion.
   B. Unlike Othello, a man of accomplishment, Woyzeck is a poor worker whose repression manifests itself in a bloody rage. His victim is even poorer than he.

IV. The Anti-Fairy Tale
   A. In keeping with the modern strain of this prophetic play, the grandmother’s fairy tale recounts a time when the heavens are dead and life is absent. This, as Professor Weinstein puts it, is “a post-nuclear world.”
   B. The evil of Iago is heightened in light of its contrast with a moral world; in Büchner, there is no alternative to Woyzeck’s plight.

Topics for Further Exploration:
1. Discuss the role of science in the world depicted by Büchner.
2. Explain what is meant in the lecture’s reference to Woyzeck presenting “a post-nuclear world.”
3. Identify what—if any—sources of virtue exist in the world of Woyzeck.
Lecture Fourteen

Woyzeck and Visionary Theater

Scope: In lecture 14 we are asked to assess *Woyzeck* as an unfinished play, a seeming fragment of a masterpiece. Büchner is one of the first Western playwrights to give us direct access into the interior state of a person suffering from psychosis. In this fragmented play and the world it depicts, we find the roots of several modern trends to come—realism, absurdism, cubism, surrealism.

Objectives: Upon conclusion of this lecture, you should be able to:

1. Assess the advantages and disadvantages of the unfinished and open-ended style of this play by Büchner.
2. Explain how Büchner establishes a mood of subjectivity in *Woyzeck*.

Readings:
Recommended: Richards, *Georg Büchner and the Birth of Modern Drama*.

Outline

I. The Play as Unfinished Business
   A. *Woyzeck* is a play without an ending, or rather various endings: most directors combine different aspects of the many drafts when staging the play.
   B. We are left to invent our own ending for Woyzeck—does he drown, is he brought to trial, or does he escape prosecution? Whether or not there is a trial, the reader is expected to sit in judgment on the artistic vision of the play.

II. The Open Stage of Büchner
   A. *Woyzeck* defies the classical structure of plays defined by Aristotle. Rather than a linear story with an evident climax, the play is a series of heterogeneous vignettes without resolution.
   B. The play assumes an unapologetic subjectivity from the start, beginning with Woyzeck muttering about his internal voices.
   C. A tortured, subjective vision persists throughout the play, casting doubt on the credibility—and sanity—of the protagonist.
   D. In *Woyzeck*, the invisible is given substance. The play leads from the edge of the recognizable world into an arena of libido, entropy, and madness.

III. Woyzeck—and the Theater—on Trial
   A. Büchner, in tracing the murky anatomy of a murder, asks by implication who is responsible for it. There is no clear agent of destruction as we saw in classical tragedy, or even in the dark comedy of Moliere.
   B. Büchner’s vision of “epic theater” will be taken up by Bertolt Brecht in the twentieth century. The theater of Brecht will also call for a cold but compassionate vision of the theater in which the spectator is asked to judge characters according to social, political, and economic questions.
   C. *Woyzeck* introduces the literature of marginalized peoples. Büchner asks us to experience art in a social context.

Topics for Further Exploration:

1. Explain the parallel made in the lecture between the theater and the courtroom.
2. Compare the voices that Woyzeck hears with those that pursue Othello.
3. Describe Büchner’s view of morality based on a reading of *Woyzeck*. 
Lecture Fifteen
Strindberg’s Father—Patriarchy in Trouble

Scope: We come to a play about domestic strife and marital violence in lecture 15. The profound doubt evinced in Strindberg’s The Father calls into question one of the wellsprings of Western culture: the patriarch. Strindberg is a pathfinder, his work spanning from the realism of the late-nineteenth century to the expressionism of the twentieth.

Objectives: Upon completion of this lecture, you should be able to:
1. Identify the process known as “infantilization” and consider it in light of other plays we’ve studied.
2. Summarize why so many of Strindberg’s opinions are seen as emblematic of the late-nineteenth century and the dawn of modernism.

Readings:
Essential: Strindberg, The Father.
Recommended: Strindberg, Miss Julie; Brustein, The Theater of Revolt.

Outline
I. August Strindberg: The Man and the Career
   A. A novelist, painter, fabulist, and poet, the multi-talented Strindberg was considered the reactionary counterpart of playwright and social progressive Henrik Ibsen.
   B. Strindberg’s career moves from an early embrace of naturalism to a later interest in expressionism, a path which finds him, in the end, a powerful purveyor of the surreal and violent.

II. Strindberg and the Close of the Nineteenth Century
   A. Strindberg’s work reenacts many of the earlier theories of Marx and Darwin that treat the history of patriarchy and the blind forces of natural selection.
   B. More than a rehash of contemporary thought, Strindberg’s themes also anticipate the work of Freud on hysteria and neurosis.
   C. Strindberg’s oeuvre goes so far as to augur the prominence of modern concerns: marital violence, divorce, custody battles, the fragility of marriage as an institution.
   D. Despite his modern sensibilities, however, Strindberg also casts a retrospective glance at tradition. He recalls in particular the search for self-knowledge in Oedipus.

III. The Father as Oedipal Meditation
   A. The hero of Strindberg’s play is a nineteenth-century figure in the tradition of Oedipus: calm, of dignified bearing, he is a man of science opposed to superstition.
   B. Though an intellectual of the highest rank, the Captain is trapped by his own methodology: while science frees him from other kinds of authority, it encourages the development of skepticism and doubt.
   C. The Captain is hounded by a radical doubt in the vein of the French philosopher Descartes: “I doubt, therefore I am.”
   D. The active source of his doubt will be the ambiguous behavior of his wife, Laura. As Iago taunted Othello with sexual innuendo, so will she prey on her husband’s doubt of their child’s paternity.

IV. The Fall of the Patriarch
   A. The Captain’s position as lawgiver and legal owner of his family is tested to the point of destruction.
   B. In the course of the play, the Captain undergoes a process of infantilization, steadily regressing to the behavior of a young boy.
   C. A confirmed misogynist, Strindberg reveals in this play a man’s submission to a shrewd wife not completely devoid of admirable qualities. Thus does art sometimes run contrary to the ideology of its creator.
Topics for Further Exploration:

1. Contrast the flaws of the Captain in *The Father* with those of the tragic heroes in Sophocles and Shakespeare.
2. Summarize the mystery at the center of this play by Strindberg, and how it compares with the mysteries pursued by Oedipus.
3. Explain why Strindberg is regarded as a precursor of twentieth-century drama.
Lecture Sixteen

Marriage—
Theatrical Agon or Darwinian Struggle?

Scope: In lecture 16 we are privy to a discussion of how, rather than the unifying role accorded marriage in traditional comedy, the domestic life is herein depicted as a virtual battleground. Strindberg is intent on exhibiting not so much the fall of an individual as the demise of an institution—marriage.

Objectives: Upon completion of this lecture, you should be able to:
1. Summarize how Strindberg’s agon in The Father is particularly modern.
2. Discuss how The Father is, among other things, a meditation about the nature of the theater.

Readings: Recommended: Strindberg, A Dream Play; Carlson, Strindberg and the Poetry of Myth.

Outline

I. The Theatrical Agon as Marriage
   A. The agon (conflict), originating with the Greeks, represented the struggle between two characters in the theater.
   B. Great periods of drama, including the late-nineteenth century, coincide with eras when the conflicts within a culture are sufficient to suggest an agon.
   C. The predominance of feminist issues like women’s suffrage in Strindberg’s day helps shape the struggle of The Father into a debate about differences in gender and more pragmatic issues like child custody.

II. Analyzing an Institution: Husband and Wife
   A. Laura and the Captain reveal completely different attitudes toward doubt. For her, it is a creative power capable of confusing whoever would challenge her authority; for him, it is a gnawing suspicion, a stain on the idea of scientific precision.
   B. Strindberg is one of the first Western writers to write in depth about the loss of autonomy that marriage engenders. As a couple, each individual surrenders part of a personal identity.
   C. Marriage offers “a starkly ecological vision of human affairs” in Strindberg. The Captain will go so far as to ask his wife to choose between his sanity and insanity.

III. The Ultimate Fall of the Father
   A. The Captain makes a chilling discovery in the course of the play: he has been seeking a mother figure, after all, and not a mate. By the end of the play he has regressed, as Oedipus did, to find something of his true identity.
   B. The Father reveals the crumbling of institutions as old as Western history: marriage, manhood, fatherhood. Strindberg calls into question the validity—and continuation—of each.
   C. Through the themes of progeny and imitation, The Father is a cultural fable about creation. It asks whether the male can call any offspring his own with certainty.

Topics for Further Exploration:
1. Contrast Strindberg’s view of marriage with the comic vision of Molière.
2. Compare and contrast Laura and Iago as pragmatists bent on advancing their own selfish ends.
3. Explain how The Father is a fable about creation and invention.
Lecture Seventeen

*The Father—
From Theater of Power to Power of Theater*

**Scope:** In lecture 17, we consider the discrepancy between appearance and reality—what seems to be true, and what is true. The man proves to be little more than a child. In this, the theater of metamorphosis, a military captain ends up in a straitjacket and the precision of science is useless in establishing the central fact in the story—Who is the father of this child?

**Objectives:** Upon completion of this lecture, you should be able to:

1. Identify where Strindberg suggests the theme of the loss of originality.
2. Explain how *The Father* echoes many of the staging principles of the theater.

**Readings:**
Recommended: Strindberg, *The Ghost Sonata.*

**Outline**

I. The Death of the Generative Principle
   A. By play’s end, the imagery of *The Father* is stripped of potency; the capon replaces the rooster (a perennial male symbol) and the moon replaces the sun.
   B. The loss of vitality is echoed in the spirits’ scene (I, viii). Bertha’s magic writing suggests the loss of originality, the insinuation that all writing is somehow stolen, plagiarized.
   C. In a later scene, the Captain cites the famous literary cuckolds who have preceded him, reinforcing the sense that we are inheritors, not the creators, of our destiny.

II. The Theater as Fact and Facsimile
   A. Just as the Captain discovers his life is not a reality but a role, the theater is a place of altered appearances, of reflected light.
   B. The theater is a place of changing identity, of metamorphosis: the Captain is tricked out of his military uniform into a hospital straitjacket.
   C. The environment of the Strindbergian theater disdains facts: doubt, change, and deception are integral elements in fashioning “a snake dance of displacements.”

III. The Fecund Legacy of Strindberg
   A. Strindberg is an alchemist of symbols, sly and profound. Rather than see the Captain change attire from tunic to straitjacket, it is yet another possibility to combine the two: the captain’s uniform *is* a straitjacket of male pretensions.
   B. Patriarchy, like theater, “is an affair of props.” Fatherhood, as much as the stage, is ruled by the use of masks.
   C. As a result, theater does not simply strip away falsehood. It is built on the notion of pretense and disguise, and so is a perfect vehicle for reflecting the deceit and illusion of life.
   D. Strindberg’s oeuvre is not about innocence, but the entrance of the human being into culture.

**Topics for Further Exploration:**

1. Conclude whether or not Strindberg has created a misogynistic play in *The Father*.
2. Give examples in *The Father* of where biology or culture are more critical forces in the individual than personality.
3. Summarize how Strindberg depicts the role of science and religion in *The Father.*
Lecture Eighteen

Beckett’s *Godot*—
Chaplinesque or Post-nuclear?

Scope: We examine in lecture 18 how Samuel Beckett embodies the absurdist trend of the twentieth century. *Waiting For Godot* grapples with neither royal, bourgeois, or even proletarian concerns. Its subject instead is the barrenness and anonymity that dominate the lives of its protagonists. This is a wrinkle in the Western tradition rather than an outright rejection of it.

Objectives: Upon completion of this lecture, you should be able to:

1. Explain what is meant in the lecture by the observation that “Charlie Chaplin haunts this play.”
2. Summarize how *Waiting for Godot* is a reversal of the development of ancient Greek tragedy.

Readings:

Outline

I. The Gulf Between Sophocles and Beckett
   A. Sophocles chooses Oedipus as the *representative man* of ancient Greece, a symbol of what the culture has achieved; Buchner chooses an urban worker for a play set during the Industrial Revolution.
   B. For Samuel Beckett, however, this figure has become a pair of tramps in an anonymous landscape.
   C. The social context of traditional drama is absent in Beckett; even the tortured middle-class dwelling in Strindberg has been cast aside for a setting that is as universal as it is empty.

II. Anti-Heroes: Vladimir and Estragon
   A. The two tramps seem to have no real counterpart in the real world; they’re not quite beggars, not Beats, not mad proletarian poets like Woyzeck. Instead they recall the cinematic vaudeville of Charlie Chaplin or the surreal slapstick of Federico Fellini.
   B. Oedipus (literally, “swollen feet”) is afflicted with a limp that is a central clue to his origins. Estragon’s limp, on the other hand, is only a sign of decay, a non-symbolic feature of a play that resists answers and solutions.

III. Beckett—Going Backward and Forward
   A. Among Beckett’s numerous influences is French philosopher Blaise Pascal. Pascal’s “the eternal silence of the infinite spaces frightens me” is a compelling description of Beckett’s world, adrift in both space and time.
   B. Beckett, if anything, reverses the tendency of classical tragedy. Instead of adding actors, he is removing them, breaking the stage down into “elemental theater.”
   C. The result of Beckett’s subtraction is the Couple: two tramps, more reminiscent of Laurel and Hardy or Martin and Lewis than a Greek chorus or a Strindberg marriage.
   D. What results from this distillation is a simplification and purgation of the theater, whose tradition has long endeared itself to symbols and props.

Topics for Further Exploration:

1. Explain the idea of representative man in several of the plays we’ve studied.
2. Describe how Vladimir and Estragon might justifiably be called anti-heroes.
3. Conclude why Beckett, so enamored of breaking down the stage, is also the author of such voluminous stage directions.
Lecture Nineteen
Beckett and the Comedy of Undoing

Scope: In lecture 19 we learn that the haunting and lyrical quality of Godot is achieved by alluding to fragments of traditional songs and stories. For all its apparent aimlessness, Godot reflects on the Christian theme of suffering and acknowledges the aspirations of traditional theater in the characters of Pozzo and Lucky. A playwright of echoes, Beckett brings together savage comic routines and collages which recall a broad spectrum of Western history.

Objectives: Upon completion of this lecture, you should be able to:
1. Compare Lucky and Pozzo with the comic types of Moliere and the stunted characters of Buchner.
2. Summarize the influence on Beckett of several writers or sources.

Readings: Recommended: Beckett, Krapp's Last Tape; Guicharnaud, Modern French Theater.

Outline
I. Beckett and His Influences
   A. Beckett’s roots are varied: from Marcel Proust he learned a haunting and personal perspective on recovering the past.
   B. From T.S. Eliot and James Joyce he borrowed the Modernist theme of the collapse of great institutions, examining the untoward fragments they leave behind.
   C. Fascinated by images of a crumbling past, Beckett also echoes the tradition of Christianity; the story of meaningful sacrifice—particularly Christ’s—suffuses the play.
   D. There is a beauty—and tragedy—of the past that is always a part of Beckett’s work. But the present is simply banal.
II. Rendezvous With Anti-Climax
   A. The long-awaited event of this play—the meeting with Godot—is analyzed to the point of silliness.
   B. Unlike a classical rendezvous with destiny—say, Oedipus’s meeting with his father at the crossroads—the sublime moment of expectation for Vladimir and Estragon is unconsummated.
   C. In Godot, meaning has died, but not the search for it. The stories of the past trickle out with no apparent function other than to fill time.
   D. Like other classical themes, suicide is stripped of its nobility; in Godot, it more resembles a pastime or routine than an act of personal resolve.
III. Introducing Lucky and Pozzo
   A. The arrival of Lucky and Pozzo heralds the memory of an older world: one defined by meaning, social station, and eloquence. Theirs is a kind of interlude, a structured episode that recalls the scenes of traditional theater.
   B. Pozzo recalls the rarefied world of nobility, one that survives from confidence and exploitation.
   C. Lucky, the slave, echoes the servant tradition of Moliere and Buchner. His extensive diatribe also happens to be utter nonsense, a reminder that the status of the intellectual in Beckett is one of pretension and foppery.

Topics for Further Exploration:
1. Describe the role of Christianity in Godot and whether Beckett evinces any nostalgia for it.
2. Conclude whether or not Godot has a dramatic climax.
3. Interpret what might be Beckett’s opinion of erudition and intellectual knowledge.
Lecture Twenty
Godot Absent—
Didi and Gogo Present

Scope: In lecture 20 we see how Beckett’s characters have sought to undo meaning rather than create it, making for a huge chasm with figures like Oedipus and Strindberg’s Captain who have made a relentless search for knowledge a part of their very being. Godot is a play without plot, a refutation of Aristotle’s original recipe for the structure of tragic drama.

Objectives: Upon completion of this lecture, you should be able to:
1. Describe the role of repetition in Waiting for Godot and infer its meaning as a structural device.
2. Summarize how Godot partakes of both tragic and comic elements.

Readings:
Recommended: Beckett, Molloy; Esslin, The Theater of the Absurd.

Outline
I. Beckett: Diversion and Routine
   A. Pascal, one of Beckett’s mentors, argues that introspection is painful because of the certainty of death.
   B. The answer to such pain is diversion, a ploy that Beckett uses with a rich mix of comedy. Diversion, indeed, is the nature of the theater.
   C. Filling time in the plays of Beckett has an ironic effect: passing time devalues it. The constant repetition of words slowly empties them of meaning.

II. The Disappearance of Plot
   A. Beckett denies us the usual payoff of drama: the conclusion, the revelation, the transformation. He undoes meaning rather than shapes it.
   B. The tragic trajectory of characters from Oedipus to the Captain is broken in Godot. Beckett ascribes no more importance to an ending than he does a beginning.

III. The Theme of Waiting
   A. For Beckett, waiting—not doing—is the central act of life.
   B. Many conclusions sought for never arrive. As in Godot, they are erased by the passage of time.
   C. Waiting takes its toll; the tramps in Godot are amnesiacs, barely able to distinguish between past and present.

IV. The Ties That Bind—the Couple in Beckett
   A. Didi and Gogo discover the ultimate reason to go on living in a meaningless world: if their double suicide were to partly fail, one of them would be forced to go on living alone.
   B. The center of Godot rests in the relationship between Didi and Gogo, paired like a hapless film duo. But does their “marriage” represent fraternal affection—or human bondage?
   C. Relying on a poor couple shorn of identity and context, Beckett has produced “the richest as well as the poorest theater in our century.” He reduces the theater to its most primal core—two actors on an empty stage—and asks us to conceptualize them in the tradition that produced Oedipus and Othello.
Topics for Further Exploration:

1. Appraise whether there is an *agon* in *Waiting for Godot* that in any way resembles the original Greek concept.
2. Conclude whether the main couple in *Godot* is, at the end of the play, any worse off than those we have encountered earlier.
3. Explain whether *Godot* represents a revolutionary new kind of theater—or a dead-end for a once-powerful tradition.
Glossary

agon: originally, the verbal struggle between two characters on the ancient Greek stage; now a more generalized term to describe dramatic conflict.

catharsis: according to Aristotle, the purging of terror or pity in the spectator.

comedy: a form of drama that typically ends with the wedding of two young people, thus regenerating the community. Sometimes, though not always, their story is also “comic” in the way we would use that word today.

documentary literature: literature derived from documentary news sources. After Buchner, this literature flowers in the twentieth century in the work of such writers as Truman Capote and Norman Mailer.

Enlightenment: a period roughly congruent with the eighteenth century in which the formal principles of secular, democratic government were established in Europe and America. The Enlightenment represented a dramatic break between church and state that had long been developing.

farce: exaggerated humor for the purpose of mockery. In Tartuffe, farce is achieved through devices like comic refrains, eavesdropping, and physical pratfalls.

infantilization: the process, noted by psychologists, of a mature adult returning to childhood behavior due to an emotional trauma. Such is the fate of the Captain in The Father, not to mention Othello and Oedipus.

l’honnête homme: the ideal in Moliere of a reasonable, unpretentious person. In Tartuffe, Cleante fills this role.

Machiavel: an unprincipled materialist who acts entirely out of cynical self-interest.

