Classics of American Literature
Part I

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Classics of American Literature

Scope:
We all read many books over our lifetimes, but how many of them do we really remember? We have all heard of the great names in American literature—Emerson, Thoreau, Poe, Hawthorne, Melville, Whitman, Dickinson, Twain, James, Hemingway, Fitzgerald, Faulkner, Eliot, O'Neill, Morrison—but do we know why they are great? Do we truly savor these books in such a way that they are a part of our inner landscape, part of the way we now see America and ourselves?

Of course, many of the books that are considered classics of American literature are part of everyone's repertory. But have we made them into personal knowledge? We know that Rip Van Winkle falls asleep for twenty years for some mysterious reason—but what exactly? Why did Emerson believe in "self-reliance," and why do we? Thoreau went to Walden Pond to force nature into utterance. Is this a victory? An escape? A fiction? Melville's Ahab does war with the white whale. Is his struggle heroic or sacrilegious? Mad or impotent? Whitman celebrates the common man, the great city, even life and death. But is he believable? Stowe shows us Uncle Tom, black slave turned into Christ figure—how much has changed since then? Dickinson, the recluse of Amherst, writes the most explosive verse of the century—how could she know what she knew? Twain, our greatest showman, tells a story with an inkling of Peter Pan: Tom Sawyer never does grow up, but Huck Finn must face the racism of the South and somehow get past his own polluted conscience—can he do it? James brings American innocents to Europe for them to inherit the world—but do they?

In the 20th century, Hemingway speaks for a lost generation of American writers who discovered Paris but lost home and self in the bargain. Fitzgerald's Gatsby is the crown prince of capitalism, the hero of self-invention. He finishes up poorly, but Willy Loman, Arthur Miller's salesman-hero, finishes even worse as the American dream turns into a nightmare—have we lost our truest faith? Faulkner's decaying South is alive with ghosts—can there be a future if we are all ghost-ridden? Ellison writes the epic story of an entire race in the adventures of his "invisible man," and Morrison harks all the way back to the horrors of slavery in Beloved, joining Stowe, Twain, and Faulkner to remind us, just as the stories of the concentration camps remind us, that even carnage may be survivable. But at what cost?

American classics are wonderfully rich fare. These books are often the sites of great conflict—political, racial, sexual, and moral. More than any other modern nation, America is a mythic land, a place with a sense of its own destiny and promise, a place that has experienced bloody wars to achieve that destiny. The events of American history shimmer forth in our classics. The Puritan origins and the Revolutionary War have pride of place in much of Hawthorne. The search for an American language—for the great American theme of freedom—is at the core of Emerson, Thoreau, and Whitman. The nightmares of slavery and fratricide, inseparable from the Civil War, inform the vision not only of Stowe, Melville, and Twain, but also of Faulkner and Morrison. America's loss of innocence in World War I, coupled with its enduring belief in the self-made man, reappear as both fact and fiction, as promises that may be unkeepable, in Hemingway, Fitzgerald, T.S. Eliot, and Arthur Miller. Somewhat like a great voyage across the United States, then, especially a voyage in time, we explore our country in these books, an exploration unimaginable in any other form.

Learning Objectives
Upon completion of this course, you should be able to

1. Explain the role of "self-reliance" and the "self-made man" in the evolution of American literature;
2. Identify the central tenets of American Romanticism;
3. Describe the evolution of the American ghost story, from Poe and Hawthorne to James and Morrison;
4. Outline the epic strain in American literature, from Melville and Whitman to Faulkner and Ellison;
5. Explain the importance of slavery as a critical subject matter for Stowe, Twain, Faulkner, and Morrison;
6. Summarize the perspective on nature revealed in such seminal poets as Whitman, Dickinson, Frost, and Eliot;
7. Identify the main tenets of Modernism in the work of Eliot, Fitzgerald, Hemingway, and Faulkner;
8. Identify the major contributions of O'Neill, Miller, and Williams to American theater; and
9. Summarize the major threads of the complex relationship between America's great writers and the past.
Lecture 1

Introduction to Classics of American Literature

Scope: A course on American classics should begin with some sense of what a "classic" is, what is "American" about this project, and what one can expect from this endeavor. "Classic" is the great honorific term that often implies staleness: we rarely expect our classics to be shocking or exciting or disturbing. All too often, we approach them with piety and boredom, seeing in them the enshrined monuments to crusty traditions. Classics are indeed those canonical texts of American literature that many of us have grown up with, but they are neither innocuous nor asleep; on the contrary, they have the power to unhinge us. They stem out of vital, often unresolvable conflicts from their own moment. They are bristling with ambiguities and insights that bid to challenge or destabilize us, even today. Even tomorrow. Our approach here is to discover the rich multidimensional manna that rests within these works, waiting to be revealed. Moreover, we will consider the names on this august list with a sense of what is timely as well as timeless. The canon changes, and many of our most revered writers today were unheard-of a while back and may be eclipsed again in the years to come, while others whom we have never read will step to fill those shoes. Finally, these literary masterpieces can be thought of as bottles with a special genie within them. Our objective is to open the bottle and free a number of miracles: the actuality of the past, the great American story that begins for us with Benjamin Franklin and goes on to Toni Morrison; and the shimmering world of feelings and imagination, of desire and fear, that is not recorded in history but that art captures and keeps alive for us centuries later, giving us a script that is radically different from anything else we have. Accessing the great American books, the classics, is a unique way of understanding the history of this country and of adding to our own personal estate of literary wealth.

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

1. Explain the pitfalls inherent in the very notion of a "classic,"
2. Summarize the unique role of literature in revealing human experience, and
3. Explain the appropriateness of the "journey" metaphor in revisiting American literature.

Outline

I. It is useful to begin a course on the Classics of American literature by asking some central questions about these terms.

A. What do we mean by "classic"?
   1. Mark Twain expresses the most widespread, if unacknowledged, view of all: a classic is a book that nobody reads.
   2. Ezra Pound, pioneering spirit of literary Modernism, claimed that classics have a special freshness about them that never stales.
   3. Harold Bloom, eminent American critic, has argued that the key feature of our canonical books is their uncompromising strangeness. Not only are they strange, but they make the world a stranger place.

B. What do we take to be the American classics? For the most part, this course accepts the configuration of the canon as it now stands.
   1. We will read key texts from key authors over the past 250 years: Benjamin Franklin, Washington Irving, Ralph Waldo Emerson, Henry David Thoreau, Edgar Allan Poe, Nathaniel Hawthorne, Herman Melville, Walt Whitman, Harriet Beecher Stowe, Emily Dickinson, Mark Twain, Henry James, Stephen Crane, Charlotte Perkins Gilman, Robert Frost, T.S. Eliot, F. Scott Fitzgerald, Ernest Hemingway, William Faulkner, John Steinbeck, Ralph Ellison, Eugene O'Neill, Tennessee Williams, Arthur Miller, and Toni Morrison.
   2. There are some notable omissions in this list. James Fenimore Cooper, Kate Chopin, Willa Cather, Theodore Dreiser, Richard Wright, and a host of significant modern writers such as Saul Bellow and Thomas Pynchon, will not be covered. Would that they could be. *Mea culpa.*
3. But the list also has its surprises. Gilman is not a name that everyone knows, yet her astonishing story of the 1890s, "The Yellow Wallpaper," is indisputably a classic today, as is evidenced by its inclusion in courses on American literature and women's literature throughout the country. We also will review unknown texts by famous authors that deserve wider recognition: hence, included as potent, stunning surprises on this list are Hawthorne's tale "Wakefield," Melville's story "Benito Cereno," Twain's novel *Pudd'nhead Wilson*, and Hemingway's posthumous novel *The Garden of Eden*. These works will challenge many of the views we have of these established authors.

4. Even though this final list may appear engraved in stone, such appearances are deeply misleading. Just as Galileo said of the earth, one must also say of the canon: "Nonetheless, it moves." The great texts in literature are "determined" to be great by writers, scholars, critics, readers, and publishers. Thoreau was not taken truly seriously until our century; Melville and Dickinson were virtually unheard-of in their own time; Faulkner was out of print until the mid-40s; and Fitzgerald died thinking he had been forgotten. And some of those who are included—Steinbeck, and conceivably Eliot and Hemingway—would be stridently rejected by many literary scholars today. Writers' reputations rise and fall, like valuations on the stock market. A few, like Shakespeare, seem to have something for every age, every taste. Others can appear unreadable or silly or dreadfully compromised at a later date. Still others whom we have ignored will find their places after we are dead.

5. There are to be no pieties in this course, except for one: the willingness to take these figures seriously. But we will not place them on pedestals, and we will be prepared to ask them hard questions, questions having to do with our agendas as much as theirs. We must be prepared, however, for the hard questions they will also ask of us.

II. Literature exists as a window into a culture—these texts, seen together, tell us about America.

A. Literature offers us a unique form of history, utterly unlike the discipline of history itself.
   1. We will place little emphasis on dates or "facts" in the sense of information to be memorized or on "schools" whose features and rules need to be memorized.
   2. The great virtue of literature (of art in general) is that it does not truck with abstract data, such as the dates of battles or elections, the numbers of this or that, or the rules or laws of this or that. One could argue that such "data" are rarely real for us, in any experiential sense, and that the business of art is precisely to translate data and information into living circumstance, to turn fact into fiction. It may seem that such a procedure moves away from reality, but the opposite is true. Facts start to live when we see them as part of experience, even fictive experience.
   3. Hence, this course offers a vision of America. It is the *storied* past of this country—its geographic regions, its explorations overseas, its historical past (going back to the Puritans), and its resonance of still earlier stories from antiquity that helped shape the writer's views.
   4. Some of these portraits of America are very focused, such as Thoreau's stint at Walden Pond, Whitman's crossing by Brooklyn Ferry, Frost's New Hampshire, and Faulkner's Yoknapatawpha. Others are sweeping and global—Melville's tales of adventure and misadventure at sea, Eliot's sense of the entire European tradition, Hemingway's discovery (for him and for us) of Paris and Pamplona, and Steinbeck's pilgrimage of Okies on the road.

B. Literature packages information in a special form: that of stories. What does this mean?
   1. Events come to us in the shape of human lives. Events appear to us as the dynamics of living people (rather than as data in books for students to memorize). The Salem Witch Trials, the Revolutionary War, the Civil War, the Gold Rush, the lure of Europe, the Great War of 1914-18, the giddy 20s and the dreary 30s all appear in their impact on lives, as human experience.
   2. Hence, art tells us about human experience, human feelings, in a way that no other discipline approaches. Art revels in subjectivity. And it poses the question: What do we actually know about the feelings of others? What do history and census books and even photographs and maps teach us about the "inner" world?
   3. Who could write your life? What could even the savviest historian know about you? This is the kind of knowledge and information that art possesses. It is a story we would not otherwise have.
4. Thus, these books give us an inside story of America. Irving and Hawthorne speak to us about the
disruption of the Revolutionary War as America became America (instead of remaining an English
colony). Melville and Stowe wrote about slavery before the Civil War, and we can see it coming;
Twain and Faulkner and Morrison show us, years after actual events occurred, even a century later,
that the issues of race and slavery embodied in that war are still with us today. The collapse of values
heralded by World War I, and sealed by the Great Depression, come to us in vivid form in Eliot,
Fitzgerald, Hemingway, and Steinbeck.

5. Not only do these authors speak in their moment, but many of them show us that the still earlier, more
remote past lives on, often insidiously, in its favorite form: inside of human beings. Hawthorne,
writing in bustling Jacksonian mid-19th-century America, is haunted by the Puritan past; Faulkner and
Morrison are virtually inhabited by older stories that must still be told, must somehow be transformed
into knowledge. All this goes squarely against our (naive) cult of the future, so much so that our first
great ghost writer, Edgar Allan Poe, appears prophetic to us with his insistent fable of "burying people
alive." People being buried alive is a perfect formula for the living past, indeed for human memory
itself.

C. Not only does literature present its information as story, but it also offers us privileged access to its
materials.

1. The art of the past contains the living blood of the past. Reading can be compared to vampirism, to
blood transfusions, or to old wines whose living grapes of twenty or even fifty years ago still have fire
when we open the bottle.

2. Whitman's title for one of his poems, "Song of the Open Road," can symbolize the journey that
literature has always offered readers. This voyage from book to life, from now to then, here to there,
me to you, is often imaged in unforgettable ways in these texts: Whitman who waits for you on the
ferry, or on the path; Faulkner's college roommates who "enter" into the Civil War a half century after
the fact; and Morrison's living ghost, who reestablishes the broken circulation system of the novel,
adumbrates that mysterious mother tongue that unites mothers and daughters over time, leading back
to Africa itself and the first slave ships.

3. These images of voyage and continuity radically challenge our customary sense of living here-and-
now, living as someone with finite contours. These texts invite us to extend our own boundaries, to
process something of the collective wealth of America.

4. And, because they are the classics that many of us read long ago, but perhaps never quite turned into
personal knowledge, never quite knew why they were classics, these books invite us to make good on
our own pasts, to reclaim our own estate. We will experience the magic joy of storytelling.

5. My role is guide. I bring with me my particular background and biases. I emphasize the great
American theme of freedom and self-making and explore how difficult such a thing is. In reading the
classics, we are recovering history and transforming it into present experience.
Lecture 2

Benjamin Franklin's Autobiography—The First American Story

Scope: Franklin is the towering figure of 18th-century America, but his status as icon is best measured by comparing him, the pragmatic journalist-diplomat-scientist, to his counterpart, Jonathan Edwards, the great theologian philosopher of the same period—Franklin the Yankee vs. Edwards the Puritan. Franklin's career is stunning, spread equally over the fields of science, diplomacy, and unparalleled public service. When he returned to Philadelphia from Paris in 1785, after conducting the political affairs and negotiations with both the English and the French during the crisis of the Revolutionary War as a mere yeoman, he was the most famous private citizen in the Western world. Only a portion of his life experiences are recorded in his Autobiography, a work he began in his sixties, but this piece of writing is nonetheless an indubitable American classic—it leaves for posterity the record of a paradigmatic American existence, from modest origins to world celebrity. Franklin's account of his life is larded with wit and moral precepts, and this brand of secular wisdom has not always been to everyone's taste, as we shall see. Like him or not, we have him at the head of the American pantheon, an instance of human self-making of such potency that it quickly becomes what we now know as The American Dream.

Objectives—Upon completion of this lecture, you should be able to
1. Compare and contrast Franklin's philosophy with that of the Puritan fathers,
2. Summarize the ethos of Franklin and explain how it is typically "American," and
3. Outline D.H. Lawrence's major criticisms of Franklin.

Outline

I. Benjamin Franklin appears to us today as the American giant of the 18th century, even though he thought of himself as a British subject until 1776. If we compare Franklin to his exact contemporary, Jonathan Edwards, we can better gauge his significance.

A. Edwards is the last great Puritan: theologian, intellectual, and author of fierce sermons such as Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God. Franklin, by contrast, is a secular figure: printer/scientist/diplomat/moralist.
   1. The traditional view is that Edwards looked to the past, whereas Franklin pointed to America's future.
   2. Yet, Franklin has had his own sharp critics. Thinkers of many varieties (e.g., Balzac, D.H. Lawrence, and William Carlos Williams) have thought his brand of optimistic secularism to be shallow.

B. Franklin's astounding list of achievements during his lifetime constitutes a record that no other American, before or since, can match.
   1. His early years consisted of establishing himself as printer, then journalist and writer. From 1732 to 1757 he wrote Poor Richard's Almanac, the first American periodical and source of proverbs that is still a bestseller even today.
   2. Franklin's accomplishments in civic and public life are even more striking. A few of his noteworthy contributions include the following: He organized the Union Fire Co. in 1736, became Philadelphia's Postmaster in 1737, proposed the idea for the American Philosophical Society in 1743, organized the Pennsylvania Militia in 1747, and founded the Philadelphia Academy in 1749 (which later became the University of Pennsylvania).
   3. Franklin's exploits in science and technology are equally historic. They include his invention of the Franklin fireplace (stove) in 1741, experiments in electricity in 1745, his assistance in founding Philadelphia Hospital in 1751, and his famous experiment proving that lightning is electricity in 1752.
   4. Hostilities between the colonies and England engaged Franklin from the 1760s through the 1780s, as a representative of Pennsylvania, initially, and, after 1776, as chief negotiator of both the war and the peace. Franklin signed both the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution.
5. He worked to abolish slavery, to extend the vote, and to implement a bicameral legislature. He died in 1790.

II. Franklin appears to us, in his writings, as a congenial, albeit shrewd man, one possessed of humor and common sense, both in large doses.

A. Poor Richard's Almanac, which Franklin published for 25 years, contains bits of folk wisdom that are still with us today. Moreover, the Autobiography reveals a man who was able to laugh at himself even while pontificating. This genial manner characterized Franklin right into his old age, even in elegant Parisian society in the 1780s.

B. Autobiography is properly regarded as Franklin's most significant literary achievement, not so much for its own artfulness (though it is artful) as for its status as a great American model of selfhood.

1. Franklin tells the story of his life with certain modesty, but future generations have seen in it the great American rags-to-riches story. From obscure origins in Boston in the 1720s to celebrated man of the world, Franklin moved in a trajectory that helped define American thinking.

2. Franklin reveals himself, in Autobiography, to be a profoundly public figure, and critics looking for intimate confessions and secrets are disappointed. In this way, he is the counter-model to Rousseau, whose contemporary Confessions are a key Romantic document. But Franklin, with or without an "unconscious" on show, makes us understand that the public man and private man were inseparable in 18th-century life. Plus, he provides us with actual strategies for succeeding as a "public" figure, and nowhere is his legacy stronger than in this regard.

3. Franklin also emerged as one of the great 18th-century moralists in that he incessantly preached a kind of prudent secular wisdom. In some of his most famous pages, these injunctions and "commandments" are rendered in graphic form. He enumerated the 13 key virtues; he kept a weekly scorecard; he devised a scheme for measuring personal development and compliance; and he articulated a universal religious creed.

4. Many subsequent writers have responded sharply to Franklin's "program," but none so savagely and humorously as D.H. Lawrence. Lawrence's critique is useful for perceiving the questionable aspects of the Franklin legacy.

5. Despite all criticisms, however, Franklin remains the enduring American icon of the 18th century, matched only by George Washington. He is with us in countless ways, as emblem of prudent business investments, as subject of countless portraits, and as an often-quoted statesman and inventor. He ultimately demonstrates more perspective than we think: he excelled in grasping others' vantage points and ways of thinking, he knew how to camouflage his own ego, and he was one of our first abolitionists in the slavery debate. Franklin founded the religion of the self-made man, and with it, the American dream.

Readings:
Essential: Franklin, Autobiography in Writings (Library of America, 1987)

Recommended: Franklin, Poor Richard's Almanac in Writings (Library of America, 1987); Lawrence, Studies in Classic American Literature (Viking, 1964); Barbour, ed. Benjamin Franklin: Critical Views (Prentice Hall, 1979)

Topics for Further Consideration:
1. Explain to what extent you think "self-made man" applies to the life and career of Benjamin Franklin.
2. Defend Franklin against the criticisms leveled at him by D.H. Lawrence.
Lecture 3  
Washington Irving—The First American Storyteller

Scope: Although Washington Irving is no longer fashionable in American Studies circles, and although his work remains known largely because of two short stories, those stories—"The Legend of Sleepy Hollow" and "Rip Van Winkle"—are American classics. Many of us have grown up with them. They were part of the folklore for children's movies of yesteryear, and they are with us still. But the significance of Irving's work goes beyond nostalgia. These two tales speak to us of the early Republic, of the growing pains and anxiety that must have accompanied the momentous shift from English colony to independent nation. "The Legend of Sleepy Hollow" reveals something of the malaise the author felt about the bustling, industrious society that America was becoming. In the classic showdown between Ichabod Crane and Brom Bones, Irving sketched an American crossroads, a choice between the goblin-haunted, past-driven schoolteacher and the brash, up-and-coming, muscular realist—which one will win the girl? But "Rip Van Winkle" is assuredly Irving's true claim to immortality, and this story of a man who falls asleep for twenty years seems indeed to escape the law of time, for it haunts us still with its mystery. Once we realize that Rip sleeps precisely through the American Revolution, the story begins to bristle with cultural overtones. Yet its deepest riddle has to do with the strange vision and potion that caused Rip to sleep in the first place, and this question is inseparable from Rip's own odd temperament, his refusal to grow up. It is a prophetic American hang-up.

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

1. Explain how "The Legend of Sleepy Hollow" partakes of America's "Wild West" tradition,
2. Summarize the religious and cultural sources Irving drew on to describe Rip Van Winkle's trip to the mountaintop, and
3. Explain how Rip Van Winkle's dilemma is particularly American.

Outline

I. Irving is something of an eclipsed figure in American Studies today: his writing and his education are profoundly Anglophile in character because he spent much of his life in England, courting the famous writers and noblemen of his day. Thus, he hardly seems to be an "indigenous" figure. Yet, because he is writing in the early years of the 19th century, at the beginning of the American experiment, his work sheds an interesting light on the cultural anxieties of the young nation.

II. "The Legend of Sleepy Hollow" (1819) is one of Irving's enduring stories, familiar to many of us in both illustrated book and film forms. This charming story has much to teach us about the new America.

A. Sleepy Hollow itself is presented as a sort of refuge from the bustling America, a haven where "romance" is still possible.
B. Ichabod Crane, the famous schoolteacher, functions as artist in Irving's scheme.
   1. Crane is shown in unflattering colors—as a grotesque figure, ravenous in his hunger for material success.
   2. Yet he is also characterized as "our man of letters," as "traveling gazette" for Sleepy Hollow, which unmistakably casts him as a writer, even as an intellectual.
   3. Ichabod is also a storyteller, but of the Cotton Mather school; i.e., of the past stories of witches and demons. This marks him as backwards-looking.
C. Ichabod's challenge, as Irving articulates it in "Wild West" fashion, is: Can he establish himself? Marry Katrina? Defeat his rival?
D. Brom Bones, Ichabod's rival, has a cultural interest of his own, given the dynamics of early American culture.
1. Rowdy, strong, brash, and fearless, Brom Bones personifies a figure who will be known as the "b'hoy," an American original of sorts, who challenges all niceties and pieties. Bones is actually referred to in terms that forecast Teddy Roosevelt: a "rough rider."

2. Bones is also the man who fights phantoms and boasts of encountering the infamous, legendary Headless Horseman.

E. In Irving's showdown, the two males "duke it out" by replaying a scene of legend. But Bones is able to best Ichabod by taking charge of the event, by scripting it so perfectly that he becomes the artist, impersonates the Horseman, substitutes a pumpkin for a head, and routs his rival. A new era is at hand, and we see the classic exchange: Ichabod Crane disappears from the scene, but the legend of his encounter with the "ghost" is born.

III. "Rip Van Winkle" (1819) is unquestionably Irving's greatest claim to fame. Although this is a story that most Americans are familiar with, it is doubtful that we have thought through its odd particulars.

A. We all know that the hero has fallen asleep for twenty years, but under what circumstances?
1. The event that Rip has slept through is, of course, the American Revolution. Irving is again telling us something about this new America, a country now liberated from England and embarking on its own path. We may wonder how appetizing this new country is for the author.

2. What changed in the twenty years during which Rip slept? Irving sketches for us a new realm of politics, a new landscape.

B. We recognize, in Rip's visionary experience on the mountain-top, a classic variant of religious epiphany, or illumination.
1. Rip, summoned by the strange figures he sees bowling and drinking, experiences a classic initiation: serving the gods, entering their world.

2. Watching the figures bowl and drink is tantamount to watching the gods at play, and Irving has included references to Barbarossa, Charlemagne, Odin, and Thor. Moreover, the specific "play" itself, Bowling and Thunder, can also be seen as a form of erotic sport.

3. The unanswered question in Rip's encounter with the gods is: Why are they so "grave"? Is this a Christian punishment? Are they harbingers of death? Irving furnishes a number of explanations later, in the story and in the notes.

C. Why is Rip singled out for this strange initiation and experience? How does Irving characterize this odd protagonist?
1. We see that Rip is no less than the eternal child: he frequents children, and he shuns responsibilities of all sorts.

2. It is also no accident that Rip is no soldier; we may indeed wonder what kind of gun he is carrying.

3. Rip does not do "family duty," we are told, and with that notation we may unpack still further the sexual dimensions of this fable. It is no surprise that Rip is ultimately happiest at the "male club," separated from women altogether.

D. We would expect the protagonist of such an "initiation" story to be altered by his experiences. How is Rip changed by the vision?
1. America is altered in powerful political ways; even nature is altered, as Irving's language suggests. But Rip remains unchanged.

2. The rusty fowling piece that he carries with him down the mountain fits in perfectly with his new life, a life without wife or "family duty" of any sort.

3. Irving's story can be read as a leap into male menopause, whereby all the earlier indices of sexual threat are finally removed.

E. Rip's momentous return to the village is arguably Irving's most fascinating touch. The setting is entirely changed, the family Rip earlier sired has grown up, and Rip undergoes what can be seen as a crisis of identity.
1. Being confronted with his grown-up son, also named Rip, with a grandson as well, Rip "unravels" and experiences an existential collapse; can we not speak of the fissured self?
2. The mobile setting that Rip encounters upon his return, especially the inn that seems to come and go, appears virtually surrealist in its implications, looking forward all the way to Hitchcock's "Psycho."

F. The legacy of "Rip Van Winkle" is rich and various, and we are still working our way through it.
   1. Hart Crane invokes, in The Bridge, Rip as "the muse of memory."
   2. James Joyce's hero, Leopold Bloom, is memorably figured as Rip Van Winkle: the work of time is seen as the corrosion that besets married life.
   3. Rip Van Winkle is particularly present and accounted for in our upcoming literary performances among the American classics.
      a. Thoreau's performance in moving to Walden Pond can be seen as ambivalent: Face reality or flee reality?
      b. Melville's Captain Delano, "Benito Cereno," will display the frightening dimensions of the childlike vision.
      c. Tom Sawyer and Huckleberry Finn, our most famous literary children, make us wonder if avoiding adulthood is an American vocation.
      d. Hemingway's Jake Barnes, of The Sun Also Rises: emasculated male, is a bitter version of Rip's fate—that is, fit only for men.
      e. Faulkner's Quentin Compson, in The Sound and the Fury, expresses Irving's chief theme, albeit in a tragic key: you cannot grow up.
   4. The universal warning of Irving's story goes beyond literature altogether: Where has life been? How did we lose it?

Readings:
Essential: Irving, "The Legend of Sleepy Hollow" and "Rip Van Winkle" in History, Tales and Sketches (Library of America, 1983)

Recommended: Young, "Fallen From Time" in Visions and Revisions in Modern American Literary Criticism (Dutton, 1962)

Topics for Further Consideration:
   1. Summarize how "The Legend of Sleepy Hollow" is a parable about the "new" and the "old" America.
   2. Explain why Rip Van Winkle sleeps for twenty years.
Lecture 4

Ralph Waldo Emerson Yesterday—America’s Coming of Age

Scope: Emerson, the guiding spirit of American Romanticism, lays the groundwork for a key tradition in American thinking and writing in his Essays, written from the 1830s through the middle of the century. His status as essayist and philosopher in mid-19th-century American culture is unmatched by any other figure. Even though his "rank" in the pantheon has had its ups and downs, his influence is still with us, not only in our literature, but also in our lives and values. Chief architect for the American belief in the empowered self, Emerson has a range and reach that are not easily mapped or subject to simple definition. We will begin with his early wake-up calls, claiming the need for a new and original American literature, liberated from the influences of Europe and the past. Then we will focus on Emerson's single most influential essay, "Self-Reliance," to see how complex and destabilizing these ideas really are. Finally, we will consider Emerson's richest and most challenging essay, "Experience," in which he sketches a view of ideology and perception that is shockingly close to contemporary thinking about knowledge, truth, and even self as both mediated and constructed.

This examination of the beginning of Emerson's career will focus on a few central early texts—including Nature (1836), and "The American Scholar" (1837)—as well as on the seminal ideas about American literature found in "The Poet" and "History." The predominant thesis that emerges here is no less than an American "declaration of independence" in all arenas—culture, literature, and ethics.

Objectives—Upon completion of this lecture, you should be able to
1. Describe the cultural liberation advocated by Emerson in essays such as "Nature,"
2. Summarize Emerson's notion of the universal man, and
3. Explain Emerson's opinion of scholarship.

Outline

I. There are many problems with the term "transcendentalism," but Emerson and Thoreau, our transcendental "Romantic" poets, are crucial to grasping what American literature becomes by the time of Whitman. Emerson's beginnings are not earth-shaking, and few could have predicted the work that he would produce.
   A. Emerson was only a middling student at Harvard College (1817-1821), graduating at the middle of his class.
   B. In chronic poor health, Emerson nonetheless attended Harvard Divinity School.
   C. In 1829, Emerson married Ellen Tucker, herself ill with tuberculosis, and this crisis continues until her death in 1831.
   D. Unable to believe in or preside over the sacraments, Emerson resigns ministry in 1832; at this point, his true "education" begins.
   E. Emerson traveled to Europe and met the great writers Coleridge, Wordsworth, and Carlyle, whose rousing work particularly moved him.
   F. Emerson moved to Concord, began to lecture in Boston, and was quickly recognized as the guiding light among the new group called Transcendentalists.

II. Nature (1836) was Emerson's great breakthrough text, and with it he immediately acquired an audience of the best and the brightest.
   A. Emerson announced essentially a new beginning for America; the political liberation was established, but the cultural one was yet to come.
      1. The first order of business Emerson prescribed was a radical break from the past, an imperious need to create an indigenous American cultural agenda and manner.

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2. Emerson, doubtless influenced by the great Romantic poets such as Wordsworth, envisioned a new relationship between man and nature. His most famous image of himself experiencing the wonder of nature is the "transparent eyeball," characterized by a complete erasure of the lines separating self and environment.

3. Emerson especially articulated the need for a new language, an idiom that would be commensurate with the revolutionary tidings he had in mind. In this regard, Emerson's theories proved quite influential for subsequent writers.

B. Emerson's concept of language is a mix of cultural and linguistic notions.
   1. Nature itself is seen in semiotic terms, in that all things are understood as signs for other things; hence, "words are signs of natural facts" and "nature is the symbol of spirit."
   2. Emerson's material linguistics have real implications for the writer because they mandate a search for "original language," for the word that most closely describes the thing.
   3. The project is strategic: the "right" writing allows you to tap into power, to recover the indwelling force that is linked to words.
   4. This noble view of utterance issues a challenge of the writer: to describe reality by "opening it up," to "speak" the riddle of the sphinx.
   5. Emerson's view of writing is expressed as a challenge for America: to open up "facts" of our indigenous new landscape and way of life and to liberate the magic and promise of America by capturing its essence and strength in the right language.

III. Emerson's famous speech at Harvard, "The American Scholar" (1837), is seen as a wake-up call to the country's young intellectuals.

A. American achievements in the political arena have not been matched intellectually or culturally, Emerson contended. It's time for America to measure up.

B. We must apprehend "Universal Man," Emerson argues, by which he means that divisions of labor and specialization blind us. In this sense, he offers a preview of Karl Marx.

C. We must go beyond scholarship as well, because the university's slavish and passive attitude can never produce a creative energy of its own.

D. We must fashion an indigenous American language, to be found in our countryside and among our simple people, close to the earth and nature.

E. In a remarkable passage, Emerson takes on the "subjectivism" of his time and claims that we must go beyond introspection, beyond self-searching, and enter the world of facts and deeds.

IV. Emerson is the prophet of American cultural independence.

A. "The Poet" (1846) is Emerson's chief statement about the literary agenda of the future.
   1. Poetry is our commonwealth, Emerson claims, by which he means literally that it enriches all of us and makes us wealthy as a nation.
   2. America is the great new poetic subject. The writer is to make us see what is timeless and enduring in our moment, just as Homer and Shakespeare did in their moments.
   3. We need a vehicular language, Emerson said, so that the poet may move his audience, and bring them into his vision of America. For this purpose, the old locutions of the past would not do.
   4. In a famous paragraph, Emerson called for the poet of the future, outlined the poet's duties, and virtually predefined what happened in 1855 when Whitman published *Leaves of Grass*.

B. In "History" (1841), Emerson articulated still further the revolutionary work in culture that had not yet been accomplished.
   1. Emerson is our poet of the New World. He claimed that America must move into its estate, must carry out its great mission of freedom and democracy.
   2. Emerson argued that our contemporary "actual knowledge is cheap," that we needlessly settle for routine notions and second-hand knowledge.
3. Setting the new American agenda is the ultimate goal of Emerson's essays: he is the great encourager, the visionary who claims that we have not begun to take or to give our measure as a nation.

4. Both Twain and Faulkner developed a language that was inspired by Emerson.
Lecture 5

Emerson Today—
Architect of American Values

Scope: In Emerson's most famous and seminal essay, "Self-Reliance," we encounter his bold and confident vision of the self. Although our American value scheme is clearly indebted to this vision, we need to grasp the radical implications of Emerson's thinking, especially regarding our role in society, our consistency as selves, and our notions of identity. In particular, Emerson's view of self is immense, almost supra-personal, with a kind of reservoir that the individual taps into when he or she is actualized. Likewise, this circuit of power is unsettling in its dictates insofar as we seek to maintain a unified self, since Emerson feels that conformity stifles authenticity.

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

1. Contrast Emerson's and Franklin's notions of self-reliance,
2. Summarize Emerson's attitude toward education, and
3. Describe the Emersonian idea of the self and "becoming."

Outline

I. Emerson's most recognized essay, "Self-Reliance," is an audacious program about the risks, strengths, dimensions, and ramifications of selfhood.

   A. The recognizable American religion of self derives in part from Emerson, but there is much that is unfamiliar in this essay. Emerson addresses self predominantly as a kind of energy system that the individual taps into.

      1. He picks up this secular idea, found in Franklin, and converts it into a new type of religion.

   B. All greatness, according to Emerson, is found in self-reliance. The individual never reaches full potential, never gives his or her full measure, unless this final commitment "inward" is made.

      1. Genius, as we see it throughout history, is always the story of self-reliance, of people who religiously followed their own bent.

      2. Genius, as we encounter it, is for us also a form of self-recovery in that it enables us to recover this vital indwelling force and reestablishes our own link in the circuit.

      3. Emerson understood genuine self as a new aristocracy, a kind of elitism that all people are heir to, if they have the courage.

   C. Tapping into originary power is Emerson's fundamental gambit.

      1. Emerson defines this existing source of universal energy as the "aboriginal self," a kind of prior force that we all partake of.

      2. Emerson contrasts "tuition" as a clear opposite to "Intuition," and with this preference given to the innate over the learned, Emerson offers a scathing view of the actual results of education.

      3. "Perception is not whimsical, but fatal," according to Emerson, because nothing is accidental or external in our modus operandi. The challenge is to take ourselves seriously, to realize that our responses to the world are indices of who we are, and that we must act on this knowledge.

      4. Self is bonded to the universe in Emerson's large-framed view so that the predictable solipsism that we might anticipate in a philosophy of self-reliance yields to a large, virtually communal view of self interacting harmoniously with both the outside nature and the inside nature. The "oversoul" is what Emerson names this reservoir of spirit.

   D. The most dramatic features of Emerson's essay have to do with the inescapable behavioral consequences of such a philosophy.

      1. "Good vs. bad," our traditional Judeo-Christian code, is replaced by the far more intuitive system, "natural vs. unnatural." A new ethics is born.
2. Emerson celebrates nonchalance, spontaneity, and naturalness vs. our cultivated moral code, our learned behavior.

3. Emerson emerges as profoundly, unapologetically antisocial in his tidings because society inevitably entails some form of self-betrayal, or at the very least, self-neglect. He rejects philanthropy and the "joint-stock company" view of society.

4. Rejecting all foreign models, Emerson issues his famous injunction: Never imitate. Is this model conceivable?

5. Emerson calls into question the utility of any "instruction," particularly as it relates to the imitation of great models. His argument is that these models themselves never studied or imitated anything, but were true to themselves. The educational ramifications of this view are interesting.

6. Emerson's critique of the current American scene is harsh and sweeping: everywhere he looks, he sees slavishness and convention.

7. Although Emerson is thought of as optimistic and "progressive," some of his most scathing comments have to do with our illusion of progress and development.

II. Emerson and the Heroics of Self

A. Emerson quickly identifies the greatest enemy of self-reliance: our own "fixed" identity. Breaking the prison of fixed identity is the arduous challenge.
   1. Emerson's most dazzling pages have to do with the cult of nonconformity, and here he effectively rewrites history as a record of geniuses who have been courageous enough to be true to themselves.
   2. Emerson illuminates the conservatism at the core of identity: our need to remain the same. Hence, he attacks the "maintenance" of identity as a key step for liberation. He stresses the importance of being true to one's instincts, as opposed to personal consistency.

B. Emerson posits speech as the most conspicuous index of authenticity—if your language is moldy, your ideas cannot be fresh.

C. In a stunning metaphor, Emerson defines the soul as pure light, and if we are true to it, all is illuminated in a radiance that has no truck with tradition or history.

D. The most arduous task of all, according to Emerson, is learning to live in the present, learning to be faithful to instinct and inner voice at every moment of one's life.

E. Emerson's final doctrine is: The soul becomes.
   1. This emphasis on "becoming" simply rewrites history, makes all judgments tentative and shifting, makes every life an open-ended adventure. We see here the cubistic Emerson who graphs a new dispensation of knowledge.
   2. We should recognize Emerson's arduous, existential view of self for its integrity and difficulty. There is nothing casual or lazy about Emerson's ethics. Being "yourself" is hard.
Lecture 6
Emerson Tomorrow—
Deconstructing Culture and Self

Scope: Emerson's philosophy is easily misconstrued as a facile optimism. The Modernists who celebrated figures like Melville and Dickinson, who saw the American artist as a countercultural figure, were not inclined to understand Emerson. Yet his thinking, at its most challenging, looks forward to Nietzsche and Foucault in their view of ideology as social construct, independent of individual choice, even constitutive of individual consciousness. Emerson's supreme accomplishment lies in his essay, "Experience," in which he boldly confronts issues of alienation and mediated consciousness, yet is able to envision at the same time an exciting ethics of freedom.

Objectives—Upon completion of this lecture, you should be able to
1. Identify some of the modern spiritual descendants of Emerson,
2. Appraise the extent to which Emersonian thought can be considered religious, and
3. Explain the Emersonian notion of human freedom and whether it really exists.

Outline

I. Emerson is a neglected, even maligned, figure in American cultural history. His confidence in self-reliance and his revolutionary fervor has led to a view of him as eternal optimist. In the early part of the 20th century, when a number of American authors, such as Melville, Whitman, and Dickinson, were rescued from obscurity, Emerson was disregarded in the literary community.

II. Emerson, when he is seen in his complexity, emerges as spiritual father to Nietzsche and Foucault, as a prophetic figure who had no illusions about the "constructedness" of both consciousness and value systems. Such awareness is all the more remarkable when we consider Emerson's genuine belief in the powers of self.

A. Although Emerson never uses Foucault's term "discourse," he nonetheless articulates a vision of ideology formation that is remarkably modern: the human subject is born into a cultural system that will govern much of what ends up being "thinkable." This is particularly evident in his essay "Circles."

B. Despite his fervent belief in self, Emerson is no less committed to self-cancellation, to a willingness to jettison an "old" self in order to be true to the emerging one.

C. All order, all forms of cogency and definition, can ultimately be seen as the result of circumstances, even as prison-house.

D. There are no "walls" or boundaries in reality; humans construct these "lines" for purposes of definition and demarcation, but they are fictive.

E. Emerson faces directly the necessity of conflict and hate in a world of incessant change because he knows that we cannot tolerate the erosion of our "truths."

F. Emerson's view is astonishingly mobile, and history appears as a kind of dance over time, an evolving play of laws and principles that men persist in thinking immutable.

G. The ultimate Emersonian self, no less than the self's vista, is an ever-shifting kaleidoscope.

H. In answer to the urgent question that emerges in such a vision, the question of "how to behave," or "what to trust," Emerson's reply is stark: abandonment—abandonment to your "nature," with impulses as your only truth.
III. Emerson's future legacy is most richly expressed in his supreme essay, "Experience"; in implicit homage to Montaigne (whose final essay is also "Experience"), the American philosopher offers his homely view of our place, both on the planet and within our bodies.

A. Emerson's first law is simple and awful: we are dispossessed, of both self and home. There is no "natural" abode for the self; our somatic and affective lives have a weird independence, an "otherness" beyond our control.

B. The evolutionary rhythm of every life, its changing views and shed skins, suggests the primal law of evanescence and change: there is no originary self.

C. In keeping with the perspectival and subjectivist thinking that starts with Hume and Berkeley, and that undergirds Romanticism, Emerson acknowledges that we see the world through lenses; there is no unmediated vision.
   1. Through these lenses, what we know affects what we see, and events take on meaning and shape for us. It is a carnival, a multicolored world.
   2. One of Emerson's most striking observations is that we "inhabit" a temperament: our affect, our mood, our "humors" (as would have been said at an earlier moment) effectively dictate what we can make of the world.
   3. We are on a treadmill, as well, according to Emerson, because we are doomed to never remain in the same place or to remain the same self, either.

D. Emerson's solution to these matters is tonic; whereas one might expect a kind of blue funk, he is joyous about our freedom.
   1. Rule No. 1 is that life is real, no matter how contingent our categories and concepts are; hence, Emerson urges praxis over theory, especially in matters of education and training the young.
   2. Praxis itself is defined in a sublime metaphor: the art of skating well. This metaphor sounds the death knell for notions such as "contents" or "secret meanings," in that it acknowledges our life on the surface. Yet, a certain grace, skill, and savoir vivre are not only possible but all the more urgent.

E. Emerson's summation is expressed in biblical terms as the Fall of Man.
   1. We are doomed to mediation, to consciousness, to never having direct access to things or others.
   2. Our highest constructs—such as Jesus—change. This is quite a statement from a former minister, and it is easy to see that the Church would not have been comfortable with such views.
   3. Emerson argues that our life is an ongoing series of discoveries, and experience records our crashing into both reality and ourselves. The universe discovers us to ourselves, makes us cognizant of our systems, and gives us our estate.
   4. Emerson concludes, much like the Existentialists do, that we are ultimately "unsponsored and free" (in Wallace Stevens' terms), but he goes on to suggest that our "islanded" condition is a creative poverty.
   5. Emerson's wisdom is the perfect complement to Voltaire's isolationism: cultiver son jardin. Unlike the French philosopher, however, Emerson means that we must "cultivate" our own earth, our own substance.

Readings:

Recommended: Matthiessen, American Renaissance (Oxford University Press, 1941); Kazin, An American Procession (Vintage, 1985)

Topics for Further Consideration:
1. Explain how Emerson's pronouncements about language in general and American culture in particular forecast developments in 19th-century American literature.
2. Conclude whether Emerson's view of self-reliance simplifies or complicates human behavior. Defend your answer.
Lecture 7

Henry David Thoreau—Countercultural Hero

Scope: Seen initially as eccentric and derivative, both Thoreau and his masterpiece, *Walden*, have undergone drastic reevaluations over time. Thoreau has been viewed as moralist, environmentalist, political philosopher, and guru. Beginning with an overview of Thoreau's successive "images," we will focus our investigation on *Walden*, with an eye toward its special appeal to the young. Thoreau's views on personal freedom lead him to the conviction that civilized life, with its rampant materialism, constitutes an absurd prison. Thoreau goes to the woods to encounter reality in its elemental form, and in so doing he establishes a kind of quintessential American dream that lurks behind (or beyond) the writings and the lives of countless Americans. Yet Thoreau is no less fascinating as stylist than as moralist, and his pithy metaphors and aphorisms are now part of our everyday language. Ultimately *Walden* intrigues us today as a meditation on our rich, sometimes tragic, relationship to nature, a relationship highlighted by contemporary thinking about the environment. The life of *Walden*, a piece of literature forever fresh, is inevitably to be contrasted with the life of Walden Pond, an at-risk tourist spot in Massachusetts.

Thoreau's contemporaries regarded him as a shadow to Emerson, and his philosophy of "self-reliance" and American promise does resemble that of Emerson, who was his mentor. But, unlike Emerson, Thoreau also stands tall in the history of political dissent, and perhaps taller still as champion of the environment. In *Walden*, he gives us not only the poem of the earth, but the still more seductive poem of our "home" in the woods: an ecstatic opportunity to discover reality, that of nature and of the self. It is enough, Thoreau says, to "know beans," thereby suggesting how ephemeral and superficial our ordinary projects are. This homespun pragmatism, a coming-to-terms with the basics, is what ultimately seduces in *Walden*; it remains eternally appealing in a society that has lost its contact with the land.

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

1. Explain how Thoreau's political views were reflected in the nature of his literary undertakings,
2. Compare and contrast the Thoreauvian and Emersonian conceptions of the individual, and
3. Summarize why *Walden* represents the quintessential American experiment.

Outline

I. Thoreau's career is something of a roller-coaster affair. His contemporaries did not take him seriously, but rather dismissed him as something of a quack at worst, or Emerson's acolyte at best.

   A. The charge that Thoreau was Emerson's follower has much truth; Emerson allowed Thoreau to live on his land at Walden Pond. Emerson's stirring orations about American promise and democracy are central to Thoreau's work.

   B. Thoreau is also, however, to be understood as one of the seminal political dissenters in American culture.

      1. In 1846, Thoreau refused to pay several years' poll tax, in protest against Massachusetts' role in perpetuating slavery; he spent one night in jail.

      2. Thoreau published "Civil Disobedience" in 1848, a relatively unnoticed text at the time, but one that later proved to be of enormous significance in its impact on figures such as Gandhi and Martin Luther King.

      3. In 1851, enraged by passage of the Fugitive Slave Act, Thoreau again became active in the abolitionist movement and was said to be involved with the Underground Railroad.

      4. In 1859, after the fateful raid on Harper's Ferry carried out by John Brown, Thoreau read publicly "A Plea for Captain John Brown," one of his most passionate political speeches, just days before Brown's execution.

   C. Thoreau is perhaps most compelling to us in the late 20th century as the environmentalist of the 19th century.
1. Consider the environmental undertones of his titles: *A Week on the Concord and Merrimack Rivers; Walden, Or Life in the Woods; The Maine Woods; Cape Cod.*

2. With 150 years of distance between Thoreau's writing and our analysis, and with a now-established tradition of nature writing from Rachel Carson to Peter Matthiessen and John McPhee, Thoreau can be seen as the beginning of a tradition, and his light shines brightly.

3. *Walden* (1854) is Thoreau's masterpiece, and although the work is not explicitly political, we cannot miss its message about the stewardship of nature.

II. Thoreau has proven to be a guru for the young, and it is not hard to see why his message strikes a chord in the rising generation, especially in our time.

A. Thoreau's put-down of the elders is very pronounced; steeped though he is in classical learning, he defiantly claims that the "fathers" of his society have nothing to teach him.

B. Thoreau, more than Emerson, elects to *live out* his principles by moving to Walden Pond; hence, he articulates a philosophy of action, of praxis over theory.

C. The cornerstone of Thoreau's vision is that we are all entrapped by the prison-house of culture, and he illustrates this concept in striking ways.
   1. We are all slaves in society, according to Thoreau, in that we follow routines and even worship gods that are patently artificial, conventional, and unrelated to our own true needs.
   2. To buttress his views, Thoreau urges us to grasp the basic concepts of economics that undergird every act of our lives; in short, he redefines the true "cost of living" as the amount of "life" that we pay for whatever we do.
   3. "The mass of men lead lives of quiet desperation" is one of Thoreau's famous remarks. It goes well beyond a recognition of habit and routine to imply a neurosis of everyday life, a frightening sense that we are all suffering a living death.
   4. Marching to a different drummer is Thoreau's explanation for all those who would be themselves, who would jettison the herd mentality.
   5. Much like Emerson, Thoreau developed a pungent antisocial philosophy, making it clear that we are essentially wasting our time and ourselves when we are involved in society.
   6. Why do charity? Thoreau does not hesitate to attack this shibboleth of polite 19th-century thinking, suggesting that he is not personally cut out for such work; hence it is to be rejected.
   7. It follows from Thoreau's cavalier view of society that he is equally committed to getting clear of the State as well; here, too, we see a potent strand of thinking in the American weave.
   8. Thoreau's program is draconian: avoid all commitment. We need to determine at what point this ideal of freedom may conceal a monstrous egoism.

D. *Walden*, the enduring work of Thoreau, is our quintessential American experiment, destined to have a long life in the aspirations of our nation.
   1. Living alone in the woods, Thoreau decides to encounter reality at last, to get clear of all distractions and abstractions, to get to the pith of experience.
   2. Knowing beans may seem trivial to an industrialized society, but Thoreau makes us understand its grandeur: to at last have authentic knowledge.
   3. Many of Thoreau's most engaging passages have to do with developing the inner man. This argument is appropriately expressed in terms of rejecting ornament and clothing.
   4. Speaking a great deal in metaphors of ownership and property, Thoreau constantly juxtaposes the material with the spiritual. His goal consists of possessing one's "real" estate: earth and sky. No mortgage or price tag is involved.
Lecture 8

Thoreau—Stylist and Humorist Extraordinaire

Scope: Much of Thoreau's authority (and charm) comes from his use of the first person. More than most writers, he cultivated a particular, idiosyncratic style, rich in axioms and unforgettable one-liners, leaving a distinct "flavor" to all his musings. Moreover, there is throughout his life an almost desperate desire to transcribe experience into language, as is evidenced by the massive journals he left, in which he set out to record the experiences of his life. Although there is a twinkle and a wink in much of his work, Thoreau is often misconstrued as humorless and sermonizing. He deserves more serious accounting as a writer; as a 19th-century stubborn Yankee voice that insists on its rights and articulates its homespun idioms. Most memorable are the pungent humor of Walden (Thoreau can be brutally satirical) and the splendid evocations of the natural world—at times lyrical, at times mock epic, and often sublime. It is here that Emerson's view of "fact" becoming "spirit" is enacted in front of our eyes.

Objectives—Upon completion of this lecture, you should be able to
1. Give examples of the mock-epic in Walden,
2. Explain Thoreau's idea of the relationship between the individual and society, and
3. Identify various ways in which Thoreau reveals himself to be a man of business.

Outline

I. Walden is written in the first person, and it is an unusual first-person at that, full of idiosyncrasies, willing to underscore its biases.
   A. A question that many first-person texts never answer is "Why say 'I'?" Thoreau, however, is wonderfully up-front here.
      1. Thoreau's first line of defense is his best one: What else do we know, other than "I"?
      2. Thoreau also goes on to argue that his touting of his own experience is more public than it appears. He is conducting an experiment for mankind, and hence he is a generic boaster about the promise of life.
   B. Walden offers an adventure in self-portraiture with a vengeance in that Thoreau is eager to accentuate his oddness, to deliver himself to us, warts and all.
      1. Thoreau, in going to the woods, discovers the savage in himself, the man who repudiates all the laws of Boston and Concord, who discovers common ground with the beasts and the elements.
      2. Despite his acknowledgment of a certain wildness, Thoreau ultimately emerges as the ascetic, the man who wants to strip down to bare essentials, who finds it easier to do without than to desire.
      3. Thoreau is perhaps our first famous vegetarian; he offers an entire program against the grossness of carnal life, especially when it comes to consuming animal flesh.

II. Thoreau's unforgettable style is what stays with us perhaps the longest.
   A. A satirical, pungent writer, he is the unrivaled master of great one-liners, phrases that stick in the imagination once we have read them.
      1. Thoreau's remark "The mass of men lead lives of quiet desperation" is one of the great American knife-like utterances about the manic darkness underneath the public discourse of cheery optimism.
      2. "I have traveled a good deal in Concord" is the virtual theme song of Walden, and once we stop smiling at its quaintness (Concord is very small), we begin to realize how serious this utterance is. Thoreau's text is precisely about the dimensionality of Walden Pond, the huge universes that one charts by spending a year in the woods.
      3. Thoreau's remark "If a man does not keep pace with his companions, perhaps it is because he hears a different drummer" is the cardinal principle of American individualism and nonconformity.
   B. Thoreau is, above all, one of the great humorists of his age.
Thoreau deliciously recounts his grand adventure at Walden Pond in the most pragmatic terms: he is the consummate businessman, doing his "job" in the best place possible.

Thoreau's coolness and antisocial attitudes show up in his frequent dilemma: how to suffer fools? He disposes of them with dispatch.

"Running risks" is a time-honored metaphor for the dangerous and authentic life; Thoreau the adventurer rings a change on the idiom.

Thoreau's sassiness, his insolence vis-à-vis conventional polite values, is nowhere more visible than in his commentary on common sense.

The poetry of *Walden* is what we most remember. It is here that Emerson's injunctions about the right kind of new language make most sense.

From earth to heaven is the classic directionality of *Walden*; this text that seems so earth-bound makes transcendental moves over and over.

From matter to spirit is the guiding principle of Thoreau's vision and style. Again and again he shocks us by revealing the reach of his subject, by showing us that a description of "things" is merely a lead-in to an account of the soul.

At his best, Thoreau is writing about claiming our estate, and in one of his most splendid metaphors, he inverts water and sky, making us realize that we are drinking heaven.

*Walden* has many set, rhetorical themes, but Thoreau's brilliance is also to be found in his casual references, his throwaway, organic style that rules everywhere.

One of Thoreau's most noted effects in *Walden* is his use of mock-epic, the invocation of Homeric figures and epithets to describe mosquitoes and ants. This is more than just a satirical account; it's a demonstration of wonders.

"Repeopling" the woods is one of Thoreau's singular phrases, and this metaphor causes us to reconceive his apparently solipsistic existence in the woods.

Thoreau's ongoing comparisons with natural creatures evoke a new kind of poetry—birds sing as they work. We realize that there is a genuine symbiosis among living/working/singing and that Thoreau's text is out to demonstrate such a model.

Thoreau's bottom line seems to be: the song of the earth is the song of the heavens. That is, if we can perceive the first, then we are well on to the path of encountering the second.
Lecture 9

Walden—Yesterday, Today, and Tomorrow

Scope: Thoreau enters the American canon belatedly, and his celebration of nature was thought to be sentimental and dated, whereas his politics have been seminal, reappearing in Gandhi and Martin Luther King. Now, in an age of environmental awareness and nature writing, Thoreau's views on Walden Pond may well constitute a politics of their own. Thoreau's importance as writer transcends the ideological, however, because he has fashioned a breathtaking new language for portraying the life cycle itself in its natural processes. The most staggering passages in Walden seem to map out a new language and a new vision: to tell the human story and take the human measure by dint of a purely natural language. Thoreau's paean to spring, to the surging life force and life forms that he sees at Walden Pond, constitutes a radically new kind of discourse; this is his vision of hope.

Objectives—Upon completion of this lecture, you should be able to
1. Explain Thoreau's notion of the relationship between nature and culture,
2. Summarize Thoreau's use of reading as a metaphor in Walden, and
3. Explain Thoreau's vision of nature as a living hieroglyph.

Outline

I. Thoreau's reputation within the American canon has changed radically over the years.
   A. In the 19th century, he was seen largely as an eccentric, a marginal figure in Emerson's shadow.
   B. In the 1920s, Modernism redefined the American canon and foreshadowed the notion of political and cultural dissent.
      1. Enter Thoreau the political writer, while Longfellow and Lowell, much admired by their peers, are shoved out.
      2. American literature comes to be seen in terms of visionary dissent, and at last there is recognition for neglected figures. Thoreau benefits from this move.

II. Thoreau the environmental prophet is a singularly topical figure in today's cultural climate.
   A. "Small is better" is not a Thoreau quotation, but he might indeed have said it. One feels peevishness in his work, a mania just under the surface, a willingness to promote this and to proscribe that. These are recognizable features of modern "political correctness."
      1. Forgo animal flesh; live on air. Thoreau supported these maxims, and we can easily imagine T-shirts printed with these mottoes.
      2. Thoreau's distrust of material clutter, his sense that our possessions, no less than the animal flesh we consume, clog our arteries, would make him an appropriate contemporary spokesman.
      3. Thoreau's richest insight is that real ownership—far from having anything to do with money or possessions—is imaginative.
   B. Nature, according to Thoreau, is our true home.
      1. We are of nature, Thoreau argues, and most of our "civilized" concepts reflect a tragic distance and alienation from the natural scene.
      2. Much of the point of Walden is that we have never seen nature, in the shimmering immediacy with which it is delivered in this writing.
   C. The beauty of Walden Pond emerges as the unstated message of the work.
      1. Thoreau is at pains to show us that, of all the Massachusetts ponds, Walden is the fairest of them all.
      2. In musing about the inhabitants and history of this pond, Thoreau suggests that nature is also a chronicle of the history of the planet; nature is written on by culture.
D. The fate of Walden Pond is an issue that is far more melancholy to today's readers than it was to Thoreau himself, who sensed the threats of civilization but could hardly imagine their virulence.

E. In depicting the remarkable life of the pond, Thoreau shows us that nature does not die, but the ruins of civilization are nonetheless green.

F. Perhaps the great lesson of Walden is that we must learn to read. Thoreau suggests that nature wants to "tell" her story, that she is rich in signs for us to interpret.

III. The story of Walden is Thoreau's great triumph: this pond is not simply a pond, but a story, a work of art.

A. Walden lives through Thoreau, as every reader of his text has both discovered and made happen.

B. Thoreau comes to us, then, not as historian, but as creator of Walden, and this act of creation is replete with sights and sounds.
   1. In some fascinating passages, Thoreau recreates the actual sounds of life on the pond.
   2. Other passages convey the strange life and vitality of this place, such as the whooping of the ice and the gambit of the foxes.
   3. Thoreau the surveyor spends much time taking Walden's measure, and although we may initially find such work mundane, we soon see the mythical stakes: he is measuring the secret of the universe, the riddle of the sphinx.
   4. Walden—finally measured, mapped, and represented—is more than a pond; it turns out to be a personal code for delivering our own story, for mapping the human figure.
   5. The most amazing sequence in Walden focuses on the form and function of nature's simplest item, the leaf. In devising a language for this evolving and repeating natural form, Thoreau fashions a strange new biological code and reveals nature to be a living hieroglyph.
   6. In Walden we see the genesis of a man, but unlike in Mary Shelley's Frankenstein, man evolves from organic matter.

C. Thoreau leaves us with the account of his year, but it ends in openness, not closure: Walden is a springtime, sap-flowing, wake-up call to its readers.
   1. Thoreau closes his text with a famous account of daybreak, enabling us to see him properly as a prophet of Dawn.
   2. In thinking through the contrast between art and environment, between Walden Pond and Thoreau's Walden, we realize that the future can indeed be built with a book, for language survives the encroachments of civilization.

Readings:
Essential: Thoreau, Walden (Library of America, 1985)
Recommended: Matthiessen, American Renaissance (Oxford University Press, 1941); Kazin, An American Procession (Vintage, 1985)

Topics for Further Consideration:
1. Explain how you would answer the charge that Thoreau is nothing but derivative Emerson.
2. Thoreau's project of confronting life at Walden Pond has the makings of an American myth. Explain whether you see evidence of this myth in subsequent American literature and in American life today.
Lecture 10

Edgar Allan Poe

Scope: Poe is arguably the strangest figure in the American literary landscape, and for many people the myth of Poe himself— orphan, disowned, wedded to his child-bride cousin, alcoholic, found dying in a Baltimore street—resembles his characters yet it is more powerful than anything he wrote. He is conceivably our most influential 19th-century writer, for he impacts the literature of Europe, especially France, in such a decisive fashion that he finally returns to American shores via his influence. Poe is a figure to be reckoned with. Consider his wide realm of influence: polished Romantic poet of incomparable technical virtuosity, premier literary critic, theorist of art, creator of prophetic genres such as science fiction and the detective story, and author of those horror stories that we read when young and that we see again in our sensationalist film culture today. His work circles forever around prodigious secrets—having to do with murder, vampirism, and death of all stripes—and it is fair to say that these same poems and stories reside in our collective subconscious, waiting for us to unpack them at last.

Poe's own life story is essential to any understanding of his work, so we begin with the tortured biography, and we consider a number of important, often dismissive judgments made on his work. Poe's poetry is often slighted as being meretricious, and yet a number of these poems are literally haunting in their suggestiveness; even more certain is the impact of Poe's famous theory of literature, since it altered the course of European poetry. Finally, his notorious view that the subject of beauty par excellence consists of the death of a beautiful woman will be examined in his lyric, "Annabel Lee," so that we can ready ourselves for its reappearance throughout his oeuvre.

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

1. Summarize Poe's contribution to the development of Modernist poetry,
2. Infer the reasons behind Poe's dissolute reputation, and
3. Outline Poe's contributions to the detective story and science fiction.

Outline

I. Poe is the most maligned figure in the American canon. His swollen image as "cursed poet" seems like a fabricated cliché, whereas his actual poems and stories are too often dismissed as sensationalist.

A. As readers of Poe's work, we must contend with his reputation as a sensitive, drunk, sick, kinky, necrophiliac gambler. We will see that these images reappear in much of his work.

B. Charles Dickens might have written Poe's biography in a maudlin moment. This work reminds us of figures like Oliver Twist and other literary creations. The reality, however, is tougher.

1. Born in 1809 to professional actors, Poe came literally from a histrionic background. His father abandoned his mother early, then died in 1811; his mother died later of consumption.
2. Poe was taken into the Virginia home of John and Frances Allan; he was close to Frances Allan, but John did not adopt him.
3. Poe's schooling took place in both Virginia and England; he later attended the University of Virginia, where he became known for a dissolute lifestyle.
4. Poe took up the excessive drinking and gambling that he is known for (although we know that he did not always drink much but rather was excessively sensitive to the effects of alcohol). He also experienced his first failed love affair. At the end of his life, he returned to this love.
5. Poe ran away, joined the Army, and did well. Like Poe's mother, Mrs. Allan also died of consumption, and Poe's only family connection now was John Allan, who sternly disapproved of Poe's behavior.
6. Allan helped Poe attend West Point, where he initially did well. But a lack of funds prevented Poe from staying, and he got himself expelled. Poe then began to make his reputation by publishing poetry and stories.
7. In 1836, Poe married Virginia Clemm, his 14-year-old cousin, his famous "child bride." Critics speculate that Poe was impotent and that this relationship remained platonic.
8. Poe developed a substantial career as editor, poet, and critic and became famous with the publication of "The Raven."
9. Virginia died of consumption in 1846. We begin to see the pattern of loved women dying in Poe's life, which is at the core of his work.
10. In 1849, Poe succumbed to binges and sprees, was found unconscious on a Baltimore street, then died in a Baltimore hospital.

C. A complicated individual, Poe was characterized by a wide range of incompatible traits; his reputation among his literary peers varied a great deal, too.

1. He was unquestionably a man of culture, yet surprisingly on target in his view of literary reputations, he was possessed of old-fashioned Southern courtesy, but he was notoriously hard to get along with, finicky, and often extreme in his judgments.
2. Emerson referred to Poe in a conversation as "the jingle man," and this dismissive comment speaks volumes about Poe's lack of standing among the "Brahmins" of New England in the early 19th century.
3. James Russell Lowell, one of the most recognized contemporary poets of the period, characterized Poe as "fudge."
4. Walt Whitman is the only major American man of letters who attended a memorial service for Poe in the 1870s. Although he was Poe's virtual opposite, Whitman had a surprising grasp of Poe's genius.
5. Henry James, our first professional literary critic/historian, considered Poe to be distinctly minor.
6. T.S. Eliot, following James' cue, also regarded Poe as insignificant, a judgment that came to be ironic, given Poe's indirect influence on his own poetic production.

II. Poe's poems are astonishing in their technical polish and hypnotic cadences, and there is a kind of magic when we listen to "the jingle man."

A. "The Bells" is Poe's most extreme phonic experiment, a poem that maniacally repeats and captures the actual sound of bells.
  1. The subject of Poe's poem is eerily connected with its phonic character as Poe outlines the shifting meaning of bells.
  2. Repetition comes to be seen as the language of psychosis, and even in a piece like "The Bells," there is a link between technique and meaning.

B. "Eldorado" is one of Poe's briefest, most haunting pieces about man's eternal quest; the goal of which can be whatever we wish—heaven, truth, or beauty. At the same time, we know that Poe's poem of 1849 was specifically addressed to a major social event of his time, the California Gold Rush.

C. "The Raven" is, of course, Poe's most famous poem. The piece is an ingenious example of complex rhyme and metric schemes.
  1. The unforgettable first stanza sounds the Poe note: an intrusive messenger, a weird new music.
  2. Parrot-like, the raven has only one obsessive word, "Nevermore." Poe's piece repeats this refrain like a recurring nightmare, and it conjures up an entire philosophy of doom, of a haunting yet irretrievable past.

III. Poe's great contribution to literary theory is his conception of Poet as Maker vs. Poet as Seer; in this we see a drastic calling-into-question of Romantic assumptions.

A. "The Philosophy of Composition" or "How I Wrote the Raven" (1846) is the (perhaps spoofing) famous account of Poe's poetic practice.
  1. Every effect is planned, according to Poe. In poetry, there are no accidents, no effects of inspiration. We foolishly persist in thinking that poetry is spontaneous, whereas it is strategic.
  2. Poe goes on to define the ideal subjects of poetry: beauty, melancholy, and death. The consequences of this notion are extreme and predictable—the great subject must be, as one could easily guess, the death of a beautiful woman. We shall see that this "literary theory" is utterly consonant with Poe's own tragic biography.
3. Poe is splendidly technical in his essay; he shows us exactly how and why the refrain and metric scheme of "The Raven" are as they are.

B. The French reaction to Poe's manifesto is of great significance because he gets a hearing across the ocean that is denied to him at home. Thus, a new aesthetic is born.
   1. Baudelaire, the greatest French poet of the 19th century, seizes on the work and career of Poe as the epitome of genius; Baudelaire becomes Poe's champion/translator. As the founder of symbolism in poetry, Baudelaire assures Poe's continued impact on poetic development.
   2. Poe serves as the central "cargo" in a famous, documented "chain" of poetic influence, moving from Baudelaire to Mallarmé, and Valéry, on to T.S. Eliot, and back to America.

IV. Despite critics' carping, Poe is America's most influential 19th-century man of letters.
   A. Modern poetry, as indicated, is demonstrably in his debt.
   B. Poe essentially created the detective story; he considers the powers of ratiocination as the opposite pole to pure sensation. This "split" marks much of his thinking.
      1. Auguste Dupin, Poe's genial Parisian detective, reigns in Poe's seminal detective stories, "Murders of the Rue Morgue" and "The Purloined Letter." The genre has been launched.
      2. Ratiocination and scientism characterize Poe's detective fiction, and we see here the desire for a world that is utterly transparent to the highly intelligent detective, a world where "details" become "clues." From here to Sherlock Holmes and Agatha Christie is a clear route.
   C. Science fiction is also one of Poe's "inventions." A number of his stories involve (bogus) scientific discoveries (trips into space, under the seas) that will be played out more fully in the future: Jules Verne, Ray Bradbury, etc.
   D. Although he was a poet, Poe gives us, in some stories, a blueprint for urban sociology. His tale "The Man of the Crowd" sketches an entire theory of crowd mentality, and this piece figures profoundly in the poems and prose of Baudelaire.
   E. Poe's greatest achievement lies in the area of psychological narrative. In writing his remarkable horror stories, Poe touches on nerves that still quiver today, and our purpose is to examine this body of work.
   F. Poe is the man most responsible for today's horror films. Those ghoulish confections with Vincent Price, Peter Cushing, et. al, are proof that he is alive and well.
   G. Poe is our first literary critic of stature, and he passes (often severe) judgment on the literary performances of his time in the form of articles and essays. His views were astonishingly on target.

V. Poe, jingle-man and analyst, seer and maker, warrants a more careful look.
   A. "Annabel Lee" is one of Poe's most lovely creations, stirring the minds of subsequent writers such as Nabokov, evoking a tragic past.
      1. As usual, Poe gives us beautiful sounds, a hypnotic assemblage of words and rhythms.
      2. Once again, we see Poe's only story: the death of a beautiful woman, located now in some mythic past that we are all invited to share.
      3. Poe's own past is obviously behind this haunting lyric.
      4. "Our" past is perhaps what is ultimately at stake here: if we have grown up with Poe, if we have ever read these pieces at an earlier moment, then they start to "play" again in some strange fashion.
   B. Poe is the great writer of the American collective unconscious: reading him entails digging in our own cellars, which is a central activity in a number of his pieces.
Lecture 11

Poe—Ghost Writer

Scope: Well before Robert Louis Stevenson's "Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde," Poe gave us the story of the divided self. In his most famous version of psychological doubling, "William Wilson," Poe recasts (in darker versions) a number of events from his own past and suggests that all lives are haunted by ghosts of our own making, notably a conscience and consciousness that we cannot silence. The more famous version of "killing one's double" occurs in "The Cask of Amontillado," in which many of Poe's phantasms—being buried alive, murdering without detection, the sweetness of revenge—are on show. Our brief look at the little-known story "The Facts in the Case of M. Valdemar" will focus on the mind/body dichotomy in Poe. Then we will close with an analysis of the quintessential horror story, "The Fall of the House of Usher," now seen as allegory of the divided psyche torn by love and hate.

Objectives—Upon completion of this lecture, you should be able to
1. Summarize the role of the doppelgänger in "William Wilson,"
2. Explain how Roderick Usher embodies the artist in "The Fall of the House of Usher," and
3. Describe the role of empiricism in Poe's narrative strategy.

Outline

I. Poe's stories, like his poems, rehearse the key events of his life and make us understand the "inner wiring" that is never visible in people but that governs their lives nonetheless.

A. "William Wilson" is Poe's classic version of the doppelgänger motif, the unsettling appearance of a "double" or "twin" who is/is not you.
   1. Poe's life, made worse, appears in this tale: in the figure of Wilson the narrator, we see the gambling, the drinking, the excesses that Poe knew all too well.
   2. Poe's story centers, however, on the entry of Wilson #2, the rival, the double, yet we do not know if this figure is visible to others or not.
   3. Being "twinned" to Wilson is the narrator's chief burden, and in the Siamese-twin relationship we see an unmistakable parable about conscience that haunts us.
   4. Wilson #2 is quickly identified with the keener moral sense, the judgment that is relentlessly (and ceaselessly) passed on our misdeeds.
   5. The narrator expresses a nagging sense of prior oneness with Wilson #2, as if they were sundered only by the accident of birth, suggesting a virtually platonic model of the divided psyche at last united.
   6. The narrator's evil career—gambling, cheating, robbing, and seducing—reads like a nightmarish account of Poe's own life, yet he is everywhere tracked by Wilson #2.
   7. The story heats up because of Wilson #2's increased agency, his willingness to speak out and to expose the narrator's crimes.
   8. The narrator's trajectory becomes wilder and wilder, international in circuit, right up to the final, fateful encounter with Wilson #2.
   9. Poe's parable differs from the story of Jekyll and Hyde, in which innocence remains the vantage point. Instead, we see a different set of actions altogether—do evil and judge yourself. With this punitive model of consciousness, Freud is in sight.

B. "The Cask of Amontillado" is one of Poe's most famous stories about doing in doubles, about the pleasures of murder.
   1. Motivation is a mystery in this piece, which leads the reader to ponder still further the rationale of this ritualistic murder.
   2. Poe's classic setting in the catacombs suggests that our deepest drives bring us closer and closer to the land of the dead, a place that seems central to Poe's topography.

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3. Poe's verbal conceits are riddles as well in this piece, as if the narrator wanted to celebrate the doubleness of language as well as of identity.

4. One feels that there is a fated unity in this piece between the killer and his victim. Consider the two names: Fortunato and Montresor, each revolving around the concept of "treasure," each a version of the other. Poe seems to be wrestling with the riddle of identity, as if identity itself were a wrestling match or a duel.

5. The beautifully executed murder in this story obliges us to think symbolically, to see this conflict as mind vs. body. There is no mere killing here, but rather a burial of one's enemy alive, and we need to ponder the difference, the kind of "benefit" the narrator derives from such acts.

6. Poe's story illustrates the civil war in the mind, but, as usual he goes all the way, beyond conflict to resolution. Yet, because this story is told 50 years after the events take place, we may wonder whether there is any closure or not.

II. Disciplining the body seems to be a major concern in Poe, especially if we consider "Amontillado" as a punishment of the physical self.

A. "The Facts in the Case of M. Valdemar" is one of Poe's least known but grisliest stories, focused entirely on the body/mind dichotomy, but cued even more sharply to issues of "voice."
   1. Poe refers to mesmerism at the tale's beginning, and we need to recover something of the prestige and fascination of this concept in the 19th century.
   2. "Facts" is the word used in Poe's title, and when we reflect that this tale was originally taken to be a true scientific experiment, the line between fact and fiction grows dim.
   3. Poe's empiricism is startling in this piece; unlike the customary Romantic idiom in most of his pieces, Poe describes the human body with morbid realistic detail.
   4. The story enacts a strange triumph of the spirit: a voice emerges from the tomb.
   5. Poe's story of a dead body speaking is at the outer limit of his war between mind and body. It is the allegory of art, art now understood as an imperishable voice, unlike the one-time body that housed it. It is also a parable of lectures—on tape, of the electronic miracle that transcends time and flesh.
   6. Poe is sufficiently tough-minded to ask: Can this be done? His grisly finish depicts, in all its horror, the scandal of flesh.

B. Poe's gambit, much like Emily Dickinson's, is to speak from uninhabitable places.

III. "The Fall of the House of Usher" is usually seen as Poe's masterpiece, and its impact on other writers is traceable.

A. The macabre setting of the story—the decaying ancestral house, the fungi—seems to be a setting of the soul. Could this be a metaphor for the dead South?

B. The story comes into being because of Usher's call for help; that is why the narrator comes, and it suggests a link between Usher and narrator that is symbolic as well.
   1. Usher is presented as end-of-the-line, as last descendent of a genteel family; Poe seems to be speaking here about sterility vs. creativity.
   2. Usher's strange sister triangulates Poe's arrangements here—the dying Madeline is Usher's "complement" just as Usher "completes" the narrator.

C. Usher is, interestingly, the artist as well, so that this story sheds light on artistic practice, too.
   1. In the brief descriptions of Usher's work, we get a precocious picture of a kind of painting that will become, a century later, abstract art.
   2. Madeline's dying serves, tragically, as Usher's source of power; her process of dying seems to animate his work.
   3. Dying—not death, but dying—may thus be thought of as the generator of Poe's art, life, and stories are out to trace this trajectory, to suck all possible energy out of it.
   4. When Usher acknowledges that he has put Madeline, living, into the tomb, he reveals the deepest wellsprings of his own modus operandi.
5. Murdering one's beloved/double is increasingly coming into focus as Poe's view of our internal wiring. Do we write off this philosophy as simply gibberish and sensational, or does it have its ugly truth?
Lecture 12

Poe's Legacy—
The Self as "Haunted Palace"

Scope: Is Poe just horrific and sensational? Or are there other reasons why we return to him, why we cannot quite forget him? A look at several of Poe's briefest and most achieved short stories, "The Black Cat," "The Tell-tale Heart" and "The Pit and the Pendulum," will show just how rich and bristling the Poe territory is. "The Black Cat" comments, as Poe writes, "on mere household events," and in it we can see a gruesome parable about the sexuality and violence that subvert Poe's horror stories and appear in shockingly displaced form. "The Tell-Tale Heart" is Poe's masterpiece about murder as an Oedipal event of liberation, and we will see that the project of putting out the "Old Man's" eye is a phantasm of cultural as well as psychotic dimensions. To bring this to language constitutes Poe's signature. As for "The Pit and the Pendulum," it remains Poe's most gruesome and perfectly constructed form of torture; we shall see that it is also an emblem of life caught in time and space.

Objectives—Upon completion of this lecture, you should be able to
1. Explain the role Poe allocates to repression in "The Black Cat,"
2. Summarize the narrative paradox at the center of "The Tell-Tale Heart," and
3. Summarize why Poe can well be considered a "master builder" of fiction.

Outline

I. "The Black Cat" is one of Poe's most suggesting and shocking pieces; it seems to pick up primitive notions of dismemberment and violation, but to keep muted its most far-reaching violence.

A. Poe's opening lines are interesting. This story is called both "wild" and "homely"; its plot is referred to as mere "household events." We are warned that this is more than a pet-story.
   1. If we are prepared to play with Poe's language, then "wild" = "willed," and that equation touches on the manic assertiveness at the core of these events.
   2. In the same vein, "homely" = space/spouse, and we can begin to see in these events a reconfiguration of married life.

B. Poe's cheerful domestic group—man, wife, and pet—breaks radically with most sentimental arrangements, turning them into horror; yet we shall see that sentiment is there nonetheless.
   1. Poe's subject here allows him an unaccustomed tenderness and feeling, in the narrator's affections for home life.
   2. We begin to see something awry in the initial reference to cats and witches, and this "Halloween-like" dimension of the story is going to take over.

C. Poe presents as cause for the horrors and violence of this piece "the Fiend Intemperance," or alcoholic excesses. Knowing Poe's history, we can credit this explanation, yet we wonder whether other, still darker motives are in play.
   1. The treatment of the cat is at once familiar and suggestive, and references to biting and caressing begin to acquire a faint erotic overtone, causing us to wonder if the "cat story" perhaps represents other stories.
   2. Poe's violent move of putting out the cat's eye is not only shocking but touches a primitive chord in us, with intimations of ritual maiming and disfiguring, as well as radical penetration.
   3. Poe alludes here to a spirit of "perverseness," an apparently illogical desire to go against both morality and one's own interests. This notion harks back to Poe's view of "the imp of the Perverse," his classic statement about conflicting and dark inner motives.
   4. As violence and misdeed mount, the house burns down, in a kind of symbolic "overloading" of the system. Yet graphic signs of accusation now appear, as if "writing" and "utterance" had a life of their own and could not be quelled even by fire and extinction.
D. At this point, Poe's story becomes a hall of mirrors as cat #2 enters; this patent repetition throws all realism to the winds and calls attention to the hallucinatory and phantasmal dimensions of the piece.

1. As we read about the described cat, we should start thinking about its "double," not so much the first cat as the obscured wife. Notations such as the cat's "covering me with its loathsome caresses" buttress this inference.
2. Overdetermined signs begin to mount: we move from the initial picture of hanged cat to a representation of the gallows themselves.
3. The second act of violence by ax actualizes the story's ultimate libidinal project: the wife is murdered. Has the story been about her all along?
4. The narrator then indulges in Poe's recurring and gratifying activity of disposing of bodies, building walls, concealing the crime. We must see in these moves something of the constituent forces of art.
5. Poe's work writes large the Freudian notion of the return of the repressed. The perfectly committed and concealed crime flaunts its "life" over and over, demands to be spoken, insists on coming "out" again. This gives new meaning to "the death of a beautiful woman," for we see it played out again and again.

E. Reflecting on the strange displacements enacted in Poe's tale, we are obliged to reconstruct a kind of erotic map.

1. Two of Poe's tales, "Ligeia" and "Berenice," hover around the compulsive and hypnotic power of eyes and teeth, and we see scenarios that smack of necrophilia and corpse-plunder, a seeking to reach "satisfaction" with these organs.
2. "Returning to the womb" is a familiar concept in that it suggests a desire for innocence and protection. In Poe's stories, this trajectory is enacted in a grisly, displaced fashion, standing in for (fearful) sexual congress itself, and we see mythic clues, such as the "vagina dentata" along the way.

II. "The Tell-Tale Heart" is arguably Poe's most impressive achievement in horror because it seems to play out all of his strengths at once: breathless narrative voice, murder, concealment, and utterance. Moreover, it has symbolic reaches that reward our plumbing them.

A. The double-edged narrative voice that opens this piece is unforgettable, claiming its sanity and broadcasting its madness in the same words.

1. This artistic economy, by which words function doubly, typifies Poe's work at its best.
2. Motiveless malignity for the crime appears to be at work here; yet, once again, the reader may not agree with this assessment.

B. The "old man" who is to be the victim of the narrator's plot calls out to us for interpretation.

1. Is he Father? God? One-eyed Odin? All of these appellations suggest that he is an "authority figure" who must be done in.
2. The old man is characterized by—and will be struck in—the evil eye. Why does Poe insist on the eye? We sense that censorship, consciousness, and guilt are all at issue here, and that putting out the eye would deliver the narrator from such surveillance.
3. Poe's tale asks the fundamental question for conscious creatures: How to be free? His answer is not to everyone's taste.
4. Poe's tale of murdering the "old man," the "king," is maniacal in its repetitions, suggesting a kind of ritual parricide/regicide.
5. "Out, out, damned spot," the famous Shakespearean line of Lady Macbeth about the impossibility of removing guilt/consciousness, is referenced in this piece.

C. The beating heart both begins and ends this hypnotic tale. Why?

1. Whose? is the first question we ask—the victim's or the narrator's? Is there a difference?
2. The beating heart is also the very heartbeat of narrative, the verbal lifeline that pumps energy from one self to another, from writer to reader.
3. Poe once again suggests that the psyche has only one recurrent tale: murder. Yet, as always, murder is a continuous affair, a "living" proposition in Poe.
4. "Buried alive," central here as in so many pieces, is the condition of memory, guilt, and consciousness.
5. Poe can be seen as the man in whom nothing dies, in whom all is put to death and brought to life relentlessly, ritualistically.

III. "The Pit and the Pendulum"

A. One of Poe's most famous tales, this piece constructs an elaborate torture situation, historically situated, and goes on to leave this image in our mind as the very epitome of human life.

B. If we consider the details of Poe's setting—a blade that descends over time, a pit that opens into space—we realize the philosophical dimensions of Poe's construct.

IV. Poe's artistic life resembles his stories. We think he is buried and gone, but he is shown to be alive and well.

A. Whitman's final tribute is expressed as a dream/vision that looks, to the entire world, like a Poe-text.

B. Hart Crane, who knew something about being a "cursed" poet, experienced a "twinship" with Poe.

C. Poe must be seen as the master builder of the haunted house, the man who presides over a kingdom of living death, of murder as a form of life, which we gradually come to see as a figure of the way we live.

1. Poe, then, is the great uncensored seer, "diving into the wreck" of psyche.

2. Poe is not just a visionary; he is also the seeker of knowledge who is aware that "knowing" kills. And thus his stories ask: how to know, in art, and yet keep alive?

Readings:


Recommended: Lawrence, Studies in Classic American Literature (Viking, 1964); Levin, The Power of Blackness (Vintage, 1958); Hoffman, Poe Poe Poe Poe Poe Poe (Doubleday, 1972)

Topics for Further Consideration:

1. Discuss the implications of "the poet as maker" vs. "the poet as seer." Summarize which vision of artistic creation you subscribe to.

2. Poe is accused of being shamelessly sensationalist and superficial; defend the case that he provides us with a meaningful representation of human feeling.
Timeline

17th century ....................... The “Great Migration” brings the Puritans and Pilgrims from England to America.

1692 .............................. John Hawthorne, an ancestor of author Nathaniel Hawthorne, officiates at a number of the infamous witch trials in Salem, Massachusetts.


1706 .............................. Birth of Benjamin Franklin.

1721 .............................. Benjamin Franklin, at age 15, starts his own newspaper, The New England Courant, and begins to write essays.

1730 .............................. Franklin is named the “Official Printer of Pennsylvania.”

1732–1757 ....................... Franklin writes Poor Richard’s Almanac, the first American periodical.

1736 .............................. Franklin organizes the Union Fire Co.

1737 .............................. Franklin becomes Philadelphia’s postmaster.

1741 .............................. Franklin invents the “Franklin fireplace” (stove).

1743 .............................. Franklin proposes the idea for the American Philosophical Society.

1745 .............................. Franklin begins to conduct experiments in electricity.

1747 .............................. Franklin organizes the Pennsylvania Militia.

1749 .............................. Franklin founds the Philadelphia Academy, which later became the University of Pennsylvania.

1751 .............................. Founding of Philadelphia Hospital, with the assistance of Franklin.

1752 .............................. Franklin conducts his famous experiment proving that lightning is electrical.

1753 .............................. Franklin receives honorary masters degrees from both Harvard and Yale.

1757 .............................. Franklin elected the representative of Philadelphia (Pennsylvania) to England.

1758 .............................. Jonathan Edwards dies.

1759 .............................. Franklin receives an honorary doctorate from the University of St. Andrews in Scotland.

1762 .............................. Franklin receives an honorary doctorate from Oxford University.

1771 .............................. Franklin begins writing his Autobiography.

1776 .............................. Declaration of Independence written and signed. Beginning of the Revolutionary War.

1783 .............................. End of the Revolutionary War.

1783 .............................. Birth of Washington Irving.

1790 .............................. Death of Benjamin Franklin.

1803 .............................. Birth of Ralph Waldo Emerson.

1804 .............................. Birth of Nathaniel Hawthorne.

1809 .............................. Birth of Edgar Allan Poe.

1811 .............................. Birth of Harriet Beecher Stowe.

1817 .............................. Birth of Henry David Thoreau.

1819 .............................. Washington Irving publishes “The Legend of Sleepy Hollow” and “Rip Van Winkle.”

1819 .............................. Birth of Herman Melville.

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1819................................. Birth of Walt Whitman.
1821................................. Ralph Waldo Emerson graduates from Harvard.
1829................................. Emerson marries Ellen Tucker.
1830................................. Birth of Emily Dickinson.
1831................................. Emerson’s wife dies.
1832................................. Spurred by his wife’s death, Emerson resigns his ministry.
1835................................. Edgar Allan Poe writes “Berenice.”
1835................................. Birth of Samuel Clemens (Mark Twain).
1836................................. Emerson publishes his essay “Nature.”
1836................................. Poe marries Virginia Clemm, his 14-year-old cousin.
1837................................. Emerson makes his famous speech at Harvard, “The American Scholar.”
1837................................. Nathaniel Hawthorne publishes his collection of stories entitled *Twice-Told Tales.*
1838................................. Poe pens “Ligeia.”
1839................................. Poe publishes “The Fall of the House of Usher,” considered the quintessential horror story, as well as Poe’s masterwork. Poe also publishes “William Wilson” during this year.
1841................................. Emerson publishes several of his best-known essays, including “History,” “Self-Reliance,” and “Circles.”
1841................................. Poe publishes “The Murders in the Rue Morgue,” considered one of the first detective stories, along with “Descent into the Maelstrom,” an early science fiction story.
1842................................. Poe publishes “The Pit and the Pendulum.”
1843................................. Poe publishes “The Black Cat” and “The Tell-Tale Heart.”
1843................................. Birth of Henry James.
1844................................. Emerson publishes the essay “Experience.”
1844................................. Poe publishes “The Balloon-Hoax,” a piece that could be considered science fiction.
1845................................. Poe publishes “The Raven,” as well as “The Purloined Letter,” considered one of the first detective stories, and “The Facts in the Case of M. Valdemar.”
1846................................. Emerson publishes “The Poet,” his chief statement about the literary agenda of the future.
1846................................. Henry David Thoreau spends one night in jail for his refusal to pay several years’ poll tax as protest against the role of Massachusetts in perpetuating slavery.
1846................................. Poe’s wife dies of consumption.
1846................................. Poe writes “The Philosophy of Composition, or How I Wrote ‘The Raven,’” the famous account (perhaps spoofing) of his poetic practice. Poe also publishes “The Cask of Amontillado.”
1846................................. Herman Melville publishes *Typee.*
1847................................. Melville publishes *Omoo.*
1848................................. Thoreau publishes his essay “Civil Disobedience.”
1848................................. Attempted revolutions fail in several European nations.
1849................................. Poe publishes “The Bells,” “Eldorado,” and “Annabel Lee.”
1849 Mardi
1849 Death of Edgar Allan Poe.
1850 Hawthorne publishes The Scarlet Letter, perhaps his best-known work. Also in this year, Melville publishes White Jacket, or The World in a Man of War.
1850 Karl Marx writes The Communist Manifesto.
1850 Passage of the Fugitive Slave Act, which required Northerners to return runaway slaves to their former masters.
1850 Melville first encounters the work of Hawthorne and writes a now-well-known review. In this same year, he publishes his masterwork, Moby Dick.
1851 Thoreau becomes active in the abolitionist movement.
1851 Melville meets Hawthorne in person. In this same year, he publishes his masterwork, Moby Dick.
1852 Harriet Beecher Stowe publishes Uncle Tom’s Cabin.
1853 Melville publishes the short story “Bartleby, the Scrivener.”
1854 Thoreau publishes his masterwork, Walden.
1855 Walt Whitman publishes the first version of Leaves of Grass.
1856 Whitman’s poem “Crossing Brooklyn Ferry” published in a version of Leaves of Grass.
1856 Melville publishes the short story “Benito Cereno.”
1856 Birth of Sigmund Freud.
1856 Birth of Charlotte Perkins Gilman.
1859 Thoreau reads publicly “A Plea for Captain John Brown.”
1859 Whitman publishes the collections of poems Children of Adam and Calamus.
1859 Birth of Petroleum.
1859 Birth of Stephen Crane.
1859 Birth of Washington Irving.
1859 Birth of Emily Dickinson.
1860 Start of the American Civil War.
1862 Death of Henry David Thoreau.
1862 Emily Dickinson has her literary exchange with noted critic Thomas Wentworth Higginson.
1864 Death of Nathaniel Hawthorne.
1865 End of the American Civil War.
1867 Mark Twain publishes the short story “The Celebrated Jumping Frog of Calaveras County.”
1869 Twain publishes Innocents Abroad.
1871 Birth of Stephen Crane.
1871 Franco-Prussian War.
1874 Birth of Robert Frost.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Event</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1875</td>
<td>Public reburial and dedication of Poe’s remains.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1876</td>
<td>Twain publishes <em>The Adventures of Tom Sawyer</em>.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1879</td>
<td>Henry James writes the first book on Nathaniel Hawthorne.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1881</td>
<td>James publishes <em>A Portrait of a Lady</em>.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1882</td>
<td>Death of Ralph Waldo Emerson.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1886</td>
<td>Death of Emily Dickinson.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1885</td>
<td>Twain publishes <em>Huckleberry Finn</em>, his acclaimed masterpiece, which was promptly banned by the Concord Public Library.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1887</td>
<td>Charlotte Perkins Gilman gives birth to a daughter, afterward suffering from post-partum depression.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1888</td>
<td>Birth of T. S. Eliot.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1888</td>
<td>Birth of Eugene O’Neill.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1889</td>
<td>Twain publishes <em>A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur’s Court</em>.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1891</td>
<td>Death of Herman Melville.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1892</td>
<td>Death of Walt Whitman. Publication of “The Wound Dresser.”</td>
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<tr>
<td>1892</td>
<td>Gilman publishes the short story “The Yellow Wallpaper.”</td>
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<tr>
<td>1893</td>
<td>Crane publishes his first novel, <em>Maggie: A Girl of the Streets</em>.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1894</td>
<td>Twain publishes <em>Pudd’nhead Wilson</em>.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1894</td>
<td>Robert Frost publishes his first poem.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1895</td>
<td>Crane publishes <em>The Red Badge of Courage</em>.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1896</td>
<td>Death of Harriet Beecher Stowe.</td>
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<td>1896</td>
<td>Birth of F. Scott Fitzgerald.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1896–1897</td>
<td>Crane is on steamship, <em>Commodore</em>, carrying arms for Cuban rebels, which sinks. Crane spends 30 hours in a small boat.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1897</td>
<td>Crane covers the Greco-Turkish War.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1897</td>
<td>Birth of William Faulkner.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1898</td>
<td>Crane covers the Spanish-American War.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1898</td>
<td>Crane publishes his short story “The Open Boat,” based on his ordeal at sea in 1897. Crane also pens the short story “The Blue Hotel.”</td>
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<tr>
<td>1898</td>
<td>James publishes <em>The Turn of the Screw</em>.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1898</td>
<td>Gilman publishes <em>Women and Economics</em>.</td>
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<td>1899</td>
<td>Crane publishes “The Monster.”</td>
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<td>1899</td>
<td>Birth of Ernest Hemingway.</td>
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<td>1900</td>
<td>Death of Stephen Crane.</td>
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<td>1902</td>
<td>James publishes <em>The Wings of the Dove</em>.</td>
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<td>1902</td>
<td>Birth of John Steinbeck.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1903</td>
<td>James publishes <em>The Ambassadors</em>.</td>
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</tbody>
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1904.......................... James publishes *The Golden Bowl*.
1910.......................... Death of Mark Twain.
1911.......................... Birth of Tennessee Williams.
1913.......................... Gilman writes “Why I Wrote ‘The Yellow Wallpaper.’”
1914.......................... Birth of Ralph Ellison.
1915.......................... Birth of Arthur Miller.
1916.......................... Death of Henry James.
1917.......................... F. Scott Fitzgerald joins the army.
1920.......................... Fitzgerald publishes his first novel, *This Side of Paradise*.
1920.......................... Eugene O’Neill publishes *The Emperor Jones*.
1922.......................... Eliot publishes his most influential poem, “The Wasteland.”
1922.......................... Fitzgerald publishes *The Beautiful and the Damned*.
1922.......................... O’Neill publishes *The Hairy Ape*.
1925.......................... Eliot publishes “The Hollow Men.”
1925.......................... Fitzgerald publishes his masterpiece, *The Great Gatsby*.
1925.......................... Ernest Hemingway publishes his first major work, *In Our Time*.
1925.......................... O’Neill publishes *Desire Under the Elms*.
1926.......................... Hemingway publishes *The Sun Also Rises*.
1926.......................... William Faulkner publishes his first novel, *Soldier’s Pay*.
1927.......................... Eliot becomes a British citizen.
1927.......................... Faulkner publishes *Mosquitoes*.
1929.......................... Hemingway publishes *A Farewell to Arms*.
1929.......................... Faulkner publishes *Sartoris*, now known as *Flags in the Dust*.
1929.......................... Faulkner publishes *The Sound and the Fury*, considered to be his breakthrough text.
1929.......................... Beginning of the Great Depression.
1930.......................... Eliot publishes “Ash Wednesday.”
1930.......................... Faulkner publishes *As I Lay Dying*, the sister text to *The Sound and the Fury*.
1931.......................... Faulkner publishes *Sanctuary*.
1931.......................... O’Neill publishes *Mourning Becomes Electra*.
1931.......................... Birth of Toni Morrison.
1932.......................... Hemingway publishes his treatise on bullfighting, *Death in the Afternoon*.
1932.......................... Faulkner publishes *Light in August*.
1934.......................... Fitzgerald publishes *Tender Is the Night*.
1935.......................... Death of Charlotte Perkins Gilman.
1935.................................. Hemingway publishes his treatise on hunting, Green Hills of Africa.
1935.................................. John Steinbeck publishes Tortilla Flat.
1936.................................. Faulkner publishes Absalom, Absalom!, an epic of the Civil War.
1936.................................. O’Neill wins the Nobel Prize for Literature.
1938.................................. Death of Sigmund Freud.
1939.................................. Steinbeck publishes his masterpiece, The Grapes of Wrath.
1940.................................. Fitzgerald writes The Last Tycoon, left unfinished at his death in the same year.
1940.................................. Hemingway publishes For Whom the Bell Tolls.
1940.................................. Faulkner publishes The Hamlet.
1941.................................. End of the Great Depression; the United States enters World War II.
1942.................................. Faulkner publishes Go Down, Moses.
1943.................................. Eliot publishes the poem “Four Quartets.”
1945.................................. Tennessee Williams publishes The Glass Menagerie.
1946.................................. O’Neill publishes The Iceman Cometh.
1947.................................. Williams publishes A Streetcar Named Desire.
1947.................................. Eliot wins the Nobel Prize for Literature.
1947.................................. Arthur Miller publishes All My Sons.
1949.................................. Miller publishes Death of a Salesman.
1950.................................. Faulkner wins the Nobel Prize for Literature.
1951.................................. Williams publishes The Rose Tattoo.
1952.................................. Hemingway publishes The Old Man and the Sea.
1952.................................. Ralph Ellison publishes Invisible Man.
1953.................................. Ellison’s Invisible Man receives the National Book Award for fiction.
1953.................................. Death of Eugene O’Neill.
1953.................................. Miller publishes The Crucible.
1954.................................. Hemingway wins the Nobel Prize for Literature.
1955.................................. The full body of Emily Dickinson’s poetic works is published posthumously.
1955.................................. Williams publishes Cat on a Hot Tin Roof.
1955.................................. Miller publishes A View From the Bridge.
1956.................................. O’Neill’s Long Day’s Journey into Night, which he had written in 1945, is published posthumously.
1957.................................. Williams publishes Orpheus Descending.
1958.................................. Williams publishes Suddenly Last Summer.
1959.................................. Lionel Trilling pays homage to Robert Frost on his 85th birthday, saying that Frost belongs in the great iconoclastic tradition of American literature.
1959.................................. Williams publishes Sweet Bird of Youth.
1961.................................. Death of Ernest Hemingway.
1961.........................Williams publishes *Night of the Iguana*.
1962.........................Steinbeck wins the Nobel Prize for Literature.
1962.........................Death of William Faulkner.
1963.........................Death of Robert Frost.
1964.........................Hemingway’s *Moveable Feast* published posthumously.
1965.........................Death of T. S. Eliot.
1968.........................Death of John Steinbeck.
1970.........................Hemingway’s *Islands in the Stream* published posthumously.
1974.........................Toni Morrison publishes *Sula*.
1977.........................Morrison publishes *Song of Solomon*.
1983.........................Death of Tennessee Williams.
1986.........................Hemingway’s final novel, *Garden of Eden*, is published posthumously.
1988.........................Morrison publishes her masterpiece, *Beloved*.
1992.........................Morrison publishes *Jazz*.
1993.........................Morrison wins the Nobel Prize for Literature.
1994.........................Death of Ralph Ellison.
1998.........................Morrison publishes *Paradise*.
Glossary

**Aboriginal self**: A concept defined by Ralph Waldo Emerson as an existing source of universal energy in which we all partake. This self is not in us, but rather, out in the world, and we must learn to move into it.

**B’hoy**: An American original character, one who challenges all niceties in pieties. The female counterpart is known as the g’hal (the gal).

**Boutade**: French term meaning a joke, a spoof, or a setup that partially hides its true meaning.

**Brahmins**: Term coined in the mid-1800s by the American writer Oliver Wendell Holmes to describe a class of New England intellectuals determined on the basis of birth, education, and scholarly pursuits.

**Calvinism**: Christian theology of the French church reformer John Calvin. The central Calvinist tenets include belief in the absolute sovereignty of God and the doctrine of justification by faith alone.

**Classic**: A work of literature having lasting significance or generally recognized worth. The canonical tests of American literature stem out of vital, often unresolvable, conflicts from their own moments in history. They are bristling with ambiguities and insights that bid to challenge the reader, in their own time, in the present day, and even in the future.

**Coming of age**: In American literature, an event or series of events that spurs a character to reach spiritual adulthood. These stories may or may not revolve around attainment of a character’s physical adulthood.

**Cosmogony**: Literally, the study of the universe’s origin. In literature, the writer’s personal theory of the universe, as reflected in his or her works.

**Cosmos**: As defined by Walt Whitman, a brash young man, a jaunty fellow with a robust ego.

**Counterculture**: A subculture, especially of young people, with values opposed to that of the established culture. Henry David Thoreau is often regarded as a major American counterculture hero.

**Demiurge**: The deity who fashions the world, a creative force. In literature, a character of such influential personality that he or she is an overpowering force in the story being told.

**Double entendre**: A word or turn of phrase having double meaning, especially when the second meaning is risqué. Ernest Hemingway’s works, for instance, revel in suggestions of dual meanings and dual sexuality.

**Dualism**: The division of body from spirit. Whereas most religious traditions assert that spirit is superior to body, some American writers—particularly Walt Whitman—reversed that notion in their works, insisting on the naturalness and sanctity of the body.

**Dysfunction**: Impaired or disorderly function of a cultural system, be it a family or a larger social group.

**Empowered self**: Often regarded as one of America’s worst gifts to modern culture, the concept that the individual is empowered to attain all he or she desires. Ralph Waldo Emerson presents the concept of the empowered, or “imperialistic,” self in his essay “Self-Reliance.”

**Epiphany**: A sudden manifestation of the meaning or essence of something or a sudden intuitive realization or perception of reality.

**Epistemology**: A division of philosophy that investigates the nature and origin of knowledge.

**Existentialism**: A philosophy that emphasizes the uniqueness and isolation of the individual experience in a hostile or indifferent universe. A frequent theme in American literature, which often stresses freedom of choice and responsibility for the consequences of one’s actions.

**Expressionism**: An artistic movement during the late 19th and early 20th centuries that emphasized subjective expression of the artist’s inner experience. Stephen Crane and Emily Dickinson personify this approach to writing, reconfiguring the world we know by clothing it in images and metaphors.

**Feminism**: A doctrine advocating the same political and economic rights for women as granted to men. Charlotte Perkins Gilman was an early feminist writer, well known for “The Yellow Wallpaper.”
Fissured self: Essentially, an existential collapse, when all one knows of the world unravels.

Geworfenheit: German term meaning that we are thrust into a world not of our own making or choosing; a sense of alienation from the world around us.

Gothic: A style of fiction emphasizing the grotesque, mysterious, and desolate.

Hagiography: A biography of saints. Uncle Tom's Cabin, though often criticized for being overly sentimental, became a black American hagiography that was part of opera and drama.

Impressionism: A movement in painting that originated in France in the late 19th century. Impressionist painters found many of their subjects around them rather than in history, which was then the accepted source of subject matter. Instead of painting an ideal of beauty that earlier artists had defined, the Impressionists tried to depict what they saw at a given moment. To achieve the appearance of spontaneity, Impressionist painters used broken brushstrokes of bright, often unmixed colors. The colors in Impressionist paintings have an overall luminosity because the painters avoided blacks and earth colors. The Impressionists also simplified their compositions, omitting detail to achieve a striking overall effect.

Individualism: The doctrine that society is an artificial device, existing only for the sake of its members as individuals and properly judged only according to criteria established by them as individuals.

Isolationism: A policy in which a nation’s interests are best served if the nation secludes itself from other nations and avoids forming alliances with them. In literature, this concept often has been applied to individuals, as in Ralph Waldo Emerson’s suggestion that we must “cultivate” our own earth, our own substance.

Ludic: Playful in a way that is spontaneous and without any particular purpose.

Malaise: A vague feeling of depression or illness.

Manself: A term created by John Steinbeck to describe and celebrate the human species; used in place of men and women. This manself is always struggling to make a success of his or her life and will prevail, no matter how terrible circumstances are.

Metaphor: A figure of speech in which a term is transferred from the object it ordinarily designates to an object it may designate only by implicit comparison or analogy. Metaphor allows the writer to yoke together diverse areas of experience and thought. Yet metaphor may also be suspected of falsely domesticating the world by substituting the poet’s own projections and fantasies for the “hard facts.”

Metaphysics: A branch of philosophy that systematically investigates the nature of first principles and problems of ultimate reality, including ontology and often cosmology. Also, critical or speculative philosophy.

Modernism: The 20th century saw the emergence of Modernism, which responded to the world’s complexity by asserting that the individual had the potential to achieve a broader perspective than that offered by any one society or its history. At the beginning of the 19th century, American authors struggled to convince the world that they had a history; by the 20th century, American authors, like European authors, had to grapple with more than enough history.

Modus operandi: A method of operating; a particular way of doing things.

Motif: An important and sometimes recurring theme or idea in a work of literature. Also called motive.

Nantucketer: A uniquely American hero presented in Herman Melville’s works. The Nantucketer is different from familiar examples of colonial character. Homespun in his manners, he is nonetheless ruler of the sea, hence, royalty in his own way.

Naturalism: A system of thought holding that all phenomena can be explained in terms of natural causes and laws without attributing supernatural significance to them. Also, the doctrine that all religious truths are derived from nature, not from revelation. In literature, Naturalism attempts to apply scientific theories to art.

Organicism: The concept that society is analogous to a biological organism, meaning that society’s overall organization—not the functioning of its individual parts—plays the principal role in determining its processes and destiny.

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Oversoul: A spiritual essence or vital force in the universe that embraces all souls, thus transcending individual consciousness.

Perspectival narration: The literary technique of viewing society from the outside. A writer may write about a historical period in retrospect, for instance, though his or her characters do not know what events are coming.

Picaresque: A literary genre in which a rogue-hero’s escapades are depicted in a context of sharp social satire. Mark Twain’s Huckleberry Finn personifies such a character.

Poet of Babel: A term used to refer to poets who make us think that poetry could be nonsense, but rather, is the sound of the brain, the fabric of consciousness. Although poetry can be a description of the world, it can also be simply the representation of the experience of living with a brain and of sensing things, thinking things, and speaking things.

Polysemy: The existence of several meanings for a single word or phrase.

Postmodernism: The literal meaning of Postmodernism is “after Modernism”; in many ways, Postmodernism constitutes an attack on Modernist claims about the existence of truth and value. In disputing past assumptions, Postmodernists generally display a preoccupation with the inadequacy of language as a mode of communication. Inaccessible ideas and impenetrable prose also characterize many Postmodern texts, although the difficulties in this case are often intentional and reflect specific claims about the nature of language and meaning.

Puritanism: Scrupulous moral sternness, especially aversions to social pleasures and indulgences. These attitudes and worldviews stem from the doctrines and practices of the Puritans.

Realism: In art and literature, an attempt to describe human behavior and surroundings or to represent figures and objects exactly as they act or appear in life. Though attempts at Realism have been made throughout history in all the arts, the term is generally restricted to a movement that began in the mid-19th century, in reaction to the highly subjective approach of Romanticism.

Rite of passage: A genre in literature based on an anthropological concept concerning rituals that a young person goes through in growing up.

Romanticism: A movement in the literature of virtually every country of Europe, the United States, and Latin America that lasted from about 1750 to about 1870, characterized by reliance on the imagination and subjectivity of approach, freedom of thought and expression, and an idealization of nature.

Self-made man: A classic hero in American literature and history, the self-made man is successful through his own actions. Benjamin Franklin personifies the concept of the wildly successful self-made man.

Semiosis: The act of translating a word or visual signal into a cultural meaning, of taking language and turning it into meaning. In literature, the concept that words are signs of natural things, which in turn, are signs of spirit.

Sentimentalism: A tendency to express obvious or powerful feelings or emotions without appealing to reason, especially self-indulgent or nostalgic writing or expression. The Sentimental tradition is the great popular literary form of the 19th century.

Social contract: A voluntary agreement among people defining the relationship of individuals with one another and with government and, by this process, forming a distinct organized society. In the 17th and 18th centuries, the theory of a social compact among individuals of a society was linked with the doctrine of natural law.

Stereotype: An oversimplified standardized image or idea held by one person or group concerning another. In literature, a character meant to typify or conform to an unvarying pattern or manner, lacking in any individuality or depth.

Stream of consciousness: A fictional narrative technique, first used in the late 19th century to evince subjective as well as objective reality. It reveals the character’s feelings, thoughts, and actions, often following an associative rather than a logical sequence, without commentary by the author.

Symbolism: The use of symbols to invest things with a representative meaning, or to represent something abstract by something concrete.
Transcendentalism: In philosophy and literature, the belief that knowledge of reality is derived from intuitive sources, rather than from objective experience. Nearly all transcendentalist doctrines stem from the division of reality into a realm of spirit and a realm of matter. Such a division is made by many of the great religions of the world. Ralph Waldo Emerson and Henry David Thoreau are considered to embody what is known as American Transcendentalism.

Trope: A word, phrase, expression, or image that is used in a figurative way, usually for rhetorical effect. Metaphor is the quintessential trope in all of poetry.

Tuition: Learned knowledge, as opposed to intuition, innate or revealed knowledge.

Un-naming: This term refers to the literary cleansing of customary labels to install fresh perception. Emily Dickinson’s poetry typifies this sort of writing.

Vagina dentata: The teethed womb that is a sexual nightmare for the male who is terrified of what it could mean to think literally about moving into the womb.

Women’s writing: Writing in a feminist vein that features language deemed to be closer to the body. Some characteristics of this kind of writing include fluidity rather than line, openness to affect and libido, suspicion of repressive order, and attention to the somatic.
Biographical Notes

Louis Armstrong (1901–1971): American jazz, cornet, and trumpet player, singer, bandleader, and popular entertainer. Armstrong overcame poverty, a lack of formal education, and racism to become one of the most innovative and influential musicians of the 20th century and one of the most beloved entertainers in the world. He is perhaps best known for helping to pioneer a style known as swing, which later formed the basis for most jazz and rhythm-and-blues (R&B) music. Armstrong’s music had a profound influence on Ralph Ellison’s Invisible Man.

Charles Baudelaire (1821–1867): A leading 19th-century French poet who seized on Edgar Allan Poe’s work and career as the epitome of genius, becoming Poe’s champion and translator in France. As the founder of Symbolism in poetry, Baudelaire ensured Poe’s continued impact on poetic development.

Catherine Beecher (1800–1878): Sister to Harriet Beecher Stowe, Catherine Beecher wrote A Treatise on Domestic Economy, dedicated to “the women of America in whose hands rest the real destinies of the Republic.”

Samuel Clemens: See Mark Twain.

Stephen Crane (1871–1900): American novelist and poet, one of the first American exponents of the naturalistic style of writing. Crane is known for his pessimistic and often brutal portrayals of the human condition, along with a sympathetic understanding of character.

Emily Dickinson (1830–1886): America’s most well known female poet and one of the foremost authors in American literature. Dickinson’s simply constructed, acutely intellectual writings examine issues vital to humanity: the agonies and ecstasies of love, sexuality, the unfathomable nature of death, the horrors of war, God and religious belief, the importance of humor, and musings on the significance of literature, music, and art.

Thomas Eakins (1844–1916): Regarded by most critics as the most outstanding American painter of the 19th century and, by many, as the greatest his country has yet produced, Eakins was an admirer of Walt Whitman. He was well known for his painting The Swimming Hole, as well as paintings of the male body and portraits of Whitman.

Jonathan Edwards (1703–1758): Often called the “last great Puritan,” this theologian and intellectual authored such fierce sermons as “Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God.”

T. S. Eliot (1888–1965): American-born writer regarded as one of the greatest poets of the 20th century. Eliot also wrote drama and literary criticism. In his plays, which use unrhymed verse, he attempted to revive poetic drama for the contemporary audience. Eliot won the Nobel Prize for literature in 1948.

Ralph Ellison (1914–1994): American author and educator, one of the most influential black American writers of the 20th century. Ellison uses rich, varied, and powerful language to portray the black experience in all its vitality and complexity. His best-known work, Invisible Man, expounds the theme that American society willfully ignores blacks and was one of the first works to describe modern racial problems in the United States from a black American point of view.

Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803–1882): Emerson, the guiding spirit of American Romanticism, lays the groundwork for a key tradition in American thinking and writing in his Essays, written from the 1830s through the middle of the century.

William Faulkner (1897–1962): American novelist, known for his epic portrayal, in some 20 novels, of the tragic conflict between the old and the new South. Although his intricate plots and complex narrative style alienated many readers of his early writings, Faulkner was a towering figure in American literature during the first half of the 20th century. With Ernest Hemingway, he is usually considered one of the two greatest American novelists of his era. Faulkner was particularly noted for the eloquent richness of his prose style and for the unique blend of tragedy and humor in his works.

F. Scott Fitzgerald (1896–1940): American writer whose novels and short stories chronicled changing social attitudes during the 1920s, a period dubbed the “Jazz Age” by the author. He is best known for his novels The Great Gatsby (1925) and Tender is the Night (1934), both of which depict disillusion with the American dream of self-betterment, wealth, and success through hard work and perseverance.
Benjamin Franklin (1706–1790): Printer, scientist, statesman, and author in the early 18th century, Franklin personified the American concept of the “self-made man,” particularly through his Autobiography. Franklin is particularly well known for his experiments in electricity; his launching of Poor Richard’s Almanac, the first American periodical; and his role in the Revolutionary War. His is the great American story of tireless achievement, assertion, and adult responsibility in the difficult arenas of business, government, and politics.

Sigmund Freud (1856–1938): The father of psychoanalysis, Freud articulated the concepts of the unconscious and infantile sexuality and repression and proposed a tripartite account of the mind’s structure, all as part of a then-radically new conceptual and therapeutic frame of reference for the understanding of human psychological development and the treatment of abnormal mental conditions. His conclusions affected the interpretation of much American literature during and after his lifetime.

Robert Frost (1874–1963): American poet who drew his images from the New England countryside and his language from New England speech. Although Frost’s images and voice often seem familiar and old, his observations have an edge of skepticism and irony that make his work, upon rereading, never as old-fashioned, easy, or carefree as it first appears. In its embodiment of both tradition and skepticism, Frost’s poetry helped provide a link between the American poetry of the 19th century and that of the 20th century.

Margaret Fuller (1810–1850): A 19th-century feminist writer and one of the great radical women among the Transcendentalists. Fuller was a journalist and edited Dial Magazine, working closely with Ralph Waldo Emerson. Nathaniel Hawthorne may have modeled aspects of Hester Prynne’s character in The Scarlet Letter on Fuller.

Charlotte Perkins Gilman (1860–1935): American feminist and writer, best known for her book Women and Economics (1898), which has become a feminist classic. She was born Charlotte Anna Perkins in Hartford, Connecticut. She was educated at the Rhode Island School of Design and worked as a teacher and commercial artist before devoting herself to feminism.

Nathaniel Hawthorne (1804–1862): American novelist whose works are deeply concerned with the ethical problems of sin, punishment, and atonement. Hawthorne is considered America’s first great classical writer and is particularly known for his novel The Scarlet Letter.

Ernest Hemingway (1899–1961): American novelist and short-story writer, whose style is brisk, terse, cleansed of adjectives, seemingly objective, and aimed at rendering the precise moment and feeling of experience. Hemingway’s writings and his personal life exerted a profound influence on American writers of his time; in fact, Hemingway is usually considered one of the two greatest American novelists of his era (the other being William Faulkner). Many of his works are regarded as classics of American literature.

Thomas Wentworth Higginson (1823–1911): Unitarian minister, abolitionist, and well-known 19th-century literary critic with whom poet Emily Dickinson exchanged letters seeking critiques of her poems.

Washington Irving (1783–1859): Often called the father of the American short story, Irving is best known for two stories: “The Legend of Sleepy Hollow” and “Rip Van Winkle.” His work is considered to precede early writings of the great Transcendentalists—Emerson, Thoreau, and Hawthorne.

Henry James (1843–1916): American expatriate writer whose masterly fiction juxtaposed American innocence and European experience in a series of intense, psychologically complex works. James’s work is characterized by leisurely pacing and subtle delineation of character rather than by dramatic incidents or complicated plots. His major writings, highly sensitive examples of the objective psychological novel, deal with the world of leisure and sophistication he had grown to know intimately in Europe.

Toussaint L’Ouverture (1743–1803): Haitian general, now known as “the Precursor,” and leader of the Haitian slave revolt, a 1791 black slave uprising against the French colonial regime. After France abolished slavery in the territory in 1794, Toussaint supported the French rulers of the country against British invaders and was made a general in 1795. In 1801, he succeeded, after many struggles, in liberating Saint-Domingue from French control and became president-for-life of a new republic.

Herman Melville (1819–1891): American novelist and major literary figure whose exploration of psychological and metaphysical themes foreshadowed 20th-century literary concerns. His works remained in obscurity until the 1920s, when his genius was finally recognized.
Arthur Miller (1915–): American dramatist whose works are concerned with the responsibility of each individual to other members of society. Simply and colloquially written, Miller’s plays spring from his social conscience and from his compassion for those who are vulnerable to the false values imposed on them by society.

Toni Morrison (1931–): American writer whose works deal with the black experience and celebrate the black community. Morrison’s work features mythic elements, sharp observation, compassion, and poetic language and is often concerned with the relationship between the individual and society. In 1993, she won the Nobel Prize in literature.

Eugene O’Neill (1888–1953): American playwright whose work dramatizes the plight of people driven by elemental passions, by memory and dream, and by an awareness of the forces that threaten to overwhelm them. His early plays (1916–1920) helped initiate American theater’s shift away from elegant parlor dramas and toward gritty naturalistic plays.

Edgar Allan Poe (1809–1849): Best known for his poems and short fiction, Poe is credited with transforming the short story from anecdote to art. He virtually created the detective story and perfected the psychological thriller. He also produced some of the most influential literary criticism of his time—the important theoretical statements on poetry and the short story.