Oedipus complex: essentially an account of the competition, unconsciously motivated, between father and son in gaining the affection of the wife/mother. The complex is relevant to males, though Freud also developed an Electra Complex.

peripeteia (point of reversal): according to Aristotle, the point at which the hero’s fortunes are reversed toward an ultimate downfall.

proletarian drama: a theater about the living conditions of the working class, first introduced by Buchner and later expanded by Bertolt Brecht in the twentieth century. Proletarian drama focuses on material rather than spiritual values.

pseudo-speciation: the act of denying humanity to someone by reason of ethnocentrism, or a belief in his innate inferiority. Pseudo-speciation assumes the observer or core group is uniquely human, therefore conferring a lesser status on outsiders.

representative man: a symbolic human figure who stands for the values of an entire era. In Buchner this is a harried proletarian; in Beckett, it is a pair of tramps set down in an empty landscape without props or plot.

rex ex machina: a variety of the Greek concept of deus ex-machina, or “god out of the machine”—a physical device that lowered a god onto the stage of a Greek performance to bring the action to an end. In Professor Weinstein’s phrase, the king is called upon by Moliere to render a similar service in order to quickly conclude Tartuffe.

ritual sacrifice: a societal convention which requires that a person be sacrificed in order to purge the culture of a fear or transgression.

scapegoating: the ritual accusation of a wrongdoer that cleanses the society of a prominent fear.

trope: the figurative use of a word or expression.

Turk: the barbarian, the uncivilized brute, the enemy. In short, the “other” who differs from us in cultural as well as moral habits.
Western Drama Timeline

525-456 B.C. .......... Aeschylus, Greek playwright
493 B.C. .......... Theater of Dionysus in Athens
496-406 B.C. .......... Sophocles
484-406 B.C. .......... Euripides, Greek playwright
  471 B.C. .......... Second actor introduced by Aeschylus
  468 B.C. .......... Third actor introduced by Sophocles
  c.430 B.C. .......... Sophocles’ *Oedipus the King*
450-387 B.C. .......... Aristophanes, Greek playwright
250-184 B.C. .......... Plautus, Roman playwright
  1110 .......... Earliest miracle play
  1510 .......... *Everyman*, morality play
1564-1616 .......... William Shakespeare
1572-1637 .......... Ben Jonson, English playwright
  1604 .......... Shakespeare’s *Othello*
  1622-73 .......... Jean Baptiste Poquelin (Moliere)
  1623 .......... Publication of Shakespeare’s first folio
1640-1715 .......... William Wycherley, English playwright
  1642 .......... Puritans close English theaters
  1664 .......... Moliere’s *Tartuffe*
1813-37 .......... Georg Buchner
  1837 .......... Buchner’s *Woyzeck*
1828-1906 .......... Henrik Ibsen, Norwegian playwright
1860-1904 .......... Anton Chekhov, Russian playwright
1871-1909 .......... John Millington Synge, Irish playwright
1849-1912 .......... August Strindberg
  1887 .......... Strindberg’s *The Father*
1856-1950 .......... George Bernard Shaw, Irish playwright
1898-1956 .......... Bertolt Brecht, German playwright
  1953 .......... Beckett’s *Waiting for Godot*
Biographies

Sophocles (496-406 B.C.)
Sophocles, author of over one hundred plays, won eighteen victories—the first in 468—at the Festival of Dionysus. All but a handful of his tragedies have disappeared. Sophocles, reputed for the beauty of his appearance and voice, was a much admired figure in classical Greece, his life spanning from the Age of Pericles to the Peloponnesian War. He introduced a third actor to the drama and reduced the role of the chorus, both of them developments that inspired the evolution of Greek drama toward issues of character. His plots, masterfully constructed, were used by Aristotle to fashion his theory of tragedy.

William Shakespeare (1564-1616)
A native of Stratford-on Avon in England, William Shakespeare married Anne Hathaway in 1582 and established himself as an actor and writer in London by the 1590s. It is believed that his playwrighting career began in 1591 with Henry VI, perhaps in collaboration with another writer. Othello first appeared in 1604, only a few years after Hamlet and a few months before King Lear. In all, Shakespeare is credited with having written over thirty plays. Though a prolific writer for the royal Court, he wrote plays that appealed to all classes of Elizabethan society. While his dramas were abridged and rewritten during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, by the Victorian Age his texts had been largely restored to their original versions. He died on his birthday in 1616 and was buried in Stratford.

Jean Baptiste Poquelin (Moliere) (1622–73)
Jean Baptiste Poquelin quit the study of law in 1643 to join a small theater. After being imprisoned for debt, he later took the name Moliere to spare his father a public embarrassment. Eventually, Moliere became the playwright and leading actor of a troupe that toured the provinces, returning to Paris in 1658. Tartuffe was first staged in 1664 at the royal residence of Versailles and later banned for its religious improprieties. Moliere married Armande Bejart in 1662, the daughter of his long-time mistress, Madeleine. The author of some three dozen plays and ballets, Moliere died of tuberculosis at the age of fifty-one, only hours after performing the lead role in The Imaginary Invalid. He was denied burial on church ground because he had been an actor.

Georg Büchner (1813-37)
A student of history, philosophy, and medicine, Georg Büchner became a political activist as a young man growing up in Germany. A critic of the aristocracy and a staunch defender of the poor, Büchner soon came under state surveillance. Awarded a doctorate in natural sciences by the University of Zurich in 1835, Büchner worked on Woyzeck during the months preceding his death from typhoid fever in 1837. Based on the true story of Johan Christian Woyzeck who, in 1824, stabbed his mistress to death and was later beheaded, Woyzeck was not published until 1879 and not performed until 1913. Büchner’s only other dramatic works were Danton’s Death (1835), Leonce and Lena (1836), and the lost Pietro Arentino.

August Strindberg (1849-1912)
Born in Stockholm, Sweden, August Strindberg failed his qualifying examinations in medicine and later made a living as a journalist. The author of some fifty plays, not to mention an assortment of other writings, Strindberg was married and divorced three times. He was indicted for blasphemy after the appearance of his collected stories, Getting Married, in 1884. In 1887 he published The Father, the first of his great plays about the depravity of culture and human nature. Later plays, including The Dance of Death (1901) and The Dream Play (1902) relied on an expressionistic portrayal of the subconscious. Strindberg frequently succumbed to mental breakdowns and died of cancer in 1912.

Samuel Beckett (1906-89)
Born and raised in Ireland, Samuel Beckett moved permanently to Paris in 1938 and subsequently wrote primarily in his adopted French. A teacher in his early career, he was later a participant in the French Resistance during the Second World War. An author of many novels, Beckett first produced Waiting for Godot in Paris in 1953; two years later, in London, the author translated the text back into his native tongue for its first production in English. In his later plays such as Endgame, Krapp’s Last Tape, and Happy Days, Beckett continued to break down the conventions of traditional theater. His novels include Watt, Molloy, Malone Dies, and How It Is. In 1969 he was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature.

©1997 The Teaching Company Limited Partnership
Readings

Required:


Recommended:


———. *Krapp’s Last Tape and Other Dramatic Pieces*. (New York: Grove Atlantic, 1957). (0-8021-5134-5)


Arnold L. Weinstein, Ph.D.

Edna and Richard Salomon Distinguished Professor and
Professor of Comparative Literature
Brown University

Arnold Weinstein was born in Tennessee in 1940 and received his undergraduate degree in romance languages from Princeton University in 1962. He studied at Université de Paris in 1960–61 and at Freie Universitat, Berlin, in 1962–63. He received his masters and his doctorate in comparative literature from Harvard University in 1964 and 1968 respectively.

Dr. Weinstein has been teaching courses on European, English, and American literature at Brown University since 1968. In addition, he is the sponsor of Swedish Studies at Brown. He has been the chairperson of the Advisory Council on Comparative Literature at Princeton University and is actively involved in the American Comparative Literature Association.

Among the many academic honors, research grants, and fellowships he has received is the Younger Humanist Award from the National Endowment for the Humanities, 1971–72. In 1983 he was visiting professor of American literature at Stockholm University where he received the Fulbright Senior Lecturer Award. He is currently a member of the Academy of Literary Studies and the director of a NEH-funded program in great books. In 1995 he received Brown University’s award as best teacher in the humanities.

Understanding Literature and Life: 
Drama, Poetry and Narrative
Part II: Poetry

SCOPE:
This course surveys some of the classic poetry of the Western tradition, from the sonnets of William Shakespeare to the epic verse of Walt Whitman to the protest poetry of Adrienne Rich. We begin with the English Renaissance, when Shakespeare was exploring a range of metaphysical topics that would help crown him “The Bard of Avon.” Next, we trade the strict form of the Shakespearean sonnet for the visionary epics and lyrics of the enigmatic William Blake, “the next great English poet after Shakespeare.”

We then turn to America and the poetic exploits of Walt Whitman, a proponent of free verse and the self-declared bard of democracy. We continue with his reclusive contemporary, Emily Dickinson, a poet unsentimental about death, isolation and the ambivalence of nature. As a further introduction to the modernist canon, we examine the French poet Charles Baudelaire: erotic poet, scribe of romantic longing, chronicler of the changing metropolis.

We enter the twentieth century with Robert Frost, a homespun populist at first glance who proves to be more complex on further scrutiny. With Wallace Stevens we turn to a lush evocation of the physical world and, in his later work, a more parsed and cerebral exploration of the mind. We conclude the course with feminist poet Adrienne Rich, an assertive presence whose project it is to create an alternative history by giving voice to women and others who have traditionally been unheard.

OBJECTIVES:
Upon completion of these lectures, you should be able to:

1. Compare the poets discussed by using concepts employed in the study of poetry: rhyme, meter, metaphor, irony, point of view.
2. Describe something of the cultural milieu of each poet and suggest how it helped to shape the poems under discussion.
3. Trace the evolution of poetic form from the sonnets of Shakespeare to the free verse of Whitman and the modernist experiments of the twentieth century.
4. Explain how a given poem is a meaningful “transcription of life into language.”
Lecture Twenty-One
Study of Literature—Approaches, Encounters, Departures

Scope: In lecture 21 we consider poetry as the most stylized and condensed of literary forms. We reflect on the nature of reading as a “cultural enterprise,” one in which our own life experience comes to bear in the way we approach a text. Poetry is not an arcane endeavor; it is about everyday things, a rediscovery of common experience.

Objectives—Upon completion of this lecture, you should be able to:
1. Define what is an “unmediated reading” and explain why such a project is virtually impossible.
2. Summarize what the labor of poets might have in common with the violent story of Oedipus.

Readings:
Recommended: Bloom, Anxiety of Influence

Outline
I. Literature and Its Discontents
   A. One reason many people are disappointed by classic literature is that they don’t know what they’re looking for in it. Literature has been trumped up as a pastime whose worth is supposedly self-evident.
   B. Poetry, the most stylized of literary forms, is perhaps the most misunderstood literary genre. Its artifice is more obvious than that of the theater or fictional narratives.

II. Poetry: What Is It?
   A. Poetry employs form and design in its very layout on the page. Unlike other genres, it has a palpable shape.
   B. From the sonnets of Shakespeare to the modernist poems of our age, poetry is about what is contemporary and topical—it is not a rarefied form of aristocratic self-expression.
   C. Poetry makes us consider the connections between things; it invites the reader to become an artist in order to interpret it.

III. Poetry: Personal and Cultural Responses
   A. Language generates a unique response in all of us. “The meaning of the text,” as we hear in the lecture, “is not on the page.”
   B. In spite of the reader’s authority, “unmediated readings” of a poem are quite impossible. Reading is a cultural enterprise: we bring the sum total of our lives to a poem when we consider it.
   C. When reading poetry, we observe a kind of recorded family history. Literature looks back on itself; texts are comprised of the scraps, echoes, and fragments of earlier texts.
   D. Thus is the history of poetry infused with an Oedipal impulse. The poet, in a sense, seeks to kill the “father” by departing from tradition.

IV. The Pragmatism of Poetry
   A. Words are our most practical tools. Poetry is a testament to the idea that our possibilities are limited by what we can say about ourselves.
   B. Poetry is the most elegant game ever invented, but a necessary game; literature itself “is a transcription of life into language.”
   C. The touchstone of poetry is that there is magic in daily life, that even the most mundane act is, in a poet’s hands, replete with mystery and value.
Topics for Further Exploration:

1. Explain why poetry is often considered an aristocratic or arcane pursuit.
2. Summarize what is meant by the idea that poetry has a family history.
3. Explain why reading is a cultural enterprise.
Lecture Twenty-Two
Shakespeare’s Sonnets—The Glory of Poetry

Scope: We consider in lecture 22 the sonnets of Shakespeare, poems of defined shape wrought by an elusive intelligence. One of the favorite themes of the sonnet is the endurance of art beyond the lifespans of life and love—Shakespeare bestows a kind of literary immortality on his subjects.

Objectives—Upon completion of this lecture, you should be able to:
1. Define the basic format of a Shakespearean sonnet.
2. Summarize how Sonnet 73 reveals an ecological view of aging, an intertwined relationship between experience and youth.

Readings:
Essential: Booth, Shakespeare’s Sonnets.
Recommended: Spenser, Poetical Works.

Outline
I. The Sonnet: Meaning and Form
   A. The sonnet is the classical form of traditional English poetry. In Shakespeare, it employs stanzas of 4-4-4-2 lines, a format at once firm and supple.
   B. The sonnet’s Petrarchian variant, more popular on the European continent, uses an 8-6 arrangement.

II. The Elusive Sonnets of Shakespeare
   A. Poetry exploits different meanings. Though the objective of everyday language is clarity, such is not always the case for verse.
   B. While straightforward in form, the sonnet can be slippery in meaning. It is mysterious and playful in the hands of a master like Shakespeare.
   C. Shakespeare is deft at bridging “high” and “low” themes in his work, from aristocratic aspirations to lewd innuendo.

III. Love and Nature in Sonnet 18
   A. In Sonnet 18, Shakespeare glories in the triumph of art over nature: his beautiful subject will one day die but not the words that describe him/her.
   B. Shakespeare plays on several registers of language in this sonnet.
      1. The opening question is a retort to a common English proverb of the day.
      2. His use of words like temperate reveals a close attention to etymology (tempus=time in Latin)
      3. He presents images that suggest a gradual diminishing of light and youth.
   C. Shakespeare has written a poem about the prowess of the poet—he can reverse nature by imbuing his subject with immortal life.

IV. Sonnet 73 and the Loss of Poetic Powers
   A. In this sonnet, Shakespeare offers a psychic portrait of the self through natural imagery: leaves, boughs, birds.
   B. Gone is the exuberance of Sonnet 18; in this poem we encounter confusion, loss, and the pain of abduction.
   C. Shakespeare concludes with an environmental picture: the ashes of youth consume the spark of life. The pathos of this poem and the exuberance of Sonnet 18 suggest the wide tonal range of the sonnets.
Topics for Further Exploration:
1. Summarize how Shakespeare’s Sonnet 18 revels in the triumph of art over nature.
2. Give examples of where Shakespeare uses metaphors of nature to suggest human frailty.
3. Identify places in Sonnets 18 and 73 where the poet deliberately seems to seek an ambiguous meaning.
Lecture Twenty-Three  

The Shape of Love and Death in Shakespeare’s Sonnets

**Scope:** In lecture 23, we continue with a discussion of spirit and body. Shakespeare employs a twist on traditional Christian and Platonic motifs by attributing a series of worldly attributes to the soul.

**Objectives**—Upon completion of this lecture, you should be able to:
1. Give examples of where Shakespeare imbues the soul with physical characteristics in Sonnet 146.
2. Give examples of puns and word-play in the sonnets discussed thus far.

**Readings:**

**Outline**

I. Shakespeare and the Temptations of Biography
   A. Theories abound as to the human subject of the sonnets: was it the “dark lady” of literary legend? Or was it, as many critics have suggested, a male lover to whom the poems were addressed?
   B. Though biographical facts can tell us something about a writer, we find ideas in the sonnets that are mysterious and cryptic by nature.

II. Body and Soul: Sonnet 146
   A. Shakespeare accepts the basic Christian division between body and soul, a tradition dating back to Saint Paul.
   B. But Shakespeare reverses the traditional pairing of the two, suggesting it is the soul that is the source of excess, perhaps an allusion to what psychologists will later call the “libido.”
   C. The mystery of the relationship between body and soul is grounded in metaphors borrowed from commonplace pursuits like mercantilism and real estate.
   D. As usual, Shakespeare revels in the connotations of word-play.
      1. *Dearth* signals *death*.
      2. *Mansion* is linked to *man*.
      3. *Terms* is derived from *terminus*.
   E. This dialectic—between Christian and Platonic, between spiritual issues and material pursuits—is a poetic staple of our most famous bard.

III. The Grandeur of Shakespeare: Sonnet 116
   A. This marriage sonnet discusses fidelity through the use of maritime metaphors suggesting fate, enterprise, and orientation.
   B. The appearance of legal imagery (*writ, prove*) in the final couplet places the power of love in the cradle of would-be abstraction. Love, however, is more powerful than legal decrees.
   C. Finally, the couplet suggests uncertainty about continuing love. Though a popular wedding poem, the sonnet is marked by a nagging doubt.

**Topics for Further Exploration:**
1. Infer whether the lack of a specific person mentioned in the sonnets makes them more or less powerful as declarations of love.
2. Explain why the sonnet, in spite of its restrictions, might be a useful format for a poet.
3. Conclude whether Shakespeare, given his penchant for immortality, reveals a streak of vanity in his sonnets.

©1997 The Teaching Company Limited Partnership
Lecture Twenty-Four
Innocence and Experience in William Blake

Scope: Lecture 24 turns to the poet of innocence and experience, William Blake. Blake evokes the angelic possibilities of childhood before engaging the initiation into culture that will deform the innocent child. In Blake is found the constant battle between those who propose the moralizing conventions of culture and those who are smothered by them.

Objectives—Upon completion of this lecture, you should be able to:
1. Summarize Blake’s treatment of the chimney sweep and explain his symbolic—and historical—purpose in the poems.
2. Explain why Blake is regarded by many students of history and literature as a prophet.

Readings:
Essential: Blake, Songs of Innocence, Songs of Experience.

Outline

I. William Blake: Prophetic Muse
   A. The next great English poet after Shakespeare, Blake belongs to no tradition in particular; he is, in the history of literature, a confirmed iconoclast.
   B. Blake is best known for what he foresees, not what he follows. He anticipates the oeuvre of Marx and Dickens on the poor; long before Freud, he notes the spiritual cost of physical repression; his collection of lyrics also foreshadows the Romantic poets.

II. Songs of Innocence and Songs of Experience
   A. Blake’s Songs of Innocence (1789) are limpid, pure, angelic, prior to reason and law.
   B. The Songs of Experience (1794) are about society, deformation, culture. Together the two offer a complementary vision of growth.
   C. In Blake, the child comes to fruition as a symbol of human development. As with most Romantic thinkers to follow, Blake posits, in the “Introduction” to Songs of Innocence, a human child as the writer’s muse, not a god or goddess.

III. “The Little Black Boy” and the Challenge to Innocence
   A. Blake’s “Little Black Boy” is an early poetic recounting of racism.
   B. Indeed, the poem is about the indoctrination of children, a favorite Blakean subject.
   C. The poem represents the essence of Blake: mired in ambiguity, we are at a loss whether to admire or pity the speaker of the poem.

IV. “The Chimney Sweeper” and the Dialectic of Blake
   A. The chimney-sweep, a common nineteenth-century symbol of the new Industrial Age, appears in Songs of Innocence as a child given respite from work by an angelic dream.
   B. In Songs of Experience, on the other hand, the boy has become an emblem of neglect, a victim of “God & his Priest and King.”
   C. In Blake, the innocence of childhood is shadowed by the imperatives established by religion and the state.
   D. Of innocence and experience, neither state is preferable in Blake. Each offers a perspective on the permeability of the human being.
Topics for Further Exploration:

1. Explain, according to Blake, what comprises the voyage from innocence to experience in the modern world.
2. Summarize whether or not “The Little Black Boy” proposes racist sentiments.
3. Contrast the format of Blake’s songs with the sonnets of Shakespeare.
Lecture Twenty-Five
Blakean Fables of Desire

Scope: We examine in lecture 25 the iconoclastic William Blake. A critic of both religion and reason, Blake views the ancient doctrine of the opposition between soul and body to be a grievous mistake—the flesh is an extension of spirit. As Blake himself wrote: “Energy is eternal delight.”

Objectives—Upon completion of this lecture, you should be able to:
1. Give examples of where Blake anticipates the sociology of Marx and the psychology of Freud.
2. Summarize what Blake really values, given his rejection of religion and reason.