Sir Walter Scott (1771–1832): Scottish novelist and poet considered to be the creator of the historical and the regional novel. He may have influenced the works of Nathaniel Hawthorne.

John Steinbeck (1902–1968): American writer and Nobel laureate, who described in his work the unremitting struggle of people who depend on the soil for their livelihood. Steinbeck’s novels can all be classified as social novels dealing with the economic problems of rural labor, but there is also a streak of worship of the soil in his books, which does not always agree with his matter-of-fact sociological approach.

Wallace Stevens (1879–1955): American poet whose works deal mainly with the individual’s interaction with the outside world. Stevens used sensuous, elaborate imagery and elevated, precise word choice to express subtle philosophical themes. He frequently contrasted the bleakness and monotony of modern industrialized life with the richness of nature.

Harriet Beecher Stowe (1811–1896): American author most famous for her anti-slavery novel, *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, one of the most influential American texts written by either man or woman and, possibly, the first American social protest novel.

Henry David Thoreau (1817–1862): American essayist, poet, and practical philosopher, renowned for having lived the doctrines of Transcendentalism, as recorded in his masterwork, *Walden*, and for having been a vigorous advocate of civil liberties, as evidenced in the essay “Civil Disobedience.”

Lionel Trilling (1905–1975): American educator and influential literary critic. For most of his career, Trilling taught at Columbia University. In his books, he used psychological and sociological methods to elucidate cultural values. One of his major concerns was the relationship between the self and society. Trilling paid homage to poet Robert Frost on Frost’s 85th birthday.

Nat Turner (1800–1831): American slave and leader of a black slave revolt in 1831. As a result of Nat Turner’s revolt, southern legislatures imposed stricter control on slaves, and the movement to abolish slavery, which had previously enjoyed some support in the South, became a northern phenomenon.

Mark Twain (1835–1910): Pen name for Samuel Langhorne Clemens, American writer and humorist, whose best work is characterized by broad, often irreverent humor or biting social satire. Twain’s writing is also known for realism of place and language, memorable characters, and hatred of hypocrisy and oppression.

Vincent Van Gogh (1853–1890): Dutch Post-Impressionist painter, generally considered the greatest Dutch painter and draughtsman after Rembrandt. He powerfully influenced the current of Expressionism in modern art. Among his masterpieces are numerous self-portraits and the well-known “Starry Night.” An admirer of Whitman, Van Gogh corresponded with the American poet.

Booker T. Washington (1856–1915): American educator who urged blacks to attempt to uplift themselves through educational attainments and economic advancement.
Walt Whitman (1819–1892): American poet whose work boldly asserts the worth of the individual and the oneness of all humanity. Whitman’s defiant break with traditional poetic concerns and style exerted a major influence on American thought and literature.

Tennessee Williams (1911–1983): American playwright and two-time Pulitzer Prize winner, whose works are set largely in the American South. As a playwright, fiction writer, poet, and essayist, Williams helped transform the contemporary idea of Southern literature. He not only paved the way for other writers but also helped the South find a strong voice, where before it had been heard only as a whisper.
Comprehensive Bibliography


Classics of American Literature
Part II

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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 master's and 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 include research grants from the American Council of Learned Societies and the National Endowment for the Humanities. 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 an NEH-funded program in great books. In 1995 he was named Brown University's best teacher in the humanities. He is the recipient of a National Endowment for the Humanities Award for University Teachers for 1998-99 for his work in literature and medicine.

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Lecture 13

Nathaniel Hawthorne and the American Past

Scope:  Hawthorne is our first great classic, from all perspectives—that of his 19th-century contemporaries and of today as well. Henry James considered *The Scarlet Letter* to be the first major work of the New World, worthy of entering the ranks of European literature, and posterity has agreed. Yet Hawthorne is strangely against the times. His relentless obsession with the sins of the past, those of his own ancestors in the Salem witch trials, and those of the young republic, stands in strong contrast to the cheery optimism and progressivist thinking of Jacksonian America. Hawthorne's collection of *Twice-Told Tales* (1837) shows us a writer wrestling with the image of America, determined to reveal the ironies and ambiguities of the Puritan "errand in the wilderness," the pious manner in which New England chose to view itself. In *The Scarlet Letter*, Hawthorne bequeaths to us the richest image we have of the Puritan mind, a mind obsessed with spiritual salvation as it coexists with human happiness and the life of the community. Yet this retrospective look into the past is inextricably of its own mid-19th-century moment: concerned with political dissent, with the failure of Revolution in Europe, with the problematic role of a strong woman in a repressive culture. Hawthorne's book captures, as no other American text does, the high political drama of freedom and revolt, but it highlights even more powerfully the processes of interpretation and analysis, the ways by which we read the heart and come to knowledge.

Beginning with a look at Hawthorne's literary reputation and his biography, we will examine several of his most famous short stories from *Twice-Told Tales*. We will see that Hawthorne's title is literal: he wants us to reconceive, to reimagine the tales of the past, from the Puritan settlements in Massachusetts up to the Revolution itself. This process of reconfiguring the past opens up those closed precincts and makes us grasp—from both the inside and the outside—the drama of sin and salvation, a drama highlighted in "Young Goodman Brown" and "The Minister's Black Veil." We will close this lecture with the remarkable "My Kinsman, Major Molineux," in which the coming Revolution, the well-nigh Oedipal break with the father country, is explored in terms of carnival and coming-of-age. We close our account of Hawthorne with an investigation of his strangest tale, "Wakefield," in which a man walks out of a marriage of ten years and then sets up camp a block away to observe the consequences for another twenty years. Here is a Hawthorne for our time, indeed.

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

1. Summarize the "typological" approach to history that Hawthorne adopts in his fiction,
2. Explain Hawthorne's complex attitude toward the moral rigor of his New England ancestors, and
3. Outline Hawthorne's ambivalence toward revolution as manifested in "My Kinsman, Major Molineux."

Outline

I.  Hawthorne comes to us as a double classic—a writer whose work has been a foundation for American literature in both his century and ours, even though those respective assessments are quite different.
   A.  The 19th-century estimate of Hawthorne was fully established a decade after his death in 1862 through the monograph written by Henry James. He is seen as the "romancer" of New England, and his elegant renditions of the past are a proud part of America's fledgling literature.
   B.  The Modernist revision of American literature, taking place in the early years of the 20th century, inverts many 19th-century judgments, but Hawthorne's significance remains intact.
      1.  Hawthorne is perhaps our most professional writer, but the darker, more anxious side of his work comes to the fore.
      2.  Hawthorne appears, in our day, as a special guide to the past, and we realize just how complex his vision of New England actually is.
II. Hawthorne's own early history is intimately connected with his deepening encounter with New England history.
   A. From 1821 to 1825, Hawthorne attended Bowdoin College and was a classmate of Franklin Pierce, who would later become President of the United States.
   B. After graduation, he spent ten years of solitary apprenticeship in Salem, essentially reading New England history.
   C. Hawthorne can be thought of as writing his way back into origins, electing the past as a richer source of literature than the bustling but "flat" present, seeking "shadows" and ramifications for the historical record he studied.
   D. In 1837 he published *Twice-Told Tales*, a deconstructive account of America, in which he ceaselessly suggests alternatives and questions about the popular notions of the American past.
      1. Hawthorne inherits the "typological" view of American history, by which all events can be read teleologically, in the light of God's divine plan.
      2. In Hawthorne's time, most historians looked at the movement from Great Settlement in the 17th century to Revolution in 1776 as nothing less than God's theocratic mission to continue the Protestant mission to the New World and expand God's kingdom.
      3. Hawthorne's project, however, is far more sophisticated and devious—he aims to illuminate Gallows Hill behind Bunker Hill, to expose the underside of Puritan beliefs and customs, and to contrast their moral rigor with the laxity of his own 19th-century moment.

III. *Twice-Told Tales*
   A. "Young Goodman Brown" represents the belief system of 17th-century America, but we will see that it is saturated with irony and questions.
      1. Brown goes prophetically into the forest, that natural realm that may well be the devil's kingdom. He sees evil everywhere—who, then, is of the "elect"?
      2. Hawthorne establishes no less than a sort of spiritual semiotics: Brown is convinced of his own status as elect, yet he now sees evil all around, even among the "best people." The tale raises the generic question: How does one know good or evil?
      3. Brown's ghostly companion may be responsible for the dreadful revelation of duplicity that he sees. Is this a dream? A vision? Is it credible or not?
      4. Brown's vision is dark: the community worships the devil, and every vestige of goodness and piety that he has known is now exposed as a sham.
      5. Hawthorne offers an essentially pre-Freudian vision of the Puritan perspective by neatly inverting or pirouetting the Puritans' absolutist moral standards, thus suggesting that all public life is a charade.
   B. "The Minister's Black Veil" is situated in an 18th-century Puritan setting, and it is even richer than "Young Goodman Brown" in its treatment of the Puritan moral code and its consequences.
      1. Reverend Hooper, the protagonist who elects one fine day to wear a black veil *permanently*, is said by critics to be modeled loosely on Jonathan Edwards, the great Puritan theologian.
      2. The power of the story derives from the extraordinary malaise caused by the black veil—what is the Reverend hiding? What is he saying?
      3. Once we take a step back, we realize that the donning of the veil is, for the engaged Hooper, a distinct exit from social/sexual life. Why?
      4. Hooper's dying words to the community leave this story right on our plate: we are always veiled, always in disguise, never transparent. The consequences of such a view are fascinating: personal life ceases, as does intimacy of any sort, but the great machine of interpretation is now humming. Hawthorne has found his "system."
   C. "My Kinsman, Major Molineux" moves into a still later phase of New England history, shortly before 1776.
      1. In this coming-of-age story, Robin the protagonist leaves family for Boston to seek the patronage of his powerful kinsman, Major Molineux, a British official. We will see the many layers of the initiation theme here.
2. Robin enters a mind-boggling 18th-century Boston: a mix of masquerade ball, carnival, hallucination, and joke. It is an "unreadable" world, often literally incoherent, and he cannot find his way or his kinsman.

3. Hawthorne's emphasis on theatricality is quite astounding: some great parade or event seems to be in the offing, with everyone playing roles that Robin cannot fathom. The reader is likewise in the dark.

4. Boston's great spectacle at last becomes clear: it is a version of killing the king, of expelling Molineux the Brit out of Boston, and doing it in the cruelest possible way: by tar and feather.

5. Laughter and cathartic release cap this denouement, and we are left uneasy with Hawthorne's ambivalence—his rousing support of the brash Americans who are routing their English officials, and his sympathy for the hounded Molineux and the confused Robin.

6. Hawthorne has written a national parable of coming-of-age, of the coming Revolution, and he has made us grasp it as an Oedipal struggle, an explosion of complex feelings that is quite different than the one-liners offered in history books.
Lecture 14

The Scarlet Letter: Puritan Romance

Scope: Hawthorne's novel opens with the exit of a young woman from prison in 1640s Boston with an infant at her breast, facing the scrutiny of the Puritan crowd, among whom are her secret lover, the minister, and her no-less-secret husband, the doctor. It would be hard to imagine a scene richer in tensions and stresses: Puritan moral severity, the dynamics of adultery as crime-and-punishment, the impact of secrecy and guilt, the fate of the woman who transgresses, and the dim prospects for the child. Hawthorne explores each of these issues, makes us see their narrative (as well as ethical) dimensions, and succeeds in telling his 17th-century story in fresh, riddling fashion, defying our own efforts to interpret these events with finality.

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

1. Summarize how Hawthorne establishes the conflict between individual and society in The Scarlet Letter,
2. Describe the standard 19th-century assessment of the Puritan "founding fathers," and
3. Explain how The Scarlet Letter is, though rooted in history, a transhistorical text.

Outline

I. The Scarlet Letter is simply the first great American novel, with a unique power and brilliance.
   A. Henry James' tribute, hedged though it is by James' own "competition" with Hawthorne, grants world-class status to Hawthorne's book.
   B. Even within this historical setting, Hawthorne centers his story on the individual vs. society, the archetypal American theme that will be at the core of American literature in the centuries ahead.
      1. Hawthorne's powerful opening paragraph is a masterpiece of bristling situations, mysterious concealed relationships, and varieties of "the gaze," all calculated to bring the reader into the text, to inaugurate the process of interpretation.
      2. The opening scene is notable, as well, for its canny mix of moral and visual elements and its detailed description of a long-ago world, seasoned with the moral passion that brought that world alive.

II. We may well ask the question: Why the Puritan setting? Is Hawthorne following in the footsteps of Walter Scott, creator of the historical novel?
   A. Hawthorne's personal background complicates any answer we might give here.
      1. Hawthorne's ancestor, John Hawthorne, officiated at a number of the infamous witch trials of 1692, and there is a clear element of penance in this book. Yet it is complicated by Hawthorne's genuine regard for the rectitude and granite nature of these magistrates and their world.
      2. Hawthorne's study of early American history, conducted during his years after college, gave him the "facts." What interested him later, he wrote, were their multiple meanings.
      3. Hawthorne doubtless turned back to the Puritan past because of his need for historical "density," for an earlier America of moral fiber and odd picturesqueness. All this contrasts with the insufferably pragmatic, businesslike, and practical America of his day.
      4. The "flatness" of mid-19th-century America was a constant impediment for Hawthorne the writer, and we can see his retreat into "romance" as a reaction against the inhospitable world in which he lived.
   B. The Puritans were seen as America's "Founding Fathers" in ways that we need to understand. Nothing less than a sacred view of history was at hand.
      1. The Great Migration, which brought the Puritans (and the Pilgrims) from England to America in the 17th century, was seen as part of a divine plan.
      2. New England became the home for Protestantism (after England failed), and it was here that the true New World was to be established.
      3. Nineteenth-century historians viewed the Puritans as the heroic model that accounted for America's progress, in matters of religion but no less crucially in all areas of social and political culture.
4. The New England legacy, then, represented God's mission for America, and historians traced a clear line of development between the Puritan settlement and the American Revolution.

5. Renowned traveler Alexis de Tocqueville confirmed the uniqueness of the legacy of American Puritanism.

C. In writing this book, Hawthorne was responding to the call for historical fiction, the need for a literature that illuminated our national origins.

D. The moral rigor of the Puritans is what both attracted and repelled Hawthorne, and we can feel his ambivalence throughout the novel.

1. As we see on the opening page, the prison represents the center of Puritan life.

2. Intolerance and severity would appear to characterize the Puritan attitude, especially when one imagines how it looked in mid-19th century.

3. Hester Prynne is presented as an exemplary victim of this severe culture, and Hawthorne is out to measure both the political and the psychological dimensions of the "law."

4. Hawthorne's subject turns out to be punishment and guilt, not passion. When we compare The Scarlet Letter with other famous 19th-century novels about adultery, such as Madame Bovary, Anna Karenina, and Effi Briest, we can gauge how unusual Hawthorne's perspective is.

5. Dimmesdale's suffering and introspection is the counterpart to Hester's public shame; Hawthorne examines both sides of the coin.

6. One of the book's most remarkable features is the presentation of Pearl as the literal embodiment of her mother's sin.

7. Hawthorne makes us see that this Puritan community possesses a number of unwanted New England citizens, including Satan, witches, and the black man. We are made aware of the complexity of the Puritan project and the number of threats that it both imagined and encountered.

8. The New England Errand into the Wilderness is present even in the book's plot, as we see in marginal references to Apostle Eliot, who sought to convert Indians to the faith.

9. Hawthorne's moral theme—the absolutism of conscience, the ineffaceable results of transgression—is beautifully expressed in his image of "the ruined wall." This unbending ethical view frightens Hawthorne by its intransigence and harshness, but it has a kind of integrity that is utterly lacking in his own historical moment.

III. Hawthorne is ultimately less a historian than a romancer; i.e, he is at pains to present the past in multicolored fashion, to represent his austere Puritan world with innuendo and asides.

A. The vista of this novel thus goes beyond Puritanism.

1. The very first vision of Hester Prynne with the infant Pearl is pointedly compared to the Virgin Mary and the infant Jesus, so that we immediately sense, in the narration itself, a Catholic presence that counterpoints the Puritan one.

2. Some of the book's funniest scenes (yes, funniest) show the Puritans undressed, routed, and less than ceremonious.

3. At the book's close, we witness a marvelous spectacle of 17th-century Boston, a multicultural Boston with people of many colors and persuasions.

B. Hawthorne's perspectival art is perhaps what we most remember, and what most typifies his kind of romance.

1. At every juncture of the story where the supernatural enters, Hawthorne presents to us a batch of competing theories; he thus covers his bets and leaves us to decide which to believe.

2. Hawthorne's liberties (and games) are most conspicuous in his treatment of witches and devils.

C. The larger gambit of The Scarlet Letter is transhistorical. It involves the high drama of interpretation and the burning issues of political dissent—in 1650, in 1850, and today.
Scope: Hawthorne's letter "A" is the most famous and potent hieroglyph in American literature. We recognize its obvious symbolism of adultery, but Hawthorne's "A" goes on to include "able," "angel," and "art." Hawthorne has grasped the enormity of "interpretation" as a praxis at once personal, cultural, and artistic; thus, the community's ongoing analysis of Hester Prynne is juxtaposed to the far more grueling and damaging scrutiny of Dimmesdale the lover by Chillingworth the husband. In this study of secrecy and violation, painted by Hawthorne in colors considered both satanic and medical, we encounter the novel's deepest commentary on knowledge and utterance.

Objectives—Upon completion of this course, you should be able to
1. Give examples of how the notorious "A" in The Scarlet Letter might be variously interpreted,
2. Explain how The Scarlet Letter portrays the relationship between truth and perspective, and
3. Summarize how the theme of concealment plays a major role in the novel.

Outline
I. The most potent hieroglyph in American fiction is doubtless Hawthorne's "A." This book prophetically centralizes the issue of signs, and no small part of Hawthorne's achievement lies in the domestic character of such activity. Hester Prynne wears an "A" that she herself, seamstress extraordinaire, has embroidered. Hawthorne shows us a culture that is strangely graphic, expressing itself in letters and codes that demand interpretation.

A. Adultery is, of course, the most obvious meaning of Hester's sign, but even here Hawthorne expands our sense of what it can mean to live "branded."
   1. Hester is treated by the community—and by herself—as the living symbol of moral transgression, and she advertises this every day of her life.
   2. Pearl, the illegitimate daughter, is presented as the literal embodiment, the incarnation, of Hester's sin. Therefore, she can be seen as the real "A"—the real symbolism—in the text.

B. Art is distinctly offered as a second meaning of the "A." This sober and severe book is also lavish in its way, presenting the Puritans themselves as a richer, more sensuous community in dress and custom than we may realize. Hester has two key roles here: embellishment and typology.
   1. Hester, as a single mother, can gain her living only by her needlework, and the Puritan community encourages this particular skill.
   2. Hester the seamstress presides, in some strange way, over the community's rituals of birth and death. She fashion the clothing of mourning—the shrouds for the dead—and she also produces the fine linens for the babies of the community.
   3. Looking unmistakably like a surrogate for the author himself, Hester functions as the community artist, the form-giver whose professional skill is revered, whatever her moral transgressions may be. Yet, significantly, she is not asked to sew clothing for brides.

C. Able is still another key meaning of the "A." Here we see the plot thicken because this moral cluster is obviously at direct odds with the surface meaning of Hester's label.
   1. Hester is presented as the community's sister of mercy, and it is her own suffering that trains her for the job.
   2. The "A" serves, in a wonderful irony, as Hester's passport, as her entry into all scenes of sorrow and distress, as her title of excellence, so that, far from being ostracized by her "fall," she is strangely sanctified by it.

D. Hester's "A" functions, then, as the object of the gaze, and Hawthorne fully exploits this concept of spectacle, of a human being on stage and under scrutiny, as a human being "read" by the community.
At times, Hester experiences her "A" as a burning wound, and we shall see how far Hawthorne goes in this direction.  
At other times, it is no less than an infernal fire, with quasi-medical connotations.  
In some of the most interesting passages, we see Hawthorne creating something of a thermal map, whereby Hester's "A" sensitizes her to "burning" and pain elsewhere in the community. It gives her a vision that others do not have.  
E. As a literary device, the 'A' is the burning emblem of art, of Hawthorne's own art.  
   1. In the prefatory first chapter, Hawthorne recounts the way he "found" the allegedly real "A" in the Customs House, thereby creating the "germ" for his novel.  
   2. His finding of the "A" is a magic moment, when the teller meets the tale, when the 19th-century author comes into physical contact with his still-living 17th-century materials.  
   3. Angel, the last "reading" of the "A," lights up the heavens themselves and is presented as no less than the illumination of our dark world.  
II. The aesthetics and ethics of interpretation are Hawthorne's central business in this novel.  
   A. The Puritans are presented as a more generous interpretive community than is commonly thought.  
   B. Hawthorne's perspectival art offers to us a virtual parade of perceptions and interpretations of events.  
   C. Roger Chillingworth, Hester's disguised and jealous husband, epitomizes the virtually lethal work of interpretation; he is the satanic analyst.  
      1. The text presents him emblematically as an intellectual snake, with Biblical overtones.  
      2. In still another epithet, he is referred to as the leech, but we also note that his position is not unlike that of the writer.  
      3. Secrets/disease/infection constitute a rich cluster of associations in this text, which always links the psychological to the somatic.  
      4. One of Chillingworth's most interesting features is his work as doctor who has learned the secrets of the Indians; he is, for us today, a practitioner of alternative medicine.  
      5. Chillingworth's great aim is the satanic project of possession, the peering into the soul of another. Don't novelists do just that?  
      6. In one of the novel's richest scenes, Chillingworth "examines" the sleeping Dimmesdale, and he espies The Promised Land in Hawthorne's cartography.  
      7. Hawthorne's moral injunctions set in as he labels Chillingworth's violation "the Unforgivable Sin," but the project of art requires such violations.  
III. In the treatment of Dimmesdale, we see Hawthorne's drama of concealment, a drama that perfectly counterpoints the public scrutiny of Hester Prynne.  
   A. Dimmesdale presents himself as the closed book; he keeps it "in."  
   B. Chillingworth's invasions are a virtual campaign to wring this secret (guilt) into the open.  
   C. The book ultimately offers a Freudian portrayal of concealment and repression. Hawthorne is fascinated with the impact of secrecy on the man who keeps the secret.  
   D. The novel is constantly, rewardingly moving toward utterance, but, at the same time, we must be attentive to its indirection.  
      1. Dimmesdale's sermons appear as displaced, therefore ironic, confessions of guilt.  
      2. Dimmesdale the eloquent minister seems to be seeking a language of pure sentience; this is one of Hawthorne's dreams.  
      3. Dimmesdale's crowning performance, the Election Day Speech, completes the verbal contract: to speak the heart. The community is moved.  
      4. The elaborate game of utterance and indirection that Hawthorne plays adds depth and interest to his view of the moral landscape as a symbolic one. Each moment of illumination is an epiphany and also an emblem, actualizing the Pauline view that we see through a glass darkly.
5. At its best and hottest, *The Scarlet Letter* casts a brilliant light on human affairs, makes us see the "letter" as precisely the sign of the spirit—this is the miracle of life in art.
Lecture 16

The Scarlet Letter:
Political Tract or Psychological Study?

Scope: Although the traditional reading of Hawthorne's book is a psychological one, there is much evidence that Hester Prynne's development reflects a number of burning political and ethical conflicts of the mid-19th century: the women's movement, the threat of anarchy and revolution, and the nature of dissent. If Hester represents a cluster of ideological issues, Dimmesdale seems a virtual portrait of neurosis and ghostliness, Hawthorne's supreme example of inauthenticity. Finally, The Scarlet Letter asks us to think about the future, about Hester's willing return to both Boston and the "A," and about Pearl's remarkable career as an American princess living in Europe.

Objectives—Upon completion of this lecture, you should be able to
1. Describe how Hester Prynne embodied some of the hopes—and fears—of the mid-19th century,
2. Explain Dimmesdale's role as a "ghost" in The Scarlet Letter, and
3. Summarize how Pearl embodies the idea of the "self-created" American.

Outline

I. Hester Prynne is Hawthorne's great portrait of a radical.
   A. Revisit the opening page, and you see the classic American conflict between rebellious individual and repressive community.
   B. Hawthorne presents Hester's endowments as rich, passionate, and even heroic.
   C. Her experience at the margin of society constitutes the political education of the novel.
      1. Living in the margin grants her the distance to judge what she sees and to understand that what she sees has been orchestrated by the community.
      2. Hester's remarkable "freedom of speculation" gives rise to the boldest, most revolutionary perceptions of the novel; we must place this within Hawthorne's historical moment.
      3. The European revolutions of 1848—anarchy, revolution, and socialism—are inevitably on the minds of thinking people in mid-19th-century America.
      4. Feminism, in particular, which is heating up in America in Hawthorne's time, is fearfully seen as a threat to "family values."
      5. Hester may legitimately be seen as the feminist rebel; moreover, she has "sisters" in Hawthorne's other work, as if he were hypnotically attached to the strong, sexual, rebellious, and anarchic woman.
      6. The "moral wilderness" is Hawthorne's notation for nature in this text, but he is also committed to the passions that come from this outlawed territory.
      7. The most beautiful scene in the novel describes the reunion between Hester and Dimmesdale in the forest; it is the book's most powerful declaration of independence.
      8. Nature's cooperation is enlisted on the side of sexual and moral freedom; yet we cannot miss the narrator's disapproval.
      9. Hawthorne is true to his contradiction, his impossible dream of freedom. "The ruined wall" is his tragic view of human daring.

II. Arthur Dimmesdale is among Hawthorne's most interesting case studies in guilt and neurosis.
   A. Dimmesdale is presented as dying from the beginning; we "know" this novel cannot end well.
   B. What about Dimmesdale's passion?
      1. Dimmesdale's behavior is fascinating in the displacements Hawthorne sketches, the circuitous route that libido takes.
2. "The minister in a maze" is Hawthorne's famous (and hilarious) chapter depicting the "freed" Dimmesdale.

C. Dimmesdale is most convincing to us as ghost, as embodiment of Hawthorne's own worst fears.
   1. Inauthenticity and role-playing characterize Dimmesdale's behavior at every turn. What is the impact?
   2. Is it possible, Hawthorne is asking, to lose the self altogether?

D. Dimmesdale is also the text's mad egoist: "the disease in his own eye" causes him to see the world according to his own malady.

III. Conclusions to draw from *The Scarlet Letter*

A. Hester Prynne's career is exemplary and rich in lessons, from dissent to community via suffering.

B. Arthur Dimmesdale's fate is no less exemplary: he is burned up by guilt.

C. We close with the future: the child Pearl, who succeeds in exiting.
   1. Pearl prefigures the Jamesian heiress who takes over Europe.
   2. Pearl outruns the moral strictures of the community; she is the little pagan who cannot be domesticated.
   3. Pearl, the creature without origins, enacts the book's call for freedom.
   4. Pearl, whose career is only sketched, may well be the self-created American hero of the future.
Lecture 17

Hawthorne Our Contemporary

Scope: Hawthorne has often been misconstrued as a quaint writer of romances, embroidering on the past. The truth is that he is the first American writer to brood on the past, the personal and the historical past. As such, he announces the great dark novels of Faulkner and a host of Southern authors who wrestle with family, determinism, and doom. As an unflinching and exploratory moralist, Hawthorne also creates the literature of New England, later embodied in writers such as Cheever, Lowell, and Gaddis. It is as "ghostwriter," however, that Hawthorne illuminates the great American theme of the "self" as empty, riddling, and constructed. In his haunting, sparse tale, "Wakefield," he gives us a parable for our time.

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

1. Explain Hawthorne's role as a seminal figure in American literature of the 19th and 20th centuries,
2. Summarize how the themes of "Wakefield" make it Hawthorne's most modern story, and
3. Explain the classically American parallels between "Wakefield" and Irving's "Rip Van Winkle."

Outline

I. Hawthorne's influence is enormous, far more potent than we might believe.
   A. He is, for his contemporaries, a seminal figure.
      1. Without Hawthorne, there would be no Moby-Dick, no "Bartleby." Melville's encounter with Hawthorne was the great catalyst for the sea writer; in Hawthorne he discovered "the power of blackness."
      2. Henry James is the inheritor: ghosts, repression, and voyeurism loom large in his novels and tales, and we know where they come from.
   B. Further afield, Hawthorne may be thought of as the "father" of Faulkner, despite the different tonalities of New England and the South.
      1. In Light in August, Hightower is strikingly Hawthornian—impotent, manic, and haunted by the past.
      2. Absalom, Absalom, Faulkner's masterpiece about the Civil War, takes its cues from both Poe and Hawthorne, reconceiving America's haunted house as a national symbol.
   C. Hawthorne inspires the Southern contingent of writers who follow Faulkner in dealing with the obsessive past and the spell of ghosts: McCullers, O'Connor, Welty, and Warren.
   D. Hawthorne's severe tales of conscience and consciousness are everywhere in our New England literature; in Cheever, Updike, Lowell, and Gaddis, Puritans live!

II. Yet "Wakefield," sparse and underrecognized, is a candidate for Hawthorne's most modern story.
   A. In nine pages, Hawthorne tells a story of exit, vigil, and reentry. The brevity is stunning; we are still filling in the blanks.
   B. Despite the story's mystery, Hawthorne's moral seems clear: Wakefield, leaving his wife and hearth, becomes the outcast of the universe.
   C. Wakefield is the Invisible Man of the 19th century—nondescript, phlegmatic, and forgettable.
   D. Why does Wakefield leave?
      1. One modern answer would be—mid-life crisis? But why set up house a block away?
      2. Leaving your wife for twenty years, to spy on her, seems a sadistic trick. No?
      3. A weird love story? Maybe not; it has been argued that Wakefield shows us how loving transcends distance and time.
      4. Hawthorne's story of observation is most interestingly seen, not as a story of Wakefield and wife, but of Wakefield and self, as a form of self-possession.
5. Hawthorne is asking the great question of how to appropriate one's own figure in life. Can any of us do it? Is self-possession possible?

6. Hawthorne's tale posits a severe law: we must exit life to enter it; we must vacate our own premises if we are to inventory them. We are "other" to ourselves.

7. Wakefield's progeny in modern literature are numerous: Proust, Joyce, Kafka, Borges, and Lacan. They are all committed to mapping the whereabouts of self.

8. In one sense, this story is a retelling of "Rip Van Winkle." Wakefield is no Puritan, but he is indeed an early avatar of the self-imaging man.

**Readings:**


**Topics for Further Consideration:**

1. Explain how Hawthorne reconceives the American past in his *Twice-Told Tales*.

2. Summarize what *The Scarlet Letter* has to teach us about both the value and the practice of interpretation.
Lecture 18

Herman Melville and the Making of Moby-Dick

Scope: Melville comes to us today as the unquestionable giant of the 19th century, with Moby-Dick as his most towering creation. Yet most 19th-century readers would have been stunned by this valuation, given the near total eclipse of Melville's reputation after the publication of his masterpiece in 1851. Moby-Dick is surely a book more praised than read, as several generations of students have experienced; moreover, in an ideological climate concerned with issues of race, class, and gender, the fishing story may well appear suspect or void of interest. Nonetheless, here is the Leviathan of American literature. Everything conspires together here to produce magic: Melville's fateful, inspiring encounter with Hawthorne; the brilliant borrowings from Shakespeare and the Bible; the adventure yarn; the encyclopedic knowledge of whaling in the 19th century; and, perhaps most importantly and least recognized, the prodigious capacity to move from physics to metaphysics, to actualize Emerson's view of "facts" as signs of "spirit." This story of men on a boat chasing a whale becomes an epic of the human soul and a meditation on man's place in the universe. And, yet, Melville is more than Moby-Dick. In particular, his two stories of the 1850s, "Bartleby" and "Benito Cereno," are ultimately more prophetic in character than the whaling novel. The story of Bartleby, the Wall Street scrivener who "would prefer not to" is now part of our intellectual landscape. But the less known "Benito Cereno," the story of an American sea captain's misadventures in strange waters, speaks no less insistently to us, today as well as a century and a half ago, about power of all stripes—military, black, artistic.

There is a Melville curve. His career began with largely autobiographical, well-received adventure stories about his experiences as a sailor in the South Seas, but each successive narrative was more ambitious, more philosophical. Then came the encounter with Hawthorne, both the man and the work, and a new sense of spiritual quest and moral complexity came to Melville, leaving its impact on the whaling book. Ishmael, Melville's jaunty, spicy narrator, ushers us into the strange world of a whaling boat, and we witness the "boosting power" of Melville's language and imagination, his uncanny talent for making us see beyond the picturesque surface into the depths beyond.

Objectives—Upon completion of this lecture, you should be able to
1. Summarize the nature—and consequences—of the deep bond that developed between Melville and Hawthorne,
2. Explain the relationship between Ishmael and Ahab that drives the narration of Moby-Dick, and
3. Summarize the ways in which Melville's democratic idealism are revealed in his depiction of the Pequod.

Outline
I. Melville's career begins with easy, early recognition and evolves into tragic anonymity.
   A. Melville's books of the 1840s were all based, in varying degrees, on his extensive sailing experiences.
   B. Typee was Melville's first book, and it was a popular success, creating, for better or for worse, an image of Melville in the mind of the public.
      1. Melville's account of life in the South Seas, among exotic natives, is a Rousseauist tract about the virtues of nature vs. the artifice of civilization.
      2. From Typee, Melville was to become known, in his own words, as "the man who lived among cannibals"; given the philosophical agendas of his later work, this reputation pained Melville enormously.
   C. After Typee, Melville published a series of increasingly ambitious sea stories, from Mardi to White Jacket.
II. *Moby-Dick*, published in 1851, is recognizably in the same vein, and yet prodigiously "other," defying any comfortable label. In it we see an author step right off the literary map and create something so new that it has no followers.

A. The original design of *Moby-Dick* made sense within the romantic tradition.
   1. Melville wanted to write a romantic text on the whale fishery, giving much exotic information, derived from encyclopedias and world literature.
   2. The characters were to be colorful and picturesque, including the Byronic captain of the whaling ship.

B. Melville's encounter with Hawthorne, in print (1850) and in person (1851), was a crucible experience, out of which a new writer and thinker emerged.
   1. The power of blackness is the Hawthorne trait that Melville cites in his article, "Hawthorne and His Mosses," and it points to a darkening, more speculative vision in Melville himself, as if he were discovering that fiction can be layered and can point to the abyss beneath the picturesque surface.
   2. The meeting with Hawthorne provokes in Melville a metaphysical plunge, an unleashing of language and vision that helps him use the material world as a springboard.
   3. Melville's passionate letters to the coolish Hawthorne imply a closeness that is more than literary, as if Melville at last found a soul brother, someone who could fully understand him. From all records, Hawthorne could not and did not reciprocate this relationship entirely. Their association reflects the homoerotic, fraternal themes that are common in Melville's work.

C. The emergence of Ahab as titanic figure owes everything to the Hawthorne encounter.
   1. Ahab, based on the arrogant Biblical king, is the novel's philosophical adventurer, the man who turns a sea story into a spiritual epic.

D. The narrative dynamics of the novel obey classical rules as to how a great central figure can be rendered through storytelling.
   1. Ishmael's job, therefore, is to render Ahab; given Ahab's outsized ambitions, this narrative task may not be possible, and much of the book's mystery stems from this incommensurateness.
   2. Ishmael himself is one of Melville's great successes. His jauntiness, his verbal flair, his generosity, and his spunk give the novel a remarkable freshness and brashness; he is also related to the "b'hoy" tradition that resurfaces in Whitman.

E. For his landlocked readers, Melville presents details about a unique life on a whaling ship, the Pequod.
   1. Melville emphasizes the democratic coloration of the boat's crew and calls it an "Anarchis Clootz delegation," an allusion to the French Revolution.

F. The "encounter" of Queequeg and Ishmael typifies Melville's democratic idealism.
   1. In the depiction of the exotic Queequeg sharing a life (and a bed) with Ishmael, we see Melville's mix of exoticism and fraternalism.
   2. Melville exploits the communal model with brilliance in a decidedly multicultural vein.
   3. The bond between Ishmael and Queequeg is presented essentially as an amorous brotherhood, and those critics on the lookout for homoeroticism in Melville are drawn powerfully to this relationship.
   4. Life—on the boat and in the larger world—is to be understood as "monkey rope bonds," a system of linkages that binds us all.
   5. Queequeg's final development is larded with metaphysical overtones, going even beyond his "fraternal" role. The two men are twins, are "married," are bonded; yet, at the same time, they're also interdependent.

G. Melville's organic language and metaphors constitute much of the novel's claim to greatness. No other writer can match his ability to play out the dimensions of thought and language, moving effortlessly from one sphere to another.
   1. The ever-growing text exemplifies the notion of "organicist" art that is so dear to Romanticism and Emerson.
   2. The genius for metaphor, for linking disparate areas together, is on show everywhere.
      a. Sometimes, Melville links physical and mental aspects together in a striking figure.
b. At other times, Melville unpacks his own colorful slogans, such as the "fast fish/loose fish" categories of thought.
Lecture 19

The Biggest Fish Story of Them All

Scope: Melville's original title is *Moby-Dick, or, The Whale*, and it can be argued that the whale, in a generic sense, is the chief protagonist of this book. In the 19th century, whaling was a huge industry, with America dominating the international scene. Much old-fashioned pride in the U.S. of A. enters this story, and we will never see Nantucket or New Bedford in quite the same way again. Above all, Melville has done real homework, and his disquisitions on cetology, as well as on the literary and mythic fame of whales, endow the central "object" of this book with legendary status. Melville's ultimate topic, like that of Fitzgerald in the 1920s, is "greatness," and his depictions of whales at sea set the stage for spellbinding passages on the dimensions of the soul and the whereabouts of truth.

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

1. Summarize how Melville presents the colonial endeavor of American commercialism,
2. Give examples of legendary sources Melville uses in his depiction of the whale, and
3. Explain how Melville employs the Christian stories of paradise and "the fall" in what is ostensibly an adventure story.

Outline

I. Whaling was a huge industry in the 19th century.
   A. When we remember that petroleum was not discovered until 1859, we realize the importance of whale oil. In 1844, $120 million was tied up in whaling.
   B. Whaling was especially significant in the American economy in the middle of the 19th century, when the industry was competing with textiles.
   C. Whaling finally became America-dominated, and considerable national pride is evident in Melville's depictions.

II. Melville's emphasis on indigenous American achievements is central to his project of fashioning an American epic.
   A. National pride is sounded again and again, in Melville's poetry of democracy, his homage to the great American promise. He contrasts American democracy with the hierarchy of Europe.
   B. Melville also presents a new American hero: the Nantucketer.
      1. The Nantucketer is different from familiar examples of colonial character.
      2. Homespun in his manners, he is nonetheless ruler of the sea, hence royalty in his own way. He is a kind of otherworldly being.
      3. Melville's lyricism virtually explodes in these celebrations of "locals," and in them he creates a new kind of American stature, a new kind of colonizer.
   C. The overarching novelty of the book is its new subject: the whale.
      2. Whales, thought perhaps to be "just big fish" in the eyes of many modern readers, are a more dignified topic than one may think.
      3. Melville's encyclopedic homework for this book is amazing: he conducted extensive research in cetology, and you have to work through the whale, from A to Z. Even the whale's tail merits extensive commentary.
      4. The whale is also a creature of legend, and Melville gets great mileage here from St. George, Hercules, and Vishnu.
      5. Whales—the intimates of heroes, prophets, and gods—turn out to be a splendid choice on Melville's part, for their story has not been told.
D. The whale is Melville's candidate for grandeur; the new country will have its epic.
   1. Melville makes good on his question: Who has a pedigree like a whale? All of history comes into play.
   2. In Melville's strange cosmogony, we are to see that whales ruled the world, had absolute power, and were gods.
   3. Whales function, thus, in the 19th century, as the sphinx of the sea, the presiding animal-god that has witnessed all of creation.

III. Melville's book is an ongoing exploration of the depths, and his brilliance in transforming scenes into parables and epiphanies is unmatched.

A. The truth of the sea is its function as analog for man's soul: endless depths.

B. There is a yearning for peace that can be found through the sea. The book's philosophical and narrative thrust is through the great waters, on to some final ground; this is expressed as seeking the "insular Tahiti," an echo of paradise.

C. The quest for life and peace is imaged unforgettably in the encounter with the population of whales in their familial setting, "the Grand Armada." The nursing mothers are revealed in the transparent waters.

D. The sea-going story moves ever outward, yet it yearns ever homeward in a spiritual sense; hence the novel exudes a strong sense of "paradise lost."
Lecture 20

Ahab and the White Whale

Scope: In Ahab, Melville set out to create a tragic, indigenous American hero. Borrowing from the Old Testament and Shakespeare, Melville constructed Ahab as a mad, imperial figure, a modern Prometheus who is at war with the gods, a new Faust who insists on "striking through the mask." Ahab's "sultanism" constitutes a huge map of the human enterprise, and Melville charts its heights and depths in unforgettable ways. The most haunting note in this symphony is the vacating of self, the loss that inheres in such monstrous inflation. Thus, Ahab's "alter ego" in this text is the black cabin boy Pip, who falls into the sea, losing not his life but his self, and then returns to keep Ahab company.

Objectives—Upon completion of this lecture, you should be able to
1. Give examples of where Melville exults democratic culture in *Moby-Dick*,
2. Explain how Ahab comes to represent a perverse version of Emersonian man, and
3. Describe the symbiotic relationship between Pip and Ahab and explain how this contributes to the theme of fraternal bonding in the novel.

Outline

I. Melville's project was to construct for our new fledgling literature a tragic American hero.
   A. Melville chose to work with indigenous materials; he created a Quaker hero, a credible American product.
   C. Ahab's "sultanism" displays Melville's epic intention: to create, in a democratic culture, the equivalent of a king or god.
      1. Melville was committed to creating American stature and rank that is defined, not by class, but by morals and imagination.
      2. Using purely American materials, Melville set out to prove that tragedy is again possible.
      3. The Shakespearean note in *Moby-Dick*—the soliloquy, the heightened diction, the extravagant metaphors—gives this book a unique flavor. At times, however, there is a grandiose, histrionic rhetoric that usurps the story.

II. The book's plot is built on one basic conflict: Ahab vs. the whale.
   A. Ahab loses a leg to Moby-Dick; here is the wound that can never be healed.
   B. The revenge scenario that follows is worthy of Shakespeare in its reach.
      1. Body and soul blend together, are inseparable, in Ahab's plaint.
      2. Ahab blasts Moby-Dick as incarnation of evil and regards his task as that of a face-to-face encounter with evil.
      3. Is such a mission sacrilege? Men such as Starbuck pointedly ask this question in the text itself. Ahab suggests that the world is a fraud, an illusion.
   C. Ahab/Prometheus conducts a war with God; he is staking out the limits of human doing and human reach. Have we encountered an overreacher?
      1. "Striking through the mask" is Ahab's formulation, and the theatrical metaphor conveys Melville's sense of living among shadows and illusory surfaces. The corollary is that we can know reality only through an act of agency and violence.
      2. Melville gaudily decks out Ahab in satanic colors.
      3. But Melville is deeply American in this project of articulating a New Man; here is the Emersonian legacy with a vengeance.

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D. Melville stakes out, in his presentation of Ahab, a new territory of the soul, and the dimensionality of this book—separate from its length—is what we remember.

1. Melville proposes woe as the eternal core of the soul. This striking view warrants our consideration; if we dig deeply enough, we come onto woe.

2. We discover madness also, as if the "dig" itself toward the kingdom below were the very pulse of madness. Ahab presents an archeological depth of character.

3. Melville is at his most theatrical when he suggests that great passion and madness are a form of takeover, that the hostage self is eclipsed.

4. Melville carries this view of madness to its grisly conclusion in a view of marionette-like behavior: the vacated self has no authority left, as it gesticulates and acts in its mania.

5. The final loss of self is shown in the black cabin-boy, Pip, who falls overboard and witnesses the indifferent gods; he is "vacated" by the experience, and the book's most haunting passages are related to his "orphaned" vision.

6. We are made to understand that Pip is precisely Ahab's alter ego, that the monomaniac and the witless idiot are versions of each other. Ahab sees that Pip will be his own undoing. This is a ghostly kind of fraternalism, different than the kind that binds Queequeg and Ishmael.
Lecture 21  

*Moby-Dick*: Tragedy of Perspective

**Scope:** One reason why *Moby-Dick* remains immensely readable is its obsession with perspective. Single vision is the common fate of all people, and Melville's text centralizes a monomaniacal quester whose only phrase to passing ships is, "Hast seen the white whale?" Yet Ahab's project is assessed and rendered stereophonically, dramatically, as Ishmael, Starbuck, Stubb, and Flask present their various angles of vision. Moreover, the philosophical heart of the book, "the whiteness of the whale," deals with color as the attribute of consciousness, of perception that makes, and describes, the world. Are we ever commensurate with reality? Can we ever see things "as they are"? And what about speech? Can we "name" the world? Can—may—we "name" God? Language itself is the leaky enterprise, and the ultimate question of *Moby-Dick* is: "How to say it?"

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

1. Summarize how Melville achieves a "double-eyed" narration in *Moby-Dick*.
2. Give examples of how Melville extends the notion of the meaning of the color white, and
3. Explain in what sense *Moby-Dick* ends by being an "orphaned" narrative.

**Outline**

I. Single vision is the common fate of the human subject who can never get outside his/her own head.
   
   A. Ahab, who would put out the sun if it insulted him, can never be more than Ahab.
      1. Ahab is envious of the sun, which sees everything, is panoptic. Nothing is dark for the sun.
      2. Monomaniacal Ahab asks only one question of passing ships: "Hast seen the white whale?" Melville makes us understand the social poverty of such a posture.
      3. In this book, ships pass in the night, and there are moments when the Pequod meets representatives of the "world," but communication inevitably breaks down.
   
   B. Whales are double-eyed—each eye sees a different reality. This ocular "advantage" speaks to the book's obsessions.

II. Double-eyed narration, the vision of whales, is what Melville creates with his narrative strategy.
   
   A. In trying to take Ahab's measure, Ishmael helps to demarcate consciousness.
   
   B. Melville knows the pleasures of stereophony and conversation, and some of the book's most charming scenes are those in which he sneaks them in. The novel is capacious and inclusive.
   
   C. The perspectivalist parade at hand reaches its climax in the chapter of "The Doubloon," where the radically different points of view that exist on the "same" event are rendered theatrically.
      1. Melville the dramatist is out to cash in on these varying perspectives.
      2. Melville the humorist knows that monomania is suffocating and that a mix of perspectives allows us needed breathing space.
   
   D. Melville gives us an insolent, pirouetting narrative, a story that cubistically inverts and plays with its utterances.
      1. It begins with Pip's grammatical declensions.
      2. In facing the sea, the various characters show us how vision shifts.
      3. Death, the most somber subject of all, is not immune from Melville's circus of perspective; Starbuck, Stubb, and Flask each have a final say.
III. The most famous and profound chapter in *Moby-Dick* goes beyond perspective itself: "The Whiteness of the Whale." Here is an absurdist Melville who seems to be a 20th-century figure.

A. Melville shows us what a color-coded world we live in, how firm a grip these conventions have on our way of representing life.

B. History suggests that white is the color of purity; in contrast, Melville examines the horror of whiteness.

C. Melville argues that whiteness is ultimately allied with atheism, nihilism, and nothingness. Here is the theatrical vision of Shakespeare ("the world's a stage") taken to its absurdist conclusions.
   1. Whiteness is the absence of color, the underlying nullity of things.
   2. Color is understood as a veil, as "subtle deceit," which trumps up the world into its illusory parade.
   3. Light—especially the light of the mind, the light that is *thinking*—is presented as both colorless and leprous, as a force that eats away material surfaces, exposes their sham, cannibalizes.
   4. Melville is telling us that human thoughts are ultimately the mind's light.

IV. We close this epic with a sense of its most urgent inquiry: How to say the truth?

A. *Moby-Dick*, the white whale, emerges in the book's story as the godlike truth that cannot be *said*.
   1. The whale symbolizes God the father, the phallic principle that creates reality.
   2. The impotent Ahab is no match for such vitality; no human is.
   3. Hence, this is a book of frenzied *approaches*, of ways of getting nearer, and of representations, not of truths.

B. The leaky enterprise is language, a set of conventions that can never "strike through the mask."
   1. Interpreting the doubloon, the prime scene of interpretation, is significantly compared to unscrewing one's navel, to losing the core.
   2. The art of incompleteness is Melville's great, passionate art. What is finished is dead.

C. Narrative—**Ishmael**, who escapes to tell the story—is to be understood as the orphaned voice that survives death.
Lecture 22

Melville's "Benito Cereno": American (Mis)adventure at Sea

**Scope:** After *Moby-Dick*, Melville retained a style but lost an audience. "Bartleby" and "Benito Cereno" testify to an increasing darkness of vision, and much of the pathos of these texts comes from the benighted narrative voice that is demonstrably unequal to the events at hand. "Benito Cereno" is inscribed in the complex debate about race and colonialism in mid-19th-century America, a few years before the outbreak of the Civil War. Melville's rendition of these issues is uniquely spiced and sharpened by his use of an innocent Yankee narrator who is faced with issues of race and power aboard a strange ship. His weird account makes this story the most fascinating whodunit of the 19th century. We need to ask: Why has it been told this way?

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

1. Summarize how "Benito Cereno" brought to the fore many anxieties of mid-19th-century America,
2. Explain how the limitations of Captain Delano's perspective are an essential part of this Melville story, and
3. Explain how Delano's reaction to the ship might be considered classically American.

**Outline**

I. Post-*Moby-Dick* Melville is a writer increasingly without an audience. His follow-up to the whaling book (which did get at least some good reviews), *Pierre*, a torturous psychological novel about issues of incest and failed career, is widely regarded as unreadable.

   A. The loss of an audience frees up Melville, in some sense, to write as he pleases, to explore all the metaphysics he likes.

   B. The corrosive vision, the vision that sees through everything, emerges as Melvillean narrative legacy.

      1. It would appear difficult to go beyond the nihilism of "the whiteness of the whale," but Melville does just that in some of his most sybilline tales.

   C. Indirect narrative is the key in later Melville: entrust the story to an uncomprehending narrator.

      1. Ishmael rendering Ahab is a vital example of such a narrative principle, but there seems to be no competition or cancellation in this version.

      2. In "Bartleby," the barrister-narrator renders Bartleby with a remarkable mix of fatuousness, incomprehension, and empathy.

      3. In "Benito Cereno," Captain Delano's rendering of Cereno is even more marked by blindness and error.

II. Epistemological quandaries

   A. Already in *Moby-Dick*, art's task is to acknowledge its inadequacy in the solving of the riddles of identity; no discourse is commensurate with the whale.

   B. In "Benito Cereno," Melville goes beyond even the perspectivism of Starbuck, Stubb, and Flask (from the whaling novel).

   C. Yet Melville retains an interest in factual materials, and the continuing need for ballast offsets his metaphysical flights.

III. When we contextualize "Benito Cereno," we see that it is about American anxieties, specifically The Democratic Dream in Question.

   A. Race and colonialism were "hot issues" in the 1850s, just as they are today.

      1. America's War with Mexico—the ambitions (among certain Southerners) for colonial expansion in Cuba and the Caribbean—serve as a backdrop for Melville.
2. The unresolved issue of slavery in America was the burning national issue of the 1850s, and Melville took his strange stand on it.
3. Examples of slave revolts, led by figures such as Toussaint L'Ouverture and Nat Turner, were much in people's minds during this time period.

B. Melville's strategy was to take the measure of Massachusetts complacency and xenophobia, by dint of narrative technique.

IV. Melville's narrator, Captain Amasa Delano, is one of the great 19th-century narrative figures.

A. Delano was a real-life figure whose published commentary was familiar to Melville.

B. Delano is also a living prototype of a figure who was popular ever since the 18th century: the classic good-natured man.
   1. The initial presentation shows us, in great detail, what things look like to Delano; here is the essence of narrative as a readerly trap.
   2. Delano's profound belief in providence does him honor as a person; but not particularly as a narrator of these strange events.

C. Melville is reflecting on a thorny perceptual proposition: What could an innocent person see?
   1. The presentation of Delano's perspective is linked to Melville's brooding over Emerson's ideas about innocence. We have Melville's word on this.
   2. Delano's entry onto the Spanish ship is done in Melville's now-classic theatrical fashion. A ship is a world unto itself.
      a. We note in this story, as never before, how histrionic and ludic the boat-stage can be.
      b. Faced with a crew of black sailors, Delano from Massachusetts asks an American question: Who's in charge?

D. Delano's Massachusetts suspicions are given full play in the first-person narrative.
   1. This odd Spanish ship lacks authority and know-how.
   2. The Spanish aristocratic captain, Benito Cereno, was probably given his captaincy—i.e., he did not earn it.
   3. Delano's conscience warns him repeatedly: Watch out for those Spaniards.
      a. One suspicion is: Is Cereno a fake?
      b. The other suspicion, that someone is plotting evil, raises the question: Who?
      c. Delano's good nature keeps repeating: Try to be fair.
   4. Melville is playing with a significant religious principle: Doesn't innocence protect?
   5. At times, this boat looks like a Halloween fantasy.
   6. Only one explanation is truly thinkable: Spanish deceivers, black accessories.
   7. Melville shows us why Delano sizes things up as he does; we see it most brazenly in Delano's view of blacks.
      a. The great tradition of loyal black servants comes into play here.
      b. Natural innocence, the kind of thing Melville wrote about in *Typee*, is also called upon.

E. Yet nothing quite works for the American captain. He has a continual dilemma: how to explain the mystery.
   1. Melville, with diabolic cunning, makes literal and metaphorical keys abound in his story, including the scene of ritual punishment.
   2. The most flagrant in-your-face scene asks the reader quite directly: How to untie the knot? Indeed, how?
Lecture 23

"Benito Cereno":
Theater of Power or Power of Theater?

Scope: At the end of the story, Melville's narrator—and thus his reader—sees the true nature of events on the Spanish ship. At this point, we realize that Melville's artistry has been much more motivated than we thought, considering the imagery of monasteries and abdication, the references to Columbus and the New World, and the view of slavery as core of the colonial enterprise. In asking why Melville has told his story "blindly," we not only understand "vision" as culturally constructed, but we also recover something of the primitive passions in play here: genocide between the races, centuries-long rage, the dynamics of revenge. That particular revenge, the "play" on board the Spanish ship, is the richest, most shocking feature of Melville's meditation on power, and it is a view we will not easily forget.

Objectives—Upon completion of this course, you should be able to
1. Summarize the political fable that Melville recounts in "Benito Cereno,"
2. Explain how Melville's fable comments on the worlds of both art and politics, and
3. Summarize the role of indirection and ignorance in "Benito Cereno" and how they reflect Melville's artistic vision.

Outline

I. Melville finally gives us the answer to the riddle: slave revolt.
   A. The American captain finally sees what has been in plain view all along, if only he (or we) had had the wit to make it out.
      1. When the Spanish captain jumps overboard into Delano's boat, the American thinks, once again, "Spanish betrayal."
      2. When the servant follows suit, the American still fails to understand.
      3. Finally he sees Babo striving to kill Cereno, and Delano has a flash of revelation: the ship has seen a mutiny.
   B. Melville's great, unasked question is: What have you seen? More than most stories, this one tests our ability to size things up, and if we have gotten it wrong, there are reasons here to ponder.
   C. The great enabling narrative and cultural truth of "Benito Cereno" is that seeing is a cultural proposition.

II. Melville has told "inside out" a political fable of startling proportions.
   A. The finally acknowledged slave revolt speaks volumes about ideological arrangements in mid-19th-century America.
      1. We tap into reservoirs of violence and hatred that have been filling up for centuries.
      2. The black women on board turn out to be murderous "does."
      3. Racial warfare is especially conspicuous in the silent fight-to-the-death that is carried out between the American sailors and the mutinous slaves.
      4. One of the most haunting notions in the story is Babo's genuine search for a "Negro country" where the slaves might find freedom.
   B. Melville's story offers us, through its imagery and plot, a powerful indictment of the Old World, the entire colonial scheme in which slavery was a crucial element.
      1. The ubiquitous imagery of monasteries, including the abdication of Charles V, starts to resonate, representing the bankruptcy of the ancient regime.
      2. Melville's most shocking conflation is that of Columbus and death, as if the entire project of colonizing the New World were a form of doom.

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3. The phrase "Follow your leader" is repeated several times, and we see that it applies not only to changing authority on board the ship, but also, more deviously, to issues of narrative authority—whom do you follow when reading this story?

III. Melville's fable is about art as much as it is about politics.

A. Upon noticing an abundance of excesses in the story, we see that there is a strange insistence on ritual.
   1. We must rethink the ceremonial scene with Atufal and the key—what is its purpose?
   2. The added point of Babo cutting himself, after he has cut Cereno while shaving him, is pure theater.

B. The shaving scene between "servant" and "master" is perhaps the moment where Melville's strange theater is most extravagantly on show.
   1. Melville mentions intimations of torture; now we know why.
   2. Melville depends on a culturally constructed vision of menials and servants, carrying out their tasks with love and fidelity. But are they?
   3. What do you see in this weird scene?
   4. Babo is referred to as the Nubian sculptor; what view of art emerges here, if we think of Cereno as his "material"?

IV. The significance of play is perhaps Melville's most far-reaching philosophical point.

A. Slaves playing slaves, as they do on the ship, is a performance we need to analyze.
   1. For the bulk of the story, virtuality, or make-believe, emerges as the realm of freedom, as an opportunity for the slaves to "do."
   2. Control and mastery are allied concepts, and they are actualized before us as the slaves revolt.

B. Captain playing captain demands even more urgently our scrutiny and consideration than slaves playing slaves.
   1. Benito Cereno, "playing" himself at the command of Babo, experiences the undoing of a (God-given?) role that has been his life.
   2. Melville has made the awesome discovery that power is a role, that it is "copiable," and that it is a dialectic between masters and slaves.
   3. Cereno's "artificially stiffened" scabbard serves as a perfect emblem of art itself, the imitation of power.
   4. The secret of art is seen at its most grisly in the preserved body of the Spanish nobleman, Cereno's friend: how to "make" the living dead.

C. Rethinking and rereading this piece leads us to the conclusion that Melville has given this story the right title; his goal is to tell Cereno's story, but he prefers to do it by total, maddening indirection. What happens when we take a second look?
   1. Every inch of Cereno is travestied by his performance on board. You could not go further in deconstructing power.