Readings:
Essential: Blake, The Marriage of Heaven and Hell.
Recommended: Behrendt, Reading William Blake.

Outline

I. The Narrative Journey of Blake
   A. As in “The Nurse’s Song,” the typical narrative fable in Blake is that of a journey from frolic to doom.
   B. Blake is a confirmed enemy of repression. Poems like “Angel” and “Garden of Love” promote his anti-clerical orientation. Religion, in the eyes of Blake, poisons the natural desires of the human being.

II. The Marriage of Heaven and Hell
   A. But Blake offers more than a critique—he is possessed of a remarkable vision too. In The Marriage of Heaven and Hell he imagines a dialectic between repression and desire, a way of bridging the usual contraries.
   B. Blake disdains the traditional split between soul and body, seeking to fuse them instead. He proposes that body is an extension of spirit.
   C. Blake would require of us a cleansing of perception. He makes hallowed the physical and instinctive, an early advocate of sexual freedom.
   D. In “The Proverbs of Hell,” Blake attacks the usual pieties, constructing a new dictionary of wisdom in the form of anti-proverbs: “Prisons are built with stones of Law, Brothels with bricks of Religion.”

III. Blake and the Rise of Science
   A. While opposed to the rule of Reason, Blake foresees the concerns of nineteenth-century science.
      1. His imagery of a ruthless Church and State anticipates Karl Marx’s critique of religion and capitalism.
      2. His ability to recognize the toll of psychic repression is a poetic foreword to the psychoanalysis of Sigmund Freud.

Topics for Further Exploration:
1. Identify a maxim from “The Proverbs of Hell” and explain how it differs from a common proverb you have heard from another source.
2. Explain why Blake would have rejected the claims of science and reason.
3. Summarize Blake’s attitude toward sexual freedom and cite supporting examples from the poems.
Lecture Twenty-Six
Blake—Visionary Poet

Scope: In lecture 26 we are reminded that, for all his archetypal symbols and extremes, Blake can also be a poet of ambiguity. He writes poems of interrogation and wonder; poems that lament without sermonizing; poems that focus on the imagery of everyday life in the Industrial Age.

Objectives— Upon completion of this lecture, you should be able to:
1. Summarize how “The Tyger” recalls imagery from both pagan and Christian traditions.
2. Contrast the point of view of “The Sick Rose” with the proverbs of The Marriage of Heaven and Hell.

Readings:

Outline
I. “The Sick Rose”
   A. This is a poem told entirely through metaphor, a small universe of allegory.
   B. In this poem, reality is all turmoil and cataclysm; the worm flies “in the howling storm.”
   C. The poem suggests the probing presence of sexuality, the phallic worm entering the rose, a symbol of female genitalia.
   D. The poem is a world removed from Blake’s proverbs. Sibylline and riddling, the poem’s symbols point to elements beyond them, but with no apparent didactic purpose.

II. “The Tyger”
   A. Capable of enormous dissatisfaction with the world, Blake can also be a poet of awe, as “The Tyger” demonstrates.
   B. Rather than a poem of pronouncements, “The Tyger” is sustained by a series of questions about the nature of Creation.
   C. Blake’s imagery recalls the Greek myth of Prometheus as well as the lamb often associated with Jesus. In the poem, the lecture shows us, “Paganism wrestles with Christianity.”

III. “London”: Great Visionary Poem of the Nineteenth Century
   A. Blake takes the “mark” of early Industrial Age London: a town chartered and branded in the eyes of a prodigal son.
   B. Blake sees the invisible, hears the silent—“the mind-forg’d manacles,” the chimney-sweeper’s cry, the soldier’s sigh, the harlot’s curse.
   C. The poet envisions a world not described by other writers of the age; the invisible is given light in the project of Blake.
   D. The poem, which ends at midnight, is apocalyptic: symbol of the new order, the city is without shame, consuming its own inhabitants.
   E. In “London,” various systems of the social order come to light; Blake is able to see the connection between the chimney sweep and the church, between the harlot and the young wife.

Topics for Further Exploration:
1. Explain the meaning of the “mind-forg’d manacles” in “London.”
2. Summarize how Blake reveals the relationship between different levels of society in “London.”
3. Describe the importance of repetition in “The Tyger.”
Lecture Twenty-Seven
Whitman and the Making of an American Bard

Scope: In lecture 27 we are introduced to Walt Whitman, the writer who marks “the birth of American poetry” with his compendium of poems in free verse, a work that breaks rank with the rhyme and meter of traditional poetry. An enemy of censorship, aristocracy, and parochialism, Whitman invents a world that embraces all, a pantheistic appeal for tolerance and democratic unity.

Objectives– Upon completion of this lecture, you should be able to:
1. Compare the attitudes of Whitman and Blake concerning the repression of desire.
2. Explain how Whitman’s poetics embody a declaration of independence from poetic tradition.

Readings:
Recommended: Emerson, “The Poet” from *Essays.*

Outline

I. Whitman’s Origins: Tocqueville and Emerson
   A. Whitman is in the tradition of Alexis de Tocqueville, a French traveler to America who praised America’s commitment to the present instead of the past, who lauded the ideal of equality, and who saw the American self as an alternative to the heroes of tradition.
   B. Essayist Ralph Waldo Emerson was also an important influence. His declaration that America needed a new kind of expression not to be found in Europe was an inspiration to Whitman.

II. A Declaration of Independence
   A. While Shakespeare and Blake employed traditional rhyming forms and metered lines, Whitman introduces the shocking innovation of “free verse.”
   B. Whitman is the poet of democracy; his breadth of subject matter is great. He will write poems about forbidden subjects like sexual desire; banal ones like a field of grass; unpoetic ones like the amputation of a soldier’s arm.

III. “Song of Myself”: A Song for America
   A. Whitman is a master of the panoramic point of view, the cinematic pan, decades before the invention of moving pictures.
   B. His poetry celebrates people unseen and unheard in traditional verse: tradesmen, volunteers, prostitutes, farmers, servants, and slaves. “Through me,” he writes, “many long dumb voices.”
   C. The spirit and body are equally flattered in Whitman. He opposes all kinds of censorship: sexual, moral, cultural, political.
   D. Whitman is a poet of appetite, not self-control. A pantheist at heart, he claims a certain divine essence, as, he believes, should everything in Creation.

Topics for Further Exploration:
1. Summarize how both the form and content of Whitman’s poetry glorified the idea of democracy.
2. Explain how Whitman achieves a panoramic point of view in his verse.
3. Explain why Whitman has frequently been labeled a “pantheist.”
Lecture Twenty-Eight
“Myself” as Whitman’s Nineteenth-Century American Hero

Scope: We consider in lecture 28 how Whitman is a throwback to the bards of the ancient world, a messenger of political and cultural information. A bold experimenter in form and content, Whitman’s “free verse” disdains the traditional forms used by Shakespeare and Blake. Whitman is one of the first writers to insist that the stuff of daily life—anyone’s life—is fit for poetic contemplation.

Objectives—Upon completion of this lecture, you should be able to:
1. Summarize what is meant in the lecture that “Whitman is the most fraternal writer in American literature.”
2. Explain why Whitman’s poetry—both in form and content—was so controversial in its time.

Readings:
Recommended: Greenspan, The Cambridge Companion to Walt Whitman.

Outline
I. Whitman and Censorship
   A. Whitman sees himself as a bard in the ancient sense, as a “public utility”—the messenger by whom political and cultural news are passed on to the people.
   B. Whitman’s portrayal of sexual desire is brazen in comparison with the New England literati of his day. More than just a genial, democratic poet, he writes about orgasm and masturbation with a frankness that shocked his age.

II. Whitman and the Ties That Bind
   A. In Shakespeare, the body and soul struggle; in Whitman, they have sex (“Song of Myself,” no. 5)
   B. Whitman even maintains a congress with the elements, establishing, as we learn in the lecture, “a copulatory relationship with nature.”
   C. When he claims to be the hounded slave or the condemned witch (“Song of Myself,” no. 33), Whitman makes a democratic pledge to have a stake in the lives of other people.
   D. Whitman maintains a “muscular fraternalism” with life, a first-person empathy that ranges from nature to humankind with easy familiarity.

III. The Risk of the Open Road
   A. D.H. Lawrence, among others, has taken Whitman to task for trying to “consume” the world, trying to homogenize everything unto himself.
   B. This sweeping aspect of Whitman is the very risk of democracy—how to hold to a center while including all the disparate elements of the land.
   C. Whitman’s vast tonal range—from the ecstatic to the delicate—connotes an intimacy with the reader hitherto unknown in poetry. His familiarity with the public is such that he asks us to be fellow-travelers on the open road.

Topics for Further Exploration:
1. Contrast Whitman’s depiction of the body and soul (“Song of Myself,” section 5) with what we read in Shakespeare’s Sonnet 146.
2. Describe the kinds of devices Whitman uses to speak as intimately as possible to the reader.
Lecture Twenty-Nine
Form and Flux, Openness and Anxiety
in Whitman’s Poetry

Scope: In lecture 29 we conclude our study of Whitman with a critical look. Is Whitman a man of legendary empathy—or a poet who lacks integrity? In a number of shorter lyrics, he reveals a somber grasp of death and nature, a far cry from his usual reputation as a democratic cheerleader and pantheistic celebrant.

Objectives—Upon completion of this lecture, you should be able to:
1. Summarize the traditional critique of Whitman’s “democratic posture.”
2. Explain how “A Noiseless Patient Spider” might be interpreted as a metaphor for the work of Whitman the poet.

Readings:

Outline

I. The Critique of Whitman
   A. For some critics, Whitman’s rhetoric is a reflection of democracy’s weakness, not its strength: his bombast represents a cheapening of political and philosophical discourse.
   B. Critics have also questioned Whitman’s easy ventriloquism: can a writer pretend to speak on behalf of so many others?
   C. The grand catalogues of Whitman can lack a center; his fabled generosity sometimes seems more slack than compelling.
   D. There are indeed doubts in Whitman, as evinced in the more solemn passages from a poem like “Crossing Brooklyn Ferry.” Whatever his preferred persona, there is another, more ponderous side to Whitman.

II. Whitman and Death
   A. Much of Whitman’s early work celebrates death and failure as part of nature’s grand compost.
   B. But in lyrics like “Out of the Cradle Endlessly Rocking,” Whitman gives a more somber view of dying.
   C. In his elegy to Abraham Lincoln, “When Lilacs Last in the Dooryard Bloom’d,” Whitman heralds the cross-country trip of the president’s coffin as the death that almost ruined the nation.
   D. At poem’s end, Whitman appeals to the organic cycle of spring, an echo of Shakespeare’s sonnets.

III. The Uncertain Whitman
   A. In “A Noiseless Patient Spider,” Whitman reveals in this short lyric all his confidence and doubt about the prospect of the writer.
   B. In this extended metaphor, the spider’s filament becomes the artist’s work—the writer can never be sure when his “anchor” will catch.
   C. The poem, like some of the Shakespearean sonnets, establishes a “fabulous reciprocity”: each reader of Whitman through the ages makes Whitman live again.

Topics for Further Exploration:
1. Describe Whitman’s treatment of death in “When Lilacs Last in the Dooryard Bloom’d.”
2. Compare the theme of art and immortality in “A Noiseless Patient Spider” with Shakespeare’s Sonnet 18.
3. Summarize the different ways by which Whitman gives shape and form to his “free verse.”

©1997 The Teaching Company Limited Partnership
Lecture Thirty
Emily Dickinson—
The Prophetic Voice from the Margins

Scope: In lecture 30 we meet Emily Dickinson—though reclusive and unknown in her own life, no less of an American original than Whitman. Through an unconventional use of plurals, punctuation, tense, and syntax, she concocts an aggressively private poetry, one that grants her credibility in the inaccessible realms of death and spirituality. Dickinson creates herself through language, what might be seen as a feminist response to the American dream of self-invention.

Objectives—Upon completion of this lecture, you should be able to:
1. Differentiate between the major stylistic devices employed by Whitman and Dickinson.
2. Identify unconventional use of language in Dickinson’s poems.

Readings:
Essential: Dickinson, Final Harvest or The Complete Poems.
Recommended: Paglia, chapter from Sexual Personae.

Outline
I. Emily Dickinson and “Inzile”
   A. Unknown in her own time, Dickinson lived the life of a domestic recluse—not an exile from the public sphere dominated by the likes of Whitman, but an “inzile.”
   B. Capable of writing a poem that begins “I’m nobody,” Dickinson seems the opposite of the congenial and democratic Whitman.
   C. Dickinson is a kind of closet iconoclast: her style compact and elliptic, she dispenses with many formal rules of grammar concerning time, number, and tense.

II. Dickinson: Pride of Self
   A. Dickinson’s social reticence is not to be confused with lack of confidence. If she is anti-social, she is aggressively so.
   B. In “The Soul Selects Her Own Society” she depicts a fierce individual that depends on utter privacy to know itself.
   C. For Dickinson, the world is mad, not sane. She will hold up none of the democratic ideals that so entranced Whitman.

III. The Rage of Dickinson
   A. In Dickinson’s work (“Dare You See a Soul at the White Heat”) there is sometimes a cataclysmic eruption that suggests a powerful, repressed desire coming forth.
   B. In other poems (“I’m Ceded, I’ve Stopped Being Theirs”) she sets herself apart from family, church, and name to reinvent herself.
   C. Language is the tool by which Dickinson shapes herself, an idea congruent with the feminist critique that woman has been controlled and made inaccessible by man.
   D. “I’m Ceded” is a fierce poem about auto-genesis in which the speaker rediscovers a subjectivity denied her by her culture.

IV. “My Life Had Stood A Loaded Gun”
   A. “My Life Had Stood” is a fable about the ultimate impossibility of repression, not an uncommon theme in Dickinson.
   B. The poem reveals a loss of agency, but an acknowledgment of enormous power. As such, it is not so much a feminist poem as it is a meditation on the potency of language and poetry.
The persona of Dickinson in this poem is both self-effacing and murderous, a twisted psyche exposing itself. Laid bare is a rift between the potential of the self and the social conditions we live in.

**Topics for Further Exploration:**
1. Identify examples of aggression and violence in poems discussed in this lecture.
2. Summarize how Dickinson’s poems are the product of what the lecture refers to as “inzile.”
3. Give examples of where Dickinson shapes a persona through her unusual use of language.
Arnold L. Weinstein, Ph.D.

Edna and Richard Salomon Distinguished Professor and
Professor of Comparative Literature
Brown University

Arnold Weinstein was born in Tennessee in 1940 and received his undergraduate degree in romance languages from Princeton University in 1962. He studied at Université de Paris in 1960–61 and at Freie Universität, Berlin, in 1962–63. He received his masters and his doctorate in comparative literature from Harvard University in 1964 and 1968 respectively.

Dr. Weinstein has been teaching courses on European, English, and American literature at Brown University since 1968. In addition, he is the sponsor of Swedish Studies at Brown. He has been the chairperson of the Advisory Council on Comparative Literature at Princeton University and is actively involved in the American Comparative Literature Association.

Among the many academic honors, research grants, and fellowships he has received is the Younger Humanist Award from the National Endowment for the Humanities, 1971–72. In 1983 he was visiting professor of American literature at Stockholm University where he received the Fulbright Senior Lecturer Award. He is currently a member of the Academy of Literary Studies and the director of a NEH-funded program in great books. In 1995 he received Brown University’s award as best teacher in the humanities.

Lecture Thirty-One
Dickinson and the Poetry of Consciousness

Scope: In Lecture 31 we acknowledge Dickinson as one of our finest observers of the natural world, a writer who translates the natural into the human realm with uncommon shrewdness. But, as Dickinson herself suggests, we construct what we see as much as we observe it. In the act of watching, we translate the world with our most imaginative vehicle: language.

Objectives— Upon completion of this lecture, you should be able to:
1. Give examples of how Dickinson uses a natural phenomenon to reflect on the interior state of the human being.
2. Summarize the various religious traditions that Dickinson draws from in her poetry.

Readings
Recommended: Porter, Dickinson: The Modern Idiom.

Outline
I. Dickinson as Nature Poet
   A. Dickinson is a nature poet of the first order, a precise observer of plants and animals.
   B. In “A Bird Came Down the Walk” she avoids the pathetic fallacy for more direct meditation. By fully identifying with the bird, she doesn’t translate nature into human terms but goes so far as to coin a word (“plashless”) for flight.
   C. In “A Route of Evanescence” Dickinson goes beyond writing about nature to describe a neurological activity—we do not merely record our perceptions, but follow them at a distance, translating them as we go.

II. Constructing the World We Live In
   A. For Dickinson, meanings are not already in the world; at the most basic level we construct the world we live in.
   B. In “There’s a Certain Slant of Light” Dickinson builds a statement of mortality from the simplest observation, converting the phenomenological world into pithy reflection.
   C. For Dickinson, the invisible work of human beings is signification—“where the meanings are” is inside the human being.

III. Nature and Religion
   A. Dickinson draws an analogy between nature and religious ceremony in “Further in Summer Than the Birds.”
   B. Dickinson’s religious sources in the poem are eclectic, ranging from the Druids to the typology of the Puritans.
   C. Dickinson, in this poem as in others, mixes the senses to create a rich quilt of imagery.
   D. For Dickinson, nature is only delivered of its message if we attend to what we see—otherwise, its reflection on mortality is lost on us.

Topics for Further Exploration:
1. Identify examples of where Dickinson, in writing about nature, is really writing about human nature.
2. Explain what devices Dickinson uses to make us take a second look at the natural world.
3. Compare and contrast the interior landscapes of Dickinson with the visionary landscapes of Blake. Do the two voices have anything in common?
Lecture Thirty-Two
Dickinson—Death and Beyond

Scope: For Dickinson, we learn in Lecture 32, death is not a climax but the threshold to a voyage. She is capable of reviewing the passage of death with both harrowing reportage and whimsical bemusement. She seems to have found the riddle, but refuses to give us an answer outright.

Objectives: Upon completion of this lecture, you should be able to:
1. Explain why death would have been an almost mundane topic in the age of Emily Dickinson.
2. Summarize why Dickinson can be considered a poet of aftermath and reflection.

Readings
Recommended: Gilbert and Gubar, chapter from The Madwoman in the Attic.

Outline
I. “Because I Could Not Stop for Death”
   A. Dickinson undertakes an unlikely itinerary in this poem: she passes out of life and into death, piercing the very border between them.
   B. “Because I Could Not Stop for Death” is vintage Dickinson—the poet looks back, in solemn aftermath, as she comes to grip with what has already transpired.
   C. While most poets would defeat death or inure themselves to it, Dickinson seems to outlive it in this poem, creating a harrowing vision out of what was, at first glance, a genteel personification.

II. “I Heard a Fly Buzz When I Died”
   A. Dickinson perceives death in this poem through an imagined act of transition, a grand climax of expectation rather than a serene ride.
   B. Just at the moment of transfiguration, however, the consciousness of the poem is interrupted by the most trivial of creatures. “A Fly—With Blue—uncertain stumbling Buzz,” writes Dickinson, again reminding us of her exacting powers as a nature poet.
   C. “I Heard a Fly Buzz When I Died” is an allegory of ignorance, a frustrating poem about the static nature of what we cannot know.
   D. The poem is shaped as a front-line account of the doors of perception, “a report on what it’s like to be alive.”

III. “I Felt a Funeral in My Brain”
   A. “I Felt a Funeral” goes beyond the last buzz of consciousness to chart an itinerary into the mind after death.
   B. In spite of the poem’s formality and decorum, however, it is an enigma. Is it about depression? A beating heart? A headache?
   C. A fundamental shift alters the poem from feeling to motion and hearing; the narrator finds herself a partner of silence.
   D. The poem ends with a paradox: the universe multiplies and collapses. An arduous journey has ended in pain and beauty.

Topics for Further Exploration:
1. Summarize how “I Heard a Fly Buzz When I Died” is a departure from other poems we have read about death to date.
2. Compare and contrast images of death in Dickinson with what is found in the elegies of Whitman.
3. Identify places in Dickinson’s poetry where she dares to describe the transitional state from life to death.
Lecture Thirty-Three
Baudelaire—The Setting of the Romantic Sun

Scope: In Lecture 33 we turn to a French poet, Charles Baudelaire, the champion of urban underworlds and bohemian revolt. In celebrating the inherent value of artifice—unlike the Romantics—Baudelaire is also an erotic poet, a sensualist, and a confirmed Catholic. His point of view will seem oddly aristocratic by comparison with his American contemporaries.