Readings:


Topics for Further Consideration:
1. How would you make the case that *Moby-Dick* is The Great American Novel? Discuss Melville's obsession with "greatness."
2. How does "Benito Cereno" contribute to your understanding of American politics?
Lecture 24

Walt Whitman:
The American Bard Appears

Scope: Today, Walt Whitman is just about everybody's candidate for "greatest American poet," although few people would have agreed to that judgment in the 19th century. Whitman's explosive new vision—of poetic language, of the common man and woman, of America as a new subject for poetry, of the nature and power of the body, of the strange beauty and appeal of the modern city, of the ubiquity of death as an informing spirit, of the bond with the reader, and of democracy itself—has so stamped our view of these matters that it is hard to realize how new they appeared in mid-19th-century America. Even though Leaves of Grass, which first appeared in 1855, looks as though it were literally prescribed by Emerson, the American public at large, and the polite New England critics in particular, were shocked by the rowdiness and explicit sexuality of these poems. We have all grown up with Whitman's celebration of America, but it is sometimes hard to get clear of the view of a facile Whitman, a jovial, all-embracing poet whose work seems to ignore the subtleties and complexities of national and personal life. Yet we will see that Whitman is more various than we think, that his muscular optimism is balanced by a surprising precariouslyness, and that his call for universal brotherhood and empathy is matched by a strange sense of distance and mystery. He is also very funny and very smart, about his country and about his poetry. Perhaps the Whitman signature is best found in the special tonality of his work, in the mix of whimsy, intimacy, and heart-wrenching pathos that calls out to us and weaves us in its spell, as much today as it did in 1855.

Emerson, the spokesperson for mid-century literary America, memorably asked when America would have the poet it deserved. Leaves of Grass is the dramatic answer to Emerson's question. Whitman celebrates, in pure Romantic fashion, the uniqueness and grandeur of the political, moral, and verbal America. Above all, Whitman fashions a poetry of democracy, freed from the weight of the European past, saluting the variety and commonness of American people, and displaying a rare ability to fuse with the groups and individuals he presents. We will examine here the path-breaking innovations that Whitman brings to American poetry, in terms of both forms and themes, while also considering the very concept of a "democratic poetry." We will close our consideration of Whitman's "bond" with the American people by examining his remarkable "night-time" version of this issue in The Sleepers.

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

1. Identify several ways in which Leaves of Grass is quintessentially American,
2. Explain how Whitman incorporates the idea of democracy into his poetry, and

Outline

I. In retrospect, Emerson's proclamation in his essay "The Poet" seems to point directly to Whitman's project in Leaves of Grass.
   A. Emerson argues that the poet whom we await will treat indigenous American subjects.
      1. We deserve, and will have, a poetry that breaks free of Europe, in its themes and forms.
      2. Such a poet must therefore discover what is new and vital in America, what is actually in plain view but not yet grasped as poetic material.
   B. Emerson insists that this new poet will at last create an American idiom, an actual language that is homespun yet powerful and fresh.
   C. Above all, Emerson calls for a poet to celebrate American grandeur, to realize that everyday American life is, in fact, grand.

II. Leaves of Grass (1855) is what the doctor ordered, although virtually no one thought so at the time.
   A. Leaves of Grass arrived as a book without an author, a thin collection of poems without label or tag.
1. The front piece has only a title and the image of a rough but jaunty man of the people. Who was he?

2. Whitman is named only on page 29 of the book's first edition.

B. Emerson, with his uncanny sense of American intellectual "weather," saw these poems for what they were and wrote Whitman a now-famous letter of congratulations.

1. Whitman promptly put this endorsement from America's preeminent man of letters to use by publishing it in the papers, without Emerson's knowledge or authorization.

2. Emerson's evolving opinion of Whitman is a story in itself, as the New England sage tries to temper the explicit language of the New York poet.

C. Whitman effectively changes the language—American, not English, is what he delivers.

1. Whitman's love for Indian names suggests a conscious effort to create an indigenous code.

2. Whitman's fondness for slang and common speech, which had always been considered inappropriate in polite verse, explodes in these raucous poems.

3. Whitman's famous "lists" are also new, and they may be thought of as the democratic form par excellence. Many asked, "Is this poetry?"

4. America is to be understood as a great poem, as a new and capacious subject for writing.

5. We must struggle to fashion new gods, says Whitman; the old gods will not do.

6. Rejecting the European legacy is easier to claim than to achieve, and it is instructive to watch Whitman's struggles here.

7. Whitman's many excesses are among the strangest performances in 19th-century literature.

D. The poetry of democracy is what Whitman aimed for; we must realize the crucial elitism of past poetry, an art form intimately related to aristocratic figures of politics, religion, or legend.

1. Whitman's programmatic inclusiveness meant that there was a place for everyone in his work. People who had never before appeared in poetry began to arrive on the scene.

2. Whitman's goal consisted of presenting American voices never before heard, and we need to measure the political as well as the literary dimensions of such an aim.

3. Whitman is justly famous for his capacity to merge with his subject, to "become" the figures whom he evokes. Is this generosity or egoism? Is it credible? This is social history of a completely new variety.

4. D.H. Lawrence offered a biting and hilarious criticism of Whitman's "empathy" as a concealed form of egoism.

E. The Sleepers, one of the most remarkable pieces within Leaves of Grass, is to be understood as a nighttime version of Whitman's bonding with the people.

1. This piece has credibly been termed the only surrealist poem in 19th-century America.

2. In democratic fashion, the poem provides lists of sleepers: here is America at night.

3. In Romantic fashion, Whitman planned on entering others' dreams, sharing and choreographing their oneiric lives.

4. The poem has its dark moments, as it offers visions of disaster; we sense here the helplessness of dreams, the powerlessness of the dreamer, and we see as well a kind of historical script.

5. Sleep is presented as the ultimate peace and reconciliation, as the very grounds of a democratic vision in which we are all "one."

6. The poem ends with the image that night embraces and contains day.
Timeline

17th century ....................... The “Great Migration” brings the Puritans and Pilgrims from England to America.

1692.............................. John Hawthorne, an ancestor of author Nathaniel Hawthorne, officiates at a number of
the infamous witch trials in Salem, Massachusetts.


1706.............................. Birth of Benjamin Franklin.

1721.............................. Benjamin Franklin, at age 15, starts his own newspaper, *The New England Courant*, and
begins to write essays.

1730.............................. Franklin is named the “Official Printer of Pennsylvania.”

1732–1757...................... Franklin writes *Poor Richard’s Almanac*, the first American periodical.

1736.............................. Franklin organizes the Union Fire Co.

1737.............................. Franklin becomes Philadelphia’s postmaster.

1741.............................. Franklin invents the “Franklin fireplace” (stove).

1743.............................. Franklin proposes the idea for the American Philosophical Society.

1745.............................. Franklin begins to conduct experiments in electricity.

1747.............................. Franklin organizes the Pennsylvania Militia.

1749.............................. Franklin founds the Philadelphia Academy, which later became the University of
Pennsylvania.

1751.............................. Founding of Philadelphia Hospital, with the assistance of Franklin.

1752.............................. Franklin conducts his famous experiment proving that lightning is electrical.

1753.............................. Franklin receives honorary masters degrees from both Harvard and Yale.

1757.............................. Franklin elected the representative of Philadelphia (Pennsylvania) to England.

1758.............................. Jonathan Edwards dies.

1759.............................. Franklin receives an honorary doctorate from the University of St. Andrews in Scotland.

1762.............................. Franklin receives an honorary doctorate from Oxford University.

1771.............................. Franklin begins writing his *Autobiography*.

1776.............................. Declaration of Independence written and signed. Beginning of the Revolutionary War.

1783.............................. End of the Revolutionary War.

1783.............................. Birth of Washington Irving.

1790.............................. Death of Benjamin Franklin.

1803.............................. Birth of Ralph Waldo Emerson.

1804.............................. Birth of Nathaniel Hawthorne.

1809.............................. Birth of Edgar Allan Poe.

1811.............................. Birth of Harriet Beecher Stowe.

1817.............................. Birth of Henry David Thoreau.

1819.............................. Washington Irving publishes “The Legend of Sleepy Hollow” and “Rip Van Winkle.”

1819.............................. Birth of Herman Melville.
1819.................................. Birth of Walt Whitman.
1821.................................. Ralph Waldo Emerson graduates from Harvard.
1829.................................. Emerson marries Ellen Tucker.
1830.................................. Birth of Emily Dickinson.
1831.................................. Emerson’s wife dies.
1832.................................. Spurred by his wife’s death, Emerson resigns his ministry.
1835.................................. Edgar Allan Poe writes “Berenice.”
1835.................................. Birth of Samuel Clemens (Mark Twain).
1836.................................. Emerson publishes his essay “Nature.”
1836.................................. Poe marries Virginia Clemm, his 14-year-old cousin.
1837.................................. Emerson makes his famous speech at Harvard, “The American Scholar.”
1837.................................. Nathaniel Hawthorne publishes his collection of stories entitled *Twice-Told Tales*.
1838.................................. Poe pens “Ligeia.”
1839.................................. Poe publishes “The Fall of the House of Usher,” considered the quintessential horror story, as well as Poe’s masterwork. Poe also publishes “William Wilson” during this year.
1841.................................. Emerson publishes several of his best-known essays, including “History,” “Self-Reliance,” and “Circles.”
1841.................................. Poe publishes “The Murders in the Rue Morgue,” considered one of the first detective stories, along with “Descent into the Maelstrom,” an early science fiction story.
1842.................................. Poe publishes “The Pit and the Pendulum.”
1843.................................. Poe publishes “The Black Cat” and “The Tell-Tale Heart.”
1843.................................. Birth of Henry James.
1844.................................. Emerson publishes the essay “Experience.”
1844.................................. Poe publishes “The Balloon-Hoax,” a piece that could be considered science fiction.
1845.................................. Poe publishes “The Raven,” as well as “The Purloined Letter,” considered one of the first detective stories, and “The Facts in the Case of M. Valdemar.”
1846.................................. Emerson publishes “The Poet,” his chief statement about the literary agenda of the future.
1846.................................. Henry David Thoreau spends one night in jail for his refusal to pay several years’ poll tax as protest against the role of Massachusetts in perpetuating slavery.
1846.................................. Poe’s wife dies of consumption.
1846.................................. Poe writes “The Philosophy of Composition, or How I Wrote ‘The Raven,’” the famous account (perhaps spoofing) of his poetic practice. Poe also publishes “The Cask of Amontillado.”
1846.................................. Herman Melville publishes *Typee*.
1847.................................. Melville publishes *Omoo*.
1848.................................. Thoreau publishes his essay “Civil Disobedience.”
1848.................................. Attempted revolutions fail in several European nations.
1849.................................. Poe publishes “The Bells,” “Eldorado,” and “Annabel Lee.”
1849.................................. Melville publishes *Mardi*.

1849.................................. Death of Edgar Allan Poe.

1850.................................. Hawthorne publishes *The Scarlet Letter*, perhaps his best-known work. Also in this year, Melville publishes *White Jacket, or The World in a Man of War*.

1850.................................. Karl Marx writes *The Communist Manifesto*.

1850.................................. Passage of the Fugitive Slave Act, which required Northerners to return runaway slaves to their former masters.

1851.................................. Thoreau becomes active in the abolitionist movement.

1851.................................. Melville meets Hawthorne in person. In this same year, he publishes his masterwork, *Moby Dick*.

1852.................................. Harriet Beecher Stowe publishes *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*.

1853.................................. Melville publishes the short story “Bartleby, the Scrivener.”

1854.................................. Thoreau publishes his masterwork, *Walden*.

1855.................................. Walt Whitman publishes the first version of *Leaves of Grass*.

1856.................................. Whitman’s poem “Crossing Brooklyn Ferry” published in a version of *Leaves of Grass*.

1856.................................. Melville publishes the short story “Benito Cereno.”

1856.................................. Birth of Sigmund Freud.

1859.................................. Thoreau reads publicly “A Plea for Captain John Brown.”

1859.................................. Washington Irving dies.

1859.................................. Petroleum is discovered.

1859.................................. Whitman writes “Out of the Cradle Endlessly Rocking.”

1860.................................. Whitman publishes the collections of poems *Children of Adam* and *Calamus*.

1860.................................. Birth of Charlotte Perkins Gilman.

1861.................................. Start of the American Civil War.

1862.................................. Death of Henry David Thoreau.

1862.................................. Emily Dickinson has her literary exchange with noted critic Thomas Wentworth Higginson.

1864.................................. Death of Nathaniel Hawthorne.


1865.................................. End of the American Civil War.

1867.................................. Mark Twain publishes the short story “The Celebrated Jumping Frog of Calaveras County.”

1869.................................. Twain publishes *Innocents Abroad*.

1871.................................. Birth of Stephen Crane.

1871.................................. Franco-Prussian War.

1874.................................. Birth of Robert Frost.
1875.............................. Public reburial and dedication of Poe’s remains.
1876.............................. Twain publishes *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer*.
1879.............................. Henry James writes the first book on Nathaniel Hawthorne.
1881.............................. James publishes *A Portrait of a Lady*.
1882.............................. Death of Ralph Waldo Emerson.
1886.............................. Death of Emily Dickinson.
1885.............................. Twain publishes *Huckleberry Finn*, his acclaimed masterpiece, which was promptly banned by the Concord Public Library.
1887.............................. Charlotte Perkins Gilman gives birth to a daughter, afterward suffering from post-partum depression.
1888.............................. Birth of T. S. Eliot.
1888.............................. Birth of Eugene O’Neill.
1889.............................. Twain publishes *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur’s Court*.
1891.............................. Death of Herman Melville.
1892.............................. Death of Walt Whitman. Publication of “The Wound Dresser.”
1892.............................. Gilman publishes the short story “The Yellow Wallpaper.”
1894.............................. Twain publishes *Pudd’nhead Wilson*.
1894.............................. Robert Frost publishes his first poem.
1895.............................. Crane publishes *The Red Badge of Courage*.
1896.............................. Birth of F. Scott Fitzgerald.
1896–1897........................ Crane is on steamship, *Commodore*, carrying arms for Cuban rebels, which sinks. Crane spends 30 hours in a small boat.
1897.............................. Crane covers the Greco-Turkish War.
1897.............................. Birth of William Faulkner.
1898.............................. Crane covers the Spanish-American War.
1898.............................. Crane publishes his short story “The Open Boat,” based on his ordeal at sea in 1897. Crane also pens the short story “The Blue Hotel.”
1898.............................. James publishes *The Turn of the Screw*.
1898.............................. Gilman publishes *Women and Economics*.
1899.............................. Crane publishes “The Monster.”
1899.............................. Birth of Ernest Hemingway.
1900.............................. Death of Stephen Crane.
1902.............................. James publishes *The Wings of the Dove*.
1902.............................. Birth of John Steinbeck.
1903.............................. James publishes *The Ambassadors*. 
1904................................. James publishes *The Golden Bowl*.
1910................................ Death of Mark Twain.
1911............................... Birth of Tennessee Williams.
1913............................... Gilman writes “Why I Wrote ‘The Yellow Wallpaper.’”
1914............................... Birth of Ralph Ellison.
1915............................... Birth of Arthur Miller.
1916............................... Death of Henry James.
1917............................... F. Scott Fitzgerald joins the army.
1920............................... Fitzgerald publishes his first novel, *This Side of Paradise*.
1920............................... Eugene O’Neill publishes *The Emperor Jones*.
1922............................... Eliot publishes his most influential poem, “The Wasteland.”
1922............................... Fitzgerald publishes *The Beautiful and the Damned*.
1922............................... O’Neill publishes *The Hairy Ape*.
1925............................... Eliot publishes “The Hollow Men.”
1925............................... Fitzgerald publishes his masterpiece, *The Great Gatsby*.
1925............................... Ernest Hemingway publishes his first major work, *In Our Time*.
1925............................... O’Neill publishes *Desire Under the Elms*.
1926............................... Hemingway publishes *The Sun Also Rises*.
1926............................... William Faulkner publishes his first novel, *Soldier’s Pay*.
1927............................... Eliot becomes a British citizen.
1927............................... Faulkner publishes *Mosquitoes*.
1929............................... Hemingway publishes *A Farewell to Arms*.
1929............................... Faulkner publishes *Sartoris*, now known as *Flags in the Dust*.
1929............................... Faulkner publishes *The Sound and the Fury*, considered to be his breakthrough text.
1929............................... Beginning of the Great Depression.
1930............................... Eliot publishes “Ash Wednesday.”
1930............................... Faulkner publishes *As I Lay Dying*, the sister text to *The Sound and the Fury*.
1931............................... Faulkner publishes *Sanctuary*.
1931............................... O’Neill publishes *Mourning Becomes Electra*.
1931............................... Birth of Toni Morrison.
1932............................... Hemingway publishes his treatise on bullfighting, *Death in the Afternoon*.
1932............................... Faulkner publishes *Light in August*.
1934............................... Fitzgerald publishes *Tender Is the Night*.
1935............................... Death of Charlotte Perkins Gilman.
1935.................................. Hemingway publishes his treatise on hunting, *Green Hills of Africa*.
1935.................................. John Steinbeck publishes *Tortilla Flat*.
1936.................................. Faulkner publishes *Absalom, Absalom!*; an epic of the Civil War.
1936.................................. O’Neill wins the Nobel Prize for Literature.
1938.................................. Death of Sigmund Freud.
1939.................................. Steinbeck publishes his masterpiece, *The Grapes of Wrath*.
1940.................................. Fitzgerald writes *The Last Tycoon*, left unfinished at his death in the same year.
1940.................................. Hemingway publishes *For Whom the Bell Tolls*.
1940.................................. Faulkner publishes *The Hamlet*.
1941.................................. End of the Great Depression; the United States enters World War II.
1942.................................. Faulkner publishes *Go Down, Moses*.
1943.................................. Eliot publishes the poem “Four Quartets.”
1945.................................. Tennessee Williams publishes *The Glass Menagerie*.
1946.................................. O’Neill publishes *The Iceman Cometh*.
1947.................................. Williams publishes *A Streetcar Named Desire*.
1947.................................. Eliot wins the Nobel Prize for Literature.
1947.................................. Arthur Miller publishes *All My Sons*.
1949.................................. Miller publishes *Death of a Salesman*.
1950.................................. Faulkner wins the Nobel Prize for Literature.
1951.................................. Williams publishes *The Rose Tattoo*.
1952.................................. Hemingway publishes *The Old Man and the Sea*.
1952.................................. Ralph Ellison publishes *Invisible Man*.
1953.................................. Ellison’s *Invisible Man* receives the National Book Award for fiction.
1953.................................. Death of Eugene O’Neill.
1953.................................. Miller publishes *The Crucible*.
1954.................................. Hemingway wins the Nobel Prize for Literature.
1955.................................. The full body of Emily Dickinson’s poetic works is published posthumously.
1955.................................. Williams publishes *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*.
1955.................................. Miller publishes *A View From the Bridge*.
1956.................................. O’Neill’s *Long Day’s Journey into Night*, which he had written in 1945, is published posthumously.
1957.................................. Williams publishes *Orpheus Descending*.
1958.................................. Williams publishes *Suddenly Last Summer*.
1959.................................. Lionel Trilling pays homage to Robert Frost on his 85th birthday, saying that Frost belongs in the great iconoclastic tradition of American literature.
1959.................................. Williams publishes *Sweet Bird of Youth*.
1961.................................. Death of Ernest Hemingway.
1961 .................................. Williams publishes Night of the Iguana.
1962 .................................. Steinbeck wins the Nobel Prize for Literature.
1962 .................................. Death of William Faulkner.
1963 .................................. Death of Robert Frost.
1964 .................................. Hemingway’s Moveable Feast published posthumously.
1965 .................................. Death of T. S. Eliot.
1968 .................................. Death of John Steinbeck.
1970 .................................. Hemingway’s Islands in the Stream published posthumously.
1974 .................................. Toni Morrison publishes Sula.
1977 .................................. Morrison publishes Song of Solomon.
1983 .................................. Death of Tennessee Williams.
1986 .................................. Hemingway’s final novel, Garden of Eden, is published posthumously.
1988 .................................. Morrison publishes her masterpiece, Beloved.
1992 .................................. Morrison publishes Jazz.
1993 .................................. Morrison wins the Nobel Prize for Literature.
1994 .................................. Death of Ralph Ellison.
1998 .................................. Morrison publishes Paradise.
Glossary

Aboriginal self: A concept defined by Ralph Waldo Emerson as an existing source of universal energy in which we all partake. This self is not in us, but rather, out in the world, and we must learn to move into it.

B’hoy: An American original character, one who challenges all niceties in pieties. The female counterpart is known as the g’hal (the gal).

Boutade: French term meaning a joke, a spoof, or a setup that partially hides its true meaning.

Brahmins: Term coined in the mid-1800s by the American writer Oliver Wendell Holmes to describe a class of New England intellectuals determined on the basis of birth, education, and scholarly pursuits.

Calvinism: Christian theology of the French church reformer John Calvin. The central Calvinist tenets include belief in the absolute sovereignty of God and the doctrine of justification by faith alone.

Classic: A work of literature having lasting significance or generally recognized worth. The canonical tests of American literature stem out of vital, often unresolvable, conflicts from their own moments in history. They are bristling with ambiguities and insights that bid to challenge the reader, in their own time, in the present day, and even in the future.

Coming of age: In American literature, an event or series of events that spurs a character to reach spiritual adulthood. These stories may or may not revolve around attainment of a character’s physical adulthood.

Cosmogony: Literally, the study of the universe’s origin. In literature, the writer’s personal theory of the universe, as reflected in his or her works.

Cosmos: As defined by Walt Whitman, a brash young man, a jaunty fellow with a robust ego.

Counterculture: A subculture, especially of young people, with values opposed to that of the established culture. Henry David Thoreau is often regarded as a major American counterculture hero.

Demiurge: The deity who fashions the world, a creative force. In literature, a character of such influential personality that he or she is an overpowering force in the story being told.

Double entendre: A word or turn of phrase having double meaning, especially when the second meaning is risqué. Ernest Hemingway’s works, for instance, revel in suggestions of dual meanings and dual sexuality.

Dualism: The division of body from spirit. Whereas most religious traditions assert that spirit is superior to body, some American writers—particularly Walt Whitman—reversed that notion in their works, insisting on the naturalness and sanctity of the body.

Dysfunction: Impaired or disorderly function of a cultural system, be it a family or a larger social group.

Empowered self: Often regarded as one of America’s worst gifts to modern culture, the concept that the individual is empowered to attain all he or she desires. Ralph Waldo Emerson presents the concept of the empowered, or “imperialistic,” self in his essay “Self-Reliance.”

Epiphany: A sudden manifestation of the meaning or essence of something or a sudden intuitive realization or perception of reality.

Epistemology: A division of philosophy that investigates the nature and origin of knowledge.

Existentialism: A philosophy that emphasizes the uniqueness and isolation of the individual experience in a hostile or indifferent universe. A frequent theme in American literature, which often stresses freedom of choice and responsibility for the consequences of one’s actions.

Expressionism: An artistic movement during the late 19th and early 20th centuries that emphasized subjective expression of the artist’s inner experience. Stephen Crane and Emily Dickinson personify this approach to writing, reconfiguring the world we know by clothing it in images and metaphors.

Feminism: A doctrine advocating the same political and economic rights for women as granted to men. Charlotte Perkins Gilman was an early feminist writer, well known for “The Yellow Wallpaper.”
**Fissured self:** Essentially, an existential collapse, when all one knows of the world unravels.

**Geworfenheit:** German term meaning that we are thrust into a world not of our own making or choosing; a sense of alienation from the world around us.

**Gothic:** A style of fiction emphasizing the grotesque, mysterious, and desolate.

**Hagiography:** A biography of saints. *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, though often criticized for being overly sentimental, became a black American hagiography that was part of opera and drama.

**Impressionism:** A movement in painting that originated in France in the late 19th century. Impressionist painters found many of their subjects around them rather than in history, which was then the accepted source of subject matter. Instead of painting an ideal of beauty that earlier artists had defined, the Impressionists tried to depict what they saw at a given moment. To achieve the appearance of spontaneity, Impressionist painters used broken brushstrokes of bright, often unmixed colors. The colors in Impressionist paintings have an overall luminosity because the painters avoided blacks and earth colors. The Impressionists also simplified their compositions, omitting detail to achieve a striking overall effect.

**Individualism:** The doctrine that society is an artificial device, existing only for the sake of its members as individuals and properly judged only according to criteria established by them as individuals.

**Isolationism:** A policy in which a nation’s interests are best served if the nation secludes itself from other nations and avoids forming alliances with them. In literature, this concept often has been applied to individuals, as in Ralph Waldo Emerson’s suggestion that we must “cultivate” our own earth, our own substance.

**Ludic:** Playful in a way that is spontaneous and without any particular purpose.

**Malaise:** A vague feeling of depression or illness.

**Manself:** A term created by John Steinbeck to describe and celebrate the human species; used in place of men and women. This manself is always struggling to make a success of his or her life and will prevail, no matter how terrible circumstances are.

**Metaphor:** A figure of speech in which a term is transferred from the object it ordinarily designates to an object it may designate only by implicit comparison or analogy. Metaphor allows the writer to yoke together diverse areas of experience and thought. Yet metaphor may also be suspected of falsely domesticating the world by substituting the poet’s own projections and fantasies for the “hard facts.”

**Metaphysics:** A branch of philosophy that systematically investigates the nature of first principles and problems of ultimate reality, including ontology and often cosmology. Also, critical or speculative philosophy.

**Modernism:** The 20th century saw the emergence of Modernism, which responded to the world’s complexity by asserting that the individual had the potential to achieve a broader perspective than that offered by any one society or its history. At the beginning of the 19th century, American authors struggled to convince the world that they had a history; by the 20th century, American authors, like European authors, had to grapple with more than enough history.

**Modus operandi:** A method of operating; a particular way of doing things.

**Motive:** An important and sometimes recurring theme or idea in a work of literature. Also called motive.

**Nantucketer:** A uniquely American hero presented in Herman Melville’s works. The Nantucketer is different from familiar examples of colonial character. Homespun in his manners, he is nonetheless ruler of the sea, hence, royalty in his own way.

**Naturalism:** A system of thought holding that all phenomena can be explained in terms of natural causes and laws without attributing supernatural significance to them. Also, the doctrine that all religious truths are derived from nature, not from revelation. In literature, Naturalism attempts to apply scientific theories to art.

**Organicism:** The concept that society is analogous to a biological organism, meaning that society’s overall organization—not the functioning of its individual parts—plays the principal role in determining its processes and destiny.
Oversoul: A spiritual essence or vital force in the universe that embraces all souls, thus transcending individual consciousness.

Perspectival narration: The literary technique of viewing society from the outside. A writer may write about a historical period in retrospect, for instance, though his or her characters do not know what events are coming.

Picaresque: A literary genre in which a rogue-hero’s escapades are depicted in a context of sharp social satire. Mark Twain’s Huckleberry Finn personifies such a character.

Poet of Babel: A term used to refer to poets who make us think that poetry could be nonsense, but rather, is the sound of the brain, the fabric of consciousness. Although poetry can be a description of the world, it can also be simply the representation of the experience of living with a brain and of sensing things, thinking things, and speaking things.

Polysemy: The existence of several meanings for a single word or phrase.

Postmodernism: The literal meaning of Postmodernism is “after Modernism”; in many ways, Postmodernism constitutes an attack on Modernist claims about the existence of truth and value. In disputing past assumptions, Postmodernists generally display a preoccupation with the inadequacy of language as a mode of communication. Inaccessible ideas and impenetrable prose also characterize many Postmodern texts, although the difficulties in this case are often intentional and reflect specific claims about the nature of language and meaning.

Puritanism: Scrupulous moral sternness, especially aversions to social pleasures and indulgences. These attitudes and worldviews stem from the doctrines and practices of the Puritans.

Realism: In art and literature, an attempt to describe human behavior and surroundings or to represent figures and objects exactly as they act or appear in life. Though attempts at Realism have been made throughout history in all the arts, the term is generally restricted to a movement that began in the mid-19th century, in reaction to the highly subjective approach of Romanticism.

Rite of passage: A genre in literature based on an anthropological concept concerning rituals that a young person goes through in growing up.

Romanticism: A movement in the literature of virtually every country of Europe, the United States, and Latin America that lasted from about 1750 to about 1870, characterized by reliance on the imagination and subjectivity of approach, freedom of thought and expression, and an idealization of nature.

Self-made man: A classic hero in American literature and history, the self-made man is successful through his own actions. Benjamin Franklin personifies the concept of the wildly successful self-made man.

Semiosis: The act of translating a word or visual signal into a cultural meaning, of taking language and turning it into meaning. In literature, the concept that words are signs of natural things, which in turn, are signs of spirit.

Sentimentalism: A tendency to express obvious or powerful feelings or emotions without appealing to reason, especially self-indulgent or nostalgic writing or expression. The Sentimental tradition is the great popular literary form of the 19th century.

Social contract: A voluntary agreement among people defining the relationship of individuals with one another and with government and, by this process, forming a distinct organized society. In the 17th and 18th centuries, the theory of a social compact among individuals of a society was linked with the doctrine of natural law.

Stereotype: An oversimplified standardized image or idea held by one person or group concerning another. In literature, a character meant to typify or conform to an unvarying pattern or manner, lacking in any individuality or depth.

Stream of consciousness: A fictional narrative technique, first used in the late 19th century to evince subjective as well as objective reality. It reveals the character’s feelings, thoughts, and actions, often following an associative rather than a logical sequence, without commentary by the author.

Symbolism: The use of symbols to invest things with a representative meaning, or to represent something abstract by something concrete.
Transcendentalism: In philosophy and literature, the belief that knowledge of reality is derived from intuitive sources, rather than from objective experience. Nearly all transcendentalist doctrines stem from the division of reality into a realm of spirit and a realm of matter. Such a division is made by many of the great religions of the world. Ralph Waldo Emerson and Henry David Thoreau are considered to embody what is known as American Transcendentalism.

Trope: A word, phrase, expression, or image that is used in a figurative way, usually for rhetorical effect. Metaphor is the quintessential trope in all of poetry.

Tuition: Learned knowledge, as opposed to intuition, innate or revealed knowledge.

Un-naming: This term refers to the literary cleansing of customary labels to install fresh perception. Emily Dickinson’s poetry typifies this sort of writing.

Vagina dentata: The teethed womb that is a sexual nightmare for the male who is terrified of what it could mean to think literally about moving into the womb.

Women’s writing: Writing in a feminist vein that features language deemed to be closer to the body. Some characteristics of this kind of writing include fluidity rather than line, openness to affect and libido, suspicion of repressive order, and attention to the somatic.
Biographical Notes

**Louis Armstrong** (1901–1971): American jazz, cornet, and trumpet player, singer, bandleader, and popular entertainer. Armstrong overcame poverty, a lack of formal education, and racism to become one of the most innovative and influential musicians of the 20th century and one of the most beloved entertainers in the world. He is perhaps best known for helping to pioneer a style known as swing, which later formed the basis for most jazz and rhythm-and-blues (R&B) music. Armstrong’s music had a profound influence on Ralph Ellison’s *Invisible Man*.

**Charles Baudelaire** (1821–1867): A leading 19th-century French poet who seized on Edgar Allan Poe’s work and career as the epitome of genius, becoming Poe’s champion and translator in France. As the founder of Symbolism in poetry, Baudelaire ensured Poe’s continued impact on poetic development.

**Catherine Beecher** (1800–1878): Sister to Harriet Beecher Stowe, Catherine Beecher wrote *A Treatise on Domestic Economy*, dedicated to “the women of America in whose hands rest the real destinies of the Republic.”

**Samuel Clemens**: See *Mark Twain*.

**Stephen Crane** (1871–1900): American novelist and poet, one of the first American exponents of the naturalistic style of writing. Crane is known for his pessimistic and often brutal portrayals of the human condition, along with a sympathetic understanding of character.

**Emily Dickinson** (1830–1886): America’s most well known female poet and one of the foremost authors in American literature. Dickinson’s simply constructed, acutely intellectual writings examine issues vital to humanity: the agonies and ecstasies of love, sexuality, the unfathomable nature of death, the horrors of war, God and religious belief, the importance of humor, and musings on the significance of literature, music, and art.

**Thomas Eakins** (1844–1916): Regarded by most critics as the most outstanding American painter of the 19th century and, by many, as the greatest his country has yet produced, Eakins was an admirer of Walt Whitman. He was well known for his painting *The Swimming Hole*, as well as paintings of the male body and portraits of Whitman.

**Jonathan Edwards** (1703–1758): Often called the “last great Puritan,” this theologian and intellectual authored such fierce sermons as “Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God.”

**T. S. Eliot** (1888–1965): American-born writer regarded as one of the greatest poets of the 20th century. Eliot also wrote drama and literary criticism. In his plays, which use unrhymed verse, he attempted to revive poetic drama for the contemporary audience. Eliot won the Nobel Prize for literature in 1948.

**Ralph Ellison** (1914–1994): American author and educator, one of the most influential black American writers of the 20th century. Ellison uses rich, varied, and powerful language to portray the black experience in all its vitality and complexity. His best-known work, *Invisible Man*, expounds the theme that American society willfully ignores blacks and was one of the first works to describe modern racial problems in the United States from a black American point of view.

**Ralph Waldo Emerson** (1803–1882): Emerson, the guiding spirit of American Romanticism, lays the groundwork for a key tradition in American thinking and writing in his *Essays*, written from the 1830s through the middle of the century.

**William Faulkner** (1897–1962): American novelist, known for his epic portrayal, in some 20 novels, of the tragic conflict between the old and the new South. Although his intricate plots and complex narrative style alienated many readers of his early writings, Faulkner was a towering figure in American literature during the first half of the 20th century. With Ernest Hemingway, he is usually considered one of the two greatest American novelists of his era. Faulkner was particularly noted for the eloquent richness of his prose style and for the unique blend of tragedy and humor in his works.

**F. Scott Fitzgerald** (1896–1940): American writer whose novels and short stories chronicled changing social attitudes during the 1920s, a period dubbed the “Jazz Age” by the author. He is best known for his novels *The Great Gatsby* (1925) and *Tender Is the Night* (1934), both of which depict disillusion with the American dream of self-betterment, wealth, and success through hard work and perseverance.
Benjamin Franklin (1706–1790): Printer, scientist, statesman, and author in the early 18th century, Franklin personified the American concept of the “self-made man,” particularly through his Autobiography. Franklin is particularly well known for his experiments in electricity; his launching of Poor Richard’s Almanac, the first American periodical; and his role in the Revolutionary War. His is the great American story of tireless achievement, assertion, and adult responsibility in the difficult arenas of business, government, and politics.

Sigmund Freud (1856–1938): The father of psychoanalysis, Freud articulated the concepts of the unconscious and infantile sexuality and repression and proposed a tripartite account of the mind’s structure, all as part of a then—radically new conceptual and therapeutic frame of reference for the understanding of human psychological development and the treatment of abnormal mental conditions. His conclusions affected the interpretation of much American literature during and after his lifetime.

Robert Frost (1874–1963): American poet who drew his images from the New England countryside and his language from New England speech. Although Frost’s images and voice often seem familiar and old, his observations have an edge of skepticism and irony that make his work, upon rereading, never as old-fashioned, easy, or carefree as it first appears. In its embodiment of both tradition and skepticism, Frost’s poetry helped provide a link between the American poetry of the 19th century and that of the 20th century.

Margaret Fuller (1810–1850): A 19th-century feminist writer and one of the great radical women among the Transcendentalists. Fuller was a journalist and edited Dial Magazine, working closely with Ralph Waldo Emerson. Nathaniel Hawthorne may have modeled aspects of Hester Prynne’s character in The Scarlet Letter on Fuller.

Charlotte Perkins Gilman (1860–1935): American feminist and writer, best known for her book Women and Economics (1898), which has become a feminist classic. She was born Charlotte Anna Perkins in Hartford, Connecticut. She was educated at the Rhode Island School of Design and worked as a teacher and commercial artist before devoting herself to feminism.

Nathaniel Hawthorne (1804–1862): American novelist whose works are deeply concerned with the ethical problems of sin, punishment, and atonement. Hawthorne is considered America’s first great classical writer and is particularly known for his novel The Scarlet Letter.

Ernest Hemingway (1899–1961): American novelist and short-story writer, whose style is brisk, terse, cleansed of adjectives, seemingly objective, and aimed at rendering the precise moment and feeling of experience. Hemingway’s writings and his personal life exerted a profound influence on American writers of his time; in fact, Hemingway is usually considered one of the two greatest American novelists of his era (the other being William Faulkner). Many of his works are regarded as classics of American literature.

Thomas Wentworth Higginson (1823–1911): Unitarian minister, abolitionist, and well-known 19th-century literary critic with whom poet Emily Dickinson exchanged letters seeking critiques of her poems.

Washington Irving (1783–1859): Often called the father of the American short story, Irving is best known for two stories: “The Legend of Sleepy Hollow” and “Rip Van Winkle.” His work is considered to precede early writings of the great Transcendentalists—Emerson, Thoreau, and Hawthorne.

Henry James (1843–1916): American expatriate writer whose masterly fiction juxtaposed American innocence and European experience in a series of intense, psychologically complex works. James’s work is characterized by leisurely pacing and subtle delineation of character rather than by dramatic incidents or complicated plots. His major writings, highly sensitive examples of the objective psychological novel, deal with the world of leisure and sophistication he had grown to know intimately in Europe.

Toussaint L’Ouverture (1743–1803): Haitian general, now known as “the Precursor,” and leader of the Haitian slave revolt, a 1791 black slave uprising against the French colonial regime. After France abolished slavery in the territory in 1794, Toussaint supported the French rulers of the country against British invaders and was made a general in 1795. In 1801, he succeeded, after many struggles, in liberating Saint-Domingue from French control and became president-for-life of a new republic.

Herman Melville (1819–1891): American novelist and major literary figure whose exploration of psychological and metaphysical themes foreshadowed 20th-century literary concerns. His works remained in obscurity until the 1920s, when his genius was finally recognized.
Arthur Miller (1915–): American dramatist whose works are concerned with the responsibility of each individual to other members of society. Simply and colloquially written, Miller’s plays spring from his social conscience and from his compassion for those who are vulnerable to the false values imposed on them by society.

Toni Morrison (1931–): American writer whose works deal with the black experience and celebrate the black community. Morrison’s work features mythic elements, sharp observation, compassion, and poetic language and is often concerned with the relationship between the individual and society. In 1993, she won the Nobel Prize in literature.

Eugene O’Neill (1888–1953): American playwright whose work dramatizes the plight of people driven by elemental passions, by memory and dream, and by an awareness of the forces that threaten to overwhelm them. His early plays (1916–1920) helped initiate American theater’s shift away from elegant parlor dramas and toward gritty naturalistic plays.

Edgar Allan Poe (1809–1849): Best known for his poems and short fiction, Poe is credited with transforming the short story from anecdote to art. He virtually created the detective story and perfected the psychological thriller. He also produced some of the most influential literary criticism of his time—important theoretical statements on poetry and the short story.

Sir Walter Scott (1771–1832): Scottish novelist and poet considered to be the creator of the historical and the regional novel. He may have influenced the works of Nathaniel Hawthorne.

John Steinbeck (1902–1968): American writer and Nobel laureate, who described in his work the unremitting struggle of people who depend on the soil for their livelihood. Steinbeck’s novels can all be classified as social novels dealing with the economic problems of rural labor, but there is also a streak of worship of the soil in his books, which does not always agree with his matter-of-fact sociological approach.

Wallace Stevens (1879–1955): American poet whose works deal mainly with the individual’s interaction with the outside world. Stevens used sensuous, elaborate imagery and elevated, precise word choice to express subtle philosophical themes. He frequently contrasted the bleakness and monotony of modern industrialized life with the richness of nature.

Harriet Beecher Stowe (1811–1896): American author most famous for her anti-slavery novel, *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, one of the most influential American texts written by either man or woman and, possibly, the first American social protest novel.

Henry David Thoreau (1817–1862): American essayist, poet, and practical philosopher, renowned for having lived the doctrines of Transcendentalism, as recorded in his masterwork, *Walden*, and for having been a vigorous advocate of civil liberties, as evidenced in the essay “Civil Disobedience.”

Lionel Trilling (1905–1975): American educator and influential literary critic. For most of his career, Trilling taught at Columbia University. In his books, he used psychological and sociological methods to elucidate cultural values. One of his major concerns was the relationship between the self and society. Trilling paid homage to poet Robert Frost on Frost’s 85th birthday.

Nat Turner (1800–1831): American slave and leader of a black slave revolt in 1831. As a result of Nat Turner’s revolt, southern legislatures imposed stricter control on slaves, and the movement to abolish slavery, which had previously enjoyed some support in the South, became a northern phenomenon.

Mark Twain (1835–1910): Pen name for Samuel Langhorne Clemens, American writer and humorist, whose best work is characterized by broad, often irreverent humor or biting social satire. Twain’s writing is also known for realism of place and language, memorable characters, and hatred of hypocrisy and oppression.

Vincent Van Gogh (1853–1890): Dutch Post-Impressionist painter, generally considered the greatest Dutch painter and draftsman after Rembrandt. He powerfully influenced the current of Expressionism in modern art. Among his masterpieces are numerous self-portraits and the well-known “Starry Night.” An admirer of Whitman, Van Gogh corresponded with the American poet.

Booker T. Washington (1856–1915): American educator who urged blacks to attempt to uplift themselves through educational attainments and economic advancement.
Walt Whitman (1819–1892): American poet whose work boldly asserts the worth of the individual and the oneness of all humanity. Whitman’s defiant break with traditional poetic concerns and style exerted a major influence on American thought and literature.

Tennessee Williams (1911–1983): American playwright and two-time Pulitzer Prize winner, whose works are set largely in the American South. As a playwright, fiction writer, poet, and essayist, Williams helped transform the contemporary idea of Southern literature. He not only paved the way for other writers but also helped the South find a strong voice, where before it had been heard only as a whisper.


Classics of American Literature
Part III

Arnold Weinstein, Ph.D.
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 master's 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 include research grants from the American Council of Learned Societies and the National Endowment for the Humanities. 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 the area of national educational reform. In 1995 he received Brown University's award as best teacher in the humanities. He is the 1998–99 recipient of a National Endowment for the Humanities Award for University Teachers for his work in literature and medicine.

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Lecture 25

Whitman: Poet of the Body

Scope: What struck (and offended) Whitman's 19th-century audience most was his powerful portrayal of the human body. Whitman virtually reverses the traditional body/spirit dualism, with its religious corollary of spirit being superior to body, by insisting on the naturalness, sanctity, and passions of the body. Whitman's own homosexual leanings, as well as his willingness to write about intercourse and masturbation, testify to a view of sexuality that was at great odds with the common views of his time. Whitman's commitment to physical contact and tenderness found its fateful outlet during his stint as a male nurse during the Civil War. In this lecture, we will examine a range of issues: the poet's self-presentation, the valorization of the body, the ecstatic fusion of the body with nature, the poems of male affection, the work that emanated from Whitman's hospital experience, and the general question of physical desire in Whitman's scheme.

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

1. Summarize Whitman's depiction of the human body and understand how this contrasted with contemporary norms,
2. Identify some of the sexual taboos Whitman broached in his poetry, and
3. Explain how Whitman's wartime experience affected his sense of comradeship.

Outline

I. One is struck by Whitman's ubiquitous and insistent physical presence in his poems.
   A. Whitman is (and remained throughout his life) a striking physical specimen: 6 feet tall, 180 pounds, a man whose presence you felt.
   B. Whitman in the flesh comes to us in countless poetic evocations that are filled with humor and wit and that give us a record of the man.
      1. Whitman often presents himself as solid as a house, a physical entity that is exceptionally grounded.
      2. The core of Whitman's vision seems to be the human body—first, last, and always.
      3. Whitman's project—tapping the power of the body—seems sensationalist and indulgent, but it is also philosophical.
   C. In Leaves of Grass, the body is made equal to the soul. This is a startling proposition.
      1. Whitman emerges as a shocking new voice, finding ways to "say" the body that were (and remain) extraordinarily vivid.
      2. Whitman ultimately claims no less than the divinity of the body, and in this formulation we can see the awesome "democracy" of his poetic vision.
   D. Whitman invented a dazzling physical inventory of terms and images to represent the body and its ecstatic life.
      1. In some memorable passages, Whitman depicts the body as landscape, as a place that interacts with natural forces.
      2. Whitman's corporeal language of the elements sounds a note that is unique in 19th-century poetry, radically different from the propriety of Wordsworth and the English Romantics.
   E. Still more shocking, Whitman celebrates the (male) body beautiful.
      2. A comparison with Edward Muybridge's photographs of the body in motion is also appropriate, for it gives us a sense of the graphic, even the scientific dimensions of Whitman's literary representations.
   F. The general reaction to Whitman's explicitness was, predictably, one of anger and outrage.
      1. General 19th-century views on the body, as we can infer them from Victorian culture, were hushed and discrete.
2. Whitman's effusions and his brawny, self-flaunting persona are the direct opposite of the sensitive, effete romantic type.

3. Contemporary reactions to Whitman are not surprising; Thoreau's response is characteristic of the pudeur of the culture.

G. The question of Whitman's homosexuality has much interested modern critics who are concerned with issues of gender, yet it is hard to gauge this key issue with certainty.
   1. Despite its pudeur, the 19th-century pre-Freudian language of male affection is surprisingly bold and extensive.
   2. Whitman is conspicuously, sometimes pathetically (as in his old age), drawn to men; he is a friend of coach drivers, ferry boat pilots, and soldiers.
   3. The poems in "Calamus" and "Children of Adam," which deal most explicitly with male friendship and attraction, offended many readers.
   4. In one instance, the male sex organ is represented as poetry.
   5. Whitman, in his life and in his poetry, emerges as a champion for open display of affections, in clear contrast to the genteel climate of the age.

H. We find in Whitman the poet of desire and touch, and his genius for depicting the sensation of physical ecstasy is unmatched by any other poet.
   1. Masturbation, a taboo subject if there ever was one, emerges in Whitman as cosmic drama.
   2. Whitman conveys the explosive life of the senses with a kind of immediacy and freshness that have not staled.
   3. Whitman must also be seen as the "over-available" man, the person who is tyrannized by his senses and emotions, whose affective life runs riot over him.
   4. "Touch" comes across as the great unstated theme of life, the actual linkage between the human subject and the world (physical and natural, self and other) that he inhabits.
   5. "Who touches this book touches a man," Whitman wrote, and his formulation perfectly expresses our strangely intimate and physical apprehension of his poems.

II. During the Civil War, Whitman found his calling as the wound dresser.

A. Whitman's wartime experience at hospitals in Washington seems to have offered him an outlet that was fully commensurate for his need to touch.
   1. Photo: Ward K, Armory Square Hospital: here is where the "good grey poet" carried out his work.
   2. "The Wound Dresser" is one of Whitman's most moving poems about the carnage of war and the sanctity of healing.
   3. Whitman conveys the scale of destruction in the Civil War by evoking the everyday frequency of dying bodies.
   4. In his hospital experience, Whitman's need for comradeship was gratified, and the demands of empathy were met at last.

B. Dying bodies became for Whitman the source of visionary poetry.
   1. "A Sight in Camp" conveys the sacramental character of tending the dying.
   2. Whitman's gift of love incorporates a kind of tenderness that complements our image of the "cosmos."
   3. The famous "Christ" photo of Whitman seems entirely relevant to this wartime experience.
Lecture 26

Whitman: Poet of the City

Scope: Whitman ranks—along with his French counterpart, Baudelaire—as one of the first poets to explore systematically the changed conditions created by the modern city: crowds, division of labor, a new kind of beauty, pageants. Whitman's poems leave us a valuable record of the actual looks and workings of 19th-century Brooklyn and Manhattan, but his larger goal is to present the metropolis as an unparalleled locus of human energy, encounter, and connection. "Crossing Brooklyn Ferry," one of Whitman's greatest poems, bears witness to all these concerns, in addition to laying out Whitman's *ars poetica* in haunting fashion. We will see how the initial view of the metropolis as spectacle and pageant yields to a profound vision of the city as a human meeting place, and therefore as an ideal poetic arena. Whitman's insistence on the bond he forges with his fellows and his readers, as well as his capacity to discern a new kind of modern beauty in the urban setting, emerge as the elements of a new type of poetry.

Objectives—Upon completion of this lecture, you should be able to
1. Summarize how Whitman's depiction of urban life broke with literary tradition,
2. Explain the role of the city in the Whitmanesque notion of human bonding, and
3. Summarize how Whitman's career as a reporter is reflected in his poetry.

Outline

I. One of the pressing questions of the Modern Age is: How does a poet render the city? Could you make the sprawling new metropolis somehow amenable to art?
   A. Whitman is ever the journalist, the reporter, in his walks through the city.
   B. Whitman is especially famous for his use of "lists" for urban representation. Here is where he breaks entirely with the metric arrangements of 19th-century poetry and where he invents a form that is appropriate to his vision and his subject.
   C. Whitman will be remembered as the recorder of 19th-century New York, a maritime city.
   D. "Broadway Pageant" offers us an image of New York the melting pot, which was an apt characterization of the city even in Whitman's time.
      1. We see the New Yorkers watching the parade together, and we grasp the commonality of public life.
      2. The Orient is on show in this poem, and we understand just how capacious the urban container can be.

II. "Crossing Brooklyn Ferry" is unquestionably Whitman's urban masterpiece, the long poem in which his vision of the city merges entirely with his vision of poetry.
   A. Historic Brooklyn of the mid-19th century is recorded here.
   B. The ferry is easily understood as a site of encounter, rather than a source of transportation. Poetry itself is redefined as a site of encounter.
   C. The "well join'd scheme" is Whitman's phrase for capturing the body politic.
   D. Whitman's "transcendental" theater is richly on show here; he urges us to see the spirit beyond the physical surfaces. This theme is classically Emerson; it is, in fact, Emerson's legacy.
   E. "Suspension," a term used repeatedly in the poem, is the poem's medium and goal.
      1. Whitman's proclivity for water and sea dates all the way back to his childhood on Long Island, and it provides the key images for many of his finest poems.
      2. The ferry ride has been presented as mythic journey in earlier literature, but never before as a place of encounter.
      3. Suspension—keeping it all fluid and "present," here/there and now/then—may be interpreted as the rhythm of desire.
F. The poem aims ultimately at identification and merging—beyond time and place. In the midst of flux, Whitman's moment of contact with his fellows (on the ferry, reading the poem) is the climax.

G. We also encounter, surprisingly, the place of doubt in Whitman's scheme; this constitutes a still deeper link with the reader. The reader "ferries" into the poem, into Whitman, as we actualize the "vehicular" energies of this piece.

H. The exhilaration of the crowd sounds the new urban note. Whitman has created a moment of temporal bonding with the future.

I. Whitman emerges finally as "soul maker." He creates a bridge with his fellows and readers through his vision and writing. If we compare this poem with Baudelaire's view of crowds, we see the warmth and pathos of Whitman's vision.

III. Other Whitman city poems, while less famous, warrant consideration.

A. "Give Me the Splendid Silent Sun" displays Whitman's ability to appreciate both the urban and the rural.
   1. We cannot miss the age-old rivalry between city and country in this poem.
   2. Whitman's endorsement of urban life over country life stamps the piece with modernity.

B. "Sparkles from the Wheel" is one of Whitman's gems in the area of urban epiphany, the visionary experience of a new order.
   1. Whitman is again the reporter, the flaneur strolling through the city, looking for experience.
   2. The poem celebrates pedestrian but miraculous moments of beauty, those moments of everyday life that become radiant if we know how to see them.
   3. "Sparkles from the Wheel" can be seen as an emblem of Whitman's poetry: the creation of beauty from the simplest elements of daily life.
Lecture 27

Whitman: Poet of Death

Scope: Although Whitman is properly seen as a vital, even titanic force whose poems celebrate life in its most sprawling and intimate phases, it is nonetheless true that a deep intimacy with death runs throughout his work, informing his vision at every turn. But two of his finest and richest poems are focused entirely on this theme: "Out of the Cradle Endlessly Rocking" examines the discovery of poetic vocation through death, and "When Lilacs Last in the Dooryard Bloom'd" is the majestic elegy that Whitman wrote after Abraham Lincoln's death. Death—as life's truth and art's source—emerges as the bedrock of Whitman's poetry. These two pieces complement each other, in that "Out of the Cradle" seizes upon death as the key ingredient to self-formation, to coming of age as an individual and a poet. The elegy to Lincoln tackles no less than the monumental damage inflicted by the Civil War itself, and it seeks to install a vision of healing and reconciliation and life, for the country at large, on the far side of death.

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

1. Give examples of different traditions of death that Whitman draws from,
2. Explain the relationship between poetry and death in "Out of the Cradle Endlessly Rocking," and
3. Summarize Whitman's unique relationship with Lincoln and how this helped to fashion "When Lilacs Last in the Dooryard Bloom'd."

Outline

I. Can the all-inclusive Whitman also include death? This is the question Whitman obliges us to ask, given his capacity for assent and for promoting all possible angles of vision.

A. Referring to the Egyptian god Osiris, Whitman speaks for a vision of eternal renewal.
B. In Western philosophy, we have Whitman the Hegelian: champion of thesis and antithesis, both sides always in play, leading to some larger synthetic vision.

II. "Out of the Cradle Endlessly Rocking" is Whitman's most intimate and moving poem about death as the key to his vocation and as the generative force of poetry.

A. The poem begins as an invocation to childhood memory, a return to beginnings.
B. Whitman displays here an exquisite talent for depicting the denizens of nature, in this case two birds.
   1. The birds, described as "Two feather'd guests from Alabama" speak their beautiful duet in this piece.
   2. Love and fidelity emerge here as the lesson of nature, the project of the species.
C. Death and loss are to be understood here as the origin of song.
   1. Whitman personifies his creatures and offers us the human drama of animals.
   2. All singers are inherently solitary, bereft; we see here both the origin and the cost of song.
D. Whitman the great ventriloquist translates the sea as well as the birds into language, thus giving voice to the entire scene.
E. The tragic loss that the bird experiences is presented as weaning, as the universal condition of self.
F. In this poetic "aria," the "savage old mother" in Whitman's drama of self-birth testifies to a mythic imagination of great power and ferocity.
G. Death is finally understood as nature's great secret, as baptism of the poet.

III. Death is often presented in Whitman's poetry as nature's truth, as transcendental illumination.

A. "The Scented Herbage of My Breast" speaks directly to the pathos and obsessive beauty of death.
IV. The Civil War is the great paroxysmic moment of American history, and Lincoln's death had, for Whitman, the noble stature that we associate with Greek tragedy.

A. Whitman himself changed dramatically during the Civil War years, and the experience as wound dresser altered him, left him broken and prematurely aged.

B. Lincoln's assassination in 1865 is therefore seen as emblematic of American deaths, as the paradigm experience of a dreadful national wound.

C. Lincoln is never named in the great elegy. We are left with the view that it could be anyone; it is a sign of national mourning.

D. Lincoln's death transforms Civil War into America's *Iliad*, into a legend that demands to be written.

E. Whitman's loving and tender attitude toward Lincoln—so unremarkable to our eyes—was utterly unlike contemporary views of Lincoln, which were unremittingly hostile.

F. "When Lilacs Last in the Dooryard Bloom'd" is the great American elegy of the 19th century.
   1. Whitman begins with an introduction to the players: lilac, star, and thrush.
   2. The thrush's beautiful song is referred to as the "song of the bleeding throat." Whitman's message here is that poetry is to be understood viscerally, as a hemorrhage.
   3. The plot is simple: the coffin travels to Springfield, and the poet's offering (an offering that we will have to measure throughout the poem) is made.
   4. The poet evokes his ultimate companions: death on each side, guaranteeing a fellowship that will sustain him.
   5. In positing the bird/poet as warbler, Whitman touches on a staple Romantic trope, but in a new key.
   6. The poem then offers us an evocation of America the bounteous, North and South, a land of plenty that must heal its wounds.
   7. The poet's "carol of death" is presented as an offering to the "dark mother," as a strange ritual of maturation and of paying one's inevitable dues.
   8. The poem achieves greatness through its visionary moment, in which destruction is transcended, and one moves beyond butchery and death. The poem is about the work of mourning.
   9. The poem's rhythm is insistent in its plea for "passing," moving on, trying to find closure for the war.
Lecture 28

The Whitman Legacy

Scope: We cannot measure Whitman merely by working through his major themes and issues. The most enduring features of his work have to do with his unique flavor and tone. Few poets have ever created a persona as vivid, compelling, and, ultimately, mysterious as his. Man of contradictions, Whitman seems to encompass all realms—animal, vegetable, mineral—and he enlarges our estate by moving us into these precincts, not as something exotic, but as our natural birthright. Whitman's celebration of life comes across as both national and intimate, and it posits American destiny as a form of freedom, of traveling the "open road." Here we will examine elements of Whitman's poetry and voice that are truly signature features of his art. Whitman's humor, his elusive and open-ended style, his uncanny buttonholing of the reader, his genial position as intimate and guide—all endow his work with an intense personal flavor. Above all, Whitman enlarges and intensifies our grasp of ourselves and our setting by inscribing us in a drama that is material and spiritual, often to the point of ecstasy. His best work makes it impossible for us to see things quite the same way again, and he remains a tutelary figure in the American poetic and spiritual landscape.

Objectives—Upon completion of this lecture, you should be able to
1. Describe the range of Whitman as the poet of nature,
2. Summarize Whitman's ambivalent relationship with the idea of American democracy, and
3. Explain why Whitman, in D.H. Lawrence's assessment, was a poet of experience rather than salvation.

Outline

I. In our analysis, we must contend with the many-sided Whitman.
   A. He is jaunty and brash, a "cosmos," a tough who represents a new, cocky stance toward life.
   B. Whitman relishes humor and contradictions and is not ashamed of his multifaceted nature.
   C. What remains in our minds is his inimitable cocky tone, an indecorous poetry that goes in for close-ups.
   D. Whitman is literally irresistible, beckoning to his reader, pulling him or her into the orbit, sharing the vision.
   E. Responses to Whitman in his lifetime were, not surprisingly, passionate, even desperate.

II. Whitman has few rivals as a discoverer and a translator of nature; it is as if he had lived among natural creatures for thousands of years.
   A. The grandeur of the natural scene bursts upon us in passage after passage in Leaves of Grass.
      1. "Bare-bosomed night" is Whitman's beautiful phrase for his ecstatic intercourse with nature.
      2. "When I Heard the Learn'd Astronomer" displays Whitman as the ironic philosopher who gently distinguishes between learned twaddle and real beauty.
      3. Van Gogh's reaction to Whitman's poems testifies to the dignity and simple passion of the work.
      4. Reclaiming nature, putting the "mental world" into its proper place, is an epic enterprise, tonic in its reversals.
   B. Nature and passion are nowhere more perfectly fused than in the little-known poem "The Dalliance of Eagles."
   C. God's signature is everywhere espied in the sacramental scheme; divine markings dot the world. Here is the Puritan legacy, transformed.

III. Whitman is our great poet of the soul; he dares to invert our accepted views here.
   A. The "soul," despite what we've been told, is carnal, and Whitman goes on to show what real worship might look like.
B. Whitman performs a rare service as reinventor of our commerce with ourselves; knowledge is to be understood as sensual apprehension.

IV. Whitman stands as the archetypal American poet.
   A. Whitman's view of American democracy evolved over time and, in his later years, could be ferociously critical.
   B. Whitman was prophetic in his vision of America as the land of the future.
      1. "Passage to India" depicts an America on the march, seeking to fulfill its global destiny. This is the autumnal period of a great poet.
      2. "Song of the Open Road" is to be understood as America's ultimate theme song: we make our futures, we are mobile and free. He prefigures the Beat Poets as the "American bard."
      3. D.H. Lawrence's commentary on the "open road" testifies to Whitman's stature: he is the poet of experience, not of salvation.
   C. Whitman emerges from his poems as our personal medium, our "self" whom we discover because of him.
   D. In the final lines of "Song of Myself," Whitman proves to be with us still, under our boot soles, as we take our leave. It is the ultimate phase of Whitman's song of the earth and is one of the most haunting farewells in literature.

Readings:


Topics for Further Consideration:
   1. Discuss Whitman as democratic poet, in terms of both poetic practice and moral vision.
   2. Whitman was all too modern in 1855. Explain how modern he is today.
Lecture 29

Uncle Tom's Cabin: The Unread Classic

Scope: Harriet Beecher Stowe's position within the American canon epitomizes the whims and changing fortunes of literary history. Although she published a number of novels in her lifetime, she is known for only one book, Uncle Tom's Cabin, a meteoric event in the American landscape that captured the attention of the entire world in 1852, but more or less vanished from sight in the 20th century. The all-male team of Emerson, Thoreau, Hawthorne, Melville, and Whitman has stood, for most of our era, as the ruling literary elite of mid-19th-century literature, and Stowe's book was long relegated by critics to the sidelines as a melodramatic, sentimental pot-boiler, too filled with sermons and too devoid of art to warrant being put on the standard reading lists. But fashions change, and we are now again, with the advent of feminist and ideological criticism, in a position to understand why Uncle Tom's Cabin sold more than 300,000 copies in its first year and became the all-time American best-seller. Stowe's novel is a shining example of the sentimental tradition, and that tradition—with its dictates of feeling over logic, its foreshadowing of the moral, spiritual world in conjunction with the vision of the Bible—is now understood as the key to the book's success and power, both then and now. Quite simply, Stowe's book changed the course of American history, made it possible to see slavery as an inhuman system because it obliged its readers to see slaves as human. Even this titanic accomplishment—and how often does literature achieve so much?—represents only a portion of the ultimate significance of Uncle Tom's Cabin. Beyond the immediacies of the slavery question, Stowe's novel is a prophetic text about America: about the fissured family, about the project of self-making, and about freedom itself.

Stowe's novel was a monumental success from the moment of its publication, reprinted in 22 languages from 1852 to 1860, and we need to know why so few people today have read it. To do this, we need to understand both the Sentimental Tradition that inspired the book as well as the Modernist bias that accounts for its neglect. In giving its account of slavery, Uncle Tom's Cabin tells the 19th century's favorite story, the Christ story, and it recasts these issues in a strikingly matriarchal fashion, placing women and the family at the core of the moral universe. Yet, we all know that this novel's title character, Uncle Tom, is a term of derision and contempt in today's conversation about race, and we shall see that black readers have had trouble with the novel ever since it was published. Like Lincoln, Stowe had divided views on race, even though she was profoundly anti-slavery, and her book is more relevant to these matters than we may have thought.

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

1. Summarize why so many critics have accorded Stowe second class status as a 19th-century novelist,
2. Explain whether Stowe's attitudes toward race seem dated or prophetic, and
3. Summarize how Uncle Tom's Cabin is a religious allegory.

Outline

I. Why didn't many of us read Uncle Tom's Cabin in school?
   A. Stowe's novel sold more than 300,000 copies in its first year, was translated into 22 languages during its first decade, and earned for its author the famous greeting from Lincoln: "So you're the little lady who made this big war."
   B. Yet our view of the "American Renaissance" has been shaped by the all-male team of Emerson, Thoreau, Hawthorne, Melville, and Whitman. It is no accident that these writers centralize the drama of the solitary individual, the ego that makes its way in the world. Stowe shows us that there is another vision to be considered—that of family, group, mother, and child.
   C. Uncle Tom's Cabin has been written off, for much of the 20th century, as "sentimental." Certain episodes such as Tom's suffering at the hands of Simon Legree, Eliza fleeing over the ice, and little Eva's tearful death remain in our minds as virtually mythic events.
1. Why are we tough on melodrama? What about the other charges against the book—that its characters are stereotypical and that it's escapist and overly steeped in religion?

2. The Sentimental Tradition is the great popular form of the 19th century, and unlike the males of the "American Renaissance"—Stowe is telling a story that touches a national nerve.

3. Stowe's book is profoundly matriarchal, and it relocates power itself, moving it from the government to the kitchen.

4. Stowe comes from a distinguished family of intellectuals, including a sister and a half-sister who are leaders in American feminism.

5. Above all, Stowe celebrates the family, the bonds and links that unite people, rather than the fate of the individual self, and we need to reconsider a number of our famous American books in this light.

6. Stowe is also writing a religious allegory, positing Tom as the book's suffering Christ and little Eva as the great redeemer.

7. Little Eva's death is the celebrated emotional center of the book, the calculated tear-jerker that nonetheless introduces a new vision of death and of slavery.

8. Tom's drama is that of Calvary; Simon Legree's single goal is to break Tom, and Stowe is out to show that the soul cannot be bought or possessed by another, no matter how "salable the body is."

II. *Uncle Tom's Cabin* is famous for its depiction of the evils of slavery, yet its view of race is notoriously uneven and warrants a careful look.

A. Since the book's publication, black leaders have disliked it: Frederick Douglass was among the earliest, but Richard Wright and James Baldwin also were critical of its view of blacks.

B. Ever since Civil Rights legislation, "Uncle Tom" has been considered a pejorative term, implying mealy-mouthed appeasement. Is this fair?

C. Stowe puts on the stage an assortment of people of color. We cannot fail to see the differences between her full-blooded black characters who speak in dialect and are almost portrayed as actors in a minstrel show and her mulatto characters who are virtually white-skinned, have European manners, and can "pass."

D. The book is surprisingly shrewd and candid about the attitudes in both the North and the South concerning slavery and race. In particular, we discover how one group can be both proslavery and fond of blacks, whereas the other is abolitionist but condescending and squeamish in its attitude toward blacks.

E. Stowe ultimately opts for an "African" solution to her story of racial injustice, and this scheme reflects an anxiety about miscegenation (blacks and whites living together) that runs throughout much American literature, with high points in Faulkner, Ellison, and Morrison.
Lecture 30

Stowe's Representation of Slavery

Scope: We know that Stowe wrote *Uncle Tom's Cabin* in passionate reaction against the Fugitive Slave Act, a law that required Northerners to return runaway slaves to their former masters. Her goal was to make her readers feel the horror of buying and selling human beings, but the deepest scandal of all is the routine annihilation of family that slavery entailed. Stowe approaches these issues from the point of view of a mother who has had and lost children, and the book's power and structure are both inseparable from its family theme. Not only does Stowe emphasize the cruelty of separating family members, but she goes a step further in showing that this policy of severance and division is, in some crucial emotional sense, an illusion, a fiction. Her vision is astonishingly maternal in the sense that the mother/child bond is seen to be indestructible, alive in the spirit even where broken in the flesh. This vision returns to the literary community more than a century later, in Morrison's *Beloved*.

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

1. Summarize the importance of the motherhood theme in *Uncle Tom's Cabin*,
2. Appraise the accuracy of the widespread belief that Stowe is a sentimental writer, and
3. Explain Stowe's perspective on the traditional American literary theme of "individuation."

Outline

I. The Fugitive Slave Act is known to be one of the catalysts that prompted Stowe to write *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. Stowe's memorable phrase for this activity is "the catching business," and she accurately captures the vehicular possibilities of this expression.

   A. Her purpose in writing this book was to bring her Northern readers to their senses by making them actually see the "marketplace exchange" of human beings for the horror it is.

   B. In accomplishing this purpose, Stowe makes us grasp the enormity of the proposition of "selling a man." The American political principles of freedom that are expressed in the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution are diametrically opposed to slavery, once we can see slaves as humans.

   C. The chapter focusing on the slave warehouse displays Stowe's moral fervor and also her cunning art as she exposes the transgressions at hand.

      1. Stowe uses the phrase "locomotive tendencies" to describe the desperate trajectories of escaping slaves and their paid trackers. Her book is indeed about the "weightlessness" of the slave as a market item.

      2. Her view of the splitting of the slave family comes across with a power that is prenuclear: a bursting of the atom to "liberate" its parts.

      3. At stake in her presentation of the family is a profound question about the ultimate status of the human subject—reified individual or member of a group? This debate will carry over to Toni Morrison's work as well, passing through other memorably threatened families, such as Faulkner's Compsons and Steinbeck's Joads.

   D. Stowe's book owes much of its searing power to its view of motherhood. This is a concept that is as much perceptual as it is moral.

      1. The presence of dead children is felt everywhere in *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, but the book's brilliance lies in its poetic substitutions, its wisdom about the paths of emotion and love.

      2. Stowe undertakes one of the major projects in American literature: reconfiguration of the human family. Here is a primary goal for literature—to show how symbolic arrangements can heal real wounds and bring together, spiritually, what has been sundered in the flesh.
II. To label Stowe a "sentimental" writer denies her due credit as a visionary. Her vision is a revolutionary maternal one, and it ultimately suggests that our notion of "individuation"—one of the cornerstones of American thinking—is illusory.

A. St. Clare, the blasé but likable master of Tom and father of Eva, illustrates Stowe's moral vision: we ultimately return to Mother.

B. The entire saga of Simon Legree, Tom's sadistic taskmaster, follows the familial logic of Stowe's book. Legree, who prides himself on being independent, on creating a closed world of his own, will experience the erosion and collapse of all his defenses as the spirit world asserts its strength at the book's close.

C. Stowe's vision of heart and soul is more modern, less sentimental, than it appears. She is out to show that we are never quite "free" or even "weaned" from our earliest experiences—in particular, our experience as child under Mother's tutelage.
Lecture 31

Freedom and Art in *Uncle Tom's Cabin*

**Scope:** The great power and beauty of Stowe's classic depiction of slavery derive from the alternative vision she proposes at every moment. Slavery is indeed a form of intolerable coercion and butchery, but freedom is absolute, and it shimmers in this text. We shall see that Legree fails to "break" or even "possess" Tom, because the soul is "unownable" by others; it is ours and God's. Whereas Tom's ultimate Christ-like liberation is well known, Stowe's depiction of the strange black child, Topsy, is just as fascinating as a meditation about forms of freedom. Finally, we shall see that this book is a much greater tribute to art than we may have thought. In the final saga of Cassy, who succeeds in escaping from Legree, we encounter a view of art as freedom, a capacity to take control over one's destiny. We witnessed a similar theme with Melville's character Babo, a black slave.

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

1. Summarize Topsy's role in the novel's overriding religious theme,
2. Explain the role of the Bible—both intellectual and physical—in *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, and
3. Give examples of how Stowe integrates the theme of redemptive art in her novel.

**Outline**

I. Although the novel depicts Uncle Tom's horrible death, we cannot fail to see that this is also a great triumph of the soul. Tom rejects Cassy's offer of aid, and, spiritually intact, goes at last to the place of freedom.
   A. Legree's great pride consists of *breaking* his slaves, and in Tom he encounters something new.
   B. Tom's final agony is clearly depicted as a symbolic crucifixion, and his death works miracles.

II. Another "unownable" soul in this text is the black child, Topsy, whose behavior constitutes one of the novel's most intriguing performances.
   A. In terms of authorial design, Topsy's role is clear: she is to be "converted" by the love of Eva and Ophelia from pagan child to Christian child.
   B. Stowe's depiction of Topsy is a stunning example of freedom in this saga of entrapment and coercion.
      1. Topsy's bizarre language is a primary instance of her freedom; she makes up terms and uses words for her own purposes.
      2. As the great mischief-maker of the text, Topsy is a "bad" girl, but we notice her remarkable successes in this vein, in particular her skill in remaining "untraceable." Here, too, a contrast with the "tracked" slaves comes to mind.
      3. Topsy's wonderful account of her "origins" and her weird playfulness in this book endow her with a kind of demiurgic power that is close to freedom itself.
   C. In the end of the novel, we find Topsy as a Christian child living in Vermont, but the energies that go into her presentation make her a strangely appropriate counter to Tom's Christian example.

III. The role of art—rarely acknowledged in the "sentimental" readings of this book—is crucially connected to the major projects of freedom: those of George and Eliza, and of Cassy and Emmeline.
   A. The exodus of the Harris family to Canada, and then to Africa, is made possible by the art of disguise, now understood to be a kind of "second skin," a way of remaking one's self.
   B. The fullest instance of art as redemptive is seen in the great story of Cassy's escape with Emmeline from Simon Legree's plantation.
      1. Tom's "crucifixion" is spliced, "cut," narratively with Cassy's scene of magic and cunning, as if art were a human version of God's presence.
      2. Cassy reconfigures Legree's proud, closed world by breaking its hold and producing powerful spirits that will then break into Legree himself.
3. Cassy is to be understood as the "mad woman in the attic," a figure who haunts much 19th-century literature—an entrapped woman who creates modes of escape and battle.

4. Cassy's escape through the swamp and her stint as "ghost" are likened to Orpheus's retrieving of Eurydice from the land of the dead.

IV. The great "intertext" of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* is obviously the Bible. Stowe has used it as her model, and she has sought to produce her own version.

A. The Bible is to be understood as a spatial, dimensional reality.
   1. It produces the backdrop of spirit, which allows us to read "properly" the story of transgression that slavery perpetuates.
   2. Tom's support system is the Bible, a book which he is unable to read but which he knows by heart. We see it as a "place" where Tom lives and to which he will escape.
   3. Reading the Bible and thereby seeing the realm of the soul is what makes Tom and Eva special, and St. Clare envies them both. Eva wants to teach slaves to read.

B. We realize that "reading" is presented in this book as a form of emancipation, a way of apprehending another world behind the finite, phenomenal one.

C. Stowe states as her final goal that she wants to make the reader feel right, and with this formulation we see the higher aim of the entire sentimental tradition—to touch the heart, to change behavior by moving the soul. There is nothing escapist or superficial in this conception of literature.

Readings:
Essential: Stowe, *Uncle Tom's Cabin* in *Three Novels* (Library of America, 1982)


Topics for Further Consideration:
1. Discuss the significance of the "divided family" in *Uncle Tom's Cabin*.
2. Taking account of today's conversation about race and gender, explain how *Uncle Tom's Cabin* should—or should not—be required reading in high school or college.
Lecture 32

Emily Dickinson: In and Out of Nature

Scope: Emily Dickinson is the 19th century's greatest surprise. Looking like Walt Whitman's opposite number in virtually every conceivable respect, the reclusive virginal figure dressed in white, who never leaves her father's house in Amherst, has captured the imagination in ways that few other poets can claim—religious poet in the Puritan tradition, poet of the Romantic school, proto-feminist poet, first poet of modernism, precursor of postmodernism—the list goes on. Like Whitman, she is more various than we have thought, and like Whitman, the more we read her work, the more sibylline she often appears. Some of her finest lyrics have a Romantic purity that matches Wordsworth, as if she were an inhabitant of nature on the same level as the woods and the birds and squirrels. Yet other, more complex poems signal her estrangement from the natural scene, her (already modern) sense of living in and through consciousness, ever at a distance from reality. Still other pieces speak to us about death in ways that are unheard-of, from vantage points that seem impossible. And there are the splendid outbreaks of rage and passion about being a woman in a man's world. Finally, there is the outright pith and virulence of her work, a propensity for violence and savagery that we need to come to terms with. Dickinson is a difficult, shocking poet, not always easy to like, but never easy to forget.

Beginning with a general account of Dickinson's reputation and biography, we will move to a discussion of her nature poems. We will see that she has two distinct manners. The first entails poems of breathtaking immediacy, in which she delivers the natural world fresh and quivering for our inspection and delight, and we easily see this "at-home-ness" as a form of Eden. Her second style is characterized by her famous adage, "tell it slant." These pieces are inferential to the point of madness, in that we see Dickinson establishing a complex, highly original set of correspondence between natural events and human lives. In these haunting lyrics, we witness a new and rich notation of experience, and our own deciphering powers are tested as we move from physical scene (which is shown) to intellectual significance (which we are to chart on our own).

Objectives—Upon completion of this lecture, you should be able to
1. Contrast Emily Dickinson with her contemporary, Walt Whitman;
2. Give examples of Dickinson's conception of "natural religion"; and
3. Explain the significance of "slanted" perception in Dickinson's poetry.

Outline

I. In many ways the opposite of Whitman, Dickinson represents many traditions: Puritan, Romantic, protomodernist, and postmodernist. Dickinson's life has captured the imagination of all poetry lovers by achieving the status of legend. She is American poetry's most famous recluse.
   A. In 1830, Dickinson was born in Amherst, Massachusetts; she lived virtually her whole life in her father's house, in all senses of the term.
   B. Dickinson was surprisingly active while young, with a reputation for humor, but she became increasingly reclusive as an adult.
   C. There was virtually nothing published of her prodigious output while she was living, but we do have the record of her crucial "literary exchange" with Thomas Higginson, who was an established literary "judge" of his day.
   D. After her death, 1,775 poems were found, written in the strangest format on bits of paper.
   E. The Dickinson style is unique and daunting. Her poems are larded with dashes and are composed of a compressed, skewed grammar and an exploded syntax. She may be thought of as the first poet of "Babel."
II. Dickinson's most congenial poems enable us to see her as the initiate of nature, the privileged reporter of a primeval world.

A. Dickinson once called Eden "that old fashioned house we dwell in every day," and her poems parallel this assertion.
   1. Her depiction of sunrise has all the elements of shock and astonishment that we are no longer able to feel.
   2. Dickinson preaches a "natural religion," in which the physical world is infused with the miraculous and the divine, as in "A bird came down the walk."

B. Nature's darker side, which deserves considerable attention, shows up in distinct ways.
   1. The unfair parallel between the endless seasons and the trajectory of human life—change and mortality—is a key notion for her.
   2. In passages such as "I dreaded that first Robin so," she seems to be saying, "Can you bear looking at the creation?" And we realize that, unlike her, we have been shielded by our blinders. She depicts the alterability of nature.

III. While some poems reveal Dickinson as Eden-based, others are more refractory, as if the natural scene could (and should) not be depicted directly. Dickinson's solution is both perceptual and artistic; hers is a poetry of indirection.

A. "Tell all the Truth but tell it slant" is Dickinson's well-known line that encapsulates an entire philosophy of seeing and saying.

B. "There's a certain Slant of light" is one of her most significant poems of indirect natural reporting, and it displays the various phases of notation and interpretation that are triggered by such writing.
   1. For the thoughtful observer, winter's message is unmistakable: death now comes. But nature does not know permanent death, whereas humans must face precisely this quandary: Is it permanent?
   2. The burden of religion is essentially to mediate this physical fate: what to make of mortality?
   3. In a stunning notation, Dickinson signals the realm of the human as the place where the "internal differences" are. Here is the drama of interpretation. The natural scene changes only slightly—shadows grow, and we understand what must be coming, and we then make the key "transference" to our own time-rulled lives.
   4. Dickinson designates our sense of mortality as our aristocracy, our "imperial affliction," a kind of covenant between us and God.
   5. Our fate of death emerges here as something perceivable, as the processing of natural hieroglyphics, a new visual language.

C. "Further in Summer than the Birds" works the same issues of mortality with a strategy of indirection that is even more developed than in other poems.
   1. The fact that the title contains the word "further" indicates the reader's cognitive position: beyond the visible and audible, at that place where the scene is translated into its imminent meaning.
   2. Nature and religion are once again fused. The crickets' chirping is designated as Mass, showing that they, too, signal the passing of season and time—our season and our time.
   3. Human solitude, so evident in the very make-up of the poem (alone in the woods) leads to a view of mortality as "pensive custom."
   4. To move from seeing to knowing is the classic Dickinson trajectory, and it undergirds her poems, making us realize their fateful character.
   5. Dickinson views nature through many perspectives; she is almost anthropological in her interpretation of meaning.
Lecture 33

Dickinson's Poetry: Language and Consciousness

Scope: Dickinson's poetry helps us realize that the project of great literature is frequently one of un-naming, of cleansing the world from its customary labels and tags to install fresh perception. Yet such a procedure inevitably highlights the inherently artificial, conventional nature of language, reminding us that all "naming" is ultimately illusory, if not futile. This drama often seems visceral in Dickinson, and we end up with a severe, almost punitive view of how knowledge is achieved: through loss and pain. Her work acknowledges alienation from external reality, and it logically focuses on what we can know—our own solitude. But, in some of her most gripping pieces, we see what a busy, "occupied" place the private mind is, because consciousness gets there first.

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

1. Give examples of Dickinson's use of negative perceptions, or "un-naming."
2. Summarize Dickinson's view of the creation, and
3. Explain Dickinson's belief that the self is never alone.

Outline

I. Dickinson's project of un-naming is on show in her use of negatives, which makes us imagine the alternative vision.

A. "It was not Death, for I stood up" signals in its initial line the Dickinson procedure: not death, for we still live, yet what then . . . ?
   1. Working your way through negativity ("it was not . . . ") is a classic form of reader involvement, of negotiating her language to see where it (obliquely) points.
   2. Fitting language to experience is what these poems are about, and they make us all the more aware of the factitiousness of naming strategies.
B. "The Tint I cannot take—is best—" may be understood as Dickinson's ars poetica, her acknowledgment of the gulf between words and nature.
   1. In all these notations, we see that nature defies language, that our "saying" can never be commensurate with the vision.
   2. Yet, maddeningly, nature seems to tease us toward utterance, as if the spectacle were there precisely for us to name it.
   3. The poem suggests that we are ignorant strangers in the world, unequipped to decipher what we see.
C. "Before I got my eye put out" is a characteristically incredible, sadistic Dickinson first line, and it points to a weird, punitive view of creation.
   1. The poem says that we are blinded by the creation, which is an astonishing position for poetry to take.
   2. Again we see the lesson: we are not equipped for vision and knowledge. And again we see how the poem nonetheless constitutes a form of vision and knowledge.

II. Some of Dickinson's finest poems map out a kind of epistemology—they show us the conditions for knowing. It is usually a question of making human knowledge out of loss, as if loss were our best way of understanding.

A. "Success is counted sweetest" is the classic utterance of this vision, and there is a wonderful economy here that awards the laurel leaf of knowledge to the loser.
B. "To learn the Transport by the Pain" expresses even more brutally the Dickinson model of knowledge via pain.
   1. Dickinson posits our life as a form of exile, a shipwrecked condition in which we are yearning for a cognitive and spiritual home.
2. Yet the poem has also a sinister ring to it. Is this search for "home" a huge anthropocentric error? Why insist on hidden mystery? Might it be a con game?

3. Dickinson's term "Sovereign anguish" suggests that our stature derives from this exile, this state of being cut off from grace.

C. "My life closed twice before its close" is the classic statement of solitude as the primal condition.
   1. Being shut off and locked out appear as the critical junctures of moral and emotional experience, an experience with which Dickinson seems extremely familiar.
   2. Given Dickinson's peculiar epistemology, we can now see "parting" as the source of knowledge. Loss endows life with meaning.

III. Dickinson is the high priestess of the closed-in self, and we realize that her life of seclusion mirrors the spiritual exile that, at times, characterizes all lives.

A. "The Soul selects her own Society" reveals the elitism and element of choice in Dickinson's solitude.

B. "After great pain, a formal feeling comes" seeks to map out the territory we call "pain," making us understand that our most intense exchanges and negotiations may be with ourselves. As in much of Dickinson, we pass, at the poem's conclusion, "off the edge of the map."

C. Yet in a sometimes awful, sometimes playful Gothic vein, Dickinson shows that the closed-in self has inmates and is not alone, after all.
   1. "Alone, I cannot be" spells out the "busyness" of the mind.
      a. Dickinson suggests that we are all containers filled with internal traffic.
      b. This "noise," these uninvited guests, are here for the duration. We are all haunted.
   2. "One need not be a Chamber–to be Haunted,—" is also a kind of *ars poetica*, illustrating a view of poetry as infusion of ghostliness, injection of "spirit."
      a. The figures of the poem—ghosts and assassins—constitute Dickinson's version of Gothicism: a playful recasting of Romantic tropes.
      b. Once again, Dickinson is intent on finding analogies and metaphors for psyche.
      c. Our commerce with ourselves is busy and frightening.
Lecture 34

Dickinson: Devotee of Death

Scope: Dickinson is perhaps best known for her astonishing poems about death. We know death and dying to have been a far more quotidian spectacle for 19th-century women than it is in our age of hospitals and nursing homes; nonetheless, Dickinson's fascination with the subject—and her range of approaches to it—cannot be adequately explained culturally. At times she is morbidly curious about the social ripple caused by a death; at other times she portrays our helpless struggle against death in organic terms that seem to possess medical wisdom. But her most stunning performances revolve around narrating her own dying and death. Now we "know" this to be impossible, yet the poems are here, on the page, with their weird assortment of personal reports, quasi-journalistic in their insistence. Even in this arena, her poetry explores death with an amazing range of perceptions: smugness that the living will soon join her, experiencing death as a courtly gentleman caller, waiting impatiently for the final revelation, and suggesting "dying" as the ultimate trope for despair.

Objectives—Upon completion of this lecture, you should be able to
1. Summarize how Dickinson's perception of death differed from that of her literary contemporaries,
2. Give examples of how Dickinson accomplishes the paradoxical task of reporting on her own death, and
3. Explain Dickinson's conception of consciousness in "I felt a funeral in my brain."

Outline

I. Death in the 19th century has a kind of quotidian presence that we have lost sight of in our culture of nursing homes and hospitals for the terminally ill.
   A. Death was especially a familiar component of women's lives, for they tended to the dying.
   B. Yet death hardly appears in the optimistic work of transcendentalists such as Emerson and Thoreau, and Dickinson's obsession harks back to the Puritan vision.

II. Dickinson's range of tones and approaches to death is astonishingly wide.
   A. Death is often simply an everyday event, each characterized by a slight change of routine.
      1. "There's been a Death, in the Opposite House" spells out for us the insidious little signs of death's visitation.
      2. "The last Night that She lived" presents death as an odd heightening of perception for the survivors.
   B. In other pieces, Dickinson's approach is quasi-medical underneath its metaphor of battling the enemy: "Death is like the insect."
      1. We see here the inadequate human strategies marshaled against death.
      2. The tenacious hold of death makes the poem a parable of cancer's invasive work.
   C. Dickinson's most stunning poems involve the imagining and reporting of one's own death.
      1. "'Twas just this time–last year–I died" is a characteristically mind-boggling title for Dickinson's report.
         a. The humor of this piece comes from its petulant notion: they'll all miss me.
         b. But the horror of the piece appears in its almost gleeful close: They'll soon join me.
      2. "Because I could not stop for Death" is arguably Dickinson's single most famous poem. Its depiction of the process of dying renders an unforgettable elegance and pathos.
         a. Death is imaged here as a courtly gentleman caller, and this notation both softens the theme and makes it more lurid.
         b. Exiting the world turns out to be a measurable process here, as Dickinson reviews the natural homeland she is leaving.
The final vista, suggested in the last line, is jolting in its temporal vantage point: Where are we now?

3. "I heard a Fly buzz—when I died—" is conceivably Dickinson's strangest performance in this area. What can a fly have to do with death?
   a. Death is presented here in its classic formulation as a moment of truth, and Dickinson fully enlists the theatrics of revelation.
   b. We also note the cooperation here as the dying person readies herself for the end and its vision.
   c. But we encounter only static instead of vision; an entire visionary project is going out of business here.
   d. Dickinson proves to be the reporter, right to the grisly end, dutifully narrating what she sees and hears.
   e. This poem epitomizes the heroics of consciousness in Dickinson, a project of scrupulous notation that refuses to be side-tracked.

4. "I felt a Funeral, in my Brain," is Dickinson's most surreal effort in troping death.
   a. We cannot be certain if this poem is really about the experience of dying. Could death be invoked as metaphor for melancholy? Headache? Hangover?
   b. Whether this death is literal or figurative, the poem displays a masochistic imagination that does not miss a step in choreographing its death.
   c. As she contemplates the many facets of death, Dickinson reaches for cosmic figures and offers us a new universe, both inside and out.
   d. In conclusion, this piece reaches furthest in coralling the territory of death. It thereby performs a strange public service of diving into the wreck, of exiting the human existence, and then miraculously telling us about it.
   e. Dickinson's remark, "I would eat evanescence slowly" suggests something of the slow-motion and zoom effect of her poetic project: to make us see the phenomena of time, including death.
Lecture 35

Dickinson: "Amherst's Madame de Sade"

Scope: One of our favorite and familiar versions of Emily Dickinson is the virginal, demure, wren-like creature that she cunningly constructed for posterity. As Camille Paglia has especially emphasized in her book, *Sexual Personae*, this image of Dickinson blinds us to the sheer violence and nastiness of her images, of her imagination. It is tonic to take a good look at the outright virulence of Dickinson's language, the recurring bouts of murder and maiming and mayhem that punctuate the poems. Sometimes this imagery is incidental or thrown in there for shock purposes; at other times we are forced to admit that the central poetic events at hand are shocking in their sadistic or masochistic power. Comparing her to the "divine Marquis," as Paglia does, may seem excessive, but our labels count less than the need to see her audacious figures for what they are: a view of life, psyche, and art that is uncompromisingly fierce and savage.

Objectives—Upon completion of this lecture, you should be able to
  1. Appraise the validity of Camille Paglia's notion that Dickinson's poetry is full of sadomasochism,
  2. Summarize Dickinson's depiction of God in her poetry, and
  3. Explain why Dickinson would depict self-awareness as a kind of wound.

Outline

I. Diminutive Dickinson is the congenial image of the poet that so easily comes to mind.
   A. We think of the Amherst recluse dressed in white—decorous and proper and unfailingly genteel. "I'm nobody! Who are you?" conveys an artificial coyness.
   B. In letters and poems, Dickinson describes herself as demure, as a shy little wren, a sweet little thing. This image stuck.

II. Camille Paglia argues, in her controversial book *Sexual Personae*, that a whole lot of sadomasochism is going on in Emily Dickinson's poetry.
   A. We begin with Dickinson's own famous definition of poetry as violent, visceral experience.
   B. In some poems, we are told how beauty is made, and the process looks a lot like torture. Perfume is made by pressure and force.
   C. Scattered throughout the poems are views of God the Father that are not only unflattering but often nasty.
      1. There is a large group of hushed, pious poems about "Master"; the servility here can cloy.
      2. Some poems, however, are more accusatory. "He fumbles at your Soul" warrants inspection along these lines.
         a. Who is he that "fumbles at your Soul"?
         b. What is he doing? What kind of molesting or uninvited intimacy is portrayed here?
         c. Dickinson reworks the trope of "music in the spheres" but makes us ask: This is how music is made?
         d. On balance, this poem informs us that we live in a murderous universe.
      3. Other poems reveal a diminished God, a figure whose authority can be questioned. A new way of looking?
         a. Consider the shocking image of God's amputated hand.
         b. Or, imagine God as a burglar/banker.
         c. A third possibility is Jesus the auctioneer.
   D. Much maiming and wounding is on show in Dickinson's poems, both in the main action and in the interstices and metaphors.
      1. Dickinson wants to acknowledge what words can do, in the arena of violence.
2. In some instances, the violence is personalized as what the poet would like to do.
3. The virulence of nature is a familiar concept, but it reaches new heights in Dickinson's work.
4. Dying comes across in Dickinson, not as a moment of compassion and tender farewell, but often as a great sadistic spectacle.
   a. Dickinson's gruesome humor is unmistakable in her most casual notations of corpses.
   b. Tortured bodies fill her poems, and we end up wondering if what we have blithely called "living" (as it comes to a close) is perhaps better understood as torture.
5. Looking at death is a primary activity here—You think it is mournful? Think again; it might be fun.

E. Dickinson's portrayal of consciousness and authenticity, a consistent pursuit in her poetry, is often imaged in gruesome physical ways.
   1. Self-awareness is memorably figured as a wound.
   2. In one of her most daring images about "knowing" others, Dickinson says, "Rip us open, to find our truth."

F. In pondering these images, so counter to any polite or genteel version of the poet, we must ask the question: How do we assess this Dickinson?
Lecture 36

Dickinson's Legacy

Scope: Legacies are notoriously hard to gauge with finality, but, in Dickinson's case, much is clear. Her status as the *Ur-Mother-Poet* among feminists in particular and women in general is unarguable, giving her a rank commensurate with Charlotte Brontë and Virginia Woolf. Some of her fiercest poems are about female power, unforgottably coded in terms of erupting volcanoes, exploding bombs, and loaded guns. She will also be remembered as the great metaphysical poet of the 19th century, with a sense of wit and sheer intellectual brilliance that have no counterpart in American literature. Finally, we find in her work something indomitable about the will to live, something Nietzschean in her understanding of life as appetite, as energy, an energy found everywhere—in nature, in so-called dying, in all human transactions. Whether we call her "explosive" or "implosive," she wrecks our accepted notions and expands our world.

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

1. Explain why feminist critics have trumpeted Dickinson's poetry,
2. Summarize Dickinson's idea that poetry is a neural event, and

Outline

I. Dickinson richly deserves her modern status as the "great mother" of feminist rage.
   A. The reclusive Dickinson writes about passion in accents and images that center around "fire" and "explosion."
      1. "Wild Nights—Wild Nights!" seems to be a poem about wild sexual passion.
         a. But, given the "conditional" or "subjunctive" cast of this piece, we have to ask: What is the tense here? And that leads to the second question: What is the tense of desire?
         b. This poem, in its economy, leaves unanswerable the important question: Sacred or profane? The subject might be religious.
      2. "Dare you see a Soul at the White Heat?" is one of Dickinson's most explicit allegories of passion.
         a. The poem begins by invoking the crucial voyeurism of poetry: "Dare you see . . ."?
         b. Dickinson ingeniously transforms the traditionally male "blacksmith" into a new gender, illustrating the kind of poaching that she likes.
         c. This poem must be understood as moving toward meltdown, with implications of apocalypse.
      3. "I'm ceded" is Dickinson's well-known rites-of-passage declaration.
         a. This coming-of-age story is paradigmatic for women.
         b. Language gives the poet this self-actualization and freedom.
         c. Dickinson's insistent political metaphors transform this event into a revolution.
         d. Self-making is understood here as a potent political act.
   B. "My Life had stood—a Loaded Gun—" is one of Dickinson's most haunting and mysterious parables about gender and power.
      1. Although the piece is usually seen as a feminist parable, many questions remain about "who" controls "whom"?
      2. The open-ended metaphoric quality of this piece—my life as a loaded gun—makes us ask: What kind of power is this? Could this be a poem about poetry rather than sexuality?

II. Dickinson is also to be seen as the great American metaphysical poet.
   A. Dickinson's metaphors and figures show her to be the poet of ratios, equations, and measures, a strangely scientific figure.
1. Pain and pleasure can be graphed with brutal concision along these lines.

2. Although little given to sociological pronouncements, Dickinson tells us with utter brevity what it means to "enter society"; she defines what we can call "life in the marketplace," in which there are "balances" and "payments."

3. Physics and engineering also take honors in her tropes for experience.

B. Dickinson will always be remembered as the aphorist of Amherst, the author of pithy phrases that stick with us.

C. At her most intense, the legacy of Dickinson redefines 19th-century literature: poetry is to be understood as a neural event. In her prophetic work, we see that the mind lives in, as, and by language.

III. We conclude by calling Dickinson the fiercest ego of the 19th century.

A. She is wise in her assertion that all true living is living against the grain.

B. She affirms a core of self that is permanent—this is the freedom that cannot be taken.

C. Devious, thriving in self-invention, she is the mistress of all roles.

D. Her legacy is casual and despotic. Imagination is all.

Readings:


Topics for Further Consideration:

1. Summarize the role of consciousness in Dickinson's poetry.

2. Explain how you would go about reconciling the view of Dickinson as demure and wren-like with the imagery of violence and sadomasochism that we find in so many of her poems.
## Timeline

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Event</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>17th century</td>
<td>The “Great Migration” brings the Puritans and Pilgrims from England to America.</td>
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<td>1692</td>
<td>John Hawthorne, an ancestor of author Nathaniel Hawthorne, officiates at a number of the infamous witch trials in Salem, Massachusetts.</td>
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<td>1703</td>
<td>Birth of Jonathan Edwards.</td>
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<td>1706</td>
<td>Birth of Benjamin Franklin.</td>
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<td>1721</td>
<td>Benjamin Franklin, at age 15, starts his own newspaper, <em>The New England Courant</em>, and begins to write essays.</td>
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<td>1730</td>
<td>Franklin is named the “Official Printer of Pennsylvania.”</td>
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<td>1732–1757</td>
<td>Franklin writes <em>Poor Richard’s Almanac</em>, the first American periodical.</td>
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<td>1736</td>
<td>Franklin organizes the Union Fire Co.</td>
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<td>1737</td>
<td>Franklin becomes Philadelphia’s postmaster.</td>
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<td>1741</td>
<td>Franklin invents the “Franklin fireplace” (stove).</td>
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<td>1743</td>
<td>Franklin proposes the idea for the American Philosophical Society.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1745</td>
<td>Franklin begins to conduct experiments in electricity.</td>
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<td>1747</td>
<td>Franklin organizes the Pennsylvania Militia.</td>
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<td>1749</td>
<td>Franklin founds the Philadelphia Academy, which later became the University of Pennsylvania.</td>
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<td>1751</td>
<td>Founding of Philadelphia Hospital, with the assistance of Franklin.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1752</td>
<td>Franklin conducts his famous experiment proving that lightning is electrical.</td>
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<td>1753</td>
<td>Franklin receives honorary masters degrees from both Harvard and Yale.</td>
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<td>1757</td>
<td>Franklin elected the representative of Philadelphia (Pennsylvania) to England.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1758</td>
<td>Jonathan Edwards dies.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1759</td>
<td>Franklin receives an honorary doctorate from the University of St. Andrews in Scotland.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1762</td>
<td>Franklin receives an honorary doctorate from Oxford University.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1771</td>
<td>Franklin begins writing his <em>Autobiography</em>.</td>
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<td>1776</td>
<td>Declaration of Independence written and signed. Beginning of the Revolutionary War.</td>
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<td>1783</td>
<td>End of the Revolutionary War.</td>
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<td>1783</td>
<td>Birth of Washington Irving.</td>
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<td>1790</td>
<td>Death of Benjamin Franklin.</td>
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<td>1803</td>
<td>Birth of Ralph Waldo Emerson.</td>
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<td>1804</td>
<td>Birth of Nathaniel Hawthorne.</td>
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<td>1809</td>
<td>Birth of Edgar Allan Poe.</td>
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<td>1811</td>
<td>Birth of Harriet Beecher Stowe.</td>
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<td>1817</td>
<td>Birth of Henry David Thoreau.</td>
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<td>1819</td>
<td>Washington Irving publishes “The Legend of Sleepy Hollow” and “Rip Van Winkle.”</td>
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<td>1819</td>
<td>Birth of Herman Melville.</td>
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1819...............................Birth of Walt Whitman.
1821...............................Ralph Waldo Emerson graduates from Harvard.
1829...............................Emerson marries Ellen Tucker.
1830...............................Birth of Emily Dickinson.
1831...............................Emerson’s wife dies.
1832...............................Spurred by his wife’s death, Emerson resigns his ministry.
1835...............................Edgar Allan Poe writes “Berenice.”
1835...............................Birth of Samuel Clemens (Mark Twain).
1836...............................Emerson publishes his essay “Nature.”
1836...............................Poe marries Virginia Clemm, his 14-year-old cousin.
1837...............................Emerson makes his famous speech at Harvard, “The American Scholar.”
1837...............................Nathaniel Hawthorne publishes his collection of stories entitled *Twice-Told Tales*.
1838...............................Poe pens “Ligeia.”
1839...............................Poe publishes “The Fall of the House of Usher,” considered the quintessential horror story, as well as Poe’s masterwork. Poe also publishes “William Wilson” during this year.
1841...............................Emerson publishes several of his best-known essays, including “History,” “Self-Reliance,” and “Circles.”
1841...............................Poe publishes “The Murders in the Rue Morgue,” considered one of the first detective stories, along with “Descent into the Maelstrom,” an early science fiction story.
1842...............................Poe publishes “The Pit and the Pendulum.”
1843...............................Poe publishes “The Black Cat” and “The Tell-Tale Heart.”
1843...............................Birth of Henry James.
1844...............................Emerson publishes the essay “Experience.”
1844...............................Poe publishes “The Balloon-Hoax,” a piece that could be considered science fiction.
1845...............................Poe publishes “The Raven,” as well as “The Purloined Letter,” considered one of the first detective stories, and “The Facts in the Case of M. Valdemar.”
1846...............................Emerson publishes “The Poet,” his chief statement about the literary agenda of the future.
1846...............................Henry David Thoreau spends one night in jail for his refusal to pay several years’ poll tax as protest against the role of Massachusetts in perpetuating slavery.
1846...............................Poe’s wife dies of consumption.
1846...............................Poe writes “The Philosophy of Composition, or How I Wrote ‘The Raven,’” the famous account (perhaps spoofing) of his poetic practice. Poe also publishes “The Cask of Amontillado.”
1846...............................Herman Melville publishes *Typee*.
1847...............................Melville publishes *Omoo*.
1848...............................Thoreau publishes his essay “Civil Disobedience.”
1848...............................Attempted revolutions fail in several European nations.
1849...............................Poe publishes “The Bells,” “Eldorado,” and “Annabel Lee.”
1849.......................... Melville publishes *Mardi*.
1849.......................... Death of Edgar Allan Poe.
1850......................... Hawthorne publishes *The Scarlet Letter*, perhaps his best-known work.
       Also in this year, Melville publishes *White Jacket, or The World in a Man of War*.
1850......................... Karl Marx writes *The Communist Manifesto*.
1850......................... Passage of the Fugitive Slave Act, which required Northerners to return runaway slaves
to their former masters.
1851......................... Thoreau becomes active in the abolitionist movement.
1851......................... Melville meets Hawthorne in person. In this same year, he publishes his masterwork,
                       *Moby Dick*.
1852......................... Harriet Beecher Stowe publishes *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*.
1853......................... Melville publishes the short story “Bartleby, the Scrivener.”
1854......................... Thoreau publishes his masterwork, *Walden*.
1855......................... Walt Whitman publishes the first version of *Leaves of Grass*.
1856......................... Whitman’s poem “Crossing Brooklyn Ferry” published in a version of *Leaves of Grass*.
1856......................... Melville publishes the short story “Benito Cereno.”
1856......................... Birth of Sigmund Freud.
1859......................... Thoreau reads publicly “A Plea for Captain John Brown.”
1859......................... Washington Irving dies.
1859......................... Petroleum is discovered.
1859......................... Whitman writes “Out of the Cradle Endlessly Rocking.”
1860......................... Whitman publishes the collections of poems *Children of Adam* and *Calamus*.
1860......................... Birth of Charlotte Perkins Gilman.
1861......................... Start of the American Civil War.
1862......................... Death of Henry David Thoreau.
1862......................... Emily Dickinson has her literary exchange with noted critic Thomas Wentworth
                       Higginson.
1864......................... Death of Nathaniel Hawthorne.
1865......................... Abraham Lincoln assassinated. Whitman writes “When Lilacs Last in the Dooryard
                       Bloom’d,” an elegy to Lincoln.
1865......................... End of the American Civil War.
1867......................... Mark Twain publishes the short story “The Celebrated Jumping Frog of Calaveras
                       County.”
1869......................... Twain publishes *Innocents Abroad*.
1871......................... Birth of Stephen Crane.
1871......................... Franco-Prussian War.
1874......................... Birth of Robert Frost.
1875.................................. Public reburial and dedication of Poe’s remains.
1876.................................. Twain publishes *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer*.
1879.................................. Henry James writes the first book on Nathaniel Hawthorne.
1881.................................. James publishes *A Portrait of a Lady*.
1882.................................. Death of Ralph Waldo Emerson.
1886.................................. Death of Emily Dickinson.
1885.................................. Twain publishes *Huckleberry Finn*, his acclaimed masterpiece, which was promptly banned by the Concord Public Library.
1887.................................. Charlotte Perkins Gilman gives birth to a daughter, afterward suffering from post-partum depression.
1888.................................. Birth of T. S. Eliot.
1888.................................. Birth of Eugene O’Neill.
1889.................................. Twain publishes *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur’s Court*.
1891.................................. Death of Herman Melville.
1892.................................. Death of Walt Whitman. Publication of “The Wound Dresser.”
1892.................................. Gilman publishes the short story “The Yellow Wallpaper.”
1894.................................. Twain publishes *Pudd’nhead Wilson*.
1894.................................. Robert Frost publishes his first poem.
1895.................................. Crane publishes *The Red Badge of Courage*.
1896.................................. Death of Harriet Beecher Stowe.
1896.................................. Birth of F. Scott Fitzgerald.
1896–1897...................... Crane is on steamship, *Commodore*, carrying arms for Cuban rebels, which sinks. Crane spends 30 hours in a small boat.
1897.................................. Crane covers the Greco-Turkish War.
1897.................................. Birth of William Faulkner.
1898.................................. Crane covers the Spanish-American War.
1898.................................. Crane publishes his short story “The Open Boat,” based on his ordeal at sea in 1897. Crane also pens the short story “The Blue Hotel.”
1898.................................. James publishes *The Turn of the Screw*.
1898.................................. Gilman publishes *Women and Economics*.
1899.................................. Crane publishes “The Monster.”
1899.................................. Birth of Ernest Hemingway.
1900.................................. Death of Stephen Crane.
1902.................................. James publishes *The Wings of the Dove*.
1902.................................. Birth of John Steinbeck.
1903.................................. James publishes *The Ambassadors*.
1904.......................James publishes *The Golden Bowl*.
1910..........................Death of Mark Twain.
1911..........................Birth of Tennessee Williams.
1913..........................Gilman writes ‘‘Why I Wrote ‘The Yellow Wallpaper.’’’
1914..........................Birth of Ralph Ellison.
1915..........................Birth of Arthur Miller.
1916..........................Death of Henry James.
1917..........................F. Scott Fitzgerald joins the army.
1920..........................Fitzgerald publishes his first novel, *This Side of Paradise*.
1920..........................Eugene O’Neill publishes *The Emperor Jones*.
1922..........................Eliot publishes his most influential poem, “The Wasteland.”
1922..........................Fitzgerald publishes *The Beautiful and the Damned*.
1922..........................O’Neill publishes *The Hairy Ape*.
1925..........................Eliot publishes “The Hollow Men.”
1925..........................Fitzgerald publishes his masterpiece, *The Great Gatsby*.
1925..........................Ernest Hemingway publishes his first major work, *In Our Time*.
1925..........................O’Neill publishes *Desire Under the Elms*.
1926..........................Hemingway publishes *The Sun Also Rises*.
1926..........................William Faulkner publishes his first novel, *Soldier’s Pay*.
1927..........................Eliot becomes a British citizen.
1927..........................Faulkner publishes *Mosquitoes*.
1929..........................Hemingway publishes *A Farewell to Arms*.
1929..........................Faulkner publishes *Sartoris*, now known as *Flags in the Dust*.
1929..........................Faulkner publishes *The Sound and the Fury*, considered to be his breakthrough text.
1929..........................Beginning of the Great Depression.
1930..........................Eliot publishes “Ash Wednesday.”
1930..........................Faulkner publishes *As I Lay Dying*, the sister text to *The Sound and the Fury*.
1931..........................Faulkner publishes *Sanctuary*.
1931..........................O’Neill publishes *Mourning Becomes Electra*.
1931..........................Birth of Toni Morrison.
1932..........................Hemingway publishes his treatise on bullfighting, *Death in the Afternoon*.
1932..........................Faulkner publishes *Light in August*.
1934..........................Fitzgerald publishes *Tender Is the Night*.
1935..........................Death of Charlotte Perkins Gilman.
1935.................................. Hemingway publishes his treatise on hunting, *Green Hills of Africa*.

1935.................................. John Steinbeck publishes *Tortilla Flat*.

1936.................................. Faulkner publishes *Absalom, Absalom!* an epic of the Civil War.

1936.................................. O’Neill wins the Nobel Prize for Literature.

1938.................................. Death of Sigmund Freud.

1939.................................. Steinbeck publishes his masterpiece, *The Grapes of Wrath*.

1940.................................. Fitzgerald writes *The Last Tycoon*, left unfinished at his death in the same year.

1940.................................. Hemingway publishes *For Whom the Bell Tolls*.

1940.................................. Faulkner publishes *The Hamlet*.

1941.................................. End of the Great Depression; the United States enters World War II.

1942.................................. Faulkner publishes *Go Down, Moses*.

1943.................................. Eliot publishes the poem “Four Quartets.”

1945.................................. Tennessee Williams publishes *The Glass Menagerie*.

1946.................................. O’Neill publishes *The Iceman Cometh*.

1947.................................. Williams publishes *A Streetcar Named Desire*.

1947.................................. Eliot wins the Nobel Prize for Literature.

1947.................................. Arthur Miller publishes *All My Sons*.

1949.................................. Miller publishes *Death of a Salesman*.

1950.................................. Faulkner wins the Nobel Prize for Literature.

1951.................................. Williams publishes *The Rose Tattoo*.

1952.................................. Hemingway publishes *The Old Man and the Sea*.

1952.................................. Ralph Ellison publishes *Invisible Man*.

1953.................................. Ellison’s *Invisible Man* receives the National Book Award for fiction.

1953.................................. Death of Eugene O’Neill.

1953.................................. Miller publishes *The Crucible*.

1954.................................. Hemingway wins the Nobel Prize for Literature.

1955.................................. The full body of Emily Dickinson’s poetic works is published posthumously.

1955.................................. Williams publishes *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*.

1955.................................. Miller publishes *A View From the Bridge*.

1956.................................. O’Neill’s *Long Day’s Journey into Night*, which he had written in 1945, is published posthumously.

1957.................................. Williams publishes *Orpheus Descending*.

1958.................................. Williams publishes *Suddenly Last Summer*.

1959.................................. Lionel Trilling pays homage to Robert Frost on his 85th birthday, saying that Frost belongs in the great iconoclastic tradition of American literature.

1959.................................. Williams publishes *Sweet Bird of Youth*.

1961.................................. Death of Ernest Hemingway.
1961 .................................. Williams publishes *Night of the Iguana*.
1962 .................................. Steinbeck wins the Nobel Prize for Literature.
1962 .................................. Death of William Faulkner.
1963 .................................. Death of Robert Frost.
1964 .................................. Hemingway’s *Moveable Feast* published posthumously.
1965 .................................. Death of T. S. Eliot.
1968 .................................. Death of John Steinbeck.
1970 .................................. Hemingway’s *Islands in the Stream* published posthumously.
1974 .................................. Toni Morrison publishes *Sula*.
1977 .................................. Morrison publishes *Song of Solomon*.
1983 .................................. Death of Tennessee Williams.
1988 .................................. Morrison publishes her masterpiece, *Beloved*.
1992 .................................. Morrison publishes *Jazz*.
1993 .................................. Death of Ralph Ellison.
1998 .................................. Morrison publishes *Paradise*.
Glossary

**Aboriginal self**: A concept defined by Ralph Waldo Emerson as an existing source of universal energy in which we all partake. This self is not in us, but rather, out in the world, and we must learn to move into it.

**B’hoy**: An American original character, one who challenges all niceties in pieties. The female counterpart is known as the g’hal (the gal).

**Boutade**: French term meaning a joke, a spoof, or a setup that partially hides its true meaning.

**Brahmins**: Term coined in the mid-1800s by the American writer Oliver Wendell Holmes to describe a class of New England intellectuals determined on the basis of birth, education, and scholarly pursuits.

**Calvinism**: Christian theology of the French church reformer John Calvin. The central Calvinist tenets include belief in the absolute sovereignty of God and the doctrine of justification by faith alone.

**Classic**: A work of literature having lasting significance or generally recognized worth. The canonical tests of American literature stem out of vital, often unresolvable, conflicts from their own moments in history. They are bristling with ambiguities and insights that bid to challenge the reader, in their own time, in the present day, and even in the future.

**Coming of age**: In American literature, an event or series of events that spurs a character to reach spiritual adulthood. These stories may or may not revolve around attainment of a character’s physical adulthood.

**Cosmogony**: Literally, the study of the universe’s origin. In literature, the writer’s personal theory of the universe, as reflected in his or her works.

**Cosmos**: As defined by Walt Whitman, a brash young man, a jaunty fellow with a robust ego.

**Counterculture**: A subculture, especially of young people, with values opposed to that of the established culture. Henry David Thoreau is often regarded as a major American counterculture hero.

**Demiurge**: The deity who fashions the world, a creative force. In literature, a character of such influential personality that he or she is an overpowering force in the story being told.

**Double entendre**: A word or turn of phrase having double meaning, especially when the second meaning is risqué. Ernest Hemingway’s works, for instance, revel in suggestions of dual meanings and dual sexuality.

**Dualism**: The division of body from spirit. Whereas most religious traditions assert that spirit is superior to body, some American writers—particularly Walt Whitman—reversed that notion in their works, insisting on the naturalness and sanctity of the body.

**Dysfunction**: Impaired or disorderly function of a cultural system, be it a family or a larger social group.

**Empowered self**: Often regarded as one of America’s worst gifts to modern culture, the concept that the individual is empowered to attain all he or she desires. Ralph Waldo Emerson presents the concept of the empowered, or “imperialistic,” self in his essay “Self-Reliance.”

**Epiphany**: A sudden manifestation of the meaning or essence of something or a sudden intuitive realization or perception of reality.

**Epistemology**: A division of philosophy that investigates the nature and origin of knowledge.

**Existentialism**: A philosophy that emphasizes the uniqueness and isolation of the individual experience in a hostile or indifferent universe. A frequent theme in American literature, which often stresses freedom of choice and responsibility for the consequences of one’s actions.

**Expressionism**: An artistic movement during the late 19th and early 20th centuries that emphasized subjective expression of the artist’s inner experience. Stephen Crane and Emily Dickinson personify this approach to writing, reconfiguring the world we know by clothing it in images and metaphors.

**Feminism**: A doctrine advocating the same political and economic rights for women as granted to men. Charlotte Perkins Gilman was an early feminist writer, well known for “The Yellow Wallpaper.”
Fissured self: Essentially, an existential collapse, when all one knows of the world unravels.

Geworfenheit: German term meaning that we are thrust into a world not of our own making or choosing; a sense of alienation from the world around us.

Gothic: A style of fiction emphasizing the grotesque, mysterious, and desolate.

Hagiography: A biography of saints. *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, though often criticized for being overly sentimental, became a black American hagiography that was part of opera and drama.

Impressionism: A movement in painting that originated in France in the late 19th century. Impressionist painters found many of their subjects around them rather than in history, which was then the accepted source of subject matter. Instead of painting an ideal of beauty that earlier artists had defined, the Impressionists tried to depict what they saw at a given moment. To achieve the appearance of spontaneity, Impressionist painters used broken brushstrokes of bright, often unmixed colors. The colors in Impressionist paintings have an overall luminosity because the painters avoided blacks and earth colors. The Impressionists also simplified their compositions, omitting detail to achieve a striking overall effect.

Individualism: The doctrine that society is an artificial device, existing only for the sake of its members as individuals and properly judged only according to criteria established by them as individuals.

Isolationism: A policy in which a nation’s interests are best served if the nation secludes itself from other nations and avoids forming alliances with them. In literature, this concept often has been applied to individuals, as in Ralph Waldo Emerson’s suggestion that we must “cultivate” our own earth, our own substance.

Ludic: Playful in a way that is spontaneous and without any particular purpose.

Malaise: A vague feeling of depression or illness.

Manself: A term created by John Steinbeck to describe and celebrate the human species; used in place of *men* and *women*. This manself is always struggling to make a success of his or her life and will prevail, no matter how terrible circumstances are.

Metaphor: A figure of speech in which a term is transferred from the object it ordinarily designates to an object it may designate only by implicit comparison or analogy. Metaphor allows the writer to yoke together diverse areas of experience and thought. Yet metaphor may also be suspected of falsely domesticating the world by substituting the poet’s own projections and fantasies for the “hard facts.”

Metaphysics: A branch of philosophy that systematically investigates the nature of first principles and problems of ultimate reality, including ontology and often cosmology. Also, critical or speculative philosophy.

Modernism: The 20th century saw the emergence of Modernism, which responded to the world’s complexity by asserting that the individual had the potential to achieve a broader perspective than that offered by any one society or its history. At the beginning of the 19th century, American authors struggled to convince the world that they had a history; by the 20th century, American authors, like European authors, had to grapple with more than enough history.

Modus operandi: A method of operating; a particular way of doing things.

Motif: An important and sometimes recurring theme or idea in a work of literature. Also called motive.

Nantucketer: A uniquely American hero presented in Herman Melville’s works. The Nantucketer is different from familiar examples of colonial character. Homespun in his manners, he is nonetheless ruler of the sea, hence, royalty in his own way.