Objectives—Upon completion of this lecture, you should be able to:
1. Define Modernism and explain why Baudelaire is considered one of the founders of the movement.
2. Explain how the metaphor in “The Cracked Bell” is a comment about the nature of poetry itself.

Readings
Essential: Baudelaire, Les Fleurs du Mal.

Outline
I. Baudelaire: The Beginnings of Modernism
   A. Charles Baudelaire, hardly recognized in his own day, is now considered the fount of modernist aesthetics.
   B. He is a poet of the city, the new urban order of the Industrial Age; unlike Whitman, however, he takes a marginal, bohemian perspective rather than a democratic one.
   C. Baudelaire is a disciple of craft and artifice; the world of nature has little attraction for this poet more interested in shrewd effects than inspiration.

II. “The Cracked Bell” and the New Voice of Poetry
   A. For Baudelaire, metaphor is about poetry, not merely a device it employs.
   B. In “The Cracked Bell” the bell undergoes a series of transformations: first personified as a gullet, then compared to a soldier, finally it becomes the complement of the poet’s soul. The bell becomes a linguistic vehicle or carriage; the soul, meanwhile, seems animated in the process.
   C. The poem begins by a cozy fireside and ends with a pile of corpses by a lake of blood: Baudelaire sees himself as a poet of sickness, not health.

III. Cynicism and Romantic Longing in Baudelaire
   A. Baudelaire has many aspects of the modern misfit: he’s enamored of drugs, is a devotee of sin, and dares to write about such “unpoetic” subjects as boredom.
   B. But there is another Baudelaire, one taken with the Romantic tradition embodied in his hero, Edgar Allan Poe. Baudelaire is a fine erotic poet, an apostle of travel to mysterious lands, and a seeker of ecstasy in the face of death.

Topics for Further Exploration:
1. Trace how Baudelaire develops the theme of travel in “The Head of Hair.”
2. Infer what might have been Baudelaire’s opinion of democracy.
3. Explain how Baudelaire, whatever his modern inclinations, is also a throwback to Romantic writers like Edgar Allan Poe.
Lecture Thirty-Four
Baudelaire’s Poetry of Modernism and Metropolis

Scope: We consider in Lecture 34 how Baudelaire, in spite of Industrial Age tracts that demonized the urban world, regarded the city as an admirable alternative to nature. His perspective on nineteenth-century Paris is by turns grotesque, futuristic, melancholic, and brutal. The city inspires in him both the ghoulish mark of Poe and the wide-eyed surrender to technical wonders that undergirds Modernism.

Objectives— Upon completion of this lecture, you should be able to:
1. Explain why the modern city exerts for Baudelaire such a peculiar fascination.
2. Summarize how Baudelaire views the displacement of the past by the forces of Progress.

Readings
Recommended: Peyre, Baudelaire: A Collection of Essays

Outline

I. Baudelaire and the City
   A. The most prophetic of Baudelaire’s work deals with the modern metropolis, a landscape severed from nature.
   B. A great observer of nineteenth-century Paris, Baudelaire in “Parisian Dream” fashions the reverie of a futurist city.
   C. Baudelaire views the city as a deposit of corruption and vitality, not a place where meet the benevolent crowds of Whitman but the anonymous faces of a mysterious world.

II. The Heart of the City: “Crowds”
   A. Poe’s story “A Man of the Crowd,” in which one man tracks another who never sleeps, inspired this poem by Baudelaire.
   B. Baudelaire depicts in this poem an intense interest in other people as worthy subjects, as “imaginative investments.”
   C. The crowd is not embraced in a fraternal fashion, but by Baudelaire’s trademark ambivalence—passionate but distant.

III. “The Little Old Women”
   A. In this poem Baudelaire doesn’t soften or romanticize the appearance of old age, but presents a series of grotesque freaks.
   B. The vampish Baudelaire narrates, imagining the spent passions of the women in what might be called an act of spiritual union—or poetic parasitism.
   C. Baudelaire makes a family from a group of strangers by investing them with an imagined past; while exploiting the terror of their condition, he endows them with a deliberate subjectivity.

IV. “The Swan”
   A. “The Swan” was written in the context of the modernization of Paris, the imperial alterations undertaken by Hausmann in the 1860s.
   B. Baudelaire depicts the now familiar sight of urban renewal, an act that deprives people of the past while exiling city-dwellers to a dreary modernity.
   C. The only wholeness, Baudelaire discovers, is to make a bridge to the past; only by thinking can we revive our history.
Topics for Further Exploration:

1. Compare and contrast Baudelaire’s treatment of women in “The Little Old Women” with Whitman’s depiction of city crowds in “Crossing Brooklyn Ferry.”
2. Summarize what is the source of light in Baudelaire’s “Parisian Dream.”
3. Define the attitudes of Baudelaire toward the stranger.
Lecture Thirty-Five
Robert Frost—The Wisdom of the People

Scope: We examine in Lecture 35 Robert Frost, “the people’s poet,” another in a long line of American nature writers. A great aphorist like Shakespeare, Frost’s phrases have entered the language without attribution but with all the authority of folk wisdom. Though familiar as a cherished icon of rural Americana, Frost is a more ambivalent and complex poet than he at first seems.

Objectives— Upon completion of this lecture, you should be able to:
1. Explain why Frost is frequently described as a “regional poet.”
2. Summarize how various aspects of the natural world are depicted in the classic poems of Frost.

Readings

Essential: Frost, Selected Poems.
Recommended: Thompson, Fire and Ice.

Outline

I. The People’s Poet
   A. Frost, who writes about common people and makes nature accessible, is part of the democratic tradition of poetry that spans from William Wordsworth to Whitman.
   B. Though strongly grounded in a democratic ethos like Whitman, Frost has no pretensions of being a national oracle as did the writer of Leaves of Grass.
   C. Almost of a piece with friendly images of America like those in Currier and Ives, Frost is sometimes wrongly dismissed by critics as nothing but a regional poet.
   D. His power as an aphorist—a conveyor of popular folk wisdom—is evident in such poems as “Mending Wall.”

II. The Famous Poems
   A. “Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening” is classic Frost: the beauty of nature is blended with a pragmatic edge. Beneath the sing-song rhythm of the poem lies an ethos of ownership in contrast to the beautiful landscape.
   B. In “Fire and Ice” Frost the metaphysician appears: a short see-saw of rhyme, the poem suggests a wistful idiosyncrasy in the face of apocalypse.
   C. As in many of his poems, Frost casts “The Road Not Taken” from the perspective of aftermath. Life is pattern, not destruction, he suggests; the individual is granted a rewarding hindsight that is the utter opposite of such classic figures as Oedipus.

III. Frost’s Signature: “The Oven Bird”
   A. In “The Oven Bird” Frost puts aside his proverbs and comforting regionalism. This is a more groping account of what nature is about.
   B. This is a world of diminished wonder—more than just the end of summer, we are given hints of a greater fall.
   C. Frost sums up a spiritual condition by writing of a bird in summer; this is a tentative statement of doubt about the course of nature and progress, far removed from the aggressive optimism of Whitman.
Topics for Further Exploration:

1. Explain how “The Oven Bird” hints at human encroachment on the natural world.
2. Summarize how “The Road Not Taken” offers a vision of the past contrary to that represented in Oedipus.
3. Contrast the effect of the rhyme and rhythm in “Stopping By Woods on a Snowy Evening” with the literal meaning of the poem.
Lecture Thirty-Six  
Frost—The Darker View

Scope: Frost is more than a populist inventor of folk wisdom. In Lecture 36 we revisit him as a poet of the psyche, one who writes about exile, loss, and even malevolence. If Frost is “the people’s poet,” he serves a broader range of people than his most famous poems would at first suggest.

Objectives— Upon completion of this lecture, you should be able to:
1. Summarize how Frost depicts the overt aggression of the natural world.
2. Explain how Frost’s poetry shows the influence of such figures as Charles Darwin and Franz Kafka.

Readings
Recommended: Gerber, Critical Essays on Robert Frost.

Outline

I. Nature as Aggressor
   A. In “Bereft,” Frost moves from an unfriendly outside (nature) to a vulnerable inside (psyche). The poem depicts an exile turned inside out, the state of “lostness” fully visible.
   B. Frost can also depict the grisly. In “Out, Out—,” he deadpans the most violent accident, recording it as life as usual, uncluttered with sentiment or emotion.
   C. “Once By the Pacific” endows nature with a demonic frenzy, a harbinger of bad things to come.

II. Frost and Darwin
   A. Nature is cast in “Design” as a web of relationships, all following a law bereft of sentiment or compassion. The spider at the center of the poem is a world removed from Whitman’s “Noiseless Patient Spider.”
   B. In “Spring Pools” Frost endows the world with a malevolent spirit, a feeling in contrast with the lulling repetition of the poem’s rhymes.

III. “Acquainted With the Night”: Frost and the Inhuman
   A. Frost here depicts the ghostly world of the exiled city; his dark description is reminiscent of Baudelaire or even Kafka.
   B. The narrator has no connections to the place. There are no discernible patterns; not even the clock has an answer.
   C. This is the inverse of the popular Frost; mystery, fright, and solitude conspire to paint a picture of no little despair.

Topics for Further Exploration:
1. Compare and contrast the point of view in Frost’s “Acquainted With the Night” with William Blake’s “London.”
2. Compare and contrast the spider in Frost’s “Design” with that of Whitman’s “A Noiseless Patient Spider.”
3. Identify the underlying presence of malevolence in “Bereft.”
Lecture Thirty-Seven
Wallace Stevens and the Modernist Movement

Scope: In Lecture 37 we are introduced to Wallace Stevens, the apparent antithesis of Frost: esoteric, extravagant, and exotic. In Stevens we find a plenitude of ideas and objects, an imagination that self-consciously exposes itself to revel in the wonders of the physical world.

Objectives: Upon completion of this lecture, you should be able to:
1. Describe the unusual arc of Stevens’s career as a poet and businessman.
2. Explain Stevens’s attitude toward the dogma of religion, especially as evinced in “Sunday Morning”

Readings
Essential: Stevens, *The Palm at the End of the Mind*.

Outline

I. The Curve of Stevens’s Career
   A. Stevens successfully combined careers in poetry and business, a rare achievement in American letters.
   B. He began his literary career in the 1920s with a poetry of exotic lushness, becoming more cerebral and reflective by the ‘40s and ‘50s.
   C. Stevens departs from the overt social concerns of many Modernist poets; he is a champion of the imagination, not a critic of the social order or a defender of tradition.

II. “Sunday Morning” and the Credo of Stevens
   A. Located in a lush setting, “Sunday Morning” suggests the feeling, common in the early Stevens, that divinity is here, that the natural world around us is our greatest hope.
   B. “Death is the mother of beauty,” writes Stevens, as it gives meaning to our lives.
   C. Organized religion has tried to repudiate that truth, he signals. Unfortunately, he adds, there is no ripeness in Paradise, a place stripped of organic life.
   D. The natural elements (“the trees, like seraphim”) are themselves imbued with holiness. We must engage them “unsponsored” by the rules of defined religion.

III. The Exile in the World
   A. In “Farewell to Florida,” Stevens takes up a theme that parallels that of his own career: the journey from lush to cerebral, the difficult voyage essential to the narrator’s evolution.
   B. In “The World as Meditation,” we find again the theme of an exile’s return, the poet even invoking Ulysses. It is an austere meditation, located within the mind in such a way that the physical world is fused with the spiritual one.

Topics for Further Exploration:
1. Identify whom the narrator personifies as “her” in “Farewell to Florida”
2. Give examples of where Stevens suggests the imminent presence of divinity in “Sunday Morning.”
3. Explain how Stevens views the relationship between nature and religion.
Lecture Thirty-Eight
Stevens and the Post-Romantic Imagination

Scope: In lecture 38 we tackle the question of whether language merely represents the world or recreates it. In a number of poems Stevens proposes the “impudent sovereignty: language”—the potential that words hold for saying the impossible.

Objectives— Upon completion of this lecture, you should be able to:
1. Summarize Stevens’s attitude toward metaphor as a central element of language.
2. Explain the relationship between the imagination and the world according to a variety of Stevens’s poems.

Readings

Outline

I. Stevens and Metaphor
   A. Metaphor is the transaction between the mind and the natural world in Stevens’s view. But does it sharpen our perceptions—or blind us?
   B. In “The Man on the Dump” Stevens throws out electrifying images that melt down into clichés. If all language is so vulnerable, how is our view of the world anything but a mere invention?
   C. In “The Emperor of Ice Cream” Stevens concocts a playful array of metaphorical fancies, suggesting their silliness at the same time he implies our need for a hierarchical imagination, so paying our respects to “the emperor of ice cream.”
   D. “The Idea of Order at Key West” is a paean to metaphor, a celebration of how the poet recreates the world through language and gains power over the elements themselves.

II. “Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Blackbird”
   A. In this, Stevens’s most famous poem, the relativism of perspective is apparent: there are myriad ways of reading the world we live in.
   B. The poem delights in hidden connections: the eye of the blackbird and the “I” of the speaker are linked.
   C. The paradoxes of the final stanza reveal the “impudent sovereignty” of language—one can state the illogical or impossible in sentences perfectly apt from a grammatical point of view. There is a freedom in language not bound by causality or natural law.

III. Stevens and the Laboratory of Language
   A. “Someone Puts a Pineapple Together” is about building, not analyzing, a thing of “nature.” The pineapple is translated into metaphors that allow the imagination to create.
   B. In the esoteric poetry of Stevens, there is a democracy of the mind. This is everybody’s world, he seems to say, and our reality is what we make of the powers of language.

Topics for Further Exploration:
1. Explain how the structure of “Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Blackbird” reinforces the sense of plenitude we commonly find in Stevens’s poetry.
2. Summarize Stevens’s attitude toward figurative language in “The Man on the Dump.”
3. Explain what is being celebrated in “The Emperor of Ice Cream.”
Lecture Thirty-Nine  
Adrienne Rich and the Poetry of Protest

Scope: Lecture 39 brings us to the final poet in the course, Adrienne Rich, a frankly feminist poet who stakes her ground in the world of political power and change. Rich denies the familiar conceit that the poet’s words are immortal, insisting instead that we are all a part of history, vulnerable and engaged whether or not we want to be.

Objectives: Upon completion of this lecture, you should be able to:

1. Explain how Rich’s attitude toward political power grows from her declared position as a feminist and lesbian poet.
2. Summarize why Rich is opposed to the notion of literature that has a “universal” value.

Readings

Recommended: Werner: *Adrienne Rich: The Poet and Her Critics.*

Outline

I. The Poet as Witness
   A. While Stevens plumbed the depths of the imagination, Adrienne Rich uses it instead as a tool in acting out her role as a witness and spokesperson. She is a lesbian writer who confronts the issues of racism and sexism in the heritage of the West.
   B. Though far from a propagandist, Rich writes about the nature of power—and how it corrupts—and the need for women and people of color to accede to it.

II. Taking On Power
   A. Rich suggests the pain and futility of trying to signal a holocaust in “Implosions.” Unlike Whitman, she hears America crying—and can barely summon the energy to announce it.
   B. In “Power,” Rich reflects on the “archeology” of our lives, the act of finding a bottle buried in the earth. The discovery is contrasted with Marie Curie, a more vital relic of the past, a woman destroyed by radiation in a dangerous dance to unleash power and avoid its consequences.

III. The Poet in North America
   A. The poet does not stand outside of history, avows Rich in “North American Time,” but is accountable to people and the planet.
   B. We are creatures of “verbal privilege,” Rich continues, our words created for us, our work to be judged in light of what comes after us.
   C. The “Word”—thought to be immortal by a tradition that dates to Shakespeare and before—is grounded in its time, is part of the world and the power it describes.
   D. The commentary of poetry is not “objective.” The idea that poems can be “universal” is not only mistaken, but a self-serving proposition for the powers-that-be.

Topics for Further Exploration:

1. Explain the relationship between language and responsibility in “North American Time.”
2. Explain the nature of Rich’s belief that words cannot be “objective.”
3. Contrast Rich’s discussion of the use of language in “Our Whole Life” with the attitude of Stevens in “The Idea of Order at Key West.”
Lecture Forty

Rich’s Project—
Diving Into the Wreck of Western Culture

Scope: We conclude in Lecture 40 with Rich’s sense of domestic exploration, a venture not included in most books of history. In Rich we find the hard acknowledgment that history has failed many people, that the public record must be countered by the challenge of a new poetry that will give names to those who have been anonymous.

Objectives—Upon completion of this lecture, you should be able to:
1. Summarize what Rich’s mission is in attempting to endow women with “subjectivity.”
2. Define Rich’s attitude toward the history of the West

Readings


Outline

I. A Woman’s Language
   A. Rich sets out to endow women with “subjectivity”—a project that men have largely ignored.
   B. In “For the Dead” she unwinds a woman’s language of sympathy, an acknowledgment that feelings are born of events.
   C. “Without tenderness we are in Hell,” she writes in “Twenty-one Love Poems.” A reverence for feeling—even tenderness—is evident in a new poetics shorn of masculine assumptions.

II. Making Visible the Vanished
   A. In “Transcendental Etude,” Rich describes a world uncharted by men—a landscape of milkweed, calico, and scrubbed boards that has nothing to do with “greatness.”
   B. The myth of being an individual is propagated in the culture at large, she writes, a belief that ignores the fact that we are born of women and owe our lives to them.
   C. Rich would counter the lies of the public record: the alternative history of women must include not just the likes of Emily Dickinson, but those women who died in childbirth, failed in business, wrote nothing at all.

III. Revisiting the Western Tradition
   A. In “The Study of History” Rich tries to make sense of a brutalized, diverted past which she compares to a body of water at night. The poem, though a searing indictment, is also about the beauty of the past, if only we could reclaim it.
   B. Rich dons the mantle of cultural historian in “Diving Into the Wreck,” a descent into an underworld where the poet seeks to understand a disaster—not just the story of it. It is here where Rich finds the missing center of her search into Western culture: “a book of myths in which our names do not appear.”

Topics for Further Exploration:
1. Explain what Rich means by “the book of myths” she refers to in “Diving Into the Wreck.”
2. Summarize what Rich means in “Transcendental Etude” by contrasting the cult of individuality with the role of the mother.
3. Infer what Rich means by the fire she describes in “For the Dead.”
Glossary

Allegory: a narrative in which each character or element symbolizes something else; the allegorical symbols have a relationship to each other independent of the text.

Alliteration: the repeated use of consonant or vowel sounds at the beginning of words or in stressed syllables.

Aphorism: a wise, pithy remark, suitable for quoting.

Caesura: a rest at the middle or end of a line of poetry.

Catalogue: a rhetorical device that suggests completeness by gathering an array of images or examples.

Connotation: the implications behind a word.

Couplet: a pair of rhyming lines; the last two lines of a sonnet.

Denotation: the standard dictionary definition of a word.

Elegy: a poem written as a lament for the deceased.

Free verse: poetry that does not employ any overt scheme of rhyme and meter.

Iambic pentameter: the most common meter of English verse, it consists of an unstressed and a stressed syllable, five times in a given line.

Images: the sensory units that create “pictures” in the mind’s eye.

Intertextuality: texts are not wholly independent; they often consist of references to or borrowings from other texts.

Metaphor: an indirect, implied comparison, i.e. Richard the Lionhearted

Meter: the measured beat or rhythm of a line of poetry.

Metonymy: a figure of speech where one word or phrase is substituted for another closely associated with it. (i.e., Uncle Sam for America).

Modernism: a movement that proposed the use of innovative modes of expression in revolt against the traditions of literature.

Pathetic fallacy: ascribing human characteristics to inanimate objects.

Proverb: a concise statement of traditional wisdom, usually balanced and rhythmical.

Quatrain: a stanza of four lines.

Refrain: a repeated phrase that recurs at regular intervals in a poem or song.

Scansion: the act of breaking down verse into metrical units.

Simile: a direct comparison using like or as, i.e. March comes in like a lamb.

Sonnet: A 14-line poem that, in the Shakespearean version, is organized in stanzas of 4-4-4-2 lines.

Symbol: an image that represents something else.

Tone: the relationship of a writer to his/her subject.

Unmediated readings: a traditional perspective which holds that a piece of literature has a single meaning that can be agreed upon.
Timeline

c. 900-801 B.C. .................... The Iliad and The Odyssey of Homer
70-19 B.C. .................... Virgil, Roman poet
5 A.D. .................... Metamorphoses of Ovid
680 .................... Aldhelm, first Anglo-Saxon poet
1000 .................... Beowulf, written in Old English
1304-74 .................... Petrarch, Italian poet and innovator of sonnet
1321 .................... Dante’s Divine Comedy
1340-1400 .................... Geoffrey Chaucer, English poet
1362 .................... “Piers Plowman,” poem in Middle English
    c. 1430 .................... Development of Modern English
1564-1616 .................... William Shakespeare
1565 .................... Elegies of Pierre de Ronsard
1572-1631 .................... John Donne, English poet
1608-74 .................... John Milton, English poet
    1617 .................... Ben Jonson declared England’s poet laureate
    1674 .................... Milton’s Paradise Lost
    1687 .................... William Winstanley’s Lives of the English Poets
1688-1744 .................... Alexander Pope, English poet
1757-1827 .................... William Blake
1759-96 .................... Robert Burns, Scottish poet
1770-1850 .................... William Wordsworth, English poet
1788-1824 .................... Lord Byron, English poet
1789 .................... Blake’s Songs of Innocence
1794 .................... Blake’s Songs of Experience
1819-92 .................... Walt Whitman
    1855 .................... First edition of Whitman’s Leaves of Grass
1830-86 .................... Emily Dickinson
1821-67 .................... Charles Baudelaire
1857 .................... Baudelaire’s Flowers of Evil
1874-1963 .................... Robert Frost
1879-1955 .................... Wallace Stevens
    1890 .................... First published volume (posthumous) of Dickinson’s poetry
1929 .................... Adrienne Rich born
William Shakespeare (1564-1616)
Born in Stratford-on-Avon, England, Shakespeare married Anne Hathaway in 1582 with whom he had three children. Emerging as a London playwright in the 1590s, Shakespeare wrote over thirty plays, the basis of his unparalleled reputation. But he also published a wide range of poetry, beginning with the narrative poems *Venus and Adonis* (1593) and *The Rape of Lucrece* (1594). His sonnets, easily the greatest part of his poetic legacy, were first published in 1609, though written in the 1590s. The autobiographical content of the sonnets has long been debated, though there is no question that their disciplined compression was an excellent preparation for the bulk of the dramatic work that followed.

William Blake (1757-1827)
Apprenticed to an engraver at the age of fourteen, William Blake later attended the British Royal Academy and established himself as an independent engraver. He married Catherine Boucher in 1782, teaching her how to read and write. Blake spent most of his career in London, publishing his own books and engraving illustrations for them. His *Songs of Innocence* (1789) and *Songs of Experience* (1794), like his later works, received little in the way of commercial success or critical accolades. A confirmed mystic, Blake was largely unappreciated in his own life and after. Only in the twentieth century was his reputation as a visionary poet established.

Walt Whitman (1819–92)
Born on Long Island, New York, Walt Whitman quit school early and went on to forge a career as a printer, editor, and journalist. In 1855 he published *Leaves of Grass*, a commercial failure that nonetheless garnered many favorable reviews. A volunteer nurse during the Civil War, Whitman later worked for the Department of Interior but was later fired when *Leaves of Grass* became controversial as an allegedly “immoral” book. Whitman added to and edited *Leaves of Grass* during his entire life, the work going through several editions. His *Democratic Vistas* (1871) is a prose critique of the idea of America that he had championed in his poetry. He moved to Camden, New Jersey, in 1884 and remained a relative recluse until his death.

Emily Dickinson (1830–86)
Dickinson lived her entire life in her father’s Amherst, Massachusetts, house, rarely venturing far from home. She graduated from Amherst Academy at 17 but failed to complete her studies at nearby Mount Holyoke Female Seminary. She developed many close friendships, and that with her editor, Thomas Wentworth Higginson, was the most affectionate. Her most productive literary years coincided with the Civil War. She began to see fewer and fewer visitors by the 1860s. In the end, she published only 7 poems during her lifetime. Shortly before her death in 1886, she wrote to her family, “Little Cousins—Called back.—Emily.” Her sister found over 1,000 poems after Emily’s death, and in the 1890s her reputation began to ascend.

Charles Baudelaire (1821–67)
Born in Paris, Baudelaire developed a lifelong devotion to his widowed mother and a hatred for the man she took as a second husband. In 1841 Baudelaire was sent to the tropics after exhibiting what was considered outlandish behavior. The next year he took up a lifelong affair with a mulatto woman, Jeanne Duval. In subsequent years he was placed under a financial tutelage by his family and also developed a venereal infection. *Les Fleurs du Mal* (1857) was the only book of poetry Baudelaire published during his lifetime, though it so scandalized French society that six of the poems were later suppressed while Baudelaire and his publisher were fined. Baudelaire also invested considerable time in being a critic, becoming a leading light of literary circles. He translated the work of Edgar Allan Poe into French and established his reputation in France. Pursued by creditors, Baudelaire left Paris for Brussels in 1864 where he was stricken with aphasia and hemiplegia. He returned to Paris where he died in his mother’s arms.

Robert Frost (1874-1963)
The son of a journalist and a teacher, Frost attended high school in Lawrence, Massachusetts, where he was co- valedictorian with his wife-to-be Elinor White. Dropping out of Harvard University, Frost had difficulty publishing his poems in this country and left for Great Britain in 1912, where he first received literary recognition. Later a professor at Amherst College and a frequent lecturer around the country, Frost was selected to read a poem at the inauguration of John F. Kennedy in 1961. His life was marked by frequent bouts of depression, affected by
the early death of his wife (1938), his son’s suicide (1940), and his ultimate failure to be awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature, the won instead by his contemporaries W.B. Yeats and T.S. Eliot.

Wallace Stevens (1879-1955)
Born in Reading, Pennsylvania, Stevens studied French and German at Harvard. After he completed law school, a legal partnership failed and he struggled to make a living with several law firms. He joined the Hartford Accident and Indemnity Company in 1916 and in 1934 became vice president. Stevens’s business and literary lives never intersected, business associates having little idea that their colleague was a writer of renown. Stevens’s first book of poems, Harmonium, appeared in 1923; later volumes include The Man With the Blue Guitar (1937), Parts of the World (1942), and The Auroras of Autumn (1950). He won the 1954 Pulitzer Prize for his collected poems.

Adrienne Rich (1929–)
Adrienne Rich was born into a middle-class family in Baltimore, Maryland, a precocious child in a family of artists and intellectuals. In 1951 she matriculated from Radcliffe College and published her first book. Married with three sons, Rich went on to publish, among other volumes, Snapshots of a Daughter-in-Law (1963) and Necessities of Life (1966) before becoming involved in the politics of protest against the Vietnam War. In the 1970s she identified herself as a radical feminist and soon declared herself a lesbian. She has won the Ruth Lilly Poetry Prize, the Common Wealth Award in Literature, and the Poet’s Prize, in addition to editing a feminist journal and teaching.
Bibliography

Required:

Recommended:
Arnold L. Weinstein, Ph.D.
Edna and Richard Salomon Distinguished Professor and
Professor of Comparative Literature
Brown University

Arnold Weinstein was born in Tennessee in 1940 and received his undergraduate degree in romance languages from Princeton University in 1962. He studied at Université de Paris in 1960–61 and at Freie Universitat, Berlin, in 1962–63. He received his masters and his doctorate in comparative literature from Harvard University in 1964 and 1968 respectively.

Dr. Weinstein has been teaching courses on European, English, and American literature at Brown University since 1968. In addition, he is the sponsor of Swedish Studies at Brown. He has been the chairperson of the Advisory Council on Comparative Literature at Princeton University and is actively involved in the American Comparative Literature Association.

Among the many academic honors, research grants, and fellowships he has received is the Younger Humanist Award from the National Endowment for the Humanities, 1971–72. In 1983 he was visiting professor of American literature at Stockholm University where he received the Fulbright Senior Lecturer Award. He is currently a member of the Academy of Literary Studies and the director of a NEH-funded program in great books. In 1995 he received Brown University’s award as best teacher in the humanities.

Understanding Literature and Life:  
Drama, Poetry and Narrative  
Part III: Narrative

SCOPE:  
This course offers a survey of narrative in Western culture from a twelfth-century courtly romance of Chretien de Troyes to the contemporary novel The Color Purple by Alice Walker.

In beginning with Chretien de Troyes we consider the earliest of the Arthurian romances which, though a poem in format, is a precursor of the narrative tradition. The Swindler by Francisco Quevedo, our next text, is a full-blown picaresque novel that showcases the hurly-burly of life on the edge in sixteenth-century Europe. With Daniel Defoe’s Moll Flanders we follow the development of the novel to England, where this story of a London moll on the make was an early example of literary “plain style.” The fall and rise of Defoe’s woman of the streets gives way to the classic Victorian tale of unsentimental education, Charles Dickens’s Great Expectations. Jane Eyre, the classic bildungsroman of Charlotte Bronte, adds further to the development of prose fiction as a mirror of cultural values.

We enter the shadow of the twentieth century with Herman Melville’s “Bartleby,” a story that anticipates much of the moral angst and minimalism that preoccupies writers of our own century. In Franz Kafka’s stories this tradition continues, branching into the absurdist exercise of “The Metamorphosis.” With William Faulkner’s “The Bear” we encounter cultural traditions that raise painful questions about race and progress. Finally, in The Color Purple we look at the Western tradition again, this time from the point of view of those who have suffered most from it.

OBJECTIVES:  
Upon completion of this course, you should be able to:

1. Trace the development of Western narrative from courtly romance and the picaresque through the bildungsroman and the Victorian novel to twentieth-century experiments in absurdist and stream-of-consciousness narration.
2. Summarize the work of the nine writers above in terms of the cultural context they wrote in.
3. Describe the narratives under discussion according to traditional components used in the study of fiction: character, plot, setting, language, point of view.
Lecture Forty-One
The Lives of the Word—
Reading Today

Scope: Books, we learn in lecture 41, are incorrectly assumed to be an alternative to reality. Through the medium of extended narrative, in fact, fiction allows us to retrieve whole lives in the form of stories. Readers are privileged to enter a medium where the individual is never an autonomous figure, but part of a larger constellation.

Objectives— Upon completion of this lecture, you should be able to:
1. Summarize the basic ways in which narrative differs from poetry and drama.
2. Explain the idea that written texts are fertile and potent objects for future generations.

Readings:

Outline
I. Narrative: The Discourse of Mortality
   A. Narrative is an “ecosystem;” it contains within it a panoptic overview none of us are privileged to have in our own lives.
   B. Because narrative posits a wide perspective, we learn to see the individual as something more than an autonomous figure. In the novel, the individual is porous, a player rather than an authority.
   C. We cannot retrieve our lives; the best we can do to preserve life is to tell—and listen to—stories.

II. Narrative: the Discourse of Immortality
   A. Language makes our past recoverable. Unlike the “hot media” described by Marshall McLuhan, a book is a humanistic labor that links successive generations.
   B. The written text is fertile and potent. It even has a life beyond the intentions of its author, who cannot control the reception or interpretation of the text.
   C. Historical interpretation seeks to find what someone like Charles Dickens really meant in writing a novel. But this mentality is hard to infer, and not as important as what the book means to us today.

III. Reading Today
   A. There is nothing escapist about reading—we understand the scope of our own day by delving into the narrative sensibilities of other times and cultures.
   B. In this way, the texts of the past are alive. Reading makes our own relationship with life more vital by increasing our store of imaginative reality.

Topics for Further Exploration:
1. Explain why narrative forces us to examine a global perspective.
2. Define the horizontal and vertical aspects of narrative.
3. Summarize how literary texts can have lives beyond the intentions of their authors.
Lecture Forty-Two
Chretien de Troyes’ Yvain—
Growing Up in the Middle Ages

Scope: In lecture 42 we learn that narrative, more than poetry or drama, offers its audience a global overview they lack in real life. Though written as a poem, Yvain fulfills many of the characteristics of narrative, most importantly the development of character and plot. Yvain is a layered story about the evolving fortunes of knighthood in twelfth-century France.

Objectives—Upon completion of this lecture, you should be able to:
1. Summarize the tradition of the courtly romance and in what ways Yvain derived from it.
2. Explain why narrative is the most comprehensive and supple of literary forms.

Readings:
Essential: Chretien de Troyes, Yvain.
Recommended: Chretien de Troyes, Eric and Enide; C.S. Lewis, The Allegory of Love.

Outline

I. The Nature of Narrative
   A. Narrative is a supple literary form, portraying both interior and exterior landscapes; the device of narration reveals the inner and outer realities of the individual.
   B. Narrative is possessed of a powerful temporal dimension; it more easily reflects the passage of time than do either drama or poetry.
   C. Novels depict the encounter between individuals and culture, a conflict that often indulges the rite-of-passage theme.

II. Yvain and the Courtly Romance Tradition
   A. Written in verse form (1170s), Yvain clearly follows a narrative structure.
   B. French in origin, Yvain is the oldest of the tales about the court of King Arthur.
   C. Chretien de Troyes was a frequent visitor at the court of Marie de Champagne, a place given over to tales of the supernatural.
   D. Chretien employed a variety of popular and learned traditions in this poem: Celtic myths; stories of chivalry and knightly love from Provence; textbooks of seduction written by the Roman poet Ovid.

III. Knighthood and the Twelfth Century
   A. The knights of Chretien’s age, who comprise a large part of the audience for Yvain, were the landless sons of gentry who roamed across Europe in fearsome gangs.
   B. The solution to the quandary of the homeless knight errant was to win a noble lady in marriage.
   C. Yvain is about the crisis of knighthood that marked the age: the conflict in French society between a warrior cult and the courtly ideal of chivalric marriage.

IV. The Tensions in Yvain
   A. Chretien’s narrative is about the struggle between the ideals of tournament and marriage, an adventure story that poses a precarious rite of passage.
   B. Yvain poses a fundamental question about knighthood: does the knight have familial and social obligations? Is he to be homosocial or heterosexual?
   C. Chretien’s narrative is filled with a mixture of raw brutality and magic; the two together are a combustible force in the story of Yvain’s transformation.
Topics for Further Exploration:

1. Outline the different traditions that Chretien de Troyes drew from in writing *Yvain*.
2. Explain the status of knighthood in 12th century France and how this would have shaped the audience for *Yvain*.
3. Describe the struggle between the ideals of knighthood and marriage.
Lecture Forty-Three

Yvain’s Theme—
Ignorant Armies Clash By Night

Scope: Though written in the Middle Ages, *Yvain* reveals the incipient imagery of what we have come to call psychology. The existence of magic rings and potions, we learn in lecture 43, doesn’t obscure the fact that such an exotic set of adventures has much to say that is critical. Finally, the text admits us to a rite of passage that parallels the self-making journey of the Hero in Western fiction.

Objectives—Upon completion of this lecture, you should be able to:
1. Give examples of how *Yvain* is a narrative conscious of both itself and the age in which it was written.
2. Explain how *Yvain* is about the maturation of character.

Readings:
Recommended: Moorman, *A Knyght There Was*.

Outline

I. Chretien and the Invention of Psychology
   A. Yvain’s madness is evoked by using the metaphor of a storm—this the incipient imagery of a field that will later be known as *psychology*.
   B. Chretien is fascinated by extreme states of mind; he often places a character in the position of observing another one under duress.
   C. Several devices mark the sophisticated self-awareness of the narrative.
      1. The presence of interior debate, as when Laudine considers remarriage.
      2. The use of capitalized or allegorical concepts which imply psychological symbols.
      3. The transformation of heraldic animals such as the lion from a personal trait to a physical presence.

II. Yvain’s Second Life: A New Beginning
   A. Though a heroic winner of tournaments, Yvain makes a pledge to Laudine that he does not fulfill.
   B. His failure to keep his word reduces him to madness. He loses rank, clothing, status, and memory as he descends to the state of an animal.
   C. Yvain is fated to be “born again” as a true Christian knight—now known as the Knight of the Lion.
   D. Yvain thus gains a second sight on his culture, discovering that something is rotten in the state of twelfth-century France.
   E. He finds women held prisoner in a castle, working for the rich in a kind of medieval sweatshop.

III. The Culture of Warfare and the Image of Blindness
   A. The dominant trope of *Yvain* is the siege: the text is filled with countless battles described with brutal realism.
   B. Even love is portrayed as a conquering force; reading and speaking are actions that pierce the heart by slashing the exterior.
   C. This relentless military imagery is colored by the theme of darkness and blindness. This is a realistic metaphor, since the heavily armored knights of the age could hardly even see whom they were battling.
   D. The trope of blindness reaches its height when Yvain must do battle with his friend Gawain, neither of them aware of his opponent’s identity.
   E. Blindness is a central fact of this society, not just a fictional device.

IV. Yvain’s Maturation
   A. The text is about maturation, the making of a moral figure in the tradition of what critic Joseph Campbell has identified as the self-making journey of the Hero.
B. Yvain, reunited with Laudine by a ruse, has once again become whole. His ego has been put back together, his integrity restored.

C. This mission of reassembling the self is as old as Oedipus in the history of literature—and will continue in many of the narratives to come.

Topics for Further Exploration:
1. Give examples of where the trope of military siege coincides with the theme of blindness.
2. Explain the role of the forest in Yvain and conclude why Chretien de Troyes characterizes it as such.
3. Compare and contrast Yvain with other Arthurian romances you are familiar with.
Lecture Forty-Four
The Picaresque Novel—Satire, Filth and Hustling

Scope: In lecture 44 we encounter a different kind of narrative: one of an insistently materialistic bent. Francisco de Quevedo’s *The Swindler* is an expert incarnation of the picaresque novel, a roaming, episodic perspective of society from the bottom-up. A put-down of the genteel tradition, *The Swindler* is a beggar’s banquet of metaphor, thievery, and scatology.

Objectives—Upon completion of this lecture, you should be able to:
1. Describe the picaresque tradition and identify some of its literary descendants.
2. Explain why starvation plays such a prominent role in *The Swindler*.

Readings:
Essential: Quevedo, *The Swindler* from *Two Spanish Picaresque Novels*.
Recommended: Cervantes, *Don Quixote*.

Outline
I. The Picaresque: Materialist Critique
   A. Francisco Quevedo’s *The Swindler* is the most exuberant example we have of the picaresque tradition.
   B. The picaresque, whose paradigm is Miguel de Cervantes’s *Don Quixote*, is suffused with materialist values rather than aristocratic or romantic ones.
   C. From picaro, or rogue, the picaresque is a view of society from the lower rungs of the social ladder, a satirical perspective from the bottom.
   D. The picaro tradition was used by Defoe, Mark Twain, Ralph Ellison, J.D. Salinger and other writers who wrote about bringing the subjectivity of the margins to bear on the literary world.

II. *The Swindler*: A Story of Excess, Eating, and Digestion
   A. Pablos, the hero, encounters a baroque world that has distinctly modern features: homelessness, criminality, roving gangs.
   B. Quevedo spares no sensibilities: fecal matter, or shit, is encountered as the lowest—and most visible—common denominator of humankind.
   C. Another important theme of the novel is starvation. The satire of such a trope is evident in a scene that even includes an act of cannibalism.
   D. The digestion motif is furthered in Quevedo’s language; as digestion is compared to corpses in a rotting grave, so the book’s metaphors are “part of the food chain,” undergoing dizzying transformations in the metamorphosis of imagery.

III. *The Swindler* and Poetry
   A. Pablos, upon meeting a man writing a play about Noah’s ark, finds such an undertaking absurd: how would one ever find all the animals to act in it? He laughs at such a foolish endeavor.
   B. Still, the cannibal scene at the banquet that Pablos attends gives us an account of man’s animality. In a sense, Pablos has already been on the Ark.
   C. The malleability of all things in Quevedo’s world, the alteration from one state to another, suggests powers that are more than material. Filthy in details, this text is rich in the metaphoric vision of the poet.

Topics for Further Exploration:
1. Explain whether or not the role of cannibalism in the novel is a realistic element.
2. Summarize how Quevedo suggests that shit is a metaphor about the nature of the world.
3. Describe how the theme of digestion relates to the metaphoric language of the novel.
Lecture Forty-Five
Francisco Quevedo’s Swindler—
The Word on the Street

Scope: As we learn in lecture 45, the delight in language and word play makes The Swindler more than an aimless romp—the linguistic cleverness is itself a form of human assertion. The struggle between language and experience is everywhere evident, from the gentlemen thieves to the skin artists and Pablos’s own encounter with Don Diego.