Naturalism: A system of thought holding that all phenomena can be explained in terms of natural causes and laws without attributing supernatural significance to them. Also, the doctrine that all religious truths are derived from nature, not from revelation. In literature, Naturalism attempts to apply scientific theories to art.

Organicism: The concept that society is analogous to a biological organism, meaning that society’s overall organization—not the functioning of its individual parts—plays the principal role in determining its processes and destiny.
**Oversoul**: A spiritual essence or vital force in the universe that embraces all souls, thus transcending individual consciousness.

**Perspectival narration**: The literary technique of viewing society from the outside. A writer may write about a historical period in retrospect, for instance, though his or her characters do not know what events are coming.

**Picaresque**: A literary genre in which a rogue-hero’s escapades are depicted in a context of sharp social satire. Mark Twain’s Huckleberry Finn personifies such a character.

**Poet of Babel**: A term used to refer to poets who make us think that poetry could be nonsense, but rather, is the sound of the brain, the fabric of consciousness. Although poetry can be a description of the world, it can also be simply the representation of the experience of living with a brain and of sensing things, thinking things, and speaking things.

**Polysemy**: The existence of several meanings for a single word or phrase.

**Postmodernism**: The literal meaning of Postmodernism is “after Modernism”; in many ways, Postmodernism constitutes an attack on Modernist claims about the existence of truth and value. In disputing past assumptions, Postmodernists generally display a preoccupation with the inadequacy of language as a mode of communication. Inaccessible ideas and impenetrable prose also characterize many Postmodern texts, although the difficulties in this case are often intentional and reflect specific claims about the nature of language and meaning.

**Puritanism**: Scrupulous moral sternness, especially aversions to social pleasures and indulgences. These attitudes and worldviews stem from the doctrines and practices of the Puritans.

**Realism**: In art and literature, an attempt to describe human behavior and surroundings or to represent figures and objects exactly as they act or appear in life. Though attempts at Realism have been made throughout history in all the arts, the term is generally restricted to a movement that began in the mid-19th century, in reaction to the highly subjective approach of Romanticism.

**Rite of passage**: A genre in literature based on an anthropological concept concerning rituals that a young person goes through in growing up.

**Romanticism**: A movement in the literature of virtually every country of Europe, the United States, and Latin America that lasted from about 1750 to about 1870, characterized by reliance on the imagination and subjectivity of approach, freedom of thought and expression, and an idealization of nature.

**Self-made man**: A classic hero in American literature and history, the self-made man is successful through his own actions. Benjamin Franklin personifies the concept of the wildly successful self-made man.

**Semiosis**: The act of translating a word or visual signal into a cultural meaning, of taking language and turning it into meaning. In literature, the concept that words are signs of natural things, which in turn, are signs of spirit.

**Sentimentalism**: A tendency to express obvious or powerful feelings or emotions without appealing to reason, especially self-indulgent or nostalgic writing or expression. The Sentimental tradition is the great popular literary form of the 19th century.

**Social contract**: A voluntary agreement among people defining the relationship of individuals with one another and with government and, by this process, forming a distinct organized society. In the 17th and 18th centuries, the theory of a social compact among individuals of a society was linked with the doctrine of natural law.

**Stereotype**: An oversimplified standardized image or idea held by one person or group concerning another. In literature, a character meant to typify or conform to an unvarying pattern or manner, lacking in any individuality or depth.

**Stream of consciousness**: A fictional narrative technique, first used in the late 19th century to evince subjective as well as objective reality. It reveals the character’s feelings, thoughts, and actions, often following an associative rather than a logical sequence, without commentary by the author.

**Symbolism**: The use of symbols to invest things with a representative meaning, or to represent something abstract by something concrete.
**Transcendentalism**: In philosophy and literature, the belief that knowledge of reality is derived from intuitive sources, rather than from objective experience. Nearly all transcendentalist doctrines stem from the division of reality into a realm of spirit and a realm of matter. Such a division is made by many of the great religions of the world. Ralph Waldo Emerson and Henry David Thoreau are considered to embody what is known as *American Transcendentalism*.

**Trope**: A word, phrase, expression, or image that is used in a figurative way, usually for rhetorical effect. Metaphor is the quintessential trope in all of poetry.

**Tuition**: Learned knowledge, as opposed to *intuition*, innate or revealed knowledge.

**Un-naming**: This term refers to the literary cleansing of customary labels to install fresh perception. Emily Dickinson’s poetry typifies this sort of writing.

**Vagina dentata**: The teethed womb that is a sexual nightmare for the male who is terrified of what it could mean to think literally about moving into the womb.

**Women’s writing**: Writing in a feminist vein that features language deemed to be closer to the body. Some characteristics of this kind of writing include fluidity rather than line, openness to affect and libido, suspicion of repressive order, and attention to the somatic.
Louis Armstrong (1901–1971): American jazz, cornet, and trumpet player, singer, bandleader, and popular entertainer. Armstrong overcame poverty, a lack of formal education, and racism to become one of the most innovative and influential musicians of the 20th century and one of the most beloved entertainers in the world. He is perhaps best known for helping to pioneer a style known as swing, which later formed the basis for most jazz and rhythm-and-blues (R&B) music. Armstrong’s music had a profound influence on Ralph Ellison’s *Invisible Man*.

Charles Baudelaire (1821–1867): A leading 19th-century French poet who seized on Edgar Allan Poe’s work and career as the epitome of genius, becoming Poe’s champion and translator in France. As the founder of Symbolism in poetry, Baudelaire ensured Poe’s continued impact on poetic development.

Catherine Beecher (1800–1878): Sister to Harriet Beecher Stowe, Catherine Beecher wrote *A Treatise on Domestic Economy*, dedicated to “the women of America in whose hands rest the real destinies of the Republic.”

Stephen Crane (1871–1900): American novelist and poet, one of the first American exponents of the naturalistic style of writing. Crane is known for his pessimistic and often brutal portrayals of the human condition, along with a sympathetic understanding of character.

Emily Dickinson (1830–1886): America’s most well known female poet and one of the foremost authors in American literature. Dickinson’s simply constructed, acutely intellectual writings examine issues vital to humanity: the agonies and ecstasies of love, sexuality, the unfathomable nature of death, the horrors of war, God and religious belief, the importance of humor, and musings on the significance of literature, music, and art.

Thomas Eakins (1844–1916): Regarded by most critics as the most outstanding American painter of the 19th century and, by many, as the greatest his country has yet produced, Eakins was an admirer of Walt Whitman. He was well known for his painting *The Swimming Hole*, as well as paintings of the male body and portraits of Whitman.

Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803–1882): Emerson, the guiding spirit of American Romanticism, lays the groundwork for a key tradition in American thinking and writing in his *Essays*, written from the 1830s through the middle of the century.

William Faulkner (1897–1962): American novelist, known for his epic portrayal, in some 20 novels, of the tragic conflict between the old and the new South. Although his intricate plots and complex narrative style alienated many readers of his early writings, Faulkner was a towering figure in American literature during the first half of the 20th century. With Ernest Hemingway, he is usually considered one of the two greatest American novelists of his era. Faulkner was particularly noted for the eloquent richness of his prose style and for the unique blend of tragedy and humor in his works.

F. Scott Fitzgerald (1896–1940): American writer whose novels and short stories chronicled changing social attitudes during the 1920s, a period dubbed the “Jazz Age” by the author. He is best known for his novels *The Great Gatsby* (1925) and *Tender Is the Night* (1934), both of which depict disillusion with the American dream of self-betterment, wealth, and success through hard work and perseverance.
Benjamin Franklin (1706–1790): Printer, scientist, statesman, and author in the early 18th century, Franklin personified the American concept of the “self-made man,” particularly through his *Autobiography*. Franklin is particularly well known for his experiments in electricity; his launching of *Poor Richard’s Almanac*, the first American periodical; and his role in the Revolutionary War. His is the great American story of tireless achievement, assertion, and adult responsibility in the difficult arenas of business, government, and politics.

Sigmund Freud (1856–1938): The father of psychoanalysis, Freud articulated the concepts of the unconscious and infantile sexuality and repression and proposed a tripartite account of the mind’s structure, all as part of a then–radically new conceptual and therapeutic frame of reference for the understanding of human psychological development and the treatment of abnormal mental conditions. His conclusions affected the interpretation of much American literature during and after his lifetime.

Robert Frost (1874–1963): American poet who drew his images from the New England countryside and his language from New England speech. Although Frost’s images and voice often seem familiar and old, his observations have an edge of skepticism and irony that make his work, upon rereading, never as old-fashioned, easy, or carefree as it first appears. In its embodiment of both tradition and skepticism, Frost’s poetry helped provide a link between the American poetry of the 19th century and that of the 20th century.

Margaret Fuller (1810–1850): A 19th-century feminist writer and one of the great radical women among the Transcendentalists. Fuller was a journalist and edited *Dial Magazine*, working closely with Ralph Waldo Emerson. Nathaniel Hawthorne may have modeled aspects of Hester Prynne’s character in *The Scarlet Letter* on Fuller.

Charlotte Perkins Gilman (1860–1935): American feminist and writer, best known for her book *Women and Economics* (1898), which has become a feminist classic. She was born Charlotte Anna Perkins in Hartford, Connecticut. She was educated at the Rhode Island School of Design and worked as a teacher and commercial artist before devoting herself to feminism.

Nathaniel Hawthorne (1804–1862): American novelist whose works are deeply concerned with the ethical problems of sin, punishment, and atonement. Hawthorne is considered America’s first great classical writer and is particularly known for his novel *The Scarlet Letter*.

Ernest Hemingway (1899–1961): American novelist and short-story writer, whose style is brisk, terse, cleansed of adjectives, seemingly objective, and aimed at rendering the precise moment and feeling of experience. Hemingway’s writings and his personal life exerted a profound influence on American writers of his time; in fact, Hemingway is usually considered one of the two greatest American novelists of his era (the other being William Faulkner). Many of his works are regarded as classics of American literature.

Thomas Wentworth Higginson (1823–1911): Unitarian minister, abolitionist, and well-known 19th-century literary critic with whom poet Emily Dickinson exchanged letters seeking critiques of her poems.

Washington Irving (1783–1859): Often called the father of the American short story, Irving is best known for two stories: “The Legend of Sleepy Hollow” and “Rip Van Winkle.” His work is considered to precede early writings of the great Transcendentalists—Emerson, Thoreau, and Hawthorne.

Henry James (1843–1916): American expatriate writer whose masterly fiction juxtaposed American innocence and European experience in a series of intense, psychologically complex works. James’s work is characterized by leisurely pacing and subtle delineation of character rather than by dramatic incidents or complicated plots. His major writings, highly sensitive examples of the objective psychological novel, deal with the world of leisure and sophistication he had grown to know intimately in Europe.

Toussaint L’Ouverture (1743–1803): Haitian general, now known as “the Precursor,” and leader of the Haitian slave revolt, a 1791 black slave uprising against the French colonial regime. After France abolished slavery in the territory in 1794, Toussaint supported the French rulers of the country against British invaders and was made a general in 1795. In 1801, he succeeded, after many struggles, in liberating Saint-Domingue from French control and became president-for-life of a new republic.

Herman Melville (1819–1891): American novelist and major literary figure whose exploration of psychological and metaphysical themes foreshadowed 20th-century literary concerns. His works remained in obscurity until the 1920s, when his genius was finally recognized.
Arthur Miller (1915–): American dramatist whose works are concerned with the responsibility of each individual to other members of society. Simply and colloquially written, Miller’s plays spring from his social conscience and from his compassion for those who are vulnerable to the false values imposed on them by society.

Toni Morrison (1931–): American writer whose works deal with the black experience and celebrate the black community. Morrison’s work features mythic elements, sharp observation, compassion, and poetic language and is often concerned with the relationship between the individual and society. In 1993, she won the Nobel Prize in literature.

Eugene O’Neill (1888–1953): American playwright whose work dramatizes the plight of people driven by elemental passions, by memory and dream, and by an awareness of the forces that threaten to overwhelm them. His early plays (1916–1920) helped initiate American theater’s shift away from elegant parlor dramas and toward gritty naturalistic plays.

Edgar Allan Poe (1809–1849): Best known for his poems and short fiction, Poe is credited with transforming the short story from anecdote to art. He virtually created the detective story and perfected the psychological thriller. He also produced some of the most influential literary criticism of his time—important theoretical statements on poetry and the short story.

Sir Walter Scott (1771–1832): Scottish novelist and poet considered to be the creator of the historical and the regional novel. He may have influenced the works of Nathaniel Hawthorne.

John Steinbeck (1902–1968): American writer and Nobel laureate, who described in his work the unremitting struggle of people who depend on the soil for their livelihood. Steinbeck’s novels can all be classified as social novels dealing with the economic problems of rural labor, but there is also a streak of worship of the soil in his books, which does not always agree with his matter-of-fact sociological approach.

Wallace Stevens (1879–1955): American poet whose works deal mainly with the individual’s interaction with the outside world. Stevens used sensuous, elaborate imagery and elevated, precise word choice to express subtle philosophical themes. He frequently contrasted the bleakness and monotony of modern industrialized life with the richness of nature.

Harriet Beecher Stowe (1811–1896): American author most famous for her anti-slavery novel, Uncle Tom’s Cabin, one of the most influential American texts written by either man or woman and, possibly, the first American social protest novel.

Henry David Thoreau (1817–1862): American essayist, poet, and practical philosopher, renowned for having lived the doctrines of Transcendentalism, as recorded in his masterwork, Walden, and for having been a vigorous advocate of civil liberties, as evidenced in the essay “Civil Disobedience.”

Lionel Trilling (1905–1975): American educator and influential literary critic. For most of his career, Trilling taught at Columbia University. In his books, he used psychological and sociological methods to elucidate cultural values. One of his major concerns was the relationship between the self and society. Trilling paid homage to poet Robert Frost on Frost’s 85th birthday.

Nat Turner (1800–1831): American slave and leader of a black slave revolt in 1831. As a result of Nat Turner’s revolt, southern legislatures imposed stricter control on slaves, and the movement to abolish slavery, which had previously enjoyed some support in the South, became a northern phenomenon.

Mark Twain (1835–1910): Pen name for Samuel Langhorne Clemens, American writer and humorist, whose best work is characterized by broad, often irreverent humor or biting social satire. Twain’s writing is also known for realism of place and language, memorable characters, and hatred of hypocrisy and oppression.

Vincent Van Gogh (1853–1890): Dutch Post-Impressionist painter, generally considered the greatest Dutch painter and draughtsman after Rembrandt. He powerfully influenced the current of Expressionism in modern art. Among his masterpieces are numerous self-portraits and the well-known “Starry Night.” An admirer of Whitman, Van Gogh corresponded with the American poet.

Booker T. Washington (1856–1915): American educator who urged blacks to attempt to uplift themselves through educational attainments and economic advancement.
**Walt Whitman** (1819–1892): American poet whose work boldly asserts the worth of the individual and the oneness of all humanity. Whitman’s defiant break with traditional poetic concerns and style exerted a major influence on American thought and literature.

**Tennessee Williams** (1911–1983): American playwright and two-time Pulitzer Prize winner, whose works are set largely in the American South. As a playwright, fiction writer, poet, and essayist, Williams helped transform the contemporary idea of Southern literature. He not only paved the way for other writers but also helped the South find a strong voice, where before it had been heard only as a whisper.
Comprehensive Bibliography


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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 master's 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 are research grants from the American Council of Learned Societies and the National Endowment for the Humanities. 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 an NEH-funded program in the area of national education reform. In 1995 he was named Brown University's best teacher in the humanities. He is the recipient of a 1998-99 National Endowment for the Humanities Award for University Teachers for his work in literature and medicine.

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The Adventures of Tom Sawyer: American Paradise Regained

Scope: In the decades after the Civil War, Mark Twain introduced a new voice into American writing—fresh, impudent, boisterous, rough, and at times infantile. He brought the West into our literature, made it possible for grotesque Southwestern humor to be mainstreamed, poked fun at the genteel pretensions of New England (while also establishing himself as one of its new citizens), and left us a legacy of two children's stories that are central to our folklore: *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* and *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*. These two books are sharply different in character, and we shall see that the latter work tackles issues of race and class in ways untouched by the earlier idyll. Twain presents us with the purest images we have of a stubborn American dream: to remain a child forever. Yet, in a modern era concerned with issues of ideology and gender, Twain's books are often in bad odor, and his so-called masterpiece about slavery has been banned from a great number of American school systems because of its language and views on race. Not only do we censor Twain today, but we also can see the work of censorship in his stories and the effort to steer clear of outright violence and sexuality, indeed the avoidance of adult themes in general. Twain appears to epitomize Leslie Fielder's contention that all of American literature can be found on the children's shelf. Yet things are not so simple. The children's stories skirt violence at every turn, and their angle of vision is surpassingly eloquent for rendering the values of a society. Finally, in Twain's little known *Pudd'nhead Wilson*, we encounter a bolder, more experimental writer who graphs and codes the racial and social nightmares of his time into a remarkably oneric text.

Published in 1876, *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* constitutes Twain's first foray into children's literature. The man from the South and the West, now living in Hartford, Connecticut, already had a number of successes to his credit, and his greatest work was yet to come. But the enduring hold of Tom Sawyer on the American imagination is testimony to Twain's already keen, even shrewd, sense of American boyhood and innocence. Tom's pranks, his "naughtiness," never call into doubt his fundamental goodness, and the setting where Twain has placed him—the Hannibal, Missouri, of Twain's own childhood—is an idyllic place whose charm and safety are utterly at odds with modern American culture. Tom's commitment to romance, not only in his "love" for Becky Thatcher, but also in his fascination with pirates and treasure and the like, places him in the company of novelistic heroes, going back to Don Quixote. Finally, this nostalgic treatment of boyhood innocence has its moments of violence and opaqueness, moments in which the idyll threatens to turn to nightmare.

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

1. Summarize the romantic tradition that *Tom Sawyer* openly draws on,
2. Explain how Twain's own career stood in direct conflict with the dominant literary tradition of New England, and
3. Describe how *Tom Sawyer* incorporates a darker vision of the human condition.

Outline

I. *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* is our quintessential American romance.

A. Tom Sawyer is the eternal child, and as such he illustrates an obsessive trait of both Mark Twain and American culture.


C. Tom the prankster, the trickster, calls into question a venerable line of American thinking.
   1. Having others whitewash the fence constitutes a perfect reversal of Ben Franklin's pious work ethos. Twain favors performance over labor.
2. Tom's escapades—skipping school, sneaking a smoke, slipping out of Aunt Polly's, getting into scuffles, seeking buried treasure—may well seem quaint today. The environment has changed.
3. How meaningful, we may ask today, is Tom Sawyer for readers of color? For women readers?
4. What are we to make of Tom Sawyer's astonishingly bookish character? Most of his pranks and adventures are done "by the book," following the rules he has read about in earlier romances. He is Twain's Don Quixote.

D. Why is this book a classic? Are there cultural reasons why Twain elected to tell a story about childhood and innocence?

II. Mark Twain's career was well established by the time he wrote Tom Sawyer.

A. In 1876 Twain was secure and established in Hartford, Connecticut, the wealthiest per-capita city in the U.S. He had a deserved reputation as the great humorist of his generation. Harriet Beecher Stowe and Charles Dudley Warner were his neighbors.

B. Twain ushered into American literature a vital tradition of Southwestern humor that is grotesque, violent, and often sadistic and racist.

C. Twain's own background mixes the South and the West. He was a child of the Mississippi valley, with significant experience on the river as a steamboat pilot. He also worked in California as a silver miner and journalist.

D. Twain's work clashed with the genteel New England culture.

   1. "The Celebrated Jumping Frog of Calaveras County" (1867) is evidence of a new kind of humor.
   2. Innocents Abroad (1869) is a seminal study of the American encounter with Europe. Harking back to the innocence theme of Melville's "Benito Cereno," Twain's book emphasizes a distrust of Europe and is characterized by both Philistinism and honesty. In some ways, Twain prefigures the attitudes of Henry James.
   3. Innocence seemed to be the great topic of American literature in the decade following the Civil War, given Harris's Uncle Remus stories, the Horatio Alger stories, and Alcott's Little Women.

E. Twain's later career was multifaceted.

   1. He took ten years to complete the sequel to Tom Sawyer, The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn. This is now considered his masterpiece.
   2. During this time, Twain became a famous lecturer/performer, but his personal life had its prodigious ups and downs. He invested and lost $190,000 in the Paige typesetter in 1880, and he suffered great reverses again in the mid-1890s.
   3. Twain published A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court in 1889, a strange, futuristic account that moves backward into the past.
   4. In 1894 he published Pudd'nhead Wilson, one of his most revealing and inventive texts about the way power was understood in the 19th century.
   5. Both celebrity and despair marked Twain's later years. He lost his two daughters, then his wife, then his belief in America.

III. The Adventures of Tom Sawyer turns out to be less idyllic and more suggestive than readers often think.

A. Twain did create a safety net of romance, so that we know nothing terrible is going to happen to his hero.

   1. Tom Sawyer is a rebel against the rules put forth for children, but we sense that he will ultimately tow the line.
   2. Tom's desire for adventure is likewise tentative; he wants excitement, but he expects to remain unscathed.
   3. The 1840s world of the novel seems sheltered; no reference is made to the Mexican War or to the strident debate on slavery.
   4. Twain reconstructed his hometown as an idyll, and he regarded his story as "simply a hymn, put into prose to give it a worldly air."
B. Yet this text has its echoes and innuendo, even if we must locate them in the book's language and metaphors.

1. Becky Thatcher's "transgression" in school consists of sneaking a look at the naked human body in her teacher's hidden anatomy book.

2. The magisterial treatment of Tom and Becky lost in the cave displays Twain at his best. It's an adventure that also suggests rites of passage, including sexuality and hints of marriage.

3. But violence inhabits the cave as much as Eros does, and Twain brilliantly places the town's great villain, Injun Joe, its racial and moral outsider, in this setting. Tom's maturation must entail this encounter. Injun Joe's death is a richly symbolic hint of what is to come in Twain's fiction.

This book closes, as so much of Twain closes, with a frenzied clean-up activity. Tom is now a hero, and his social prospects are underlined. The revolt against civilization has been squelched.
Lecture 38

Huckleberry Finn: The Banned Classic

Scope: Ever since its appearance, The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn has offended. The Concord Public Library banned it in 1885, and it has been banned from countless school districts in America ever since the 1960s. Its views on race have been hotly disputed, but it is perhaps an even more central text in American literature on the topic of freedom—not just for escaped slaves, but also for young white boys. We need to read this book as a rites-of-passage story. As such, it can be seen to illuminate the various adult value systems that Huck and Jim must negotiate. Twain's evocation of his childhood in Hannibal, Missouri, takes on a much darker coloration in this book than it had in Tom Sawyer, and we find here a mix of nostalgia and contempt, love and hate, that does not get sorted out easily. Huck's adventures lead him into contact with a host of unforgettable figures—the King and the Duke, Sherburn and Boggs, the Shepherdsons and Grangerfords—who represent a South that is far more complex than anything in the earlier novel.

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

1. Give examples of why people have advocated banning Huckleberry Finn in American schools,
2. Conclude whether Twain's novel is primarily intended for adults or children—or both, and
3. Describe Twain's depiction of the South in Huckleberry Finn.

Outline

I. Scandal has been associated with Huckleberry Finn ever since it first appeared, but the reasons given differ broadly.

   A. In 1885 Twain's novel was banned by the Concord Public Library, an event that has a symbolic resonance, given Concord's place in high-toned New England culture.

       1. The book's language was the principal culprit—not its racist terminology, but rather its vulgarity and roughness.

       2. Twain shrewdly saw the Concord banning as an incitement to sales.

   B. In the last three decades, Huckleberry Finn has been removed from reading lists all over the country because of its language about, and characterization of black people.

       1. The book's defenders argue that it is our strongest American text against racism.

       2. Those who ban the book do so because Twain uses over and over the word "nigger" and because the presentation of Jim is alleged to be caricature-like.

II. The book's fundamental plot consists of two people afloat on a raft on the Mississippi River. We may view this elemental activity as freedom or as evasion. The view we choose makes a difference in our interpretation of the message.

   A. At the end of Tom Sawyer, Huck is portrayed as resistant to civilization, as someone who wants "out."

   B. In the second book, Huck's bolting from Aunt Polly's is presented as an inability to accept "bourgeois" order, especially in the prim and regimented form that it comes in, in 1840s St. Petersburg.

   C. We easily see that the great adventure on the raft is precarious; the river is hardly a safe place. It carries an obvious danger in itself, but the culture on both sides of it—slave hunters, family feuds, and con men—is even more threatening.

   D. Twain's story is a classic rites-of-passage experience: how a boy comes of age. Such a genre invariably illuminates the operative value schemes put forth by the adults, the terms by which one becomes an adult. Hence, Huck's rebellion tells us about the culture itself. In some passages, the protagonist opts "out" rather than "in."

   E. The book's theme is freedom—the freedom that Huck seeks from the stifling home situation he leaves and the rather different freedom that Jim seeks as a runaway slave.

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1. The great moral theme is what makes the book a central American text, and the issues of childhood and race add dimension.

2. Twain's novel has received sharp criticism for its alleged failure to make good on the freedom theme. We will have occasion to examine the plot more carefully on this issue, especially in terms of its problematic ending.

3. T.S. Eliot has written memorably about the river as the book's great driving force, and he argues that the kind of "moral closure" we are perhaps looking for is ultimately inappropriate to Twain's vision.

4. Finally, it is worth remembering that this is also a children's book and that our obsession with high ethical principles and moral rigor may be out of phase with the very genre of the story.

III. It is known that Twain began *Huckleberry Finn* in 1876, right after finishing *Tom Sawyer*, but that his inspiration failed, and he was stumped about where to go with his story. In particular, the book "stopped" at the point when Huck and Jim come down the river to Cairo, where they must either escape north to freedom or continue south to Arkansas into slave country, which would negate the "liberation" story. Twain could not see his way clear.

A. The early chapters that Twain wrote in the 1870s have much in common with *Tom Sawyer*.

1. Huck still wants out from under Aunt Polly.

2. Pap, Huck's blood father, is both funny and scary, and Twain obviously enjoyed characterizing such a figure.

3. Above all, St. Petersburg (Hannibal) is still recognizably Tom Sawyer country, and the early pages of the book depict Tom's fun and games. His adventures are patterned after romances that he read.

B. When Twain picked up his book again and finally resolved the Cairo situation, his depiction of the South darkened considerably in character.

1. We now meet the King and the Duke, Twain's consummate pair of con men, who commandeer both the boat and, it seems, the book. Twain's depiction of this duo merits our analysis: it can be hysterically funny, as well as corrupt.

2. We see, in the depiction of Bricksville, a view of the South as Hell, as the horrible underside of St. Petersburg. Twain appears to say that the victims of the con men are as bad as their exploiters. There is a withering kind of contempt in these evocations, as Twain vents his spleen about the coarsening of American democracy.

3. The cardinal episode at Bricksville is the gunning down of the town drunk, Boggs, by the "gentleman," Colonel Sherburn, who has had enough of Boggs's obscenity. In Sherburn's famous words to the "mob," we hear distinctly the anger (and horror) that Twain felt.

4. Twain's depiction of the South is further darkened by his account of the Sheperdson-Grangerford feud. This bloody business attains a rare mix of pathos, humor, and horror by dint of Huck's own personal involvement with these people.

5. Twain's account of the South is not quite an indictment, but it has a bite that is new, and much of the criticism is directed against the absurd chivalric ethos and misplaced honor code. We see here a kind of democratic revulsion against European models, against romance itself, and in this light the antics of Tom Sawyer need to be reconsidered. Through it all, though, Twain injects humor.
Lecture 39

_Huckleberry Finn:_
A Child's Voice, A Child's Vision

**Scope:** Hemingway once wrote that all modern American literature comes from one book called _Huckleberry Finn_, and although the claim is large, it has its share of truth. Hemingway's own Nick Adams and Faulkner's Ike McCaslin both hail from this lineage. Huck's vision is radically different from Tom Sawyer's: he is not middle class, and he does not easily believe in fairy tales or romance. Huck is the book's clear-eyed pragmatist, and his vision is tonic, especially when it comes to the power of "fictions," whether they be literary, religious, or racial. The novel's greatness consists in having this unschooled child view the great institution of slavery, not as a Sunday school teacher might, nor even as a total outsider might, but as a boy who discovers, to his great confusion, that his _conscience_ is at war with his heart. Twain has no equal when it comes to showing how the dominant culture is inside of all of us, shaping our preconceptions, speaking through our words.

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

1. Describe the major differences between the literary characters Huck Finn and Tom Sawyer,
2. Summarize how _Huckleberry Finn_ is a novel that deals with rites of passage, and
3. Give examples of how _Huckleberry Finn_ is representative of the picaresque tradition.

**Outline**

I. The novel's power and poetry come from the special optic on life that Huck himself presents.
   A. Huck, unlike Tom Sawyer, is a genuine outsider, never to be assimilated to the middle class.
   B. Huck's pragmatism and common sense provide a remarkable lens through which Tom Sawyer's fun and games can be viewed.
      1. Huck is willing to try anything Tom asserts, but he wants to see the pay-off.
      2. Huck shrewdly senses a connection between Tom Sawyer's literary rules about life and the doctrines put forth in Sunday school.
   C. In writing this novel from Huck's perspective, Twain is obliged to create a highly original idiom and point of view, and much of the book's brilliance is in Huck's speech. His fresh, lyrical, unliterary account of both nature and mores is new in our literature. Twain's use of the vernacular—rather than correct English in the manner of Thoreau—conveys great pith and immediacy.
   D. Hemingway's claim that all modern American literature comes from a book called _Huckleberry Finn_ has its truth; it is not hard to point to Twain's legacy here: Anderson, Hemingway, Faulkner, Salinger and others take their inspiration from this book.
   E. Twain's book belongs squarely to the picaresque tradition of viewing society from the outside, looking in.
      1. Twain's decision, a decade after the Civil War, to tell a story about the South in the 1840s, is a perspectival Pandora's box: he writes from retrospect, but his characters cannot know what is coming.
      2. Still more crucial, he uses as his narrator a "bad boy," what we might call a "drop-out." Then he proceeds to show what this person would likely make of the world around him, including a runaway slave named Jim.
   F. Huck's account of Jim is essentially the moral heart of the novel.
      1. Huck's conscience is constructed according to the prevailing assumptions of his 1840s society, but unlike many of his contemporaries, he comes to see Jim, the runaway slave, as a human being with his own rights and dignity.
      2. Twain uses the innocence and limits of perspectival narration, just as Melville did in "Benito Cereno," but his aims are quite different from Melville's. He does not want to fool his reader but rather to show us what these events look like "from the ground up."

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3. Like Melville, Twain understood that the process of seeing is a cultural proposition, not a retinal one. Hence, he "deconstructs" slavery in a way utterly different from the sermonizing of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, by showing how saturated Huck is with racist views, while at the same time depicting Huck's growing affection and respect for Jim.

4. Arguably the greatest moment in American fiction comes when Huck realizes that freeing Jim means, in his culture (and thus, according to the voice of his conscience) that he will go to Hell. Nonetheless, he accepts this plight, thus defining his own sense of right and wrong, which doesn't match the social moral code he has been taught.
Twain's primary goal in *Huckleberry Finn* is doubtless to tell a good story. But, in doing so, he offers us one of the shrewdest texts we have about the formation of ideology and subjectivity.

A. All rites-of-passage fictions depict, willy-nilly, the nature of authority in the adult world. If authority is corrupt, then the text shows us the failure of rites of passage, since entry into such a scheme is morally damning.

B. In this novel, the conflict between "conscience" and "feeling" is a textbook illustration of how values are formed. We can see this; Huck cannot. Ideology is never visible to the human subject until it becomes "denaturalized."

C. Twain's vision is wonderfully critical and corrosive here in that it expects a good number of values and beliefs as, ultimately, fiction.
   1. Miss Watson's notations for heaven and hell as the "good place" and the "bad place" are subject to the same scrutiny.
   2. Tom Sawyer's literary rules are seen also to be arbitrary, made-up.
   3. We begin to realize that terms such as "white" and "natural" are equally larded in ideological ways.
   4. Twain even suggests, in one episode, that gender also is a constructed cultural category, rather than a natural given.

D. The novel never gets entirely clear of its racist norms or underpinnings.
   1. Racism is shown even in "good" people such as Aunt Sally. Twain's realism requires him to depict people as they are.
   2. Jim is all too often depicted as a minstrel-show caricature (although he is often shown to be shrewd as well).

E. Above all, there is the famous botched ending of *Huckleberry Finn*, a failure to resolve the book's issues in a way that satisfies readers or critics.
   1. The last third of the novel consists of outrageous pranks and games, conducted by the inimitable Tom Sawyer (while Huck more or less goes along), directed toward "freeing" Jim according to the proper rules of romantic literature.
   2. We realize that Huck has been freed all along, and that Tom has known this. Yet the childlike fantasia is carried out. Critics argue that the moral high ground of the novel is utterly lost, and that Twain's vision failed.
   3. Is there a way out of this critical impasse? Or is the book damaged goods?
Lecture 40

Huckleberry Finn, American Orphan

Scope: Twain's presentation of Huckleberry Finn makes use of picaresque conventions but then goes a step further by conveying the profound loneliness of this outsider. Twain portrays Huck's solitude in various ways: through the recurring stories of abandonment and death that Huck tells repeatedly, through his escape strategies that turn out to be sham versions of death, and through other vignettes that contribute to the choral effect of positing orphanhood as among the book's central truths. It is in this light that Jim's role is so crucial and meaningful: he is to be understood as Huck's father, and that symbolic role is only achievable when all the insurmountable obstacles of race and class have been faced. Twain is telling a mythic American story about the needy white child who finds love in a black man, and this model seems to haunt our collective consciousness, as a counterpart to our real history of racial conflict. But Twain's keen vision does not stop here: at its most radical, it presents Huck's story as a fiction of the self, as the discovery that self and identity are also composed of laws and rules and are as fictional as anything else in this bold text.

Objectives—Upon completion of this lecture, you should be able to
1. Summarize why Huck might be seen as the "great American orphan,"
2. Describe Jim's role—both literal and figurative—as a father figure in the novel, and
3. Summarize the role of disguise and impersonation in Huckleberry Finn.

Outline

I. Huck's isolation and loneliness endow Twain's book with an undercurrent of melancholy and death.
   A. In the opening pages of the book, we hear Huck's threnody to death.
   B. Beneath all the comic stories and disguises that Huck excels in, there is a repeating theme of death and abandonment.
   C. Huck's crucial escape from Pap's tyranny is no less than an elaborate playing out of his own death.
   D. Huck Finn is to be understood as the great American orphan, the child in search of a father.
      1. Twain's most eloquent statement of this condition appears in the vignette of the "Raftman's story," which Twain initially wrote for this novel but then included in Life on the Mississippi. Most editors still include it in the appendix to Huckleberry Finn.
      2. In the funny but touching account of the wise King Solomon, as retold by Jim and Huck, we see still another unmistakable parable about parenting and children.
      3. One of the first references in the novel is to the baby Moses found in the bulrushes; here, too, Twain is pointing to the symbolic issues of eventual liberation and parental nurturing.

II. Jim, despite the racist features that may still attach to him, emerges clearly as the novel's father. Here is the book's ethical core.
   A. Jim is depicted richly as a father within his own family.
      1. Huck is stunned that Jim actually loves his children as much as a white man would.
      2. Jim critiques the Biblical story of Solomon and insists on the integrity of the "whole child."
      3. In Jim's story of his punishing his own deaf child, we see evidence of his compassion, a compassion that is richly counterpointed by his being dressed out, in the next chapter, as King Lear.
   B. Despite the enormous obstacles of race and class—enormous for Twain, enormous in the fictive 1840s—Jim becomes, in front of our eyes, a father for Huck.
      1. We see Huck's growing realization of Jim's dignity after the boy successfully fools Jim into thinking it was a dream when they were separated on the river; Jim's eloquent put-down of Huck opens the boy's eyes.
2. Twain's own memories of a cold-hearted father and the warmth he sought among the black servants are evident in his characterization of Jim and Huck.

3. In the famous scene in which Huck is ready to go to hell, the crucial element is precisely the presence of Jim as a loving friend.

C. Twain's depiction of love between Huck and Jim must transcend not only the racial barriers of his culture, but also—at least some would argue—the gender barriers as well. The possibility of a love relationship between a white child and a black man raises the question of a mythic view of brotherhood, even homoerotic brotherhood, that crosses the racial divide as alternative to our real history. Our own recent film culture gives evidence of this myth as well.

III. Twain's bold insights about the construction of identity lead ultimately to a still more corrosive conclusion: self is a mirage, a fiction, something that is not innate but made. Twain's text is often circus-like in its display of slippage and mobility in the arena of "self."

A. The picaresque model has common cause with the concept of "nobody," the outsider whose social status is nil.

B. In some of the most heightened passages, Twain seems to suggest that the ultimate medium of life is fog, that we are always in the mists, and that contours are always blurred. In the river scene where Huck and Jim are separated by fog, Twain suggests the utter factitiousness of identity itself.

C. With this perspective in mind, we can rethink the dizzying amount of disguise and impersonation within the text, including those moments where Huck forgets "who" he is, has to be told by others, and ends up in the final segment calling himself Tom Sawyer. Here is the epistemological jungle that Twain charts ultimately in *Pudd'nhead Wilson.*
Lecture 41

Mark Twain's *Pudd'nhead Wilson*:
Black and White Charade

**Scope:** *Pudd'nhead Wilson* is Twain's most experimental, surreal novel, and it deserves recognition as his boldest account of the despotic conventions of race and class, which he found could be routed only in the "play" of dream and art. This novel also displays Twain's obsessive sense of doubles and twins, his intuition that society worships unitary notions—black vs. white, man vs. woman, master vs. slave—whereas art makes it possible to show the strange mixtures that we actually find in reality. It is here that Twain also tests notions of identity as produced either genetically or environmentally, and he does so with the explosive plot device of swapping two similar infants at birth, one with "white" blood, one with (a little) "black" blood. What follows constitutes a meditation on the kinds of freedom and maneuvering room that are available to us, in art if not in life.

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

1. Give examples from literature and history of the destabilizing influence of twins,
2. Explain why the traditional plot twist of mistaken identity was perfectly matched for American mores in the mid-19th century, and
3. Summarize what Twain suggests in *Pudd'nhead Wilson* about the perennial debate of nature vs. nurture.

**Outline**

I. The concept of twinship—being doubled or replicated—looms amazingly large in Twain's mind and his work.
   
   A. The early version of what was to become *Pudd'nhead Wilson* is a kind of fantasia about Siamese twins, based on real-life Siamese twins who toured America in the 19th century. Twain "separates" his twins in the later text, but they are there to reveal connections that are true but invisible and to expose the superficiality of our apparent integrity and wholeness.

   B. Twain's earlier career is likewise stamped by "twins."

      1. We recall that Huck "becomes" Tom Sawyer at the end of his story, and we see here the kind of slippage that will be even more pronounced later.
      2. We recall Twain's texts such as *The Prince and the Pauper*, a classic illustration of the benefits—narrative, social, ideological, dramatic—that accrue in a story of "swapped" youngsters from different backgrounds who look so much alike that no one (except them) knows the difference.
      3. There is a suggestive folklore about twins, that they are inherently destabilizing. The story of Romulus and Remus is not only about the founding of Rome, but about fratricide and instability; the legend of the Man in the Iron Mask tells a comparable story about the threats entailed by "twinning": Who is legitimate? Who has authority? There are also studies of cultures in which the birth of twins automatically requires that one be put to death, to avoid the kinds of doubling and ambiguity that we will be discussing.
      4. Twain himself knew this issue in his gut. He was a Southwesterner transplanted to New England; he was Samuel Langhorne Clemens known to the world as Mark Twain. Doubles were nothing new for him; they were the story of his life.
      5. Finally, twins and doubling introduce a contrasting element into a system that appears fixed and monolithic. Twins erode categories of difference in a culture that thinks in unitary terms: black or white, master or slave, man or woman, lady or whore, gentleman or scoundrel, etc.
      6. This issue interests me personally; I am a twin.
II. The enabling plot device of *Pudd'nhead Wilson* is the fateful exchange of two infants at birth—the "white" one born to Judge Driscoll, and the "black" one (with a bit of black blood, but "white" skin) born to the servant Roxy, who carries out the swap so that her child will not risk being sold down the river.

A. Twain has created a textbook case for testing the merits of nature vs. nurture as the key to human identity and behavior. Do we look to genetics or to the environment to understand what people become? These issues are with us still. The story of the two boys is to be a test case, virtually a laboratory experiment.

1. Environment seems to rule with Chambers, the child who is brought up "black." Even though his racial identity is cleared up at the end, it is too late to change anything; he is now "black."

2. The other child, brought up "white," is the central character of the story, and Twain cannot seem to make up his mind about why he is what he is. At one key moment, his mother tells him of his black blood and even suggests that he is the scoundrel he is because of that blood; here is the genetic position.

3. Yet the book will not rest with that determinist view, and Tom most intrigues us by his remarkably histrionic life, a life of conscious roles and disguises. The roles he plays are invariably evil—thief, even murderer—and he does so dressed sometimes in black, sometimes as a woman. Twain is offering us a kind of kaleidoscopic view of self in this character.

4. Tom's behavior can be thought of as a kind of racial revenge, a veiled attack against the white "fathers" and the patriarchal values of the South.

5. But he makes just as much sense to us as a figure of self-creation, a kind of whirling dervish who delights in producing himself, in taking advantages of extraordinary freedoms that would not be conceivable in any other fashion.

II. Twain's book is written under the aegis of "doubles," and his "real" twins, left over from the earlier conception of the book, are still here, functioning as mirrors, as reflecting counters to the events of the book.

A. Twain's high jinks and experimental art are to be understood as a funny but desperate way to introduce freedom and play into a fixed culture, to act out alternative scenarios to business as usual, to show the duplicity and multiplicity of the human subject. As for the racial dimensions of the story, Twain is doing what Melville did, showing that art is a special arena of power, and that self-fashioning is a form of control.

B. The book closes with the performance of its title character, David Wilson (known as Pudd'nhead), who uses the new science of fingerprinting to solve the key crime in the text—Tom's murder of Judge Driscoll (a symbolic parricide). Wilson also drops the other shoe by enlisting this same notion of "natal autographs" and "physiological signatures" to expose the swapping that initially took place.

C. Tom therefore "regresses" from white to murderer to black to a thing that can then be sold down the river, precisely the fate his mother sought to avoid.

D. Wilson's efforts are also a classic version of "killing the twin," putting doubles and mystery out of business. This is what the community requires for its peace of mind. Yet the reader retains a sense of the heady kind of freedom that Twain has reached for in this strange story, a way of opening up closed precincts, of creating a kind of oneiric script in which what is either feared or desired escapes censorship and is at last brought to the light of day. This is a noble view of art as the ultimate "territory" of freedom that Huck seeks at the end of *Huckleberry Finn*. No other text from the 19th century offers us such a prophetic view of future directions in literature and art.

Readings:


Topics for Further Consideration:

1. Contrast Twain's representation of boyhood in *Tom Sawyer* with that of *Huckleberry Finn*.

2. Using *Huckleberry Finn* and *Pudd'nhead Wilson* as your texts, discuss Twain's views on the formation of identity.
Lecture 42

Henry James and the Novel of Perception

Scope: With the appearance of Henry James in the last decades of the 19th century, American literature achieved a degree of sophistication, refinement, and technical brilliance that stand even today as high points in our literary tradition. The inheritor of both Poe and Hawthorne, James is the great theorist of narrative, the high priest of art who carries their earlier themes of ghosts, mysteries, and endless scrutiny to unheard-of levels. Not only does he more or less invent the international theme—the encounter of American innocence with European history and tradition—but he also subjects the entire enterprise of storytelling to a masterful and fascinating critique. In his hands we rediscover the passion, and often the horror and the dread, that are inherent in the basic transactions of human exchange—How do we get information? How do we read the heart? What kind of hunger drives us in this area? Can we ever see clearly the true effects of our own situation? James shows us that interpretation and epistemology are high drama and that the novel form is capable of choreographing our involvement with our fellows in ways that no other art can manage. We begin with an overview of the Jamesian career and close with a careful look at his greatest ghost story, The Turn of the Screw, which remains a testament about the lethal possibilities of knowledge and perception.

James's stock in the literary market has gone up and down over the years, partly because of his apparent elitism, but mostly because of his real difficulties. His writing possesses a degree of complexity and nuance that modern readers, educated by Hemingway and the minimalists, cannot easily negotiate. James was exposed to the traditions of England and Europe in his early years, then returned, logically enough, to the issues of cultural difference throughout his career. He approaches these matters in terms of consciousness and perception, and he ends up leaving us with an arsenal of techniques to actualize this vision. A brief look at one of James's late masterpieces, The Ambassadors, will allow us to gauge both the Jamesian manner and the crucial role that imagination plays in his fictional world.

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

1. Summarize how James's novels represent both a continuation of and a break with American romanticism,
2. Explain how Jamesian fiction offers a springboard to the modernism of the 20th century, and
3. Summarize James's depiction of the relationship between America and Europe.

Outline

I. James's position in the American canon is currently in question.

A. Although he was never a popular favorite among students and young people, James's mix of refinement and passion about narrative endeared him to scholars and critics. In a climate that is curious about issues of ideology such as race or gender, James is difficult reading; for a public that is accustomed to simple narrative, James is definitely difficult reading.

B. James offends by being a writer of privilege, about privilege.

1. He was born into a prominent family in 1843; his father, Henry James, Sr., was a transcendentalist friend of Emerson and other major intellectual figures. His brother William became a world-famous philosopher and psychologist.

2. In his early years, James lived abroad, in Geneva, London, Paris, and Bonn; his education was aggressively international, nonparochial.

3. He lived mostly in London, visited and loved Paris, and saw America as his problematic subject matter. Like Hawthorne, he appreciated European social conventions and cultural richness.

4. Paris was his great artistic vocation: he admired the work of Balzac and Flaubert, and he felt that the novel could have a rigorous, formal propriety.
5. In 1881 he published *A Portrait of a Lady*, his first and greatest popular and critical success. In the years to follow, he experimented, disastrously, with theatrical texts. From 1897 to 1904, he produced the great works of his "late phase," *The Ambassadors*, *The Wings of the Dove*, and *The Golden Bowl*, as well as a host of brilliant short stories.

C. James is too difficult, too mannered, too refined, and too fastidious and prim for many readers today. He offers us very little snappy plot or action. Everything is a matter of motivation, interpretation, and conjecture. As a result, his works are short on particulars, as is evident in the conversation in *The Ambassadors* between Lambert Strether and Maria Gostrey.

D. The Jamesian novel centers on interpretation, and he makes us see what a rich and complex matter that can be, both conceptually and narratively.

1. Interpretation comes to be seen as astonishingly social, like a duet, a prodigious process of two people "making out" things together.

2. The hallmark of James's fiction is his brilliance in creating new formal conventions to convey this interpretive drama: the *ficelle* or character who can register information only in his/her own way and terms, the "center of consciousness" figure whose scrutiny governs the contours and possibilities of the entire narrative.

3. James is strikingly "democratic" in these devices in that he "levels" the narrative by abandoning any omniscient or panoptic view of events. His own language for this innovation is worth our attention.

II. James can be seen as the culmination of the 19th-century literary tradition.

A. Although he spoke critically of Poe, James nonetheless worked in the same arena, refining the genre of the ghost story into a prodigious psychological form. He added especially to the "perceptual" issues connected to ghost stories.

B. James is especially understood as Hawthorne's successor in terms of the novel.

1. If we recall Pearl's fate in *The Scarlet Letter*, her becoming an heiress who leaves America for Europe, we can see the seeds of Jamesian narrative. James repeats the story of Americans who "inherit" Europe, innocent Americans in search of fulfillment and knowledge, and he dramatizes the difficulties they encounter in "making out" the strange conventions of European manners and values. Daisy Miller, Isabel Archer, and Milly Theale are among his most memorable figures along these lines.

2. Men also play out this role of American "innocents"—and the debt to Twain is spelled out here—as they encounter European culture. Christopher Newman and Lambert Strether are among James's major characters in this regard.

3. James is further Hawthorne's disciple in his unremitting concern with the forms of inquiry and analysis, the peculiar and often dreadful drama of getting information out of people, of "reading" one's fellows. "The Aspern Papers" deals with the obscenity of such needs, and its interest in learning the secrets of the rich and famous calls to mind our contemporary concern with paparazzi and their parasitic activities. "The Beast in the Jungle" is James's supreme meditation about analysis and scrutiny becoming a form of life, replacing all other issues in life.

4. The conflict between imagination and life, between interpretation and experience, is indelibly rendered in one of James's finest books, *The Ambassadors*.

a. Strether, James's middle-aged, lovable hero, is off to Paris to rescue Chad from the grips of a Parisian siren and to bring him back home to Woollett, Massachusetts. If successful, Strether will likely marry Chad's wealthy mother, Mrs. Newsome.

b. Strether discovers that Chad is stunningly improved, that the French woman has done him much good. Strether gradually comes to realize the narrowness of his moral and experiential scheme, and he understands the precious value of "living."

c. Strether then realizes the active sexuality of Chad's arrangements with Mme. de Vionnet (with whom our hero is half in love), and he senses that Chad will abandon this beautiful woman and return to the security of Woollett.

d. At the end, Strether must decide whether or not to act and make good on "living," or simply to remain a sensitive observer whose gratification is to be always vicarious.
III. James not only caps the 19th century; he is also a figure for our times in that he has helped to shape our own narrative assumptions.

A. Jamesian experiments, always decorous, lead nonetheless to some of the most powerful and immediate writing of our century. Faulkner, Ellison, and many others play out their versions of the "center of consciousness."

B. James teaches us that the great drama of life is indeed cerebral, a tempest in our own teapots, and with this notion in mind, we may wonder about the importance of "plot" in fiction.

C. Most surprisingly, James shows us how profoundly social and interactive an issue "interpretation" is. His stories are not solipsistic, but rather drenched in human connections, and we see that our analysis of others is our lifeline with them. We also see, in some of his finest texts, such as *The Turn of the Screw*, that this lifeline can become a deathline.
Lecture 43

The Turn of the Screw: Do You Believe in Ghosts?

Scope: As an author obsessed with issues of consciousness and communication, James seems fated to have tackled the genre of ghost stories. The Turn of the Screw is a candidate for the greatest horror story in literature, even though it has none of the Gothic features we remember in Poe. Instead, it deals with the themes of innocence and guilt, understood spiritually as the exit from Eden, actualized narratively as drama of perception. The horror of the story derives from its choice of protagonists: two children who are suspected of being in communication with evil ghosts from the past. This bristling scenario comes to us via the vision of the governess-narrator who is to protect these children from harm. This story has been subject to some famous critical theories, and they all add up to one thing: What do we see in what we see? Or, no less strikingly: how do we read?

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

1. Summarize the "straight" and "Freudian" readings of The Turn of the Screw,
2. Explain how James renders vision to be inherently ambiguous in The Turn of the Screw, and
3. Describe how James's depiction of Miles and Flora offended the Victorian sensibilities of his day.

Outline

I. The Turn of the Screw constitutes a cause célèbre in literary criticism. James's text has caused consternation since its appearance in 1898.

A. At the time of its publication, James's story was seen as shocking and awful. It is the account, offered by a heroic governess, of two innocent children hounded by evil ghosts. James offended the Victorian belief in childhood purity; his story of corruption was considered ghastly.

B. The Turn of the Screw is elaborately outfitted with metaphors of innocence and corruption, and its images make it clear that James is telling a story of the proverbial Fall.
   1. The children, Miles and Flora, are easily understood as symbolic figures: Miles as soldier and essential male; Flora as flower and essential female.
   2. This is a pastoral reading: the story begins in June, when all is in bloom, and finishes in November, in darkness. The children are themselves "aged" by the text, as the story continues.
   3. The Fall—the children's loss of innocence—is to be understood as the cost of knowledge, especially sexual knowledge.
   4. The Fall is also the arrival of death onto the scene.
   5. The governess exercises a priestly function in that she valiantly does battle with the evil ghosts who want to claim the children. She presses Miles to confess his contact with the ghosts; only when he confesses can he be saved.

C. This version of events, a version most readers subscribe to, is now regarded as the "straight reading." In 1934, Edmund Wilson published a famous alternative in his essay, "The Ambiguity of Henry James." Enter the notorious "Freudian reading," in which the reader discovers more than just a surface meaning.
   1. In one view of the story, the children are not in cahoots with the ghosts and have no visions at all; in fact, no one other than the governess ever actually sees the ghosts.
   2. The governess sees the ghosts because she is having hallucinations, and she is having hallucinations because she is sexually repressed. Hence, the ghosts, Quint and Jessel, are "projected" by the governess, even though she truly believes that they are real and that the children see them.
   3. Textual evidence buttresses this theory, indicating that the governess is infatuated with the master/uncle who entrusts her with the children, and this infatuation generates her visions.
4. Quint and Jessel, former menial and governess, make their ghostly appearances in strikingly symbolic fashion: Quint appears on a tower, Jessel by a lake. The Freudian doctrine easily translates this into symbols of male and female sexuality. Other scenes also have a powerful sexual dimension to them, and there is a growing sense that they represent sexual experience in multiple ways, resulting in an evil impact on the children.

5. Yet this reading flies in the face of James's claim that the governess has no "subjective complications" of her own. James himself specified what kind of ghost story he was writing: not the "case-study" type, but the one evoking "sacred terror." There is much horror in this reading, since we now have to imagine innocent children subjected to a mad governess who is seeing ghosts.

D. There are still other interesting readings. Some suspect the housekeeper, Mrs. Grose, of being the villain; others have argued that our categories of innocence and experience need to be rethought. After all, both the straight and the Freudian readings presuppose utterly innocent children who are destroyed either by the ghosts or the governess. But are children utterly innocent? What about infantile sexuality? What about Victorian priggishness?

E. Nonetheless, the reader is obliged to choose between two divergent interpretations: (1) The ghosts are real, we trust the governess, and the story is a sacrificial parable of the Fall; or (2) The governess is delusional or mad, she invents the ghosts, and we see this because we distrust her account.

II. At issue in this critical crossroads is the status of vision. Does the governess *see* or *invent/produce* the ghosts? The ramifications of this question are enormous.

A. Remember the lesson of Melville's "Benito Cereno": Vision can be culturally constructed. What might a sheltered and repressed Victorian woman see?

B. The initial Freudian premise is that the governess is projecting her desire for the master into a vision of Quint (as a "lower" version of master) and Jessel (as a consenting version of herself). But the screw turns still further: Is the governess projecting her desire onto the children? There is much evidence to buttress this view as well.

C. Finally, what does it actually mean to choose between the straight and the Freudian readings?

1. Who would choose the "straight" reading? It is a gullible, naive, duped, gross reading of events.

2. Conversely, the Freudian reading is seductive because it is suspicious and sophisticated; we must invest in "reading" the governess and "interpreting" her account rather than simply believing it.

3. Freud, arriving for his first visit in America, joked that he brought the plague with him. He did, indeed. "Plague" is the era of suspicion, the very project of psychoanalysis whereby what you "say" does not mean what you really think. Here is the distinction between manifest (surface) meanings and latent (deeper) meanings. Only a fool believes in the surface and trusts the appearances; we like to probe, translate, and uncover what is hidden.

4. These issues are at the core of literature and reading. To distrust the governess's account is to critique, to rewrite, to decode. Hence, the status of vision in literature turns out to be inseparable from the status of language and reading. This is not simply a question of literature; it translates into our everyday lives as well—How do we "read" the newspapers? The language of friends and loved ones?

D. And yet, to *translate* the story of the governess—a story of evil ghosts corrupting innocent children—into a story of sexual repression and projection is to do to her what she does to the children: to extort her secret, to label her story a cover story. She insists on seeing evil in the children; we insist on seeing evil in her. Isn't this the reductive and coercive procedure that psychoanalysis can fall into, a bullying vision that says, "I know you better than you know yourself; I can decode your secrets; I can translate you; I make it possible for you to confess."
Lecture 44

Turning the Screw of Interpretation

Scope: How can one get past the critical impasse of the two opposed readings of The Turn of the Screw? Are there ultimate guidelines for reading properly? Will the text 'tell' us its true meaning? These questions seem to be about issues of literary and critical procedure, but they lead us to other, still deeper issues of how we negotiate our world, how we see and assess our experience. James's story is a haunting one, not because it deals with ghosts, but because it displays with awesome purity the moral stakes of interpretation. Once again, we realize how social, ethical, and 'relational' interpretation is; it does not take place in a vacuum but involves our judgment of others, indeed our treatment of others. James will show us that interpretation can be lethal.

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

1. Summarize the role of "subjective complications" in The Turn of the Screw,
2. Explain the role that love plays in the James novel, and
3. Describe, according to James, the nature of human vision.

Outline

I. We have become familiar with the notion of reading as detective work. All texts require deciphering, and many texts centralize that activity and make us grasp its enormity.
   
   A. Getting to the hidden truth is not a benign operation. The prodigious example of Roger Chillingworth "working" on Arthur Dimmesdale in The Scarlet Letter speaks volumes to us about the ethical transgressions involved in such "sleuthing."
   
   B. Hawthorne's playful manner—his mixing of registers and his profusion of possible meanings for the "A"—suggests that single meanings and right answers may not be what literature and life offer.
      1. We need to reconsider James's notion of authority here. The master is absent from the scene in The Turn of the Screw. All we can have are partial versions of events.
      2. More urgently, how do we go about interpreting children, who cannot interpret themselves? Infans means "speechless." What does it mean to get at their infantile secrets? Could there be an analogy here with the unconscious (which is inherently resistant to language)?
   
   C. James claimed that "subjective complications" were ruled out in his story. Is this possible? What about criticism itself? Is it free of subjective complications? Should it be?

II. James is showing us, on every page of this text, that all thinking and all utterance is "governed" by subjective complications.
   
   A. Stories do not "speak." They must be spoken. The elaborate frame of The Turn of the Screw underscores the contingency of narrative, its status as personal utterance.
      1. The narrator learns of the story from Douglas, who wants to share it with friends.
      2. Douglas got it from an older woman, his sister's governess (with whom he seems to have been in love), who died and left him the story. The parallels between Miles and the governess of the narrative are unmistakable.
      3. This story has an ominous feel to it of a deadly form of chain letters—in dying, someone bequeaths this horrible account of children and ghosts, and it moves from speaker to speaker. We recall Poe's interest in voices beyond the grave. We also might consider the possibility that a story can kill—you could die of fright. As we will see, that notion will return within the story itself.
   