Objectives—Upon completion of this lecture, you should be able to:
1. Describe various ways that Quevedo’s characters use language as a tool or weapon.
2. Summarize how Quevedo ascribes magical powers to language.

Readings:
Recommended: Lazarillo de Tormes (anonymous) from Two Spanish Picaresque Novels; Iffland, Quevedo and the Grotesque.

Outline
I. The Language of The Swindler
   A. Quevedo suggests a connection between starvation and word play. In a sense, for a poor man with little other recourse, language is “edible,” a personal revenge on the world.
   B. For Pablos, language, like money or rank, is a resource. Wordplay is a form of human assertion, conferring dignity on things that life has otherwise disdained.
   C. Thus language has particular value in an impoverished world: by conferring status, words alter and beautify the world.

II. The Rivalry Between Words and Matter
   A. Literature often engages in a kind of institutional narcissism: it holds itself up as a mirror to remind us of the power of the Word.
   B. Pablos encounters a myriad of characters who engage the world through language: a theorist of wordplay who can’t even dismount a horse; a man who calls venereal disease a military wound. The war between language and experience is everywhere.
   C. With the “gentlemen thieves,” Pablos encounters a tribe that uses its wits to create the triumph of appearance over reality. The have-nots become the haves by the sheer power of suggestion.

III. Art and Magic in The Swindler
   A. Pablos yearns for magic power, the ability to improve or reverse the power of nature.
   B. Though unable to achieve any magic himself, he meets up with the skin artists, a group whose disfigurations (real or fake) symbolize a change of identity.
   C. When Pablos, disguised as a nobleman, runs into his former acquaintance Don Diego, the picaresque is transformed into a struggle between Art and Reality: will Pablos be unmasked?
   D. Pablos’s comeuppance—and his subsequent disfiguration—again underlines the adaptability of the picaro. The exploits of the self-made person are the stuff of this unlikely hero—and many other literary types who follow.

Topics for Further Exploration:
1. Give examples in The Swindler of where language is a source of deception.
2. Explain the relationship in The Swindler between starvation and wordplay.
3. Conclude whether language beautifies or impoverishes the world of Pablos.
Lecture Forty-Six
Daniel Defoe’s Plain Style and the New World Order

Scope: We consider in lecture 46 one of the earliest novels written in English. Daniel Defoe’s *Moll Flanders* is a progenitor of the English plain style, a fitting format for a writer dedicated to the middle class virtues of economy and measurement. Though of limited success for some critics, the novel is capable of examining not only the ups and downs of life on the street, but the interior state of a London ruffian seemingly at the mercy of fate.

Objectives—Upon completion of this lecture, you should be able to:
1. Explain the historical context of mercantile London that helped spawn the plain style and middle class material values.
2. Describe how the character of Moll Flanders is a mix of the idealism of Yvain and the crass materialism of Pablos.

Readings:
Essential: Defoe, *Moll Flanders*.
Recommended: Defoe, *Robinson Crusoe*.

Outline

I. Daniel Defoe: His Career and Style
   A. One of the earliest English novelists, Defoe was also a journalist, pamphleteer, and literary jack-of-all-trades.
   B. Defoe reported on practically every significant social trend of his age: duels, bankruptcies, insurance, the treatment of servants and the mentally ill.
   C. Defoe was the first great practitioner of the English “plain style.” This style, characterized by its direct, conversational energy, eschewed the rhetorical flourishes and classical allusions so popular in conventional literature.

II. London in the Eighteenth Century
   A. Between 1600 and 1700 London doubled in population, an influx from the countryside creating a new class of investors and entrepreneurs.
   B. By the eighteenth century, London was the center of what the philosopher Voltaire was to call “a new world order”: an international system of banking and trade that was weakening feudal and national loyalties.
   C. By the eighteenth century, this order had coalesced into the Protestant work ethic of the middle class. Spiritual and material values happily coexisted in the mercantile ethos.

III. The Project of *Moll Flanders*
   A. In Defoe’s best-known novel, *Robinson Crusoe*, the hero develops no interior life to speak of.
   B. *Moll Flanders*, by contrast, offers a heroine with an active inner life, even if overlooked by many critics.
   C. Moll Flanders combines the idealism of Yvain with the materialism of Quevedo’s Pablos, though the latter predominates. The heroine introduces a new concept of the gentlewoman—not someone of social standing, but of independence and character.
   D. Moll is faced with a series of financial propositions; money, not love, is her driving motivation. Her body and her wit are the only currencies available.

IV. Defoe and the World of Things
   A. Defoe focuses on the material world, on things that can be seen and touched.
   B. This emphasis on the worldly reflects a mercantile culture where money has become the measure of all things.
C. *Moll Flanders* has been critiqued for this very materialist ethos: the narrator is captivated by money to the point that nothing else has value.

D. But facts have shadows. Defoe is capable of describing the material world in passages marked by profound ambiguity and doubt.

**Topics for Further Exploration:**

1. Explain how the writing career of Daniel Defoe is manifested in the style and subject of *Moll Flanders*.
2. Explain whether money is the ultimate value for all of the characters in *Moll Flanders*.
3. Summarize the different motives for marriage in the novel.
Lecture Forty-Seven

Moll Flanders and the Self-made Woman

Scope: Lecture 47 informs us that, like Quevedo, Defoe is a chronicler of disguise. Moll dupes just about everyone into believing she’s someone she isn’t, and never reveals her true name to the reader. But occasionally we see beneath the mask, and Defoe seems to ask an unnerving question: how do we ever know the truth about people?

Objectives– Upon completion of this lecture, you should be able to:
1. Trace the theme of disguise in Moll Flanders.
2. Discuss the principles by which marriage was contracted in Daniel Defoe’s day.

Readings:
Recommended: Defoe, Moll Flanders (critical essays in Norton Critical Edition); Price, To the Palace of Wisdom.

Outline

I. Prison Narratives and Highwaymen
   A. In the preface to the novel, Defoe relates that he fashioned the narrative from an account he got from a woman in prison. It was a common practice of the day to take down the confessions of criminals and publish them.
   B. Another source for the novel would seem to be the adventures of Moll Hackabout, a folkloric figure who may also have inspired Defoe.

II. The Picaresque and Disguise
   A. As in The Swindler, the theme of disguise pervades Moll Flanders. Moll’s very name, it turns out, is a pseudonym.
   B. The disguise motif is central to the book: not even her accomplices in crime know her real name or where she lives; she even “changes” gender when working with one partner.
   C. Disguised one day as a wealthy widow, Moll is falsely accused of theft. The novel thus presents a conundrum of identity: when falsely accused, Moll comes closest to having her real profession revealed.
   D. The original title page of the novel suggests the span of Moll’s identity—from whore to gentlewoman to incestuous sister. Can anyone so duplicitous really have a “character”?

III. The Integrity of the Actor
   A. In husband Jemy, Moll meets her match: a con man as duplicitous as she.
   B. Their adventure, however, reminds us that there is something in Defoe beyond the materialist scheme. Both of them eventually discard their masks and adopt a life of conventional morality.

Topics for Further Exploration:
1. Explain whether Moll’s final “identity” in America is truer to her real self than her other identities.
2. Describe the role of papers and documentation in Moll Flanders.
3. Conclude whether or not Defoe condones the immorality of Moll and her colleagues.
Lecture Forty-Eight
Matter and Spirit in Defoe

Scope: Lecture 48 discusses the scrupulous honesty of Defoe, his unremitting clarity in addressing the desperate circumstances of London life as well as the internal feelings of a woman who experienced it. In Defoe’s hands the novel permits us to peer beyond the surface of life into the workings of internal consciousness. In a way that many critics have not acknowledged, *Moll Flanders* is a confessional novel of the first order.

Objectives— Upon completion of this lecture, you should be able to:
1. Explain why *Moll Flanders* is a breakthrough novel in the narration of human consciousness.
2. Summarize how Defoe develops the theme of worldly appearances and interior reality.

Readings:
Recommended: Blewett, *Defoe’s Art of Fiction*.

Outline

I. Appearances Become Reality
   A. Defoe reminds us that we live by reading the surfaces of people: Moll undertakes a charade before the court to prove that she is really not what she is accused of being. The court finds accurately in her favor, but gets nothing right in so doing.
   B. Moll’s thieving is possessed not just of necessity, but its own peculiar ethos. She masters the art of disguise until she is even able to go out in the street “dressed” as what she really is—a beggarly old woman.

II. Defoe: Chronicling the Here and Now
   A. The enabling principle of *Moll Flanders* is that the past is not visible—we can only see what is before us.
   B. Thus Defoe has Moll take a series of partners in an episodic round where each is replaced in turn; the past is quickly forgotten.
   C. The reader is an objective observer of all this, a privilege that no camera—aimed at surface details—can accord us.

III. The Preciousness of Art
   A. When Moll meets the banker, he doesn’t know all the invisible baggage she carries. Again, surface details predominate.
   B. But realizing how abominable her own past is, Moll resolves to be true to him. The conflict between surfaces and consciousness is laid bare by Defoe.
   C. Thus is the private wedded to the public, what is the heart of the Narrative idea: a dialectic is achieved between inner and outer states.

IV. Defoe’s Achievement
   A. All of our lives are picaresque, episodic, chameleonlike. Defoe captures one such life and shows us our scandalous interior freedom from observation.
   B. *Moll Flanders* ends up telling the reader what she would not have told anyone else; a subjective—and private—world is shared through the medium of a confession.
   C. In telling her story there is a purgative catharsis. We see a woman who is a pickpocket and a whore in the eyes of society, and we hear her own reflections on what brought her to such a state. *Moll Flanders* tells us what she cannot tell others.
Topics for Further Exploration:

1. Explain the ironies involved in the episode when Moll is accused of thieving by the mercer.
2. Give examples of how Defoe “privileges” the reader by entering Moll’s state of mind.
3. Summarize how the myriad adventures of Moll advance the form of the picaresque.
Lecture Forty-Nine
Dickens—
The Novel as Moral Institution

Scope: As Moll Flanders was a novel about making one’s way in London, so is Charles Dickens’s Great Expectations. This “great urban fable,” we learn in lecture 49, is a tragic story intended for the moral education of the urban middle class. In the spirit of the bildungsroman, Great Expectations offers us the story of one person’s education—and the harsh loss that accompanies it.

Objectives—Upon completion of this lecture, you should be able to:
1. Explain the historical roots of the novel as a moral institution in Europe.
2. Describe the social values of nineteenth-century London portrayed in Great Expectations

Readings:
Essential: Dickens, Great Expectations.
Recommended: Dickens, David Copperfield.

Outline
I. Great Expectations: Another London Story
   A. Great Expectations (1860) is Dickens’s finest masterpiece, the crown jewel of the nineteenth-century novel.
   B. Like Defoe’s novel, this is another “urban fable” about the loss of innocence, the move from country to city, and how to survive in a world dominated by lawyers and criminals.
   C. Great Expectations is another orphan’s story, but this one will be rich in the tragic nature of the moral knowledge thus gained.

II. The Novel as Moral Institution
   A. By 1860, the novel had become a moral institution. Middle-class readers had come to negotiate the demands of the urban environment by reading didactic fiction.
   B. Dickens’s novels, serialized in popular magazines, provided a fund of reflection on the costs of the modern world: of capitalism, of the fading of rural values, of the city as a dubious moral force.
   C. Great Expectations, imbued as it is with moral meditation, is a secular version of the Biblical Fall. The hero, Pip, will tumble from innocence to experience in the course of his hard-wrung education.

III. London and Alienation
   A. Pip learns from his companion Wemmick that there’s nothing “personal” about London crime: it’s just a way of life.
   B. Wemmick also educates him as to the public (work) and private (home) spheres of life—never the twain shall meet.
   C. In his “put the case” speech, the lawyer Jaggers delivers a classic jeremiad against the immorality of London.
   D. Pip’s move from blacksmith to gentleman snob reflects the labyrinthine maze of London itself. But the knowledge that he has “risen” above his origins is accompanied—only when it is too late—by the recognition that he has given up something in the doing.

IV. Dickens and Mystery
   A. The Dickensian novel is laden with mystery. Jaggers himself is a Sphinx-like character who withholds his part in the riddle until the end of the book.
   B. Pip, like Oedipus, has to unravel the riddles of his life before he can come to terms with himself. He presumes much that is false about Miss Havisham and Estella as he tries to learn the truth about his life.
   C. Dickens asks an important question about experience and mystery: Are some truths suffered rather than learned?
V. The *Bildungsroman* Tradition
   A. The *bildungsroman*, its founder the German writer Goethe, is a novel about the education and formation of character.
   B. This genre, with variations across Europe, poses a central question about the new Industrial Age order: Does entrance into society shape us positively—or deform us?
   C. For Dickens, the new urban order is redolent of evil.

Topics for Further Exploration:
1. Summarize how *Great Expectations* might be interpreted as a secular version of the Biblical story of the Fall.
2. Explain how Pip resembles Oedipus in his search for identity.
3. Compare and contrast the London of Dickens with the London of Defoe.
Lecture Fifty

Pip’s Progress—
From Blacksmith to Snob and Back

Scope: We learn in lecture 50 that *Great Expectations* is a story of autogenesis—how one person fashions a character from early childhood to maturity. What Dickens shows us is the human heart under attack, a life of terror and mystery for a boy who would aspire to the role of gentleman. But our hero, Pip, is marked by an enervating guilt, one that further clouds the mystery of his origins and makes his deliverance problematic.

Objectives— Upon completion of this lecture, you should be able to:

1. Trace the theme of self-invention in *Great Expectations*.
2. Describe different examples of foreshadowing that Dickens uses to alert the reader of things to come.

Readings:

Outline

I. Classic Dickens: The Opening Scene
   A. In the first scene, Pip undertakes an act of autogenesis: he explains the odd creation of his name.
   B. The graveyard, while an inventory of death, is also a way for Pip to understand his origins.
   C. With the entrance of the convict, a sense of death and terror looms heavy over Pip; it is a mood that will never entirely desert him.
   D. Threatening to tear out the boy’s heart and liver, the convict represents the terror of childhood insecurity that haunted Dickens himself.

II. Dickensian Terror
   A. Dickens plays to a sense of vulnerability: what you hide is the most important thing about you.
   B. Pip, as such, is marked by a guilt complex, identifying at the theater with scenes of evil misdeeds.
   C. Pip’s heart, once threatened by the convict, is under constant attack by Estella through the rest of the novel.
   D. The terrifying mood of the marshes in the first scene is periodically revisited on Pip. The wind and the cold, closely associated with Magwitch, reappear with hallucinatory power.

III. Dickensian Markers
   A. Dickens scatters markers or pointers throughout his novels, foreshadowing the nature of things to come.
   B. A man who surprised Pip while contemplating his parents’ burial stone turns out to be his “second father.” We are symbolically set up at the beginning for the plot that transpires.
   C. The avowed presence of a “gentleman” in the hulks at novel’s beginning subtly warns us that the very idea of a gentleman is suspect.
   D. By comparing Stella to the stars in a transport of affection, Pip reveals her ultimate distance and coldness.
   E. Finally, the reader is put in the position of “reading” Pip as he reads the facts of his own life.

Topics for Further Exploration:

1. Describe how Dickens mixes a childlike and adult perspective in the novel’s opening scene.
2. Summarize the role of the heart—or human affection—in *Great Expectations*.
3. Infer what the reader of *Great Expectations* is intended to conclude about the arc of Pip’s life.
Lecture Fifty-One
Riddles of Identity in *Great Expectations*

**Scope:** Lecture 51 reminds us that, as in the picaresque tradition, this Dickens novel is also a riddle of identity. In fact, the Dickens oeuvre is marked by bizarre coincidence, a wild surrealism, and a dark psychological undertow, all of which make *Great Expectations* a study in the transforming nature of guilt and revenge. Not the sentimental novel it is often made out to be, *Great Expectations* has an explicit underside of terror.

**Objectives**—Upon completion of this lecture, you should be able to:
1. Summarize the function of coincidence in *Great Expectations*.
2. Describe the layer of psychological terror undergirding this Dickens novel.

**Readings:**
Recommended: Miller, *Charles Dickens: The World of His Novels*.

**Outline**

I. Great Coincidences
   A. All loose ends are tied together in Dickens; all characters have tentacles and their stories inevitably intertwine.
   B. But Dickens doesn’t just invent his coincidences, he earns them: when Pip and Magwitch are finally reconciled, the latter’s claim to be Pip’s second father—a thought once abhorrent to Pip—has become more plausible as Magwitch has graduated to an advisory figure.
   C. Though London is a place where families fall apart, the characters in the typical Dickens novel become a kind of family, fitting together by the strange logic of coincidence.

II. The Surreal Dickens
   A. Dickens is more than just a “realistic” novelist. In scenes such as the one with Trabb’s boy, the author’s penchant for exaggeration can hardly be contained.
   B. The strange details that populate his novels—like Pip’s vision of Miss Havisham hanging from a noose—are examples of the violently surreal in Dickens.

III. The Subversive Novel
   A. Many events in *Great Expectations* have a dark underside that suggest Pip’s own rage and guilt.
   B. When Pip struggles with Miss Havisham to smother the fire that consumes her, we catch a glimpse of his vindictiveness toward the woman who has caused him so much pain.
   C. When Orlick admits he is the murderer of Pip’s sister, he says that Pip himself did it. In a sense this is true, given Pip’s own hatred of the woman. Orlick thus becomes a kind of alter ego.
   D. This is the deepest stratum of Dickens: how victims sublimate awful knowledge and still manage to survive trauma.

IV. Coming of Age
   A. In the end, all the odd connections of the novel are warranted at a psychological level: Magwitch first gave his money to Pip because he saw something in him of his own daughter.
   B. Finally, Pip admits to Magwitch that he loves his daughter. So it is that Dickens “earns” a fairy tale ending and adapts it to the conventions of the novel.

**Topics for Further Exploration:**
1. Describe the role of the family in *Great Expectations*.
2. Infer what Dickens might have thought of the American idea of the “self-made man.”
3. Give examples of where sublimated fears rise to the surface in *Great Expectations*. 
Lecture Fifty-Two
Charlotte Brontë and the Bildungsroman

Scope: We learn in lecture 52 that Charlotte Brontë’s *Jane Eyre* is a female version of the *bildungsroman*. Bronte is a pioneer in the tradition of creating female subjectivity in Western literature. A grand success in its day, *Jane Eyre* relates the fall and rise of a heroine who encounters savagery and horror in the context of a modern fairy tale.

Objectives—Upon completion of this lecture, you should be able to:
1. Explain the idea of the cultural hero (“transformer”) in the context of *Jane Eyre*.
2. Summarize the idea of ecological (female) versus autonomous (male) conceptions of human character.

Readings:
Essential: Brontë, *Jane Eyre*.
Recommended: Brontë, *Villette*.

Outline

I. Goethe’s Model
   A. The purpose of the *bildungsroman*, as articulated by Goethe, is to depict the mission of self-actualization.
   B. The *bildungsroman* is an organic view of the self, a story about the unfolding potential from childhood to maturity.
   C. The nineteenth century held little in the way of advancement for women. Thus, we must read the female heroine of the *bildungsroman*—Emma Bovary, Effie Briest, Anna Karenina—as the protagonist of a story where social horizons are limited.

II. Other Views of “Character”
   A. Contemporary sociology has confirmed that girls and boys are raised differently—a key notion in understanding the character of Jane Eyre.
   B. Boys are raised as closed, unified selves. Their interaction with culture is defined by competitive collisions.
   C. Girls, on the other hand, are raised as interconnected selves whose boundaries are more porous. Their interaction with culture is relational, and their sense of self is “ecological.”
   D. The female model, therefore, offers a challenge to the self-enclosed picture of the male self. *Jane Eyre* is an early literary example of this challenge.

III. The Brontë Phenomenon
   A. In 1847, Charlotte and Emily Brontë published *Jane Eyre* and *Wuthering Heights*; the former was a critical success, the latter a disaster.
   B. The Brontë sisters were sired by Patrick Brontë, a Yorkshire clergyman with rigorous Puritan principles who taught his children to be freethinkers.
   C. The daughters were to create their own private literary universe—a place where the savage realm meets the civilized world.
   D. Almost like fairy tales, their narratives chart the rite of passage of a Victorian girl in a world dominated by darkly sexual males. The heroine becomes a cultural hero, a “transformer” of wild nature into something humane.

IV. Jane Eyre’s Rite of Passage
   A. Jane will take on the intermediate role of governess, halfway between child and master, mediating between the powers of both.
   B. As with her opening description of Brocklehurst, Bronte plumbs the deep register of fairy tales in creating character and situation.
   C. But does Brocklehurst resemble the wolf in “Little Red Riding Hood”—or more a sinister phallic symbol out of Freud? This is part of Brontë’s ambiguity.
Topics for Further Exploration:

1. Infer what may have been the reasons for *Jane Eyre*’s immense popular success in mid-nineteenth-century England.
2. Summarize how the governess was an ideal role for the main character in the female *bildungsroman*.
3. Give examples of where Brontë uses a fairytale environment to create a horrific effect.
Arnold L. Weinstein
Edna and Richard Salomon Distinguished Professor and
Professor of Comparative Literature
Brown University

Arnold Weinstein was born in Tennessee in 1940 and received his undergraduate degree in romance languages from Princeton University in 1962. He studied at Université de Paris in 1960–61 and at Freie Universitat, Berlin, in 1962–63. He received his masters and his doctorate in comparative literature from Harvard University in 1964 and 1968 respectively.

Dr. Weinstein has been teaching courses on European, English, and American literature at Brown University since 1968. In addition, he is the sponsor of Swedish Studies at Brown. He has been the chairperson of the Advisory Council on Comparative Literature at Princeton University and is actively involved in the American Comparative Literature Association.

Among the many academic honors, research grants, and fellowships he has received is the Younger Humanist Award from the National Endowment for the Humanities, 1971–72. In 1983 he was visiting professor of American literature at Stockholm University where he received the Fulbright Senior Lecturer Award. He is currently a member of the Academy of Literary Studies and the director of a NEH-funded program in great books. In 1995 he received Brown University’s award as best teacher in the humanities.

Lecture Fifty-Three

Jane Eyre—
Victorian Bad Girl Makes Good

Scope: Though a popular novel, we learn in lecture 53, *Jane Eyre* scandalized the keepers of Victorian morality with all its “bad girl” manners. In fact, the heroine of the novel disdains many of the conventions of Victorian times as well as our own: she has no patience for romantic rhetoric and is a plain Jane in physical appearance. But as in Dickens, there is a dark psychology that lingers not very far beneath the surface.

Objectives— Upon completion of this lecture, you should be able to:
1. Explain the reasons that *Jane Eyre* scandalized certain segments of Victorian society.
2. Outline the theme of psychological abuse that empowers the characters of *Jane Eyre*.

Readings:

Outline

I. The Victorian Establishment Responds
   A. Though *Jane Eyre* sold well, it troubled the literary establishment of the day. Rochester’s confessions about his mistresses created a contemporary scandal—young female readers’ minds, it was felt, shouldn’t be filled with such “trash.”
   B. Jane’s own behavior toward Helen Burns branded her as a “bad girl,” an un-Christian whelp who disdains the idea of turning the other cheek.

II. Jane Eyre: Against the Grain
   A. Jane is one of the first characters in English literature to speak out for women’s rights. “Women feel just as men feel,” she says, speaking for millions in silent rebellion.
   B. No mere theorizer of social equality, Jane refuses the advances of two strong men—Rochester and St. John Rivers.
   C. Nor can Jane subscribe to other conventions of the day, mocking as she does the romantic ritual of parting when she takes leave of Rochester.
   D. Still more astonishing, Jane is decidedly plain in appearance. Brontë wages a war against beauty throughout the novel, reminding us that good looks and glamour are shallow virtues at best.

III. Brontë’s Cult of Power
   A. Rochester resembles the powerful, dark Byronic male, intellectually and physically imposing.
   B. While bullying his governess, Rochester himself has to endure Jane’s twisted approval of his sarcasm as a kind of emotional aphrodisiac.
   C. Bronte revels in the psychology of insult and injury. Beneath the romantic surface lies something sinister that is keyed to a power struggle between male and female, between wealthy and poor.
   D. Like Dickens, Brontë fashions a novel about social class and psychological abuse. For both writers, childhood has a reach far beyond itself in shaping the individual.

Topics for Further Exploration:
1. Explain the significance in *Jane Eyre* of male figures who captivate in both their intellectual and physical powers.
2. Criticize or defend the notion that *Jane Eyre* is a novel with a strong feminist bent.
3. Summarize Jane Eyre’s opinions about the class structure of Victorian Britain.

©1995 The Teaching Company Limited Partnership
Lecture Fifty-Four
The Madwoman in the Attic—
19th Century Bills Coming Due

Scope:  *Jane Eyre* harbors a fundamental story of the search for identity. In lecture 54 we learn how Jane must come to terms with her own wishes and delusions—as well as those of the culture at large—before she can marry the father figure she has come to adore. The ever-present shadow of Jane Eyre is the horrible presence of Bertha Mason Rochester, a stark reminder of the repression of women and human desire.

Objectives—Upon completion of this lecture, you should be able to:
1. Summarize how Jane’s confinement in the red room suggests the more dangerous depths of her character.
2. Explain the notion of the alter ego or ‘Other Self’ in the context of *Jane Eyre*.

Readings:
Recommended: Gilbert and Gubar, *The Madwoman in the Attic*.

Outline

I. Primal Abuse: In the Red Room
   A. Jane, locked up for fighting her abusive cousins, is confined to the room where her uncle died.
   B. Taken with a seizure, Jane utters a horrific scream that seems to have come from another place; thus she reveals a hidden alterity.
   C. This ‘Other Self’ of Jane is what cannot be accommodated; she becomes, in a sense, a multiple character.

II. The Arrival of Bertha Mason Rochester
   A. But Jane is not the “monster” of the novel; that is instead Bertha Mason Rochester, the character whose presence shadows Jane from her arrival at Thornfield.
   B. Bertha, Rochester’s wife, has the fierceness of a mad dog or vampire, though her presence is carefully screened through most of the novel.
   C. Indeed, Bertha’s animalistic nature is a Victorian gentleman’s nightmare about female sexuality; she is, in this way, an alter ego for Jane, a symbol of her repressed rage at living in a culture—and a house—that can so abuse her.
   D. Like Orlick and Pip in *Great Expectations*, Bertha and Jane are two halves of a whole psyche. The tiny governess is completed by a vicious, feral woman.

III. The Orphan’s Revenge
   A. The tables are turned by novel’s end: before Jane will consent to marry Rochester, he must first be domesticated.
   B. Jane triumphs as the female version of the cultural hero. The images of the fairy tale have thus been adapted to a story about abuse and power.

Topics for Further Exploration:
1. Describe any one facet of Jane Eyre’s character that stands for the role typically accorded women in Victorian England.
2. Summarize the cultural and symbolic significance of the “madwoman in the attic.”
3. Explain how Jane fulfills the role of the “transformer” of cultural heroine.
Lecture Fifty-Five
Herman Melville’s “Bartleby”
and the Genesis of Character

Scope: Concerning Bartleby, we learn in lecture 55, there is no more enigmatic character in all of Western literature. Far from the madding crowd of most nineteenth-century American dynamos, Bartleby is a symbol of negation—a mere copyist, he is employed to regurgitate the words of others until he is no longer willing to assert so much as a personality. He becomes, in Melville’s hands, a rich meditation about blankness and the absence of character.

Objectives— Upon completion of this lecture, you should be able to:
1. Contrast the character of Bartleby with the general strain of nineteenth-century American literature.
2. Identify the various ways in which Bartleby is deprived of character rather than endowed with it.

Readings:
Essential: Melville, “Bartleby.”
Recommended: Melville, Moby Dick; McCall, The Silence of Bartleby.

Outline

I. American Literature: Paradigms of Confidence
   A. The American literature of Melville’s time is pervaded by the myth of the imperial self: consider Captain Ahab, Hester Prynne, the works of Emerson, Whitman, and Thoreau.
   B. The American ethos of the century prized the possession of self-reliance, still a part of our political and religious culture.

II. Bartleby the Ghost
   A. Bartleby’s story presents the reader with a crisis—why should anyone invest any labor in reading about a character who says and does so little?
   B. Bartleby is such a riddle that the story is narrated by the lawyer who employs him—the enigmatic refrain “I would prefer not to” is thus twice removed from the reader.
   C. “Bartleby” was written during a period of withdrawal and brooding in Melville’s life—many have suggested that the character is a symbol for Melville’s own resignation.
   D. Such is the enigma of Bartleby, opinions abound as to what he might symbolize: the Artist? Conscience? Christ?

III. A Study in Negativity
   A. The narrator describes Bartleby in terms of what he isn’t—not agitated, not impatient, not ambitious.
   B. Melville breaks the usual contract with the reader by slowly erasing the character of Bartleby rather than developing him.
   C. Melville fashions “Bartleby” as a meditation on the nature of originals and copies. A scribe by profession, Bartleby himself seems to lack any claim to individuality, a paper creature by nature and inclination.

Topics for Further Exploration:
1. Summarize how Bartleby’s refrain, “I would prefer not to,” is a seeming contradiction of the very motive for writing literature.
2. Explain how Melville’s other work touched on themes similar to those in “Bartleby.”
3. Infer how “Bartleby” might be, as suggested in the lecture, a prophetic story about the modern world.
Lecture Fifty-Six
“Bartleby”—Christ on Wall Street?

Scope: Bartleby, the man with no character, succeeds in shedding light on all who surround him. This irony, noted in lecture 56, is a key to unlocking the secrets of a story that reflects the thinking of philosophers like Henri Bergson and Karl Marx. In the end, Melville’s fable concerns a man who decides to live rather than work, incurring the disbelief, if not the enmity, of the materialistic culture around him.

Objectives—Upon completion of this lecture, you should be able to:
1. Summarize how the figure of Bartleby resembles the revolving light depicted in Melville’s The Confidence-Man.
2. Explain how the gradual conversion of the narrator contributes to the ambiguity of the story.

Readings:
Recommended: Melville, Billy Budd; Weinstein, Nobody’s Home: Speech, Self, and Place in American Fiction from Hawthorne to DeLillo.

Outline
I. Melville and the “Drummond Light”
   A. In his novel The Confidence-Man, Melville describes what he calls the Drummond light—a revolving light that illuminates everything but itself.
   B. Bartleby provides just this function, a kind of impassive but illuminating foil for everyone else in the narrative.
   C. Most clearly he brings out the narrator—like many of Melville’s narrators a man unequipped to understand the mystery unfolding in front of him.
   D. Bartleby also illumines the office itself, a place that verges on the absurd through the highjinks of Turkey and Nippers.

II. The Human Machine
   A. Bartleby’s dreary refrain turns out to be contagious—his fellow workers echo it as the story progresses.
   B. French philosopher Henri Bergson has theorized that the origins of comedy are when the human being begins to act like a machine. This not only describes the antics of the Marx brothers and Charlie Chaplin, but helps explain the strangely comic effect of Bartleby himself.
   C. Karl Marx based his critique of capitalism on the alienation of the worker with no connection to the fruits of his labor. In this light, “Bartleby” can be seen as the critique of an economic system where the point of contention is a man’s labor.

III. Living at the Office
   A. Bartleby’s refusal to budge persists to the point that he takes up residence in the office, forcing his boss to leave.
   B. Bartleby has chosen to live, not to work. He will not have his life defined by productivity, an existential decision.
   C. The story is a meditation on the condition of people with no rights, about the nineteenth-century homeless. Without money, “Bartleby” seems to be suggesting, what rights does anyone have?

IV. The Lawyer’s Mission
   A. The narrator eventually comes to see Bartleby as part of a grand Design. The lawyer invests an interest in the strange character, if only to tell his story of this machine-man to the rest of the world, thus bonding with another human being.
   B. Thus the lawyer, in the tradition of literature, is a saver and maker of lives. His own uncertainty about Bartleby helps make the story believable.
Topics for Further Exploration:

1. Appraise the validity of the suggestion that Bartleby might symbolize the figure of Christ.
2. Explain merits and shortcomings of using a narrator who does not completely understand the events he describes.
3. Summarize how Bartleby represents what Karl Marx described as a victim of economic alienation.
Lecture Fifty-Seven
Franz Kafka’s “Metamorphosis”: Sacrifice or Power Game?

Scope: Whether Franz Kafka is a realist or fantasist is hard to know. Lecture 57 explains a story—“The Metamorphosis”—that turns the most fantastic of assumptions into a deadpan recounting of daily life. Kafka disassembles what is human to find out what makes it tick. The answer he decides on—that humankind is a small and wavering thing—is the comic and repulsive subject of “The Metamorphosis.”

Objectives—Upon completion of this lecture, you should be able to:
1. Explain the tension in “The Metamorphosis” between the outward appearance and the inward consciousness of the narrator.
2. Summarize the series of metamorphoses that occur in the story.

Readings:
Essential: Kafka, “The Metamorphosis” and “The Penal Colony.”

Outline
I. Kafka: A Vision
   A. Kafka, one of the most fascinating writers of the century, maintains a bizarre remove from the events he writes about—a literary anthropologist of the first rank.
   B. Though he died at age forty, Kafka believed throughout his life that writing fulfilled a priestly function. His fiction reveals some of the strangest areas of the human spirit.

II. Kafka’s Recipe
   A. Kafka builds his unsettling fiction by relying on shared experiences of metamorphosis. In dreams, for example, we are all familiar with the alteration of shapes and forms; in “real” life we also observe and endure the slow change of the human body.
   B. Though critics love to consider Kafka as a master of the allegorical, they often forget that he is an expert at conveying realistic detail. “The Metamorphosis” is narrated in an utterly flat, deadpan style, all the more compelling for its mundaneness.

III. Dismantling the Human
   A. Narrated from the point of view of an insect with consciousness, Kafka calls into question the nature—and grandeur—of the human condition. Kafka’s is a somber reply to Oedipus’s riddle about what is human.
   B. While the reader knows that Gregor is still possessed of a human consciousness, his family does not. Thus the story is founded on a tragic irony of perspective; the reader can “hear” Gregor but not see him, while his family is in precisely the reverse situation.

IV. The Metamorphoses of Kafka
   A. Gregor has been transformed overnight from the family provider to an embarrassing family secret.
   B. His father also undergoes a change in the process; once decrepit, he is physically restored by the disaster that befalls his son, a kind of Oedipal drama in reverse.
   C. Even Grete, Gregor’s sister, seems liberated by his transformation. Gregor, in effect, is sacrificed, but his disappearance will have a beneficial effect on his family.

V. Kafka: A Parable
   A. Kafka often presents a character who has an insatiable need for nourishment that is not available.
   B. His protagonists are never satisfied with the material world, suggesting a religious longing for transcendence.
Topics for Further Exploration:

1. Explain how the banality of Kafka’s own life is mirrored in the narration of “The Metamorphosis.”
2. Infer what the insect at the heart of Kafka’s story symbolizes—if anything.
3. Summarize the ways in which Gregor Samsa is sacrificed for the benefit of his family.
Scope: As in many of his works, the law is a major theme of Kafka’s “In the Penal Colony.” In a tale by turns exotic and awful, we learn, in lecture 58, of Kafka’s own allegorical efforts to depict the fate of reading and language. We are also privy to another moving metamorphosis, this time when the Officer submits to the punishment he had formerly administered.

Objectives—Upon completion of this lecture, you should be able to:

1. Compare and contrast the two codes of law that dominate the island in “In the Penal Colony.”
2. Identify what the themes of speech and reading in the story suggest about Kafka’s world view.

Readings:
Recommended: Benjamin, chapter in Illuminations; Heller, chapter in The Disinherited Mind.

Outline

I. “In the Penal Colony”: Exploring the Horror
   A. In this story, we are introduced to a primitive machine that enacts an exacting public revenge on its victims: needles inscribe a written punishment on the prisoner’s back.
   B. But the machine is the end result of a strange judicial process, one commonly found in Kafka: there is no trial, and prisoners are always presumed guilty.

II. Dual Codes
   A. The machine is regarded on the island as the relic of a former regime, no longer much beloved.
   B. The old commander, like someone out of the Old Testament, seems severe and punitive. The new commander, symbol of the new regime, is milder and gentler.

III. A Parable of Language
   A. An important theme in the story, language is at issue from the very beginning, when the officer speaks French so that the prisoner won’t understand him.
   B. Language is the vehicle by which the Explorer—and the reader—understands the machine; the structural frame of the story is the Officer’s detailed explanation.
   C. Throughout the tale Kafka toys with the idea that language is a convention which may or may not convince an audience; “In the Penal Colony” at one level is a “love story” between teller and hearer, a journey of persuasion undertaken by the Officer to seduce the visiting Explorer.

IV. Language and the Machine
   A. In much of Kafka, food and sex are rejected as basic needs in favor of language.
   B. In “In the Penal Colony,” the Word is transcribed onto the body, language enters into flesh. This is a magic, potent version of the Word, the symbol of the writer’s greatest dream.
   C. But the Explorer eventually refuses the machine, and the Officer submits himself to the torture.
   D. This is the ultimate metamorphosis: the torturer places himself in the role of victim, entering the point of view of the Other in a final search for knowledge.

Topics for Further Exploration:
1. Explain how the Explorer functions as a surrogate of the reader in “In the Penal Colony.”
2. Infer whether the Machine in “In the Penal Colony” is projected more as an instrument of terror or a symbol of something more abstract.
3. Conclude whether or not the Officer should be considered the hero of “The Penal Colony.”
Lecture Fifty-Nine
Faulkner’s “The Bear”—
Stories of White and Black

Scope: With William Faulkner comes the stream-of-consciousness novel. In lecture 59 we consider how Faulkner uses the interior monologue to revisit—and redeem—the tragic tradition of the South. The issues of gender and race are also brought to bear in the short fictions that comprise Go Down, Moses, Faulkner’s elegy about the tragedy of a region.

Objectives— Upon completion of this lecture, you should be able to:
1. Outline the course of Faulkner’s career and distinguish the unique achievement of Go Down, Moses.
2. Explain the importance of the extended interior monologue in the history of the novel.

Readings:
Essential: Faulkner, “The Bear.”
Recommended: Faulkner, Go Down, Moses; Sundquist, William Faulkner: A House Divided.

Outline

I. Faulkner and His Oeuvre
   A. “The Bear” is from Go Down Moses (1940), a collection of stories about black and white people.
   B. Faulkner’s early great novels—As I Lay Dying and The Sound and the Fury—are spiked with personal trauma revealed in stream-of-consciousness monologues. These novels reveal a traditional South on the verge of social change.
   C. In Light in August and Absalom, Absalom!, Faulkner goes back to the past to catch the cultural heart of the South. We are, he seems to say in these works, the product of our past.

II. Another Breakthrough: Go Down, Moses
   A. In “Was,” a story intercut with the account of a black servant, Faulkner weaves together several strands in a tale with parallel accounts about hunting women, hunting animals, and hunting slaves.
   B. “Pantaloon in Black” is about the bitter grief of Rider, a black widower who ends up murdering a white woman, another in a series of Faulkner narratives where blacks are no longer simply figures of equanimity.
   C. In “Fire in the Hearth,” Lucas Beauchamp is the first of Faulkner’s black characters to have any of the rich subjectivity usually confined to white people in his fictions.

III. Women in Faulkner
   A. In “Fire in the Hearth,” Lucas’ wife, Molly, declares “I wants a voce” (divorce)—an echo of the Latin word for voice, what might be emblematic of the muted role of women in these stories.
   B. As for Rider, his wife is “vanished, but not gone”; his role becomes to speak a continual elegy for her. He will commit suicide to assuage his grief, a fact the white people can never understand.

Topics for Further Exploration:
1. Trace the development of character subjectivity in Faulkner’s writing career.
2. Summarize the role of women in Go Down, Moses.
3. Explain the barriers that would have prevented a writer like Faulkner from even attempting a narrative of black subjectivity.
Lecture Sixty
“The Bear”—American Myth or American History?

Scope: “The Bear” recalls the ancient ritual of the hunt. In lecture 61 we learn of the American romance of the forest and its role as a place of purity and renewal. The eternal round of the hunt, however, is broken when the bear is killed. The hero, Ike McCaslin, is left to erect a memorial to the dead—even if the dead, though vanished, are never gone.