   B. James repeatedly shows us the collusion between vision and speech that characterizes human utterance (at least in this story).
      1. Douglas seems to speak of what he imagines, not what he sees.
2. We also learn that love is inseparable from this narrative: the beloved governess told Douglas the original story; the story itself is about love as a filter of language.

3. In a number of key scenes within the story, we see a kind of slippage and fluidity that again display the hold of fantasy, of all language being scripted by inner drives.

III. As James's story delves ever deeper into the nature of vision, of what goes into what we see, a very central issue comes into focus: the significance of the unseen, the reign of the invisible.

A. We hear over and over about the governess's "inner certainty," her powerful intuition about what is happening, vs. a visual account of events.
   1. The governess even says that the ghosts are not there if she doesn't see them, and we sense a kind of umbilical cord between them and her.
   2. The governess's apprehension of the ghosts is also motivated by an odd desire to see them, to have them appear. And each time they do appear, we have a clear notation of "collusion" with the governess herself.
   3. The plot thickens, however, when the governess moves from her own "vision" of the ghosts to her indictment of the children for denying that they also see the ghosts. What do they see? What do we see?
   4. Quickly enough, the governess moves from conjecture to certainty, even though the "visual evidence" is open-ended. This is an intriguing issue in that we are accustomed to crediting all intuitions as prophetic and truthful when they appear in literature. In real life we are much less credulous, more dependent on empirical data. One thinks also of the Emersonian doctrine of self-reliance and spontaneity, which celebrates "inner certainty" at the expense of everything else. Is this a formula for disaster in the public world of interpersonal relations?

B. In a central image, the governess describes her role as a shield. We need to mull over this image.
   1. The governess wants, laudably, to protect the children from ghosts.
   2. It follows that she therefore needs to know everything about the ghosts, and she is worried if she doesn't see them. Is this an invitation?
   3. Regarding the shield, we cannot know whether the children see the ghosts, but we do know they see the governess. In short, the shield itself is visible.
   4. What kind of a shield is this? Consider the language by which the governess describes her activities with the children. We must realize that she is a player in these events, not simply an objective narrator.
   5. The "activist" nature of the governess is most fully on show in two key scenes with Flora and Miles—when the governess points out the presence of Jessel, but Flora looks at the governess, and in the governess's bedside interview with Miles.

C. At what point must all our guessing games stop? Do issues of epistemology (which remain undecided) yield to issues of ethics (which we simply must decide)? Consider, in this regard, a key scene in which the governess watches the children at play and then describes to Mrs. Grose what she really sees. What do you see?

D. We finally attend to the central issue here: Is there a ghost in this text?
   1. Watch the actual behavior of the governess. Who does things like this?
   2. How would you imagine a ghost in action? We need to take a careful look at the harrowing final pages of this narrative, in which the governess fatefuly seeks to get at Miles's secret. Here is where all the Jamesian issues—getting at the truth, projecting one's own feelings, creating ghosts—are on show, and there is little in literature that matches this for beauty and horror. Poe would have been proud.

Readings:

Topics for Further Consideration:

1. Identify some of the technical innovations that Henry James brings to the art of the novel.

2. Summarize the questions that *The Turn of the Screw* raises about both "reader suspicion" and the "ethics" of reading.
Stephen Crane and the Literature of War

Scope: Stephen Crane's meteoric career and brief life constitute a very pure and luminous moment in American literature. This young man, who died at the age of 28, bore witness to a radically changing world in the 1890s. He witnessed the epic changes that took place in the Civil War, and indeed the gruesome spate of wars that mark our 20th century, and he did so in language that remains as fresh, startling, and vivid today as it was a century ago. Crane's *Red Badge of Courage* is not only the best account we have of the Civil War (written by someone who had never seen a war before), but it also introduces a new style in our literary tradition—images of unheard-of violence and distortion, cacophony of noise, and a rendition of events that brings the objectivity of journalism and the immediacy of experience into narrative discourse. Crane points directly to Hemingway's efforts to render the moment, to tell American readers about conflicts all over the globe as well as right here at home. But he prefigures the war literature of others as well, including Mailer, Heller, and the literature of Vietnam. But Crane is more than *The Red Badge*; he is also the author of some of the finest short stories we possess: the account of four shipwrecked men surviving in an "open boat" (based on Crane's real experience), the report of a fatal altercation in a Nebraska town in arctic winter, and the astonishing portrayal of an idyllic small-town in America going terribly sour. Here, as everywhere, Crane emerges as the implacably lucid observer of violence, of the human subject under stress, of the war that is life.

Crane is the great youth of our literature; he tore through his life and burned out, like a comet going across the sky, dying of tuberculosis at the age of 28. His integrity, his fearlessness, his lucidity, his restless desire to see and report on the violence that subtends life—all this puts him in the company of other visionary writers who died young, including Georg Büchner and Arthur Rimbaud. Starting his career with exposés of brutal life in the Bowery, Crane moves prophetically to his great subject of war in *The Red Badge of Courage*, the book that took the world by storm and made the 23-year-old writer a celebrity overnight. Crane's rendition of the Civil War is unprecedented in its immediacy, and his account of the true proportions of war lays forever to rest any lingering views of battle as noble, grand, or even coherent. With this text we witness the birth of a new kind of American writing: the unflinching, quasi-journalistic report of violent conflicts, rendering both the individual subject and the harsh setting in ways never before attempted.

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

1. Summarize in what ways Crane is and is not a naturalist,
2. Give examples of why *The Red Badge of Courage* was considered by many critics to have been a clear break with the literature of Europe, and
3. Explain, according to Crane, the relationship between fiction and journalism.

**Outline**

I. A new phase in American literature begins with *The Red Badge of Courage*. Contemporary critics considered it a break with the European past. Stephen Crane's "freshness" is to be understood as part of his youthful genius, as if he came fully into his powers without the need for education or training.

   A. It is instructive to compare his career to that of the equally precocious German playwright Georg Büchner, who had a comparably clinical view of human emotions under great stress and who left us the single greatest play about the French Revolution (a parallel text, of sort, to *The Red Badge*), *Danton’s Death*.

   B. Crane's career was tragically brief, but the curve in it is suggestive: from home to world, from privilege to responsibility.

      1. Crane was born in 1871 in Newark, New Jersey, the son of a Methodist minister, in a very large family.
Interested in athletics more than academics, Crane was an erratic, "sometime" student at both Lafayette College and Syracuse University, but he spent most of his time in New York, studying the life in saloons and flophouses in the Bowery. From this experience, he wrote his first major text, *Maggie: A Girl of the Streets*, a brutal "naturalist" account of prostitution and sordidness in the modern urban setting. Crane published this piece at his own expense.

Crane established contact with the leaders of American Realism, Hamlin Garland and William Dean Howells. In 1895, *The Red Badge of Courage* was published, and it was a sensation, especially in England. It made Crane famous overnight.

Crane continued to defend the victims of urban culture against the authorities. On December 31, 1896, he departed on the steamship *Commodore* to deliver arms to Cuban rebels, but the ship sank, and Crane left his record of surviving at sea in his masterful story, "The Open Boat."

Crane lived with Cora Taylor, an older woman who was a war correspondent. Crane covered the Greco-Turkish War in 1897 as a war correspondent, then moved to England with Cora, covered the Spanish-American War, traveled to Cuba and to Puerto Rico, and came under fire at Gauntanamo and San Juan Hill. He was exhausted and ill.

Crane returned to England in 1899, enjoyed a circle of distinguished British writers as friends, and continued to publish war stories and children's stories. Then he suffered his first T.B. attack. Crane traveled by litter in 1900 to a sanitarium in the Black Forest, where he died the same year.

Many consider Crane a naturalist, though he did not hold to the tenets of determinism. William Dean Howells's comment that Crane "had sprung into literature fully armed" speaks volumes about Crane's precociousness and also his subject matter.

The two decades of world peace following the Franco-Prussian War in 1871 come to a close in the 1890s, a time of constant hostilities. Crane seemed magnetically drawn to these far-flung sites of conflict and carnage. In this way, he anticipated writers such as Hemingway and Malraux, great adventurer-journalists who felt compelled to give testimony. He also anticipates our century of war-related horrors.

Crane's education in "war" began in New York. His critical experiences were in the Bowery, and he saw, in the lives of laborers and prostitutes, the principles of violence and conflict that are common to the modern city and the modern war. Crane carries out the naturalist mission here, in depicting the brutal industrial machinery that grinds up human lives.

Crane's own upbringing, in a good family with station and means, suggests that his early experiences were perhaps a form of "slumming." Yet there is nothing condescending or sensationalist in his accounts of "the other side," and his great work invariably sets out to dismantle pretension, to stab through inflated rhetoric, to expose hyperbole. He turns out to be deeply "countercultural."

*The Red Badge of Courage* is Crane's most famous contribution to American literature, and it constitutes our premier literary account of the Civil War, seen from the battlefield itself.

**A.** The book was a sensation, an immediate bestseller, especially in England, and Crane became a celebrity overnight.

1. Critics felt that this was the first truly indigenous work of American literature, that earlier 19th-century writers had been responding in some fashion to Europe, whereas Crane was working new ground.

2. Crane is said to have written his book in ten feverish nights. Astonishingly enough, this 23-year-old writer described the war without ever having seen a battle. He later claimed that his knowledge of conflict came from his background in athletics, and it gave him great pleasure that war veterans assumed him to have "been there." Once he did actually encounter war, he was especially pleased to have "gotten it right" beforehand.

3. Getting it right meant, for Crane, to report on the actual experience, rather than repeating the rhetoric. It is instructive to see how national leaders at the time described the Spanish-American War, when looking at Crane's version of the Civil War. Political rhetoric of the day was naïve and jingoistic.

**B.** Crane's sole creed was to be faithful to what he saw. He would appear to have gone too far with *Maggie*, but *The Red Badge* was a perfect hit. Here was a war story that needed telling.

1. Crane's protagonist, Henry Fleming, senses that the age of epic warfare is already over.
2. Yet Henry is a young romantic, hungering for glamour and glory, expecting grand events, wanting to believe in heroism.

3. But Crane deflates these expectations over and over. Henry's mother initially sounds this cautionary note, and periodically throughout his experience, Henry himself, by the end of the novel, sees clearly this flaw in his vision, this need to idealize and romanticize war.

4. Crane's true subject is not so much war itself as crisis, a set of violent circumstances in which a human being is placed. Crane was the lucid observer of what is virtually a laboratory procedure. We come to realize that human behavior is fundamentally a question mark.

5. Hence, Henry Fleming does not know how he will react to battle. His own future behavior is a riddle. And he is obsessed to find out the answer. This is the scientific realm of the text.

6. Crane is perhaps best defined as an impressionist, not a naturalist.
Scope: Crane's central strategy in his war novel is to juxtapose the inner, private world view with the external world of others and nature. Henry Fleming is subjected to this dynamic, and he thinks of his acts as a performance, a public spectacle that must be validated. But we see that the natural scene is utterly out of phase with the so-called heroics of battle. We see this because Crane has invented a staggering new kind of prose to force upon us—a welter of disorienting colors, a figurative language that sees animality and metamorphosis everywhere it looks, an expressionistic genius that twists the familiar world of forms and concepts into something grotesque and new, a discourse of energy that locates power in things rather than people, and an all-out critique of the possibility of human control, especially in a war setting. Crane's book has been read in various ways, including as a rites-of-passage account and as a mythic presentation of war. It is perhaps best seen as a collision course with death, and as such, the central scenes of rendezvous with death seem to prophesy Crane's own premature death.

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

1. Summarize Crane's method of "inside/outside" narration,
2. Give examples of two types of critical interpretations of The Red Badge of Courage, and
3. Explain how Crane's depiction of death differs from the Romantic vision.

Outline

I. Crane's basic strategy consists of narrating from both "inside" and "outside." Being a soldier is portrayed as a theatrical event in terms of how you see yourself and how others see you.

A. For the most part, Henry Fleming is alone with his senses, but he is periodically shocked by other views.
   1. At the very beginning, Henry's mother articulates the corrective view: he is a small part of a large event.
   2. At key junctures, Henry overhears the officers speaking of his regiment's behavior and character; he is stunned by their pejorative view.
   3. Henry utterly internalizes this dynamic of inside/outside; he obsesses about how others might see him. In the beginning of the story, he runs away, and this act haunts him. At the end, his bravery is understood as a performance, one that can now be validated.

B. Yet Crane makes us understand that the inside/outside dialectic is more radical than this; the entire war comes across as absurdity, as senseless noise and killing in a nature that has no connection with it.

II. Crane's brilliance as a writer is most on show in his rendition of war as a kind of perceptual and experiential chaos. His artistic mission is to show us what war really looks like and feels like.

A. We first note the staggering use of vivid, stunning, disorienting colors in Crane's descriptions.
   1. Crane is justly thought of as a great "Impressionist" writer, and his rendition of the visual world parallels the Impressionist painters' works.
   2. A world that comes to us predominantly as colors is also a world that is losing some of its conceptual definitions.

B. We also see that Crane's world is a bestiary—not that there are so many literal animals in it, but that it is rendered through animal metaphors.

C. Looking forward to the Imagism school of poetry, Crane's most dazzling verbal touches suggest a style that is best termed expressionistic. Comparable perhaps to Emily Dickinson, Crane reconfigures the world we think we know by clothing it in shocking images and metaphors.

D. One of Crane's favorite games here is to underscore the frightening slippage between things and animals, between machines and people.
1. In many striking passages, "things" are invested with a kind of furious in-dwelling power, in animate form. It is as if power itself had been displaced from humans to their "instruments."

2. The corollary to such passages is found in the numerous notations of humans as mechanized, "thingified." We see this as a strangely urban phenomenon, as if the "crowd" psychology were found to be operative in war as well. But battle itself might be understood as an "infernal machine." In his best passages, Crane evidences a genius for unpacking these images, as if their explosive formal power—to reconfigure our world—led to an equally explosive conceptual revolution.

E. There is no easy or agreed-on way to assess the vision and significance of *The Red Badge of Courage*.

1. Many critics have seen in Henry Fleming's experience an exemplary case of rites of passage, consisting of the classic phases of this paradigm: separation, initiation, and incorporation. There is much truth here.

2. Other critics, attending to Crane's metaphors, have seen in his story a mythic presentation of war, replete with primitive images of sacrifice and savage new gods. This reading completes the rites-of-passage presentation as an interpretation of what Henry Fleming becomes: a barbarian.

3. One unmistakable result of Crane's work here is that the traditional view of war as a "great Game," as an exercise in strategy and design, is utterly cashiered. The only cogency at hand here is that of death.

4. Death would seem to be the ultimate truth and quarry of Crane's novel; many scenes actually choreograph the movements of the dying. Death is repeatedly imaged as the story's inevitable rendezvous, not only for the dying, but also for Henry, who encounters it in a remarkable passage early in the text.

5. It is hard not to see this book's repeated staging of an encounter with death as a prophetic dress rehearsal for Crane's own doomed, brief life.
Lecture 47

Stephen Crane: Scientist of Human Behavior

Scope: Although Crane is most celebrated for *The Red Badge of Courage*, some would argue that his greatest accomplishments lie in the realm of the short story. His two most famous forays in this genre are "The Open Boat" and "The Blue Hotel." In the former, he offers a sobering account of his own experience in surviving the sinking of a steamship off the coast of Florida, and we see here a far more disciplined and restrained form of writing than was true of his war novel. Yet Crane succeeds even more powerfully in evoking the contest between puny humans and a ferocious, impersonal environment, endowing this virtually mute battle with a kind of largeness of soul that is very moving. The second story comes to life in a fierce Nebraska winter setting, and it constitutes one of Crane's bravura pieces about the mission of art: to depict the violent vagaries of human behavior under intense stress. Crane is reflecting on his own medium as well—the explosive power of words. A Crane coda can be seen in his astonishing rendition of Americana in "The Monster," a grisly text that turns yesteryear into nightmare.

Objectives—Upon completion of this lecture, you should be able to
1. Summarize why "The Open Boat" is considered by many critics to be Crane's most consummate work,
2. Explain how "The Blue Hotel" conveys a sense of language as not just descriptive but prescriptive, and
3. Describe how "The Monster" anticipates both the small-town and horror literature of the 20th century.

Outline

I. Many consider "The Open Boat" to be Crane's single most achieved work of art. It does not have the fireworks of *The Red Badge*, but it more than offsets the earlier text by the grandeur of its subject and the discipline of its treatment.

A. This story is based on Crane's real-life experience. On December 31, 1896, Crane set sail on the steamship *Commodore*, carrying arms to Cuban rebels. The boat sank off the coast of Florida, and Crane survived his experience in a tiny open boat with two crew members and the captain. Crane was so scrupulous about getting the story right that he asked the captain to check out his version before publishing it.

1. The pyrotechnics and "special effects" of *The Red Badge* are absent in this solemn account of a trial at sea.
2. Crane's depiction of the four humans in this tiny boat is simple and beautiful; they work together flawlessly. There is no emotional subplot, virtually no interest in character as psychology.
3. The great antagonist here is the sea itself, and Crane is able to depict the fate of puny humans in a fierce world with as much power as he did in the war novel. The tiny boat comes to us as a symbol of human torture, reminiscent of Poe's "Pit and Pendulum."
4. As usual, the integrity of this piece consists in the unflinching honesty and accuracy of Crane's perspective. What does it look like in this open boat? Crane's genius for one-liners is on show as well.
5. Crane is the reporter right to the end, telling it straight even as the little boat capsizes, and they go down.
6. This account of human endurance, so unrhetorical, so "cool" in its language, achieves great beauty in its final lines about "earning" the right to "interpret" nature.

II. "The Blue Hotel" differs radically in tone from "The Open Boat." It is filled with histrionics, and it is an ongoing meditation about the resources of art, as well as the ingredients of disaster.

A. Crane is again dealing with his favorite topic: How do humans act under great stress? In this brief text, he shows us how to choreograph such reactions, how a room with four people can produce astonishing fireworks.

1. We note, first, the Blue Hotel itself as a kind of strident metaphor, a human construct in a harsh setting, a piece of theatrical machinery.
2. Crane's experiment consists of putting together the right (i.e., explosive) mix of people within this peculiar container, with freezing arctic conditions outside. His catalyst for the forthcoming violence is the Swede, a precarious figure who seems exaggerated, puffed up, and who spews omens. We see the group's resistance to the Swede's behavior.

3. Crane offers some explanations: the Swede is laboring under a clichéd picture of the "Wild West." Crane suggests—with diabolic irony—that those violent days are over.

4. The Swede proceeds to become demiurgic, monstrous, bidding to take over the entire text.

5. We start to realize that all of his exaggerations, all of his ridiculous claims about being murdered, are going to become true. This text is about prophecy—how its meaning can be literal, how it actualizes its own language and turns its words into deeds.

6. Crane is showing that "words" are not merely conventions, but that they can trigger real explosions. Empowered language peppers the text, language that breaks out of its normal frames and predicts events to come.

7. At the close, the Swede seems to carry the day by defeating Johnnie, but then, in a stunning "reversal," he is murdered. This is no reversal at all, but rather a fulfillment of the story's own premises.

8. Crane wraps up his piece with a stunning bit of magic: the "game" has been completed, and all the characters were "players" in ways they never suspected. All the parts have now fallen into place, according to a higher logic (of both violence and art). Here is Crane's dark wisdom. In the final analysis, fate can be seen as an equation; Crane was the scientific observer of crisis.

III. We leave Crane by glancing at his weird text, "The Monster," in which he abandons the melodrama of war, sinking ships, and wild Westerners and Swedes, to come back "home" to small-town America, Whilomville.

A. Here is a version of the town where Tom Sawyer and Huck Finn grew up, a nostalgic place that is poised between gas lights and electric lights, on the threshold of modernity.

B. It is here that the jaunty, lovable, good-looking black handyman, Henry Johnson, performs a heroic act by saving Dr. Trescott's son Jimmy from a burning house, a house that contains the doctor's laboratory.

1. Johnson is horrendously disfigured—"defigured"—in the process.

2. This faceless man, this "monster," does not know what horror he arouses in people; he starts to "haunt" the town, to become a threat to the community.

3. Crane has crafted a story of racial anxiety that bids to change our view of yesteryear forever. He takes the American small town beyond the neuroses of Anderson's (coming) *Winesburg, Ohio*, to offer a vision of horror that is close in spirit to Stephen King and David Lynch.

Readings:


Topics for Further Consideration:
1. Explain how Crane challenged received notions about war in *The Red Badge of Courage*.

2. Both "The Open Boat" and "The Blue Hotel" are made up of explosive contests in which human beings either confront or release great violence. Explain how the two stories differ.
Charlotte Perkins Gilman: War Against Patriarchy

Scope: Charlotte Perkins Gilman is not a name that everyone will recognize, yet she is indisputably one of the exciting and provocative additions to the "canon." Moreover, there is nothing vogue or whimsical about her new status: she is going to stay, and when people read American literature a century from now, they will still be reading her masterpiece, "The Yellow Wallpaper." Although largely eclipsed through most of the 20th century, Gilman was a veritable powerhouse a century ago. She was known most of all for her ground-breaking feminist work, as seen in key publications such as Women and Economics (1898), in which she announced a bold prophetic program of social reform based on recognition of women's rights (as opposed to their ongoing "enslavement" by the institutions of marriage, home, and work). But "The Yellow Wallpaper" is more than feminist tract; in addition to being a companion piece to Chopin's The Awakening, it belongs, as well, in the Gothic and psychic tradition of American romance, as seen in the horror stories of Poe and the psychological probings of Hawthorne, Melville, and James. Gilman's fictional account of her skirmish with madness is a harrowing descent into a mind on the brink—indeed a mind that goes over the brink—and also a rich social portrait of the power relations between men and women in the 19th century. Like all great art, this brief story bears witness, and we have much to learn, even today, in our seemingly more egalitarian age, from its depiction of woman's key dilemma in culture: Work? Or family? Have we solved this, in our time?

Gilman's name and work, familiar to readers a century ago, were largely eclipsed until the reissue of "The Yellow Wallpaper" by the Feminist Press in 1973, the decade of Roe vs. Wade and a host of landmark decisions about the rights of women in America. Gilman comes from the distinguished Beecher family, leaders of American feminism in the 19th century, yet her life and work are also stamped by the vicissitudes of family, especially by the impossible demands placed on women. The author's problems with marriage and childbirth led to the (loaded) diagnosis of "hysteria," which, in turn, led Gilman to her fateful encounter with America's ruling physician of hysteria, S. Weir Mitchell. Mitchell prescribed for Gilman his then-famous remedy, the Rest Cure, and from that experience of torture we have the hypnotic tale, "The Yellow Wallpaper," the harrowing account of a woman essentially going mad by doctor's orders.

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

1. Summarize how some of Gilman's ideas prefigured the feminist movement of the late 20th century,
2. Explain the nature of Gilman's ambiguous depiction of madness in "The Yellow Wallpaper," and
3. Compare Gilman's depiction of vision with that portrayed in other classic American writers like Melville.

Outline

I. Gilman's brief short story, "The Yellow Wallpaper," indisputably crashed the gates and entered the American canon in literature, taking many by surprise.
   
   A. "The Yellow Wallpaper" was first published in 1892, then anthologized by William Dean Howells in Great American Short Stories in 1920, and then largely forgotten.
   
   B. The Feminist Press reissued this text in 1973, and it is now among the most widely read and assigned American texts of the 19th century. Along with Kate Chopin's The Awakening, "The Yellow Wallpaper" has simply changed the way we understand gender arrangements in the 19th century. Although the general public may not be familiar with Gilman, her name was indeed a household term a century ago.

II. Gilman comes from one of the most influential intellectual families of the 19th century, the Beechers. Her great-aunts were Harriet Beecher Stowe (Uncle Tom's Cabin), Catherine Beecher (pioneering advocate for new roles for women in the household), and Isabella Beecher Hooker (women's suffragist).
   
   A. Yet, in ways that are specific and often tragic, family seems to be the greatest problem of Gilman's life and her art.
1. Her father, Frederick Beecher Perkins, was an intellectual who abandoned his wife and child and led to their continuous economic straits.

2. Her mother was a cold, repressed woman, and we know from Gilman herself just how love-starved she was as a child.

3. After much hesitation, Charlotte married Walter Stetson, a handsome Rhode Island artist, a free spirit in some areas but decidedly conservative in his views on marriage. We have a record of Charlotte's constant wrestling with the double demands of marriage vs. work. It is here that she is an emblematic figure for women today.

4. In 1887 Charlotte gave birth to a daughter, Katherine, a somewhat sickly infant, and she experienced what—today—we would call post-partum depression.

5. She was then sent to the leading neurologist in America, S. Weir Mitchell, who was especially famous for his treatment of hysterical or neurasthenic women. Hysteria, a "condition" that has been discussed by (male) doctors ever since the Greeks, was rife in 19th-century America. Emotional instability, regressive behavior, nervous fits—the whole phenomenon usually related to some form of alleged sexual disorder. Mitchell's Rest Cure was the great 19th-century answer to this problem; Charlotte underwent it.

6. Charlotte almost lost her mind. Finally she bolted, left both Walter and Katherine, and moved to California to live with her friend Grace Channing. In 1891 she wrote "The Yellow Wallpaper"; in 1913, she wrote "Why I Wrote the Yellow Wallpaper," explaining her reasons for the text.

7. Charlotte later lived with both Grace and Walter (who were, by then, married to each other), and the three of them jointly brought up Katherine.

B. Readers a century ago would have known a different Charlotte Perkins Gilman, the author of explosive texts about the conditions of women in America. In particular, her Women and Economics (1898) was a landmark book; it is now a forgotten classic.

1. Gilman attacked the way female children were brought up in America, indicting the "sexuo-economic" relationship that enslaves women in marriage, and tracing its despotic hold in child rearing.

2. Gilman also indicted "home" as the locus of gender exploitation and other forms of imprisonment. She argued that children need not be raised by their blood mothers but can be reared in collectives, a view that points beyond even nurseries toward our contemporary day-care centers.

C. Other texts, such as The Home: Its Work and Influence and Human Work continue the attack against patriarchal arrangements. She consistently argued from a socialist position against the American worship of the ego, rather than valuing the importance of the collective. She proposed kitchenless houses, feminist apartments, new dress codes, and new spaces where new social relations might be fostered. Gilman was a friend and equal to Susan B. Anthony and Jane Addams of Hull House. Sigmund Freud knew and respected her work.

D. Nonetheless, if she is to be remembered tomorrow, it will doubtless be for "The Yellow Wallpaper," her only fictional effort that is unvitiated by didacticism.

III. "The Yellow Wallpaper" was seen, from the beginning, as a horror story, but the terms of that horror have changed over the years.

A. Gilman tried to get the piece published when she wrote it in 1891, but the Atlantic Monthly vehemently rejected it.

B. What happens in this strange story?

1. A nameless female protagonist recounts her experience of Weir's Rest Cure in an ancestral house while on vacation with her child, sister-in-law/helper, and doctor/husband, who prescribes and supervises the cure.

2. Essentially confined to the bedroom/nursery, the protagonist secretly writes about her experience in violation of the "rules" against writing.

3. Her writing displays an increasing fascination with the strange yellow wallpaper in her room, and she begins to discern odd patterns in it, finally identifying with it, and ultimately "entering" into a realm that is hard to name—Fantasy? Madness? Freedom?

1. The story was initially thought to be a heroic tale of feminine resistance, an emblematic version of the well-known thesis of Gilbert and Gubar: "the madwoman in the attic."

2. As the feminist debate has become more complex, with many earlier gains now reconsidered, and as ideological criticism has focused ever more on the insidious forces that constitute subjectivity itself, this tale becomes less clear. Is it a victory? Can madness be a triumph? Is patriarchy altered by the outcome?

3. Given the vantage point of this course—our knowledge of complicated first-person narratives in Poe, Melville, and James—we can see the richness and ambiguities of Gilman's achievement. In particular, as in "Benito Cereno," we will be attentive to the cultural component of seeing, the use of metaphors, and the parallel between "our" reading experience and the protagonist's interpretation of the wallpaper. Finally, we will want to ask: What is madness? Escape? Freedom? And how does our interpretation parallel that of the narrator?

4. Let us consider the opening page of this story, to see the richness of tone that Gilman achieves at the outset. The writing exhibits a skepticism of conventional Victorian attitudes.
Timeline

17th century ....................... The “Great Migration” brings the Puritans and Pilgrims from England to America.

1692 ................................... John Hawthorne, an ancestor of author Nathaniel Hawthorne, officiates at a number of the infamous witch trials in Salem, Massachusetts.

1703 ................................... Birth of Jonathan Edwards.

1706 ................................... Birth of Benjamin Franklin.

1721 ................................... Benjamin Franklin, at age 15, starts his own newspaper, The New England Courant, and begins to write essays.

1730 ................................... Franklin is named the “Official Printer of Pennsylvania.”

1732–1757 ........................ Franklin writes Poor Richard’s Almanac, the first American periodical.

1736 ................................... Franklin organizes the Union Fire Co.

1737 ................................... Franklin becomes Philadelphia’s postmaster.

1741 ................................... Franklin invents the “Franklin fireplace” (stove).

1743 ................................... Franklin proposes the idea for the American Philosophical Society.

1745 ................................... Franklin begins to conduct experiments in electricity.

1747 ................................... Franklin organizes the Pennsylvania Militia.

1749 ................................... Franklin founds the Philadelphia Academy, which later became the University of Pennsylvania.

1751 ................................... Founding of Philadelphia Hospital, with the assistance of Franklin.

1752 ................................... Franklin conducts his famous experiment proving that lightning is electrical.

1753 ................................... Franklin receives honorary masters degrees from both Harvard and Yale.

1757 ................................... Franklin elected the representative of Philadelphia (Pennsylvania) to England.

1758 ................................... Jonathan Edwards dies.

1759 ................................... Franklin receives an honorary doctorate from the University of St. Andrews in Scotland.

1762 ................................... Franklin receives an honorary doctorate from Oxford University.

1771 ................................... Franklin begins writing his Autobiography.

1776 ................................... Declaration of Independence written and signed. Beginning of the Revolutionary War.

1783 ................................... End of the Revolutionary War.

1783 ................................... Birth of Washington Irving.

1790 ................................... Death of Benjamin Franklin.

1803 ................................... Birth of Ralph Waldo Emerson.

1804 ................................... Birth of Nathaniel Hawthorne.

1809 ................................... Birth of Edgar Allan Poe.

1811 ................................... Birth of Harriet Beecher Stowe.

1817 ................................... Birth of Henry David Thoreau.

1819 ................................... Washington Irving publishes “The Legend of Sleepy Hollow” and “Rip Van Winkle.”

1819 ................................... Birth of Herman Melville.
1819.............................. Birth of Walt Whitman.
1821.............................. Ralph Waldo Emerson graduates from Harvard.
1829.............................. Emerson marries Ellen Tucker.
1830.............................. Birth of Emily Dickinson.
1831.............................. Emerson’s wife dies.
1832.............................. Spurred by his wife’s death, Emerson resigns his ministry.
1835.............................. Edgar Allan Poe writes “Berenice.”
1835.............................. Birth of Samuel Clemens (Mark Twain).
1836.............................. Emerson publishes his essay “Nature.”
1836.............................. Poe marries Virginia Clemm, his 14-year-old cousin.
1837.............................. Emerson makes his famous speech at Harvard, “The American Scholar.”
1837.............................. Nathaniel Hawthorne publishes his collection of stories entitled Twice-Told Tales.
1838.............................. Poe pens “Ligeia.”
1839.............................. Poe publishes “The Fall of the House of Usher,” considered the quintessential horror story, as well as Poe’s masterwork. Poe also publishes “William Wilson” during this year.
1840.............................. Emerson publishes several of his best-known essays, including “History,” “Self-Reliance,” and “Circles.”
1841.............................. Poe publishes “The Murders in the Rue Morgue,” considered one of the first detective stories, along with “Descent into the Maelstrom,” an early science fiction story.
1842.............................. Poe publishes “The Pit and the Pendulum.”
1843.............................. Poe publishes “The Black Cat” and “The Tell-Tale Heart.”
1843.............................. Birth of Henry James.
1844.............................. Emerson publishes the essay “Experience.”
1844.............................. Poe publishes “The Balloon-Hoax,” a piece that could be considered science fiction.
1845.............................. Poe publishes “The Raven,” as well as “The Purloined Letter,” considered one of the first detective stories, and “The Facts in the Case of M. Valdemar.”
1846.............................. Emerson publishes “The Poet,” his chief statement about the literary agenda of the future.
1846.............................. Henry David Thoreau spends one night in jail for his refusal to pay several years’ poll tax as protest against the role of Massachusetts in perpetuating slavery.
1846.............................. Poe’s wife dies of consumption.
1846.............................. Poe writes “The Philosophy of Composition, or How I Wrote ‘The Raven,’” the famous account (perhaps spoofing) of his poetic practice. Poe also publishes “The Cask of Amontillado.”
1846.............................. Herman Melville publishes Typee.
1847.............................. Melville publishes Omoo.
1848.............................. Thoreau publishes his essay “Civil Disobedience.”
1848.............................. Attempted revolutions fail in several European nations.
1849.............................. Poe publishes “The Bells,” “Eldorado,” and “Annabel Lee.”
1849................................. Melville publishes *Mardi*.
1849................................. Death of Edgar Allan Poe.
1850................................. Hawthorne publishes *The Scarlet Letter*, perhaps his best-known work.
1850................................. Melville first encounters the work of Hawthorne and writes a now-well-known review. Also in this year, Melville publishes *White Jacket, or The World in a Man of War*.
1850................................. Karl Marx writes *The Communist Manifesto*.
1850................................. Passage of the Fugitive Slave Act, which required Northerners to return runaway slaves to their former masters.
1851................................. Thoreau becomes active in the abolitionist movement.
1851................................. Melville meets Hawthorne in person. In this same year, he publishes his masterwork, *Moby Dick*.
1852................................. Harriet Beecher Stowe publishes *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*.
1853................................. Melville publishes the short story “Bartleby, the Scrivener.”
1854................................. Thoreau publishes his masterwork, *Walden*.
1855................................. Walt Whitman publishes the first version of *Leaves of Grass*.
1856................................. Whitman’s poem “Crossing Brooklyn Ferry” published in a version of *Leaves of Grass*.
1856................................. Melville publishes the short story “Benito Cereno.”
1856................................. Birth of Sigmund Freud.
1859................................. Thoreau reads publicly “A Plea for Captain John Brown.”
1859................................. Washington Irving dies.
1859................................. Petroleum is discovered.
1859................................. Whitman writes “Out of the Cradle Endlessly Rocking.”
1860................................. Whitman publishes the collections of poems *Children of Adam* and *Calamus*.
1860................................. Birth of Charlotte Perkins Gilman.
1861................................. Start of the American Civil War.
1862................................. Death of Henry David Thoreau.
1862................................. Emily Dickinson has her literary exchange with noted critic Thomas Wentworth Higginson.
1864................................. Death of Nathaniel Hawthorne.
1865................................. End of the American Civil War.
1867................................. Mark Twain publishes the short story “The Celebrated Jumping Frog of Calaveras County.”
1869................................. Twain publishes *Innocents Abroad*.
1871................................. Birth of Stephen Crane.
1871................................. Franco-Prussian War.
1874................................. Birth of Robert Frost.
1875............................... Public reburial and dedication of Poe’s remains.
1876............................... Twain publishes *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer*.
1879............................... Henry James writes the first book on Nathaniel Hawthorne.
1881............................... James publishes *A Portrait of a Lady*.
1882............................... Death of Ralph Waldo Emerson.
1886............................... Death of Emily Dickinson.
1885............................... Twain publishes *Huckleberry Finn*, his acclaimed masterpiece, which was promptly banned by the Concord Public Library.
1887............................... Charlotte Perkins Gilman gives birth to a daughter, afterward suffering from post-partum depression.
1888............................... Birth of T. S. Eliot.
1888............................... Birth of Eugene O’Neill.
1889............................... Twain publishes *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur’s Court*.
1891............................... Death of Herman Melville.
1892............................... Death of Walt Whitman. Publication of “The Wound Dresser.”
1892............................... Gilman publishes the short story “The Yellow Wallpaper.”
1893............................... Crane publishes his first novel, *Maggie: A Girl of the Streets*.
1894............................... Twain publishes *Pudd’nhead Wilson*.
1894............................... Robert Frost publishes his first poem.
1895............................... Crane publishes *The Red Badge of Courage*.
1896............................... Death of Harriet Beecher Stowe.
1896............................... Birth of F. Scott Fitzgerald.
1896–1897....................... Crane is on steamship, *Commodore*, carrying arms for Cuban rebels, which sinks. Crane spends 30 hours in a small boat.
1897............................... Crane covers the Greco-Turkish War.
1897............................... Birth of William Faulkner.
1898............................... Crane covers the Spanish-American War.
1898............................... Crane publishes his short story “The Open Boat,” based on his ordeal at sea in 1897. Crane also pens the short story “The Blue Hotel.”
1898............................... James publishes *The Turn of the Screw*.
1898............................... Gilman publishes *Women and Economics*.
1899............................... Crane publishes “The Monster.”
1899............................... Birth of Ernest Hemingway.
1900............................... Death of Stephen Crane.
1902............................... James publishes *The Wings of the Dove*.
1902............................... Birth of John Steinbeck.
1903............................... James publishes *The Ambassadors*.
1904.................................James publishes *The Golden Bowl*.
1910.................................Death of Mark Twain.
1911.................................Birth of Tennessee Williams.
1913.................................Gilman writes “Why I Wrote ‘The Yellow Wallpaper.’”
1913.................................Frost publishes his first book of poems, *A Boy’s Will*.
1914.................................Birth of Ralph Ellison.
1915.................................Birth of Arthur Miller.
1916.................................Death of Henry James.
1917.................................F. Scott Fitzgerald joins the army.
1920.................................Fitzgerald publishes his first novel, *This Side of Paradise*.
1920.................................Eugene O’Neill publishes *The Emperor Jones*.
1922.................................Eliot publishes his most influential poem, “The Wasteland.”
1922.................................Fitzgerald publishes *The Beautiful and the Damned*.
1922.................................O’Neill publishes *The Hairy Ape*.
1925.................................Eliot publishes “The Hollow Men.”
1925.................................Fitzgerald publishes his masterpiece, *The Great Gatsby*.
1925.................................Ernest Hemingway publishes his first major work, *In Our Time*.
1925.................................O’Neill publishes *Desire Under the Elms*.
1926.................................Hemingway publishes *The Sun Also Rises*.
1926.................................William Faulkner publishes his first novel, *Soldier’s Pay*.
1927.................................Eliot becomes a British citizen.
1927.................................Faulkner publishes *Mosquitoes*.
1929.................................Hemingway publishes *A Farewell to Arms*.
1929.................................Faulkner publishes *Sartoris*, now known as *Flags in the Dust*.
1929.................................Faulkner publishes *The Sound and the Fury*, considered to be his breakthrough text.
1929.................................Beginning of the Great Depression.
1930.................................Eliot publishes “Ash Wednesday.”
1930.................................Faulkner publishes *As I Lay Dying*, the sister text to *The Sound and the Fury*.
1931.................................Faulkner publishes *Sanctuary*.
1931.................................O’Neill publishes *Mourning Becomes Electra*.
1931.................................Birth of Toni Morrison.
1932.................................Hemingway publishes his treatise on bullfighting, *Death in the Afternoon*.
1932.................................Faulkner publishes *Light in August*.
1934.................................Fitzgerald publishes *Tender Is the Night*.
1935.................................Death of Charlotte Perkins Gilman.
1935.................................. Hemingway publishes his treatise on hunting, *Green Hills of Africa*.
1935.................................. John Steinbeck publishes *Tortilla Flat*.
1936.................................. Faulkner publishes *Absalom, Absalom!*; an epic of the Civil War.
1936.................................. O’Neill wins the Nobel Prize for Literature.
1938.................................. Death of Sigmund Freud.
1939.................................. Steinbeck publishes his masterpiece, *The Grapes of Wrath*.
1940.................................. Fitzgerald writes *The Last Tycoon*, left unfinished at his death in the same year.
1940.................................. Hemingway publishes *For Whom the Bell Tolls*.
1940.................................. Faulkner publishes *The Hamlet*.
1941.................................. End of the Great Depression; the United States enters World War II.
1942.................................. Faulkner publishes *Go Down, Moses*.
1943.................................. Eliot publishes the poem “Four Quartets.”
1945.................................. Tennessee Williams publishes *The Glass Menagerie*.
1946.................................. O’Neill publishes *The Iceman Cometh*.
1947.................................. Williams publishes *A Streetcar Named Desire*.
1947.................................. Arthur Miller publishes *All My Sons*.
1949.................................. Miller publishes *Death of a Salesman*.
1950.................................. Faulkner wins the Nobel Prize for Literature.
1951.................................. Williams publishes *The Rose Tattoo*.
1952.................................. Hemingway publishes *The Old Man and the Sea*.
1952.................................. Ralph Ellison publishes *Invisible Man*.
1953.................................. Ellison’s *Invisible Man* receives the National Book Award for fiction.
1953.................................. Death of Eugene O’Neill.
1953.................................. Miller publishes *The Crucible*.
1954.................................. Hemingway wins the Nobel Prize for Literature.
1955.................................. The full body of Emily Dickinson’s poetic works is published posthumously.
1955.................................. Williams publishes *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*.
1955.................................. Miller publishes *A View From the Bridge*.
1956.................................. O’Neill’s *Long Day’s Journey into Night*, which he had written in 1945, is published posthumously.
1957.................................. Williams publishes *Orpheus Descending*.
1958.................................. Williams publishes *Suddenly Last Summer*.
1959.................................. Lionel Trilling pays homage to Robert Frost on his 85th birthday, saying that Frost belongs in the great iconoclastic tradition of American literature.
1959.................................. Williams publishes *Sweet Bird of Youth*.
1961.................................. Death of Ernest Hemingway.
1961.......................... Williams publishes *Night of the Iguana*.
1962.......................... Steinbeck wins the Nobel Prize for Literature.
1962.......................... Death of William Faulkner.
1963.......................... Death of Robert Frost.
1964.......................... Hemingway’s *Moveable Feast* published posthumously.
1965.......................... Death of T. S. Eliot.
1968.......................... Death of John Steinbeck.
1974.......................... Toni Morrison publishes *Sula*.
1977.......................... Morrison publishes *Song of Solomon*.
1983.......................... Death of Tennessee Williams.
1992.......................... Morrison publishes *Jazz*.
1993.......................... Morrison wins the Nobel Prize for Literature.
1994.......................... Death of Ralph Ellison.
1998.......................... Morrison publishes *Paradise*.
Glossary

Aboriginal self: A concept defined by Ralph Waldo Emerson as an existing source of universal energy in which we all partake. This self is not in us, but rather, out in the world, and we must learn to move into it.

B’hoy: An American original character, one who challenges all niceties in pieties. The female counterpart is known as the g’hal (the gal).

Boutade: French term meaning a joke, a spoof, or a setup that partially hides its true meaning.

Brahmins: Term coined in the mid-1800s by the American writer Oliver Wendell Holmes to describe a class of New England intellectuals determined on the basis of birth, education, and scholarly pursuits.

Calvinism: Christian theology of the French church reformer John Calvin. The central Calvinist tenets include belief in the absolute sovereignty of God and the doctrine of justification by faith alone.

Classic: A work of literature having lasting significance or generally recognized worth. The canonical tests of American literature stem out of vital, often unresolvable, conflicts from their own moments in history. They are bristling with ambiguities and insights that bid to challenge the reader, in their own time, in the present day, and even in the future.

Coming of age: In American literature, an event or series of events that spurs a character to reach spiritual adulthood. These stories may or may not revolve around attainment of a character’s physical adulthood.

Cosmogony: Literally, the study of the universe’s origin. In literature, the writer’s personal theory of the universe, as reflected in his or her works.

Cosmos: As defined by Walt Whitman, a brash young man, a jaunty fellow with a robust ego.

Counterculture: A subculture, especially of young people, with values opposed to that of the established culture. Henry David Thoreau is often regarded as a major American counterculture hero.

Demiurge: The deity who fashions the world, a creative force. In literature, a character of such influential personality that he or she is an overpowering force in the story being told.

Double entendre: A word or turn of phrase having double meaning, especially when the second meaning is risqué. Ernest Hemingway’s works, for instance, revel in suggestions of dual meanings and dual sexuality.

Dualism: The division of body from spirit. Whereas most religious traditions assert that spirit is superior to body, some American writers—particularly Walt Whitman—reversed that notion in their works, insisting on the naturalness and sanctity of the body.

Dysfunction: Impaired or disorderly function of a cultural system, be it a family or a larger social group.

Empowered self: Often regarded as one of America’s worst gifts to modern culture, the concept that the individual is empowered to attain all he or she desires. Ralph Waldo Emerson presents the concept of the empowered, or “imperialistic,” self in his essay “Self-Reliance.”

Epiphany: A sudden manifestation of the meaning or essence of something or a sudden intuitive realization or perception of reality.

Epistemology: A division of philosophy that investigates the nature and origin of knowledge.

Existentialism: A philosophy that emphasizes the uniqueness and isolation of the individual experience in a hostile or indifferent universe. A frequent theme in American literature, which often stresses freedom of choice and responsibility for the consequences of one’s actions.

Expressionism: An artistic movement during the late 19th and early 20th centuries that emphasized subjective expression of the artist’s inner experience. Stephen Crane and Emily Dickinson personify this approach to writing, reconfiguring the world we know by clothing it in images and metaphors.

Feminism: A doctrine advocating the same political and economic rights for women as granted to men. Charlotte Perkins Gilman was an early feminist writer, well known for “The Yellow Wallpaper.”
**Fissured self:** Essentially, an existential collapse, when all one knows of the world unravels.

**Geworfenheit:** German term meaning that we are thrust into a world not of our own making or choosing; a sense of alienation from the world around us.

**Gothic:** A style of fiction emphasizing the grotesque, mysterious, and desolate.

**Hagiography:** A biography of saints. *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, though often criticized for being overly sentimental, became a black American hagiography that was part of opera and drama.

**Impressionism:** A movement in painting that originated in France in the late 19th century. Impressionist painters found many of their subjects around them rather than in history, which was then the accepted source of subject matter. Instead of painting an ideal of beauty that earlier artists had defined, the Impressionists tried to depict what they saw at a given moment. To achieve the appearance of spontaneity, Impressionist painters used broken brushstrokes of bright, often unmixed colors. The colors in Impressionist paintings have an overall luminosity because the painters avoided blacks and earth colors. The Impressionists also simplified their compositions, omitting detail to achieve a striking overall effect.

**Individualism:** The doctrine that society is an artificial device, existing only for the sake of its members as individuals and properly judged only according to criteria established by them as individuals.

**Isolationism:** A policy in which a nation’s interests are best served if the nation secludes itself from other nations and avoids forming alliances with them. In literature, this concept often has been applied to individuals, as in Ralph Waldo Emerson’s suggestion that we must “cultivate” our own earth, our own substance.

**Ludic:** Playful in a way that is spontaneous and without any particular purpose.

**Malaise:** A vague feeling of depression or illness.

**Manself:** A term created by John Steinbeck to describe and celebrate the human species; used in place of men and women. This manself is always struggling to make a success of his or her life and will prevail, no matter how terrible circumstances are.

**Metaphor:** A figure of speech in which a term is transferred from the object it ordinarily designates to an object it may designate only by implicit comparison or analogy. Metaphor allows the writer to yoke together diverse areas of experience and thought. Yet metaphor may also be suspected of falsely domesticating the world by substituting the poet’s own projections and fantasies for the “hard facts.”

**Metaphysics:** A branch of philosophy that systematically investigates the nature of first principles and problems of ultimate reality, including ontology and often cosmology. Also, critical or speculative philosophy.

**Modernism:** The 20th century saw the emergence of Modernism, which responded to the world’s complexity by asserting that the individual had the potential to achieve a broader perspective than that offered by any one society or its history. At the beginning of the 19th century, American authors struggled to convince the world that they had a history; by the 20th century, American authors, like European authors, had to grapple with more than enough history.

**Modus operandi:** A method of operating; a particular way of doing things.

**Motif:** An important and sometimes recurring theme or idea in a work of literature. Also called motive.

**Nantucketer:** A uniquely American hero presented in Herman Melville’s works. The Nantucketer is different from familiar examples of colonial character. Homespun in his manners, he is nonetheless ruler of the sea, hence, royalty in his own way.

**Naturalism:** A system of thought holding that all phenomena can be explained in terms of natural causes and laws without attributing supernatural significance to them. Also, the doctrine that all religious truths are derived from nature, not from revelation. In literature, Naturalism attempts to apply scientific theories to art.

**Organicism:** The concept that society is analogous to a biological organism, meaning that society’s overall organization—not the functioning of its individual parts—plays the principal role in determining its processes and destiny.
**Oversoul**: A spiritual essence or vital force in the universe that embraces all souls, thus transcending individual consciousness.

**Perspectival narration**: The literary technique of viewing society from the outside. A writer may write about a historical period in retrospect, for instance, though his or her characters do not know what events are coming.

**Picaresque**: A literary genre in which a rogue-hero’s escapades are depicted in a context of sharp social satire. Mark Twain’s Huckleberry Finn personifies such a character.

**Poet of Babel**: A term used to refer to poets who make us think that poetry could be nonsense, but rather, is the sound of the brain, the fabric of consciousness. Although poetry can be a description of the world, it can also be simply the representation of the experience of living with a brain and of sensing things, thinking things, and speaking things.

**Polysemy**: The existence of several meanings for a single word or phrase.

**Postmodernism**: The literal meaning of Postmodernism is “after Modernism”; in many ways, Postmodernism constitutes an attack on Modernist claims about the existence of truth and value. In disputing past assumptions, Postmodernists generally display a preoccupation with the inadequacy of language as a mode of communication. Inaccessible ideas and impenetrable prose also characterize many Postmodern texts, although the difficulties in this case are often intentional and reflect specific claims about the nature of language and meaning.

**Puritanism**: Scrupulous moral sternness, especially aversions to social pleasures and indulgences. These attitudes and worldviews stem from the doctrines and practices of the Puritans.

**Realism**: In art and literature, an attempt to describe human behavior and surroundings or to represent figures and objects exactly as they act or appear in life. Though attempts at Realism have been made throughout history in all the arts, the term is generally restricted to a movement that began in the mid-19th century, in reaction to the highly subjective approach of Romanticism.

**Rite of passage**: A genre in literature based on an anthropological concept concerning rituals that a young person goes through in growing up.

**Romanticism**: A movement in the literature of virtually every country of Europe, the United States, and Latin America that lasted from about 1750 to about 1870, characterized by reliance on the imagination and subjectivity of approach, freedom of thought and expression, and an idealization of nature.

**Self-made man**: A classic hero in American literature and history, the self-made man is successful through his own actions. Benjamin Franklin personifies the concept of the wildly successful self-made man.

**Semiosis**: The act of translating a word or visual signal into a cultural meaning, of taking language and turning it into meaning. In literature, the concept that words are signs of natural things, which in turn, are signs of spirit.

**Sentimentalism**: A tendency to express obvious or powerful feelings or emotions without appealing to reason, especially self-indulgent or nostalgic writing or expression. The Sentimental tradition is the great popular literary form of the 19th century.

**Social contract**: A voluntary agreement among people defining the relationship of individuals with one another and with government and, by this process, forming a distinct organized society. In the 17th and 18th centuries, the theory of a social compact among individuals of a society was linked with the doctrine of natural law.

**Stereotype**: An oversimplified standardized image or idea held by one person or group concerning another. In literature, a character meant to typify or conform to an unvarying pattern or manner, lacking in any individuality or depth.

**Stream of consciousness**: A fictional narrative technique, first used in the late 19th century to evince subjective as well as objective reality. It reveals the character’s feelings, thoughts, and actions, often following an associative rather than a logical sequence, without commentary by the author.

**Symbolism**: The use of symbols to invest things with a representative meaning, or to represent something abstract by something concrete.
Transcendentalism: In philosophy and literature, the belief that knowledge of reality is derived from intuitive sources, rather than from objective experience. Nearly all transcendentalist doctrines stem from the division of reality into a realm of spirit and a realm of matter. Such a division is made by many of the great religions of the world. Ralph Waldo Emerson and Henry David Thoreau are considered to embody what is known as American Transcendentalism.

Tropes: A word, phrase, expression, or image that is used in a figurative way, usually for rhetorical effect. Metaphor is the quintessential trope in all of poetry.

Tuition: Learned knowledge, as opposed to intuition, innate or revealed knowledge.

Un-naming: This term refers to the literary cleansing of customary labels to install fresh perception. Emily Dickinson’s poetry typifies this sort of writing.

Vagina dentata: The teethed womb that is a sexual nightmare for the male who is terrified of what it could mean to think literally about moving into the womb.

Women’s writing: Writing in a feminist vein that features language deemed to be closer to the body. Some characteristics of this kind of writing include fluidity rather than line, openness to affect and libido, suspicion of repressive order, and attention to the somatic.
Biographical Notes

Louis Armstrong (1901–1971): American jazz, cornet, and trumpet player, singer, bandleader, and popular entertainer. Armstrong overcame poverty, a lack of formal education, and racism to become one of the most innovative and influential musicians of the 20th century and one of the most beloved entertainers in the world. He is perhaps best known for helping to pioneer a style known as swing, which later formed the basis for most jazz and rhythm-and-blues (R&B) music. Armstrong’s music had a profound influence on Ralph Ellison’s *Invisible Man*.

Charles Baudelaire (1821–1867): A leading 19th-century French poet who seized on Edgar Allan Poe’s work and career as the epitome of genius, becoming Poe’s champion and translator in France. As the founder of Symbolism in poetry, Baudelaire ensured Poe’s continued impact on poetic development.

Catherine Beecher (1800–1878): Sister to Harriet Beecher Stowe, Catherine Beecher wrote *A Treatise on Domestic Economy*, dedicated to “the women of America in whose hands rest the real destinies of the Republic.”

Samuel Clemens: See Mark Twain.

Stephen Crane (1871–1900): American novelist and poet, one of the first American exponents of the naturalistic style of writing. Crane is known for his pessimistic and often brutal portrayals of the human condition, along with a sympathetic understanding of character.

Emily Dickinson (1830–1886): America’s most well known female poet and one of the foremost authors in American literature. Dickinson’s simply constructed, acutely intellectual writings examine issues vital to humanity: the agonies and ecstasies of love, sexuality, the unfathomable nature of death, the horrors of war, God and religious belief, the importance of humor, and musings on the significance of literature, music, and art.

Thomas Eakins (1844–1916): Regarded by most critics as the most outstanding American painter of the 19th century and, by many, as the greatest his country has yet produced, Eakins was an admirer of Walt Whitman. He was well known for his painting *The Swimming Hole*, as well as paintings of the male body and portraits of Whitman.

Jonathan Edwards (1703–1758): Often called the “last great Puritan,” this theologian and intellectual authored such fierce sermons as “Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God.”

T. S. Eliot (1888–1965): American-born writer regarded as one of the greatest poets of the 20th century. Eliot also wrote drama and literary criticism. In his plays, which use unrhymed verse, he attempted to revive poetic drama for the contemporary audience. Eliot won the Nobel Prize for literature in 1948.

Ralph Ellison (1914–1994): American author and educator, one of the most influential black American writers of the 20th century. Ellison uses rich, varied, and powerful language to portray the black experience in all its vitality and complexity. His best-known work, *Invisible Man*, expounds the theme that American society willfully ignores blacks and was one of the first works to describe modern racial problems in the United States from a black American point of view.

Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803–1882): Emerson, the guiding spirit of American Romanticism, lays the groundwork for a key tradition in American thinking and writing in his *Essays*, written from the 1830s through the middle of the century.

William Faulkner (1897–1962): American novelist, known for his epic portrayal, in some 20 novels, of the tragic conflict between the old and the new South. Although his intricate plots and complex narrative style alienated many readers of his early writings, Faulkner was a towering figure in American literature during the first half of the 20th century. With Ernest Hemingway, he is usually considered one of the two greatest American novelists of his era. Faulkner was particularly noted for the eloquent richness of his prose style and for the unique blend of tragedy and humor in his works.

F. Scott Fitzgerald (1896–1940): American writer whose novels and short stories chronicled changing social attitudes during the 1920s, a period dubbed the “Jazz Age” by the author. He is best known for his novels *The Great Gatsby* (1925) and *Tender Is the Night* (1934), both of which depict disillusion with the American dream of self-betterment, wealth, and success through hard work and perseverance.
Benjamin Franklin (1706–1790): Printer, scientist, statesman, and author in the early 18th century, Franklin personified the American concept of the “self-made man,” particularly through his Autobiography. Franklin is particularly well known for his experiments in electricity; his launching of Poor Richard’s Almanac, the first American periodical; and his role in the Revolutionary War. His is the great American story of tireless achievement, assertion, and adult responsibility in the difficult arenas of business, government, and politics.

Sigmund Freud (1856–1938): The father of psychoanalysis, Freud articulated the concepts of the unconscious and infantile sexuality and repression and proposed a tripartite account of the mind’s structure, all as part of a then—radically new conceptual and therapeutic frame of reference for the understanding of human psychological development and the treatment of abnormal mental conditions. His conclusions affected the interpretation of much American literature during and after his lifetime.

Robert Frost (1874–1963): American poet who drew his images from the New England countryside and his language from New England speech. Although Frost’s images and voice often seem familiar and old, his observations have an edge of skepticism and irony that make his work, upon rereading, never as old-fashioned, easy, or carefree as it first appears. In its embodiment of both tradition and skepticism, Frost’s poetry helped provide a link between the American poetry of the 19th century and that of the 20th century.

Margaret Fuller (1810–1850): A 19th-century feminist writer and one of the great radical women among the Transcendentalists. Fuller was a journalist and edited Dial Magazine, working closely with Ralph Waldo Emerson. Nathaniel Hawthorne may have modeled aspects of Hester Prynne’s character in The Scarlet Letter on Fuller.