Objectives—Upon completion of this lecture, you should be able to:
1. Compare and contrast the symbol of the forest in American and European literature.
2. Summarize how Faulkner’s prose style aims to achieve a fluidity of timelessness and motion.


Outline

I. The Ritual Hunt
   A. The hunt in “The Bear” has a noble pedigree in American literature, from Moby Dick to the Leatherstocking tales of James Fenimore Cooper.
   B. The hunt is a ritual return to a time of the nomadic hunter-gatherer.
   C. In American literature, unlike what we saw in Yvain or Jane Eyre, the forest is seen as a place of purity and renewal.

II. Ike’s Initiation
   A. Ike McCaslin, finally allowed to come on the hunt, sets out on his own. Losing himself in the forest, he comes upon the bear without gun, watch, or compass.
   B. The timelessness of this encounter, a voyage into the dark heart of renewal, is reflected in the prose style of Faulkner: by inverting the traditional structure of sentences, he creates a prose that is fluid and moving.

III. History Versus Myth
   A. In many ways, the myth of “eternal return” is soon over. First, the bear is killed, the object of the quest.
   B. Sam Fathers, the symbolic Indian of the ritual hunt, also dies.
   C. Ike pays homage to the bear and Sam, leaving a catafalque in the forest. This elegiac act is symbolic of the Faulkner theme of eliminating death: to stress the fluidity of the world, to be of the earth and not in it.

Topics for Further Exploration:
1. Explain how the racial heritage of Sam Fathers is an important symbolic element of “The Bear.”
2. Compare and contrast the exclusive worlds of myth and history.
3. Summarize what might be the symbolic connotations of a bear.
Lecture Sixty-One

Tracking the Bear, or Learning to Read

Scope: In Faulkner, the theme of language is invariably present. As we learn in lecture 61, the story of Ike’s rite of passage is replete with metaphors of “reading” the world in order to understand it. In a small ledger is revealed the legacy not only of Ike’s family but of the brutal history of his culture.

Objectives—Upon completion of this lecture, you should be able to:
1. Trace the development of the reading trope in “The Bear.”
2. Summarize how reading plays a role in the time-honored rites of passage in many cultures.

Readings:
Recommended: Philip Weinstein, *Faulkner’s Subject: A Cosmos No One Owns*.

Outline

I. Reading Signs
   A. Language, the vehicle of elegy, is among our tools for dealing with death. Even the tombstone suggests its prominent role in making memory.
   B. Language is, in fact, the most wonderful aspect of the hunt, including the sheer exuberance of talk.
   C. In still another way is language vitally imbued: Ike McCaslin learns to “read” the wilderness as he does the bear’s tracks. The metaphor for comprehending language is applicable to the most primitive sport of humankind.

II. The Language of the Fall
   A. The basic rite of passage of literate peoples is the act of learning how to read, converting signs into human meaning.
   B. The world of language is a world after the Fall, after the time of Eden when there were things but no words.

III. Language and the Recovery of the World
   A. Language reveals the nature of the world to us; the signs of Ben’s tracks confer a meaning. The science of signs, or “semiosis,” represents the movement from sign to signal.
   B. Like the tracks of the bear, Faulkner’s story suggests more than we can immediately see. “The Bear” recovers for us the legacy of racism in the South, the story a symbolic rendition of the moral transgressions of Southern culture.

IV. Reading Racism
   A. In part 4, Ike and his cousin read the family ledger for the plantation, the story of the McCaslin family on the land.
   B. The events therein described—from the buying of slaves to a slave who drowns herself—represent the legacy of a culture. Faulkner never comes closer to articulating the dark side of racial violation that his culture springs from.
   C. A humanistic labor, learning to read is a time-honored rite of passage—learning to understand the significance of things while being initiated into a community.
   D. Ike ultimately denies his tradition, refusing to own the land after his initiation into the Word.

Topics for Further Exploration:
1. Summarize how the creation of language might be considered as symbolic of the Fall.
2. Explain Faulkner’s attitude toward the idea of owning the land.
3. Summarize how Ike’s refusal to be initiated marks “The Bear” as a modern text.
Scope: Alice Walker’s *The Color Purple* is the logical extension of Faulkner’s experiments with subjectivity. As we learn in lecture 62, the story of Celie is, in many ways, the perfect sequel to Faulkner’s excursions, only this time from the point of view of a black woman who has faced down the horror of life. Walker travels backward through time to show us how a woman succeeds in recreating her identity.

Objectives— Upon completion of this lecture, you should be able to:
1. Describe instances where Walker uses fairy tale motifs in depicting a violent, racist world.
2. Trace the “development” of God as a character in *The Color Purple*.

Readings:
Recommended: Walker, *Their Mother’s Gardens*.

Outline

I. *The Color Purple*: An Angry Reception
A. Alice Walker’s novel was received by many critics as a saccharine version of the South, especially given its status as a best-seller and its celebrated film version.
B. Many black critics also claimed the novel was an unfair indictment, and thus a betrayal, of black men.

II. Reassessing *The Color Purple*
A. But the story is not so simple. Walker, for example, employs a fairy tale context in which people are seemingly trapped in other bodies. But these are brutal tales, not ones with empty-headed morals or easy endings.
B. *The Color Purple* is a text of complex vision: Africa is celebrated as a black homeland, but is also indicted for its treatment of women.
C. Finally, the language of the novel is imbued with a rare formal grace; it has all the symmetry and parallelisms of poetry.

III. The Language of the Victim
A. *The Color Purple* opens with Celie describing her rape in a letter to God; this, an example of black subjectivity, is the perfect sequel to the individual consciousness Faulkner was seeking to describe.
B. Through Celie’s letters, the novel is filled with the frank, though dignified, language of the victim. Long treated as an object, Celie eventually conveys the power of controlled subjectivity.

IV. Shug Avery: Love Apostle
A. The love of Shug Avery—sexual and emotional—awakens Celie from her sleep, another fairy tale element in the novel.
B. Celie has to be retaught everything—including how to love; Shug Avery convinces her that she’s really a virgin in spite of all her sexual experience.
C. With the help of Shug Avery, Celie travels back in time and forward in her development. Her life is reassembled anew.

Topics for Further Exploration:
1. Summarize the critical objections that greeted the publication of *The Color Purple*.
2. Describe what role recounting the past plays in Walker’s novel.
3. Give examples of where Celie, though a victim, displays a dignity of language in recounting her life.
Lecture Sixty-Three
Ideology as Vision in *The Color Purple*

**Scope**: Disguise—both willing and unwilling—is a major theme of *The Color Purple*. Lecture 63 examines the “disguises” borne by many characters, including God, that belie the simplicity of identity. Walker stresses the importance of revision, of changing what we thought we knew in the light of subsequent experience.

**Objectives**— Upon completion of this lecture, you should be able to:
1. Describe the motif of forced disguise in *The Color Purple*.
2. Summarize the role that Africa plays in forcing us to revisit the early part of the novel.

**Readings**: Recommended: Gates, *The Signifying Monkey*.

**Outline**

I. Disguise as Invention
   A. As in the theater, disguise in narration offers a powerful opportunity to reinvent character.
   B. But disguise can also have a negative element in literature, as when Oedipus and Gregor Samsa realize that they aren’t what they supposed they were.
   C. In *The Color Purple*, Harpo’s domestic proclivities hide beneath a masculine “disguise” that traps him in a role for which he isn’t suited.
   D. The multiple dimensions of people are repressed by the conventions of culture; as Shug tells Celie, the folks on the society pages are the same ones on the front page. Everyone wears a mask.

II. The Disguises of God
   A. Celie recognizes the God of the Bible: old, white, and powerful.
   B. But Shug defines a different God: the “it” in everything. God is the pleasure source, the giver of the color purple.
   C. Celie later comes to see that the God of her early life was treacherous—“he” gave her a lynched father; he even raped her, posing in the form of the man she mistook at the time for her father. God is configured in many ways in Walker’s novel.

III. Revising the World
   A. Walker presents a world in which thought and experience are culturally conditioned. One has to challenge the terms of the culture at large to reinvent the world.
   B. Nettie’s description of Africa places America in a different light: all earlier “facts” of the story are now seen as the fictions that denied black Africa a past and a present.
   C. Through Nettie’s letters, Celie comes to understand that the man who raped her wasn’t her father; an alternative world emerges that frees her from the prejudice of the past.
   D. This revision of the world is accomplished by, for example, a suspended loop in the novel. A passing incident early in the book is recalled when Celie reads a letter from Nettie who thanks her for giving herself up to a man so many years before—thus the original event is invested with a newfound resonance.

**Topics for Further Exploration**:
1. Explain how Harpo is stereotyped by his culture.
2. Conclude whether *The Color Purple* is an affirmation—or a rejection—of God.
3. Compare and contrast how Celie and Moll Flanders undergo the process of reinventing themselves.
Lecture Sixty-Four
Reconceiving Center and Margin

Scope: Though the African material is essential to Celie’s rebirth, it is her colloquial speech that is the heart of the novel. Though a novel of pathos, we learn in lecture 64, The Color Purple offers a prognosis of hope. It is, however, a hope informed by class warfare, colonialism, and slavery. Like Adrienne Rich, Walker would offer an alternative to history, this one a version that admits everyone as a child of God.

Objectives—Upon completion of this lecture, you should be able to:
1. Contrast how the use of the King’s English and Celie’s marginalized speech define a basic conflict in the novel.
2. Summarize how language is used in The Color Purple to create a world and not just designate it.

Readings:
Recommended: Hurston, Their Eyes Were Watching God; Morrison, Beloved.

Outline

I. The Language of Character
   A. Some criticism has been leveled at the academic tone of Nettie’s narration; the King’s English almost seems to steal the vitality from her story.
   B. Celie, on the other hand, is at the center of the novel—her vigorous, ironic speech is a unique tool in negotiating her way through an unforgiving world.
   C. The power of language is nowhere better represented than in the curse Celie puts on Mister; in this case, the word has a way of becoming real.

II. Diving Into the Wreck—Again
   A. The Color Purple offers a panoply of wrongs: colonialism, slavery, domestic violence. These are part of the legacy of the West.
   B. But the novel refuses the easy path of pointing the finger. When African complicity in the slave trade is acknowledged, it’s clear that Walker is aiming at a parable that includes the entire human family.

III. Revising Tradition
   A. The symbolically named Adam, Celie’s son, returns to America and turns to the act of remaking himself.
   B. In the manner of Whitman, Walker reminds us that tradition can only be enriched by allowing new voices.

Topics for Further Exploration:
1. Compare and contrast the endings of The Color Purple and Moll Flanders.
2. Describe differences in the way Celie and Nettie use the language.
3. Conclude whether The Color Purple “earns” the happy ending that it presents.
Glossary

alter ego: a second self, usually a fantastic variation of an individual.

autogenesis: self-creation.

bildungsroman: a novel that recounts a young person’s growth from childhood to maturity.

courtly romance: a fictitious narrative that relates the exploits of medieval heroes.

deconstruction: a school of literary criticism which holds that words only refer to other words, and textual statements ultimately undermine their own meanings.

existentialism: a philosophical school which emphasizes the freedom of the individual, the need to take personal responsibility for one’s actions, and the existence of an indifferent universe.

libido: the manifestation of sexual desire.

panoptic: a perspective that includes everything visible in a single view.

picaresque: the realistic depiction of the adventures of a rogue or scoundrel.

plain style: a prose manner that is direct and conversational, eschewing literary allusions and rhetorical flourishes.

point of view: the perspective from which a text is narrated.

semiotics: the science of signs.

stream-of-consciousness: a literary device that reveals the emotions and thoughts of a character as they occur.

surrealism: an artistic movement characterized by bizarre juxtapositions of imagery that attempt to portray the workings of the subconscious.

transformer: a cultural hero who transforms the savage into the civilized.
Timeline

1144-90 ...................... Chretien de Troyes
1348-53 ...................... Boccaccio’s Decameron
1375 ...................... Robin Hood appears in popular literature
1494-1553 .................... François Rabelais, French writer
1547-1616 .................... Miguel Cervantes, Spanish writer
1580-1645 .................... Francisco Quevedo
1605 ...................... Cervantes’s Don Quixote, part I, published
1628-88 ...................... John Bunyan, English author
1661-1731 .................... Daniel Defoe
1707-54 ...................... Henry Fielding, English novelist
1722 ...................... Defoe’s Moll Flanders
1726 ...................... Jonathan Swift’s Gulliver’s Travels
1759 ...................... Voltaire’s Candide
1767 ...................... Laurence Stern’s Tristram Shandy
1775-1817 .................... Jane Austen, English novelist
1799-1850 .................... Honore de Balzac, French novelist
1812 ...................... Brothers Grimm’s Fairy Tales published
1812-70 ...................... Charles Dickens
1816-55 ...................... Charlotte Brontë
1818 ...................... Mary Shelley’s Frankenstein published
1819-91 ...................... Herman Melville
1823 ...................... The Pioneers, first of James Fenimore Cooper’s Leatherstocking Novels
1840-1902 .................... Emile Zola, French novelist
1841 ...................... Publication of E.A. Poe’s first detective story, “The Murders in the Rue Morgue”
1847 ...................... Bronte’s Jane Eyre
1851 ...................... Herman Melville’s Moby Dick
1852 ...................... Harriet Beecher Stowe’s Uncle Tom’s Cabin
1861 ...................... Dickens’s Great Expectations
1862 ...................... Victor Hugo’s Les Miserables
1866 ...................... Dostoyevsky’s Crime and Punishment
1871-1922 .................... Marcel Proust, French novelist
1883-1924 .................... Franz Kafka
1884 ...................... Mark Twain’s Huckleberry Finn
1897-1962 .................... William Faulkner
1898-1961 .................... Ernest Hemingway, American writer
1944 ...................... Alice Walker born
Biographies

Chretien de Troyes (c. 1140-91)
Little is known of the life of Chretien de Troyes. The author of narrative romances including The Knight of the Wagon and Perceval le Gallois, he also wrote Tristan, now lost, and some imitations of Ovid. Under the patronage of the Countess Marie de Champagne, he composed four romances in rhyming couplets while in residence at her court in Troyes, including Yvain.

Francisco de Quevedo (1580-1645)
Born to a wealthy family, Quevedo was educated at the universities of Alcala and Valladolid and was fluent in several languages. After serving as counselor to the Duke of Osuna for several years, Quevedo was arrested in 1620 when the duke fell from favor. Henceforth Quevedo quit politics for literature, composing satirical prose and verse. He was arrested again in 1639 and confined in a monastery. Soon after his release he died. In addition to The Swindler (La Vida del Buscon, 1626) he wrote Dreams (1627), a compilation of fantasies about hell and death. He also translated some of the works of Epictetus and Seneca.

Daniel Defoe (1660-1731)
The son of a butcher, Defoe was trained for the Presbyterian ministry but instead established himself as a merchant in his early twenties. Declaring bankruptcy in 1692, Defoe was never able to completely free himself of creditors the rest of his life. He was imprisoned for his 1702 satire, “The Shortest Way With Dissenters,” and was bailed out by a political friend. Defoe, considered by some the father of modern journalism, published, edited, and wrote for some 26 periodicals during his lifetime. Not until his later life did he take to writing novels, his Life and Strange Surprising Adventures of Robinson Crusoe (1719) being published not as a novel but an alleged memoir of a shipwrecked man. Moll Flanders (1722) and A Journal of the Plague Year (1722) cemented his reputation as a quasi-historical writer with a penchant for physical details.

Charles Dickens (1812-70)
Dickens, the son of a naval clerk, hailed from Portsmouth, England. While Charles was still a boy his father was imprisoned for debt and his son underwent the humiliation of working in a boot-blacking warehouse. During his early career, Charles was a court stenographer and a highly successful parliamentary reporter for a London newspaper. His first novel, The Posthumous Papers of the Pickwick Club (1836-37) made an instant name for him and his characters. In 1836 he married Catherine Hogarth and together they were to have 10 children. Dickens’s subsequent novels received enormous popular acclaim and first appeared as installments in popular magazines. His American Notes (1842) was greeted with decidedly mixed reviews in the United States, given Dickens’s penchant for social criticism. His most famous novels include Oliver Twist (1838), David Copperfield (1850), A Tale of Two Cities (1859), and Great Expectations (1861). Eventually separated from his wife, he engaged in an enormously productive literary life, touring the British Isles and America to read from his works. He is buried in Westminster Abbey.

Charlotte Brontë (1816-55)
The daughter of an Anglican clergyman, Charlotte and three of her sisters were educated at a school for the children of poor churchmen. Two of her sisters died of tuberculosis. Charlotte was educated at Miss Wooler’s school at Roe Head, where she later became a teacher. The family finances in disarray, she left for Brussels in 1842 to study foreign languages with an eye to opening a school. When this plan failed, the three Brontë sisters—Charlotte, Emily, and Anne—began publishing fiction and poetry under the pseudonyms of Currer, Ellis, and Acton Bell. After Jane Eyre (1847), Charlotte published Shirley (1849) and revealed the truth of her identity. Reveling in the high life of London literary circles, Charlotte married in 1854, but died only a year later of pregnancy toxemia. Emily and Anne preceded her in death—both of tuberculosis.

Herman Melville (1819-91)
Melville was born into an impoverished family and quit school at age fifteen. He signed up as a cabin boy on a ship bound for Liverpool and later did eighteen months on a worldwide whaling voyage. He was captured by cannibals on the Marquesas Islands, but was well-treated by them and later rescued. His early novels Typee (1846) and Omoo (1847) reflect these adventures in the South Seas. Melville’s career was soon established and he became a popular figure in New York and abroad. He married Elizabeth Shaw in 1847 and they moved next-door to writer Nathaniel Hawthorne in
Pittsfield, Massachusetts, in 1850. The next year he published *Moby Dick*, his greatest masterpiece, though it was not well-received at the time. His later years were sunk in debt, forcing him to accept a job as a customs inspector in 1866. He died a forgotten writer, and it wasn’t until the 1920s that his literary reputation was reestablished.

**Franz Kafka (1883-1924)**
Born in Prague, Czechoslovakia, Kafka obtained a law degree in 1906 and eventually gained employment in the workmen’s compensation division of an insurance company. He considered marriage for several years, but broke off a planned engagement as a young man. In the last year of his life he lived in Berlin with Dora Dymant, a talented scholar and actress, what was likely the happiest period in his life. He died in 1924 of tuberculosis, having endured several painful attacks. Most of his works—including *The Trial* (1937), *The Castle* (1930) and *Amerika* (1928)—were published after his death.

**William Faulkner (1897-1962)**
Born in New Albany, Mississippi, Faulkner added a “u” to his surname upon publishing his first book, *The Marble Faun*, in 1924. He trained as a pilot in the Canadian Air Force, lived in Paris, and attended the University of Mississippi during his early adult years. He moved to Oxford, Mississippi, in 1931 where he was to live as something of a recluse. Most of his fiction is set in the imaginary Yoknapatawpha county, what became a literary symbol for the entire South. Faulkner’s most acclaimed novels include *The Sound and the Fury* (1929), *As I Lay Dying* (1930), *Light in August* (1932) and *Absalom, Absalom!* (1936). He was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1949 and the Pulitzer Prize in 1954 and 1962.

**Alice Walker (1944—)**
The daughter of Georgia sharecroppers, Alice Walker published her first book, *Once: Poems*, in 1968. In 1972 she was granted a Ph.D. by Russel Sage College, and has since gone on to be a writer-in-residence at schools including Wellesley, Yale, Tougaloo, and the University of California/Berkeley. Her book *Revolutionary Petunias* was nominated for a National Book Award in 1973, and with her publication in 1982 of *The Color Purple* she became the first black woman to be awarded the Pulitzer Prize for a novel. She has been a contributing editor of *Ms.*, has been politically active in the movement against female circumcision, and has published many books, including *The Temple of My Familiar* (1989) and *In Search of Our Mothers’ Gardens: Womanist Prose* (1983).
Bibliography

Required:
Chretien de Troyes. *Yvain, or The Knight With the Lion*. Cuth Cline, translator. (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1975). (0-8203-0758-0)

Recommended:
Iffland, James. *Quevedo and the Grotesque*, vol. 2. (Rochester, NY: Boydell and Brewer, 1982). (0-7293-0140-0)
Melville, Herman. *Billy Budd and Other Tales.* (New York: NAL Dutton, 1961). (0-451-52237-0, Sig Classics)