Charlotte Perkins Gilman (1860–1935): American feminist and writer, best known for her book Women and Economics (1898), which has become a feminist classic. She was born Charlotte Anna Perkins in Hartford, Connecticut. She was educated at the Rhode Island School of Design and worked as a teacher and commercial artist before devoting herself to feminism.

Nathaniel Hawthorne (1804–1862): American novelist whose works are deeply concerned with the ethical problems of sin, punishment, and atonement. Hawthorne is considered America’s first great classical writer and is particularly known for his novel The Scarlet Letter.

Ernest Hemingway (1899–1961): American novelist and short-story writer, whose style is brisk, terse, cleansed of adjectives, seemingly objective, and aimed at rendering the precise moment and feeling of experience. Hemingway’s writings and his personal life exerted a profound influence on American writers of his time; in fact, Hemingway is usually considered one of the two greatest American novelists of his era (the other being William Faulkner). Many of his works are regarded as classics of American literature.

Thomas Wentworth Higginson (1823–1911): Unitarian minister, abolitionist, and well-known 19th-century literary critic with whom poet Emily Dickinson exchanged letters seeking critiques of her poems.

Washington Irving (1783–1859): Often called the father of the American short story, Irving is best known for two stories: “The Legend of Sleepy Hollow” and “Rip Van Winkle.” His work is considered to precede early writings of the great Transcendentalists—Emerson, Thoreau, and Hawthorne.

Henry James (1843–1916): American expatriate writer whose masterly fiction juxtaposed American innocence and European experience in a series of intense, psychologically complex works. James’s work is characterized by leisurely pacing and subtle delineation of character rather than by dramatic incidents or complicated plots. His major writings, highly sensitive examples of the objective psychological novel, deal with the world of leisure and sophistication he had grown to know intimately in Europe.

Toussaint L’Ouverture (1743–1803): Haitian general, now known as “the Precursor,” and leader of the Haitian slave revolt, a 1791 black slave uprising against the French colonial regime. After France abolished slavery in the territory in 1794, Toussaint supported the French rulers of the country against British invaders and was made a general in 1795. In 1801, he succeeded, after many struggles, in liberating Saint-Domingue from French control and became president-for-life of a new republic.

Herman Melville (1819–1891): American novelist and major literary figure whose exploration of psychological and metaphysical themes foreshadowed 20th-century literary concerns. His works remained in obscurity until the 1920s, when his genius was finally recognized.
Arthur Miller (1915–): American dramatist whose works are concerned with the responsibility of each individual to other members of society. Simply and colloquially written, Miller’s plays spring from his social conscience and from his compassion for those who are vulnerable to the false values imposed on them by society.

Toni Morrison (1931–): American writer whose works deal with the black experience and celebrate the black community. Morrison’s work features mythic elements, sharp observation, compassion, and poetic language and is often concerned with the relationship between the individual and society. In 1993, she won the Nobel Prize in literature.

Eugene O’Neill (1888–1953): American playwright whose work dramatizes the plight of people driven by elemental passions, by memory and dream, and by an awareness of the forces that threaten to overwhelm them. His early plays (1916–1920) helped initiate American theater’s shift away from elegant parlor dramas and toward gritty naturalistic plays.

Edgar Allan Poe (1809–1849): Best known for his poems and short fiction, Poe is credited with transforming the short story from anecdote to art. He virtually created the detective story and perfected the psychological thriller. He also produced some of the most influential literary criticism of his time—important theoretical statements on poetry and the short story.

Sir Walter Scott (1771–1832): Scottish novelist and poet considered to be the creator of the historical and the regional novel. He may have influenced the works of Nathaniel Hawthorne.

John Steinbeck (1902–1968): American writer and Nobel laureate, who described in his work the unremitting struggle of people who depend on the soil for their livelihood. Steinbeck’s novels can all be classified as social novels dealing with the economic problems of rural labor, but there is also a streak of worship of the soil in his books, which does not always agree with his matter-of-fact sociological approach.

Wallace Stevens (1879–1955): American poet whose works deal mainly with the individual’s interaction with the outside world. Stevens used sensuous, elaborate imagery and elevated, precise word choice to express subtle philosophical themes. He frequently contrasted the bleakness and monotony of modern industrialized life with the richness of nature.

Harriet Beecher Stowe (1811–1896): American author most famous for her anti-slavery novel, Uncle Tom’s Cabin, one of the most influential American texts written by either man or woman and, possibly, the first American social protest novel.

Henry David Thoreau (1817–1862): American essayist, poet, and practical philosopher, renowned for having lived the doctrines of Transcendentalism, as recorded in his masterwork, Walden, and for having been a vigorous advocate of civil liberties, as evidenced in the essay “Civil Disobedience.”

Lionel Trilling (1905–1975): American educator and influential literary critic. For most of his career, Trilling taught at Columbia University. In his books, he used psychological and sociological methods to elucidate cultural values. One of his major concerns was the relationship between the self and society. Trilling paid homage to poet Robert Frost on Frost’s 85th birthday.

Nat Turner (1800–1831): American slave and leader of a black slave revolt in 1831. As a result of Nat Turner’s revolt, southern legislatures imposed stricter control on slaves, and the movement to abolish slavery, which had previously enjoyed some support in the South, became a northern phenomenon.

Mark Twain (1835–1910): Pen name for Samuel Langhorne Clemens, American writer and humorist, whose best work is characterized by broad, often irreverent humor or biting social satire. Twain’s writing is also known for realism of place and language, memorable characters, and hatred of hypocrisy and oppression.

Vincent Van Gogh (1853–1890): Dutch Post-Impressionist painter, generally considered the greatest Dutch painter and draughtsman after Rembrandt. He powerfully influenced the current of Expressionism in modern art. Among his masterpieces are numerous self-portraits and the well-known “Starry Night.” An admirer of Whitman, Van Gogh corresponded with the American poet.

Booker T. Washington (1856–1915): American educator who urged blacks to attempt to uplift themselves through educational attainments and economic advancement.
Walt Whitman (1819–1892): American poet whose work boldly asserts the worth of the individual and the oneness of all humanity. Whitman’s defiant break with traditional poetic concerns and style exerted a major influence on American thought and literature.

Tennessee Williams (1911–1983): American playwright and two-time Pulitzer Prize winner, whose works are set largely in the American South. As a playwright, fiction writer, poet, and essayist, Williams helped transform the contemporary idea of Southern literature. He not only paved the way for other writers but also helped the South find a strong voice, where before it had been heard only as a whisper.
Comprehensive Bibliography


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 master's 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 include research grants from the American Council of Learned Societies and the National Endowment for the Humanities. 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 an NEH-funded program in the area of national education reform. In 1995 he was named Brown University's best teacher in the humanities. He is the recipient of a 1998-99 National Endowment for the Humanities Award for University Teachers for his work in literature and medicine.

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Lecture 49

"The Yellow Wallpaper": Descent into Hell or Free at Last?

Scope: This twenty-page account of a young wife's ordeal while "convalescing" is one of the most harrowing and unforgettable pieces of prose in American literature, lodging itself in the minds of readers much the way Kafka's grisly fables do. Gilman achieves an astonishing richness and economy in her piece by using the husband, John, as the wife's doctor. This characterization illuminates both the crippling gender arrangements of the 19th century and gives us an all too recognizable portrait of doctor-patient bullying that resonates even today. Yet, the story's strongest claim on us involves the difficulty of final assessment: What can we make of the protagonist's increasing entry (and final exit) into fantasy? Is it indeed fantasy? What do readers see in this remarkable wallpaper? Is Gilman's text about a single, conceivably psychotic woman, or is it about the operation of an entire culture?

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

1. Summarize the importance of the movement from description to pattern in Gilman's depiction of the wallpaper,
2. Explain the ways in which "The Yellow Wallpaper" can be viewed as a "triumph of imagination" and as a "social tragedy," and
3. Describe how Gilman's story can be seen as a parable about women in general, not just one woman.

Outline

I. It is no accident that the bedroom where the protagonist is to have her Rest Cure is also a former nursery. Motherhood and babies are part of this story.

   A. Gilman offers us a number of details about this nursery that make us wonder where we are.
      1. The room is also said to be a gymnasium, complete with barred windows and "rings and things in the walls." There are unsettling connotations here.
      2. We hear repeatedly how heavy the bed is, even that it is "nailed down," and again, as readers of Poe, we wonder.
      3. In a remarkable sequence, we learn that the entire floor is scratched and "gouged." With this description, it is hard not to think of torture chambers where people have suffered in the past, and where they are to suffer once again.

   B. The central feature of the story is, of course, the astonishing wallpaper.
      1. It is first described in terms that move from the aesthetic to the experiential. Gilman's terms are, once again, loaded.
      2. Particular attention is given to the color of the paper. It is a yellow that is "unclean," that is "sickly sulphur." Here too the connotations are interesting: urine, feces, babies, semen?
      3. The protagonist's project of deciphering the wallpaper is, of course, a violation of the husband's basic law: No writing. What does this tell us about writing? About women's options? About authority?
      4. Above all, the protagonist is admonished not to give way to "fancy," and "fancy," or imagination, is, of course, the generative force not only of this story, but of literature itself.
      5. The husband, John, is portrayed with a mix of horror and sympathy. He genuinely believes he is a perfect mate; we see his patronizing and bullying very differently. How might his behavior be viewed in the 19th century?
      6. The descriptions of the wallpaper start to become more urgent and disturbing, especially in the depictions of uncontrollable organic and vegetable life. What do these descriptions connote?
      7. The crucial move from description to pattern is enacted as the protagonist begins to make out a "story" and "figures" in the paper. She understandably fears what is now unfurling. The pattern seems to grow, to become virtually cancerous.
8. At this point, the wallpaper resembles the old polaroid film that comes into focus as you watch it. The contours that begin to appear tell a shocking story about entrapment. Whose?

9. As the narrator seems to move ever more fatefully and passionately into the realm of fantasy and vision, we note that she begins to take control of the story, even usurping the traditional prerogatives of the doctor himself: surveillance and diagnosis.

10. The final pages register the vertiginous "exit" of the protagonist into the "wallpaper," as the story of entrapment and liberation becomes more urgent and hallucinatory. The world of the wallpaper moves to the world outside the window. The protagonist becomes the "authority" of the text through fantasy.

II. The great challenge of Gilman's story is: What do we make of it?

A. As we watch the protagonist move further into the realm of imagination and fantasy, we are reminded of that "Negro country" that Babo was seeking in Melville's "Benito Cereno," a place where personal imagination becomes law and reality. Here is the realm of virtuality and of art.

B. We cannot escape, however, the awful recognition that this so-called triumph of imagination is a social tragedy. It "proves" that women are hysterics. It leaves the patriarchy stronger than ever. And it leaves us with questions about the possible efficacy of vision. Can madness ever be an answer?

C. Although the protagonist's own fate is ambiguous, there is nothing ambiguous at all about the gender and cultural arrangements that Gilman is able to illuminate through her extremist fable.

1. Gilman offers us, decades before Woolf's famous essay, a hallucinatory version of "A Room of One's Own."

2. Yet, Gilman also gives us a story about a group, not just one woman, that is entrapped and seeking emancipation. Art offers us a kind of script and illumination that could scarcely be conceived or actualized in other ways.

Readings:
Essential: Gilman, "The Yellow Wallpaper" (Rutgers University Press, 1993)

Recommended: Essays in Erskine and Richards, eds., "The Yellow Wallpaper" (Rutgers University Press, 1993)

Topics for Further Consideration:

1. Can you place "The Yellow Wallpaper" in the horror story trajectory that we have seen in Poe and James?

2. What kind of moral or social valuation do you finally give to the close of "The Yellow Wallpaper"?
Lecture 50

Robert Frost and the Spirit of New England

Scope: Robert Frost may be one of the most well-known and beloved American poets of the 20th century. His poems, which are often about the woods and farms of New England and are written in rural, everyday language, constitute a body of writing that looks a good deal like folk wisdom. We read Frost as if he were our Breughel or our Currier and Ives, a portraitist of a bygone day that we remember fondly. This image is misleading on two counts. First, it has led to a certain amount of scorn for Frost's work among literary critics and, second, it has lulled us into thinking that his work is gentle and affirmative. It is important to recognize that Frost belongs in the front ranks of modern poetry, because he deals with the same crises of belief that Eliot, Pound, Yeats, and Stevens do. The difference lies in Frost’s approach to these issues, which is by means of an idiom that is not erudite or "high brow" and by dint of a vision that is shot through with sardonic wit and wry pragmatism. The matter-of-fact outlook of Frost's poetry is, however, entirely compatible with a rich vision of language and passion, even of fantasy. Moreover, his perspective on nature, although it harks back to Emerson, Whitman, and Dickinson in its pursuit of spirit, has an ominous dark side with which we need to come to terms. Finally, Frost stands virtually alone among modern poets in celebrating the meaning of work, choreographing the human dance with the soil, to take the measure of our simple yet complex investment in the rhythms of life. Despite their homely manner and materials, Frost's poems are large propositions, bidding to reconfigure altogether our sense of who we are and where we live.

The reputation of Robert Frost is by no means a settled matter, and there are many scholars of American literature, even today, who deny all seriousness in his work. Born in 1874, Frost predated the great modernist writers—Eliot, Pound, Joyce, Stevens, Hemingway, Faulkner—even though his first book of poems, A Boy's Will, appeared in 1913. Frost's rural idiom, his selection of New England as the sufficient base and prism for examining life, is in some ways parallel to Faulkner's choice of Mississippi, but the ease and facility of Frost's verse stand in stark contrast to the portentous difficulties of modernism. Frost's work was not congenial to the ideological critics of the 1930s and 1940s, nor to the East Coast intelligentsia that often shaped the reputations of writers. But, if we look more carefully at the Frost corpus, especially at some of his most well-known poems, we shall see that they are considerably more open-ended and less settled than is usually thought.

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

1. Summarize the ways in which Frost's work diverges from the modernist movement of his time,
2. Give examples of Frost's dark and violent treatment of nature, and
3. Explain the duality in some of Frost's work that contrasts the outside and the inside worlds.

Outline

I. Robert Frost's position in the canon of classic American literature is fiercely contested, despite the undeniable popularity that his poetry has always enjoyed.
   A. Frost's reception by critics has been vexed, ever since his first book of poems was published in 1913.
      1. Frost was born in 1874 and actually published work as early as 1894, before Crane's Red Badge of Courage; before the careers of Lawrence, Joyce, Eliot, and Pound; before Fitzgerald, Hemingway, and Faulkner were even born.
      2. Frost's major collections appeared during the early decades of the 20th century, putting him under fire by two distinct groups. His apparently easygoing poems differed radically from those of the great modernists T. S. Eliot and Ezra Pound. Their work was learned, difficult, and highly wrought; it alluded to earlier cultures; took a pessimistic view of modern life; and was overtly international. On the other hand, Frost also fared poorly at the hands of a critical establishment that, from the 1930s on, was interested in issues of Marxism and ideology.
3. For the purposes of illustration, compare Frost's lead-off poem in A Boy's Will (1913), "The Pasture," with Eliot's vastly more complex "invitation" in "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock." Any reader can see the radical differences in manner and language. In contrast to the international bent of modernism, Frost seemed a committed New Englander, even to the point of being a closet Republican, critical of Roosevelt and the New Deal.

4. The seeming ease and accessibility of Frost's poems not only damaged his reputation in the eyes of many critics, but led to the conclusion that folks who liked Frost didn't really like poetry or modern literature in general. He was accused of being both facile and philistine, and there is a "cutesy" streak in his work.

5. The more serious criticism is that Frost neither delves inward very far (as, say, Dickinson does), nor offers a panoramic view of his nation (as, say, Whitman does).

6. Finally, in 1959, Lionel Trilling paid homage to Frost on his 85th birthday. Trilling more or less declared that the war between Robert Frost and New York was over, that Frost indeed belonged in the great iconoclastic tradition of American literature.

B. Trilling was right. When we reconsider some of Frost's most famous poems, we discover how bristling and unsettling they actually are. "Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening" epitomizes this feature of Frost's genius.

1. Like generations of schoolchildren, we are lulled by the sing-song rhythms of this sweet poem.
2. The setting seems idyllic and soothing at first glance.
3. Yet, in the end, the piece announces a tug-of-war between the ethical and the natural realms of life.
4. Just as the first line hints, the poem is about ownership: not who owns the woods, but whether the woods own the speaker, whether the human subject can maintain self-ownership. There is a distinct threat of dissolution, of letting go, that we shall see much of in Frost.

5. Most of all, the poem is disturbing in its evocation of the woods themselves as seductive and alluring. We recall Hawthorne's "Young Goodman Brown" and the Puritan fear of nature.

C. Frost is capable of ringing changes on this theme of nature as enticement. Consider "Come In" in this light.

1. Significantly, the poem terms the woods "dark," and we see that "song" is allied to darkness as well, as if all poetry had its source in darkness.
2. Dying light is shown to be the bird's message. This equation is suggestive: Light produces song, and song produces light.
3. Nature is "pillared," as if it were a cathedral; yet it is also a temptation for losing oneself.
4. The speaker rejects the dark woods because he is "out for stars." How do we assess this? Is he looking for safety, retreat, a divine plan?
5. The laconic closing remark about not being asked is signature Frost. Humans are outsiders, whatever natural reveries they have. This admission that we are not "of" the woods gives closure to the piece.

D. Frost can present encounters with the dark woods in ways that are still stranger, sometimes bordering on horrifying, as in "The Draft Horse."

1. These dark woods match anything that Hawthorne could produce in the way of horror.
2. The encounter with violence seems to be in keeping with the design and directives (two Frost concepts) of a higher authority. We don't seem that far from Kafka's totalitarian world.

II. Frost definitely has a black side—apocalyptic, drawn to cataclysm, focusing on the theme of human abandonment and alienation.

A. Well-known poems, such as "Bereft," spell out the virulence of nature and its seemingly personal attack on the human subject. This piece demonstrates the loss of support in a human life.

B. Other pieces, such as "Acquainted with the Night," are still more stark in their existential portrait of abandonment and alienation. Here we see a world in which humans have no "home" whatsoever. Again, echoes of Kafka can be heard in some of Frost's work.

C. Perhaps the most disturbing feature of Frost's vision comes with his awareness that the most devastated and desolate sites are on the inside. Consider "Desert Places" in this regard.
1. The mobility, the acceleration, of the piece is initially striking. There is no stability here.
2. Moreover, the woods seem to have taken over entirely. In this poem, they own everything, showing us how far we are from "Stopping by Woods."
3. Frost's depiction of emptiness as whiteness recalls Melville's famous chapter in *Moby-Dick* on "The Whiteness of the Whale."
4. Frost's closing tone is splendid, like a child with his back against the wall: "They cannot scare me."
5. The worst is yet to come: Trueemptiness and devastation are on the inside. Here is a view of the human soul that is supremely inhospitable.
6. Yet, the piece has a strange kind of pride, as if the human condition could match the horrors of nature any day of the year.

III. Can you go past the "nothingness" on the inside of people? At his best, Frost is willing to jettison the story of human constructs and set his sights heroically, resolutely, on the natural scene. To face the phenomenal world without any imaginative window dressing is a challenge to poetry. Consider, as a closing poem, "The Wood-Pile," in this light.

A. The poem begins in laconic fashion. The speaker has no direction, no plan.
B. We understand early that this is a story of humans lost in a hostile world.
C. Frost's evocation of the bird's "vanity," its error in thinking the natural world is self-related, underscores the issue of romantic projection.
D. We then move on to the woodpile itself.
   1. Here is the finite, unsymbolic world; it is the world of things, resistant to metaphor.
   2. Yet, the woodpile unmistakably signals an abandoned human project.
   3. Nature seems to have taken over, to have proven the futility of human doing.
   4. The speaker then muses about motivation. Why would one abandon this woodpile and go on to "fresh tasks"? Is this a reference to poetry?
   5. The brilliant but enigmatic final notation causes us to reconsider our notions of utility. Is this a triumph of human achievement after all? Does all human labor have unforeseen real consequences?
Lecture 51

Robert Frost: "At Home in the Metaphor"

Scope: Because metaphor is the central vehicle for going beyond the literal or the phenomenal surface of things into figurative or spiritual realms, all poets, at all times, have a vital stake in its significance. Metaphor allows the poet to yoke together diverse areas of experience and thought. Yet, metaphor may also be suspected of falsely domesticating the world by substituting the poet's own projections and fantasies for the "hard facts." Among modern poets, Wallace Stevens is credited with exploring the ramifications of this issue, especially insofar as the imagination comes to stand as sustaining article of belief in a desacralized world. Yet, Frost rivals Stevens in this area, and his concern with metaphor is all the more engaging when we realize his scrupulous desire to give the material world its due. His most interesting poems along these lines are at once playful and inquisitive, indulging in metaphoric flights while remaining lucid about metaphor.

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

1. Summarize the dilemma inherent in Frost's use of metaphor,
2. Give examples of Frost's acknowledgment of the human need for fictions, and
3. Explain Frost's notion of the purpose and consequence of song.

Outline

I. Frost's most succinct statement about the centrality and risks of metaphor is found in his talk "Education by Poetry."

A. Metaphor is the indispensable vehicle, the passport, as it were, for poetry, because it enables a kind of "translation," or even transcendence, that crosses from one realm to another. Hence, the journey from the literal to the figurative is an elemental journey in poetry, but it is worth asking what the "cost" of the journey is.

B. A central issue in the status of metaphor is its subjectivity, its flaunting of a personal vision that transforms the givens of the objective world into the new dispensation of the poet. Part of the integrity of poetry consists in remaining aware of this transaction, this poetic operation, that bids to alter the phenomenal world.

C. One fascinating example of the stakes of this argument can be found in Kafka's famous parable about metaphor, in which he points to both the strengths and weaknesses of figurative utterances.

D. Wallace Stevens is the modern poet most known for his concern with the status of metaphor. His post-romantic celebration of metaphor as the demiurgic triumph of the imagination in a desacralized world marks a key moment for 20th-century poetry.

II. Frost is as drawn to the dilemma of metaphor as Stevens is, even though he is less given to extravagant pronouncements on the subject. He will not speak of "supreme fictions" or "Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Blackbird," but he is deeply concerned with conceptual honesty, with the need to distinguish between the physical world that will not budge and the mobile projections we foist upon it.

A. One of Frost's most moving poems on this subject is "The Need of Being Versed in Country Things."

   1. As in "The Wood-Pile," we see here a ruin, the remains of human shelter, the failure of human enterprise, in a hostile natural setting.

   2. The poem suggests that human will is powerless to sustain human projects.

   3. At a key moment, however, the murmur of the birds becomes a human "sigh," and metaphor—or, in this case, personification—takes over.

   4. The poet's diverse figures and similes create a human drama that is doubly compelling, in that the poem restores a human presence that has been driven precisely from the scene.
5. Frost closes the poem with a clear reference to his own fictive procedures, the endowing of a natural scene with human significance. We are to understand that this is the inevitable task of art itself, but we must recognize our artifice.

B. "Birches," one of Frost's most famous poems, is a lively, even playful, romp through the same conceptual arena.
1. At the outset, the speaker acknowledges two distinct interpretations of the shape of birch trees, one of them scientifically likely, the other frankly fanciful.
2. Frost takes pleasure in developing the rational scenario, even though he will announce that he chooses not to believe in it.
3. The more interesting course of action for the poem is to offer a compelling fiction about birches, a fiction that centralizes a boy's will (and remember that the title of Frost's first collection was *A Boy's Will*).
4. The boy's game with the birches symbolizes rites of passage, and it is loaded also with sexual innuendo.
5. The climbing of birches is understood to be a kind of practice in ascending "toward" heaven, moving toward flight and release. We can see in this ascent an ideal education for the poet.
6. The beauty of this piece resides in the poet's fine attempt to possess both heaven and earth, to rise and fall. He tells us that the poem is also about love, about process. Frost's special economy consists of it being "good both going and coming back."

C. "Directive" is a late, rich metaphoric piece about going to heaven or, rather, going back to paradise. This quest poem is clearly Frost's playful version of Eliot's "The Waste Land."
1. The poem begins with our condition of confusion and sense of being lost. We need markers.
2. The poem rambles through a series of sardonic phases as it makes it way—both temporally and spatially—toward truth, which starts to appear as a form of salvation entailing death.
3. The poem closes with humorous references to the Grail and the Gospel—once again referring to Eliot's poem—but they are now transformed into the humble, imagined possessions of children. That, the poem suggests, can save us. Can it? How far can we ride the metaphor?

D. Frost's strongest, most uncompromising poem about the tension between our need for fiction and the "hard facts" of life is to be found in "The Most of It."
1. He begins here with the basic human condition. We are alone and unsponsored.
2. The only noise we hear is echo, a repetition of our own noise; whereas we seek response. Frost is working here with motifs that go back to Ovid, Milton, and Wordsworth.
3. Part of the grandeur of this poem is related to the powerful natural setting that the human subject interrogates.
4. The last half of the poem evokes a great vision, but far from being merely the "counter-love" sought by the speaker, it is fabulous beyond any domestication. Is this the appearance of the God? Is there something grand and noble about being in a world without human form?

E. The perfect sequel to Frost's primitive poem is the haunting piece "Never Again Would Birds' Song Be the Same." Here Frost is directly tackling a theme dear to Wallace Stevens, especially as expressed in "The Idea of Order at Key West."
1. The poem is delicately stamped by the matter-of-factness of a male speaker trying to evoke a vision of love and beauty.
2. Frost makes the remarkable assertion that human song—composed of both love and laughter—enters nature and becomes bird song.
3. We note the drama of "rising," of going "aloft"; this is not just about human noise.
4. Taking a step that is atypical, Frost harks back to Adam and Eve, and we realize he is retelling the story of family, of the enduring nature of love.
5. We note that the mythic "garden" of the beginning becomes the familiar "woods" of the end, as the piece carries out its temporal task.
6. Ultimately we realize that the notion of Eve's voice as part of the birds' song is a two-way street, asking us to hear Eve in the birds.

7. Frost's larger gambit here is to suggest that song changes the world, that human love and human poetry become part of phenomenal reality, endure over time, and are appreciated by later poets, readers, and lovers. Here is a view seen in Whitman. It is close to modern notions of textuality, as if the private view of "echo" seen in "The Most of It" had now become a view of tradition itself, of the labor of the community throughout history.
Lecture 52

Robert Frost and the Fruits of the Earth

Scope: Although countless poets have waxed lyrical about nature and the "good life," very few have ever written about work. Perhaps taking his cues from Thoreau's example in *Walden*, Frost has left us with some unforgettable poems about man's interaction with the earth. This interaction becomes spiritual in that it inscribes the human being in the eternal cycle of life. It would seem that Frost is implicitly celebrating a kind of male fertility in such poems, but it is crucial to grasp the richness and boldness of Frost's view of labor itself: It is a process that only appears to be over when the product or the task is completed. Frost is committed here to a view of human gesture that is wonderfully open-ended and future-bound in ways that no one can plan or anticipate. Here, too, Frost is reflecting on diverse kinds of labor—tilling the soil and picking apples, making love, writing poems—and he makes us understand the unsuspected reach and grandeur of such activities.

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

1. Give examples of how Frost uses rural life to embody the human condition,
2. Explain how Frost is a descendant of Whitman and Dickinson in his perception of everyday life, and
3. Summarize Frost's view of the relationship between poetry and science.

Outline

I. Frost is inimitable in his complex interweaving of agriculture, love, and poetry in his poems about working the soil.

A. "Mowing," one of Frost's earliest poems, establishes the crucial nexus that reigns in his work: Facts as precious, labor as voice, labor as future-bound.
   1. We note, at the outset, that the elements themselves do not speak, but that human implements become "lingual," have a strange speech of their own, which the poem seeks to interpret.
   2. Frost boldly reconceives our notion of "dream" in this poem. He retrieves the notion from the realm of fancy or unreality and suggests that it has elements in common with facts and work.
   3. The poem never loses sight of the particulars involved in mowing.
   4. "The fact is the sweetest dream that labor knows" remains one of Frost's most sibylline phrases, a haunting suggestion that the separation of these categories has been wrong all the time. *Things* can exist in a love relationship to us, and that relationship is labor; moreover, labor *knows*, is a form of knowing. Knowledge is dissociated here from all bookish notions and becomes something vigorous, even visceral. Work/life becomes poetry here.
   5. The piece ends with a reference to the "long scythe," a classic symbol of death and time, yet it whispers "life" here. The closing terms, "left the hay to make," open on to a vista of ongoing growth and development, of a kind of continuous "production" beyond our finite efforts.

B. "Putting in the Seed" focuses entirely on the conflation of planting crops, making love, and creating poetry. The poem also displays Frost's technical genius in its rigorous form as Shakespearean sonnet.
   1. The first notation spells out the man-wife connection. This piece is going to be a strange love poem.
   2. We note how the speaker merges death and birth, plants the petals along with the seeds, insists on their togetherness.
   3. At a key moment, the poem becomes incandescent, as if its speaker realized that a powerful allegory is being enacted here. This is the moment that Emerson prescribed for poetry: To make the facts luminous with spirit.
   4. The poem closes with a dignified, slow-motion, five-line account of the miracle of creation, the palpable trajectory from seed to plant. We cannot miss the human dimensions of Frost's seedling here or how this event also speaks for the processes of making love and poetry.
"After Apple-Picking" is arguably Frost's strangest performance in this area. Using the most common New England activity of apple-picking, he offers us a surreal, hallucinatory evocation of the human condition, going back to the Fall.

1. The description of the "two-headed ladder" that sticks "through" the trees emphasizes, once again, Frost's interest in metaphor. The ladder is a conduit to other realms, a set of parallel points and tracks.
2. This poem is grounded in the speaker's fatigue and drowsiness, which sets the stage for dreaming and slipping.
3. Frost's language is dense here. "Essence" applies to apples and to the underlying core of meaning; this labor will be appropriately followed by a sleep that is like hibernation.
4. Frost is working in the same territory that Whitman did in "The Sleepers," but he does so in an idiom all his own.
5. The strange reference to the vision through the glass picks up the famous Pauline notation of "through a glass darkly," with its desire for final knowledge and recognition.
6. The poem moves into dream material as we survey a world of apples. We see a drama of loss and salvation enacted in that strange code.
7. Ultimately the poem speaks to us about man's covenant with the earth, a kind of stewardship that mandates making good on our labor, on the fruits of the earth.

II. Frost's range makes him a metaphysician of the earth, the successor to both Whitman and Dickinson in his capacity to see spiritual events in everyday life. His zaniest effort in this area may well be "A Star in a Stone-boat," a piece that can be read as the poet's *ars poetica*.
   A. This poem seems petulant right from the beginning: "Never tell me." It is going to propose some odd theories.
   B. Frost sets upon the stage his opposite number, a laborer who is entirely unperceptive.
   C. The phrase "the air in which we roll" nicely signals the insistent notion of mobility in this piece, the view that the world is a far more puzzling and changing place than we know, with a gravitational pull that is also conceptual.
   D. The stone at the center of the poem goes through a number of avatars, including wing, tail, and heat. We note that it is allied to beauty, producing flowers not grain. Frost is offering us a parable about the beauty that is inherent in our "meanest" things, if we could open our eyes.
   E. This piece is shot through with a kind of interstellar energy. For Frost, science and poetry can be bedfellows.
   F. Frost leaves us with a sense of synthesis and magic that we saw in Thoreau's *Walden*, as if the measure of a pond, like the character of a stone, were "star-shot," or filled with magic. Looking at walls can be a visionary activity.

III. Frost emerges as celebrator of our internship on earth, our involvement with the processes of life and labor. But his whimsical and sardonic eye give his work a tonality that is unmistakable, differing sharply from the performances of Whitman and Dickinson.
   A. "Gathering Leaves" maps out a seasonal ritual that we all know. Frost handles it with deftness and wit, and pathos, too.
      1. Dead leaves epitomize futility. We all know their weightlessness and how awkward they are to handle.
      2. Frost emphasizes the negatives: No weight, no color, just (we might say) the dead skins of life.
      3. But labor is labor. We realize that the future may come into play here, that this work may lead to more than we thought.
      4. And it does, once we consider the unstated referent of the poem: Human memory. Now we see all the traffic here, between death and life, absence and presence, language and reality.
   B. To end this discussion, we will examine one of Frost's briefest, most laconic, and unsublime pieces, "The Span of Life."
1. The conditions of writing this lecture are in play here: my thirteen-year-old golden retriever, Nappie, lies on the floor and barks.

2. Here is the pulse of poetry: To make *us* perform the labor that turns language into meaning, old age into memory of youth, death into life.

**Readings:**


**Topics for Further Consideration:**

1. Explain whether you regard the "New England-ness" of Frost's poetry as a weakness or a strength.

2. Summarize Frost's vision of the nature and significance of labor.
Lecture 53

T. S. Eliot: Unloved Modern Classic

Scope: If Robert Frost is America's most beloved poet, the author of unforgettable lines about "mending walls" and woods that are "lovely, dark and deep." T. S. Eliot is his opposite number in virtually every respect. Eliot is cosmopolitan, international, urban, polyglot, elitist, and literary throughout. Eliot speaks to us of high culture, of the canonical works of the European past, and his poetry is a tribute to the great tradition that reaches back to classical antiquity. But Eliot is unmistakably modern as well, because his themes are the crisis of belief and the breakdown in culture. His complex, demanding poems inevitably contrast the brutal and impoverished state of modern life (as he saw it) with the richness and coherence of earlier eras. Eliot's reputation has taken a considerable beating in the latter decades of the 20th century, because his work is openly elitist and, therefore, inhospitable to criticism that champions the causes of any marginalized group, including women, workers, and people of color. Because Eliot is synonymous with the recognized canon of "classic" literature, he came under attack during the Culture Wars. There is a suspicion, as well, that his concern with order and form—stemming in part from his anxiety about contemporary disorder—conceals a bias towards fascism and intolerance. Yet, Eliot is simply a dominant presence in English-speaking poetry of the first half of the 20th century, and no amount of dislike will remove him from this seminal position. Finally, the status of Eliot as our "classic," as a poet whose great motif is ruins ("fragments shored up against my ruins"), is an issue we cannot duck, for it is inseparable from the goals of this program on American classics: Can these fragments be read? Are they dead or alive? Can they make us whole?

Eliot came from a prominent New England family and benefited from familiar advantages, including education at Harvard, the Sorbonne, and Oxford. His background led to a prestigious career as a poet and critic and the award of the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1947. Eliot's importance was immediately recognized. He set the terms for the poetry (and prose) of high modernism. He single-handedly consigned some writers to oblivion while bringing others to the fore. His tastes and his crises (emotional and religious) were the guiding light for an era, even though he claimed that poetry is inherently impersonal. Eliot's view of history and the "tradition" has come under fire, but it is a complex theory, warranting our consideration in an age that is (still) obsessed with "making it new." "The Waste Land" is Eliot's magnum opus, but we can see, even in the early "Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock," the makings of a poetry that introduces a new note in American literature.

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

1. Summarize Eliot's role in arguing the importance of tradition and the individual talent,
2. Explain how "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" is a modernist poem, and
3. Summarize the "mythical method" employed by Eliot and other modernists.

Outline

I. The veritable opposite of Frost, T. S. Eliot must be seen as the "ruler" of high modernism, Eliot shared the stage with Pound, Auden, the aging Yeats, Joyce, and others, but his poems and his essays acquired paradigm status even as they appeared.

   A. Thomas Stearns Eliot was born in St. Louis in 1888 to a prominent New England family that first arrived from England in the 17th century. The family was committed to public service and religious leadership. Eliot's grandfather went to St. Louis in 1834, established the first Unitarian Church there, and founded Washington University.

   B. The young Eliot went to Harvard in 1906, finished college in three years, did graduate work in philosophy, studied at the Sorbonne, returned to Harvard, and joined the faculty. He was on a traveling fellowship in Germany when the war broke out. He then went to Oxford to read Greek philosophy and more or less stayed in England the rest of his life (becoming a British subject in 1927), except for prestigious academic appointments in the United States.
The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" appeared in 1915, and Eliot continued to publish poetry, plays, and essays for the rest of his life. He worked for a time with Lloyd's Bank, but then became active in publishing, was editor of The Criterion until the late 1930s, and became a director of the London house Faber and Faber. Eliot won the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1947.

Eliot's most famous and influential poem, "The Waste Land," was published in 1922, and it, along with James Joyce's Ulysses (of the same year), are key texts for literary modernism.

Eliot's later important poems are "The Hollow Men" (1925), "Ash Wednesday" (1930), and Four Quartets (1943). He also made notable efforts to revive poetic drama in the modern era; Murder in the Cathedral is his most memorable achievement in this endeavor.

In addition to his creative work, Eliot also published a number of landmark essays on literature that turned out to be as influential as the poems themselves, especially in the academic world. Eliot is important, even today, because "The Waste Land" changed the face of modern literature. Its themes addressed cultural despair, but its form was shockingly new. The poem consisted of a mix of references, allusions, and quotations from earlier texts, cohabiting with Eliot's own brand of truncated lyricism. Eliot's essays were no less ground-breaking.

1. His likes and dislikes worked their way into English departments throughout the world. Hence, his rejection of romanticism, his enthusiasm for the metaphysical poets of the 17th century, his championing of Dante and Baudelaire as great spiritual visionaries brought new views to the study of literature. It was again possible to fuse the sublime and the conversational, the religious and the secular, by dint of associative logic and jarring discords.

2. Eliot's essays on prose were no less significant, especially his assessment of the "mythical method" that stamps Joyce's Ulysses. In articulating what he takes to be Joyce's strategy, Eliot spells out much of the forthcoming program of modernism to be seen in works by Yeats, Pound, Mann, Faulkner, and O'Neill.

3. An earlier essay, "Tradition and the Individual Talent," published in 1919, remains provocative even today. Invoking "tradition" as the "mind of Europe," Eliot offers a remarkable vision of culture as something that lives, evolves, and is altered by the creation of new works. The view of impersonality put forth here was equally influential (and misleading) as a theory of poetry.

4. Critics interested in uncovering voices that have been either unheard or silenced—women writers, writers of color, writers from the margins—do not find much to like in Eliot's view of tradition.

5. The remarkable mobility in Eliot's conception, however, suggests a suppleness with which we should come to terms. The tradition is not something monolithic, but something that lives.

Eliot's ability to re-imagine the relations between the individual and the tradition—to create a poetry that uses individual utterance as a prism, a lens for seeing history and culture—is central to a host of writers who follow. The fierce visions of Eliot's fellow St. Louis writer, William Burroughs, and the virulent confessions of Eliot's poetic successor, Robert Lowell, testify to the enduring legacy of Eliot's views.

To see what is new in Eliot, we have only to examine his poems, even the very early ones that already strike a different chord.

"The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" begins with a (now famous) invitation to the reader. Bear in mind Frost's special invitation to his reader in "The Pasture."

1. The opening lines usher in imagery of disease, urban anomie, alienation. We recognize the influence of Baudelaire and Laforgue, especially in their city poems.

2. Eliot shows himself already as the unrivaled master of ditties and refrains that we will remember all our lives. He has a gift for epigram. He is also giving us an anatomy of culture: sterile, superficial, vain, pointless.

3. Eliot also sounds a signature note about fear and insecurity: Prufrock is hounded by doubts and anxiety, about the impossibility of passion or direct utterance.

4. Life is presented here, as Frost has also said, as "a diminished thing," but Eliot adds a new kind of protagonist: the second-rater, the man in the margins, the onlooker who cannot act.
5. Part of Eliot's economy and charm lie in the languid lyricism that remains, throttled though it is; Prufrock cannot act, but he can indeed yearn.

B. If, however, we are to grasp Eliot’s stature and accomplishment—and understand why he is so "unloved" today— "The Waste Land" must compel our most serious attention.

1. This poem is arguably the most elitist ever written. It is woven out of references to other texts, many of them arcane to today's readers. To top things off, Eliot also published several pages of notes to his poem, explaining his allusions, telling us where to look. Many felt then, and many feel today, that this kind of bibliographic research and erudition has nothing whatsoever to do with poetry.

2. We will deal in detail with "The Waste Land" in the following lecture, but consider now the closing lines. Listen to their strangeness.

3. How is one to assess these shards, these fragments? Are these dead letters? Is the "tradition" essentially fragments, ruins? What about our own American classics? Eliot's project is on our plate in this program.
Lecture 54  
T. S. Eliot: "The Waste Land" and Beyond  

Scope: Despite Eliot's claim of impersonality, we know that this poem was written during a time of intense personal anguish, and much of the poem's pathos and power derives from this state. Still, the grand challenge is to domesticate the poem's fierce strangeness, its formidable array of artifice and allusion. Eliot has told us of his debt to the anthropological work of Frazer and others, and we see that the "waste land" is a metaphor of spiritual sterility. Eliot explores and expresses this sterility by means of old myths and rituals, involving sacrificial legends, the story of the Grail, and vegetation rites, all intended to provide a choral view of culture's need for vitality and rebirth. Beyond the myths, however, we crash into Eliot's central technique of allusion and citation, usually of older literary or religious texts, enlisted in a powerful series of contrasts with the impoverished conditions of modern life (as Eliot saw it). What we make, or do not make, of these fragments, these allusions, is the heart of the matter. But interpretation is not simple, because the poem takes the form in which the past always remains for us: as residual texts that we either can or cannot read. Our analysis of Eliot's famous poem will be followed by a brief look at his haunting final poetic work, *Four Quartets*.  

Objectives—Upon completion of this lecture, you should be able to  
1. Give examples of how "The Waste Land" projects the sterility of the modern age,  
2. Describe the use of fragment and allusion in Eliot's poetry, and  

Outline  

I. "The Waste Land," we now know, is an intensely personal poem, despite Eliot's theory of impersonality. The text is larded with references to the poet's own anguish, and it is a more "human" document for just this reason.  

A. We see evidence of the poet's convalescence at both Margate and Lausanne.  
B. The theme of nervous breakdown is central to both the poem and the poet.  
C. Even here, in these notations of anomie, we come across Eliot's favorite technique: embedded quotations. What are we prepared to make of this?  
D. Pound's editing of the poem turned it into a more fragmented, modernist document.  

II. "The Waste Land" is understood to be a metaphor of cultural pessimism and sterility. It depicts a culture that is dying and longs for vitality or rebirth.  

A. Eliot has signaled his debt to Jessie Weston's *From Ritual to Romance* and Frazer's *The Golden Bough*. Are we expected to follow suit? Must we read anthropologists to understand the poem?  
B. We do need to see how the legend of the Fisher King is interwoven with other myths and legends of wound, sterility, and rebirth. The story of the Grail relates, therefore, to other sacrificial myths. Eliot's brilliance is to present this situation as a landscape, a landscape of drought and ruin, a heap of stones. We see here the very iconography of broken belief systems; the recurring question is: Can they be made whole?  
   1. Early and late in the poem, Eliot offers us direct references to the Fisher King, and we recall Eliot's earlier concern with failure of passion in "Prufrock."  
   2. The references to sacrificial myths include the Hanged Man, as well as deaths by fire or drowning that might be restorative.  
   3. Christ himself is evoked in this series, first at Gethsemane, then at Emmaus.
4. Eliot also includes images from the modern world in his purview. He borrows explicitly from Baudelaire's rendition of 19th-century Paris as both infernal and the place where modern redemption must be sought. Using Baudelaire, Eliot depicts modern London as a place of the living dead, with specific reference to London Bridge, finally cited in its nursery rhyme version as "falling down." This reference to falling cities is symbolic of Eliot's pessimism and apocalyptic sense of modern culture, with revolution and anarchy everywhere.

5. Eliot's cultural pessimism has been sharply criticized along ideological lines, because he appears to be a defender of the Old Guard. Some of the most intriguing criticism suggests a kinship between Eliot's yearning for order and form and the appeal of fascism itself. The example of Pound, a spokesman for fascism, is instructive here. Today, Eliot's politics tend to be resented in the academic world.

C. The central technique of "The Waste Land" is its use of fragment and allusion. These matters bear scrutiny.

1. What is a fragment? Because all fragments come from "wholes," how much of the "whole" must we know to understand the fragment?

2. E.D. Hirsch, in his book Cultural Literacy, presents a view that is strikingly analogous to Eliot's: Culture exists in the form of texts, and education consists in becoming acquainted, if not with the texts themselves, at least with their titles or key quotations. What is to be made of this theory?

3. Can we not also say that culture itself, the past itself, invariably exists in this textualized form? Inside our own minds there exists a series of fragments, of ruins, consisting of titles or one-liners that we have retained (or that we have never gone beyond): To be or not to be. Mine eyes have seen the glory. London Bridge is falling down. Chaos is come again. The promised land. Call me Ishmael. To be great is to be misunderstood.

4. These are the nuggets of many texts. What meaning do they have by themselves?

D. Eliot's strategy is to boldly allude, but also to contrast, to refer to these charged references to the past, while commenting precisely on our degraded, "unredeemed" present. This is the "mythical method" Eliot celebrated in Joyce.

1. We can consider Eliot's treatment of the "departing nymphs" in "The Waste Land" as representative of this strategy. Eliot achieves a great economy and a strange music by conflating Spenser, Sydney, Day, and Marvell and a contemporary description of sexual abuse and indulgence on the banks of the Thames.

2. A second example can be found in the depiction of lovemaking as it now happens in London (in 1922) by Tiresias (the central consciousness of the poem, according to Eliot's original design). We remember the poem's earlier references to sexual passion, as well as Shakespeare's depiction of Cleopatra.

III. Eliot continued to evolve as a poet, and his rich sequence of four long poems, Four Quartets, written during the early years of World War II, explores issues of religious crisis and belief as seen in "The Waste Land," but in a much less extravagant or allusive manner. A look at "East Coker" will illuminate what is continuous and what is altered in Eliot's poetry. These lines are haunting in their fine awareness of life as both linear and circular. They suggest, as well, the makings of a new kind of art, composed of everyday terms that could still, somehow, bring to life the past and the future.

Readings:


Topics for Further Consideration:
1. Discuss Eliot's view of the relationship between "the tradition and the individual talent."

F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby*: American Romance

**Scope:** Fitzgerald has long been thought of as the darling of American literature, the glamorous yet doomed chronicler of the Jazz Age. Precocious, witty, devilishly handsome and gifted, a remarkable stylist and observer, Fitzgerald produced two of the most memorable novels of the century—*The Great Gatsby* (1925) and *Tender Is the Night* (1934). These succeed in delineating his own personal romance and travails against an echoing backdrop of American manners and aspirations. His fascination with the revels and excesses of the Roaring Twenties, as well as his acute sense of social rituals, hierarchies, and jargons, make him at once a historian of his moment and a figure much neglected in today's English departments. Yet, *Gatsby* is certain to remain a key American document, perhaps our finest presentation of the lure of money and fortune in the early years of the 20th century. Beyond that it stands as a nearly perfect embodiment of what we know as the American dream: The possibility of constructing your own life, of becoming truly a self-made man, a feat of volition and freedom that is at the core of American democratic ideology. In this sense, too, Fitzgerald may appear prehistoric to many cultural critics, because his belief in self-making seems naive given contemporary views of ideology's stranglehold on the human subject. For all these reasons, we need to look hard at *The Great Gatsby* to see our myths writ large. We may also discern in Fitzgerald's lyrical monument a mirror that can still disturb.

Fitzgerald is our great chronicler of the giddy 1920s. In his masterpiece, *The Great Gatsby*, we see an evocation of the boisterous excesses of the period, its manic rejection of a more prim Victorian past, and a keen understanding of the real energies at play. Gatsby himself is the hero of the American Dream, our 20th-century inheritor of Benjamin Franklin's legacy of self-making, of moving from humble origins to exalted deeds; yet, the tonality of this book is radically different from the prudent discipline practiced and preached by Franklin. On the contrary, Fitzgerald delivers the music of a madcap era and he shows us what ultimately "finances" great fortunes: Not simply money or brains or luck, but burning desire, the driving force that harnesses our power and moves worlds. Fitzgerald is to be understood as the lyric poet of capitalism, the man who best understood (perhaps because he could least resist) the magic of riches and glamour. To present this phenomenon fundamentally as a love story, a story of desire so strong that it seeks to reverse time and recapture the past, is to fuse the personal and the cultural in striking fashion.

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

1. Summarize how Fitzgerald's fiction offers a window onto the Jazz Age of the 1920s,
2. Give examples of how Jay Gatsby is a 20th-century incarnation of Benjamin Franklin, and
3. Explain why Fitzgerald's reputation has suffered in recent years.

**Outline**

I. We begin with an overview of Fitzgerald's career and reputation.

A. Fitzgerald's position in American literature is that of chronicler of the Jazz Age, the giddy 1920s, when America frenetically rejected its prim Victorian 19th-century past in pursuit of pleasure.
   1. Born in 1896 in St. Paul, Minnesota, Fitzgerald went to Princeton as a precocious writer and a wild party boy. While there, he began what would later become his first novel, but left the university in 1917 to join the Army.
   2. At an Army post near Montgomery, Alabama, Fitzgerald met the beautiful, talented, well-born, and unstable Zelda Sayre, whom he courted and later married. This core experience is replayed variously in the plots of both *Gatsby* and *Tender Is the Night*. 
3. Fitzgerald became a literary success with his first novel, *This Side of Paradise* (1920), and his second, *The Beautiful and the Damned* (1922). Each work is replete with the Fitzgerald staples: wealth, glamour, narcissism, a tinge of horror, brooding, and death. *The Great Gatsby* (1925) is his masterpiece, but his wild life with Zelda, saturated with excess, alcoholism, and impending madness on her part, leads inexorably toward "crackup." *Tender Is the Night* (1934) testifies eloquently to this evolution.

4. *Gatsby* is Fitzgerald's most accomplished book, but *Tender* is his most complex and heartbreaking, and his last unfinished novel, *The Last Tycoon* (1940), dealing with Hollywood, makes us wonder what he might have done had he not succumbed to his demons. "There are no second acts in American literature," Fitzgerald is famous for saying, and he understood failure in a way that few others did.

B. Fitzgerald is not in great demand today in the academic world.

1. There is doubtless more critical interest, along feminist lines, in his doomed but brilliant wife, Zelda.

2. Fitzgerald and Zelda were among the "beautiful people." They attended never-ending parties and went on binges; they drank themselves into stupor; they were breathtakingly handsome, smart, savvy, and spoiled. This attachment to the rich and famous, this fascination with the way the beautiful people lived, does not endear him to critics interested in ideological arrangements. Fitzgerald is usually dealt with as a target rather than as a subject in fashionable work today.

II. *The Great Gatsby* presents all the major themes of the 1920s: wealth, parties, and dreams.

A. Gatsby appears to us, and to his fellows, as a legendary figure of wealth and mystery.

1. Like the ancient gods, for whom there are multiple myths of birth, there are multiple legends of "origins" for Gatsby. He may be a nephew or cousin to Kaiser Wilhelm, a German spy during the war, an Oxford man, a bootlegger, or a killer. Mysterious and elusive, he fits Tom Buchanan's scathing judgment: "Mr Nobody from Nowhere."

2. Gatsby’s origins may be unknown, but his parties are indisputable. Owner of a huge mansion on the water in "West Egg," Long Island, he regularly hosts gala events to which people come for pleasure, revelry, and mayhem. In the party scenes, Fitzgerald delivers the flavor of the Jazz Age. There is an air of madcap evanescence, conveyed by language that is often stunning in its freshness and wit. Nick Carraway offers us an unforgettable retrospective of the folks who came to Gatsby's parties.

B. At the center of all this, of course, is the mysterious Gatsby himself.

1. Fitzgerald enlists his narrator, the commonsense Nick Carraway, to "deliver" the mysterious title figure.

2. Gatsby can be understood as the 1920s (manic) version of Benjamin Franklin, the boy without resources who made himself into a tycoon. Gatsby's is the "rags-to-riches" American story, but without Franklin's prudence and civic-mindedness. Gatsby is also (as we shall see) more sinister and far more romantic than his 18th-century forebear.

3. Gatsby, we learn, bought this mansion and gives these parties in hopes of one day re-encountering his lost love, Daisy. Daisy is now married to Tom Buchanan and lives in a mansion across the bay in "East Egg," the more traditionally wealthy part of Long Island. Gatsby can see the green light on her dock, which comes to represent all his desire and longing.

4. Gatsby tells Nick (his neighbor) of falling in love with Daisy when he was stationed in the South, five years earlier, an officer with infinite dreams but no real claims. This love affair was the spiritual high point of his life, and Fitzgerald offers us an exquisite evocation of love and sexual desire as the prime forces that move the world.

5. Our discussion thus far is relatively chronological, but narratively backwards. We begin this text with Nick, then Daisy (Nick's cousin) and Tom, then Gatsby's fabulous parties, and then the request that Nick invite Daisy to tea, so that Gatsby can at long last see her again and make good on his dream.

6. This long-awaited rendezvous is handled with Fitzgerald's characteristic charm and wit and pathos. It moves from near-disaster to tearful reunion to stunning triumph of love, glamour, and even wealth.

7. Gatsby's character is elusive and full of pathos. His aura is reflected in the enormous parties he throws, a wild pursuit of the American dream that is deeply romantic.
8. At this point, interpretation of Fitzgerald becomes uncomfortable. These passages echo with an extraordinary lyricism, as in the scene with the shirts. Fitzgerald is the poet of capitalism; yet, the reader must wonder: Can this dream be truly gratified? Is the American project saddled with a flawed design? This book is about the beauty of the dream and the imperfection of the dreamer.
Lecture 56

The Great Gatsby: A Story of Lost Illusions?

Scope: Lost Illusions, one of Balzac's great novels, and Dickens's Great Expectations both chronicle the trajectory from delusion and dream to a chastened sense of reality. Realism can be thought of as a mode of thinking and writing that routinely deflates "large" appearances, brings them back to their small causes, educates us about the snares of the world. There is a comparable critical bent to The Great Gatsby: We come to understand that all people are flawed. Tom Buchanan is arrogant, brutal, and racist; Daisy is ultimately "careless"; Jordan Baker is dishonest; Nick himself is also labeled "careless"; and, above all, Gatsby is revealed to be knee-deep in crime and shady business. In a flourish of deflating "explanation," we encounter, at the end of the novel, the schedule of self-improvement aids of James Gatz (which is Gatsby's real name), bringing this high-flying hero to a mean point of origin indeed. All of this leads to the even more serious concern: Is the dream itself flawed? Can desire, the superhuman desire that has animated Gatsby, be sustained even after it is gratified? Is this also to be a "lost illusion"?

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

1. Summarize how The Great Gatsby can be situated in the tradition of the realist novel,
2. Describe how Gatsby is a heroic protagonist, and
3. Give examples of how The Great Gatsby is a "narrative of disenchantment."

Outline

I. Literary realism may be thought of as the narrative of disenchantment.

   A. Nick informs us at the very outset that his experience in the East with Gatsby has been a lesson in corruption and decay.
   1. Like Conrad's Marlow in The Heart of Darkness, Nick takes the measure of events.
   2. We will learn just how flawed these characters actually are.
   3. Tom Buchanan comes across as rich, arrogant, brutal, and comically racist.
   4. Daisy, the great love interest, will not bear up. Not only will she finally abandon Gatsby when the heat is on, but in a key description, her magic voice is "explained" as the voice of money. Here too we see the deflations of realism: Look behind the glamour and you find the purse.
   5. Jordan Baker, Daisy's friend and Nick's potential love interest, is also exposed as a professional golfer who cheats, who is incurably dishonest. Dishonesty seems to be an occupational hazard in this novel.
   6. Jordan later implies that Nick too has been dishonest with her. He is labeled "careless," the exact term that Nick uses to indict Tom and Daisy for their heartlessness.
   7. Above all, Gatsby himself will be examined and found wanting. We will see that he is implicated in countless shady deals and sleazy operations, that he is mixed up with criminals, and that he is Daisy's social inferior. In short, he seems discredited.
   8. In the end, Nick likens his stay with Gatsby and company to a descent into hell, and he plans to return to the Midwest, a place where virtue and principle still exist.

   B. All these actions are quintessential features of realism, the critical genre par excellence.
   1. Balzac's Père Goriot and Illusions Perdues are chronicles of rot and corruption in mid-19th-century Paris, focusing on the loss of innocence brought on by trying to succeed in the modern city.
   2. Dickens's Great Expectations follows essentially the same formula as Pip learns how corrupt and corrupting his "pursuit of success" has been.
   3. Flaubert (whom Fitzgerald admired) tells this story over and over, especially in Emma Bovary's loss of belief and romantic expectations in Madame Bovary. This is the generic collapse of ideals, representing the saga of an entire generation's disenchantment after the failure of 1848 that Flaubert represents in L'Education Sentimentale.
4. Fitzgerald gives us the list of the partygoers on the flyleaf of July 5, which perfectly symbolizes the book's project: To tell the story of July 4, the great party, on July 5, the day of the hangover. In this light, grand celebrations and revelries look much poorer. Large things shrink, are exposed in their underpinnings.

5. We may think of this process of deflation in terms of thinning, which is how Nick puts it. In other words, think of the 1920s leading to the 1930s; this is not only Nick's thinning but America's.

6. This gambit of realism moves from illusory appearances to mean truths. Legendary figures are exposed and deflated. We need merely to consider our own age of journalistic exposés to know how badly heroism fares in our time.

7. The final "deflating" document of the text is the schedule of James Gatz found in the flyleaf of his book, exhorting the young future Gatsby to perform a number of self-help tricks to guarantee SUCCESS.

II. Behind all the reduction and criticism, the key question remains: Can the dream resist this realist exposure or is it illusory as well?

A. What, then, is left in this story? Is Gatsby really great? Is the novel great? Is anything great? What survives realism?

B. The core of the novel is desire, the generative force of Gatsby's dream and his life. He did what he did out of desire. What will happen when he re-encounters the lost love? Can she measure up?

1. Early in the book, Fitzgerald warns us that no flesh-and-blood creature can compare with our dreams.
2. Gatsby seeks—madly, heroically, splendidly—to reverse time, to recreate the past.
3. He insists that Daisy erase the past five years with Tom.
4. Yet Fitzgerald knows that time cannot be erased. After the moment of truth, we see a quiet scene of Tom and Daisy eating chicken together: they are married folks.
5. Gatsby dies as a man shorn of his dream.
6. Here is a text of unflinching realism. Is it true?
Lecture 57

Fitzgerald's Triumph: Writing the American Dream

Scope: Even though Fitzgerald's novel is relentless in its drive toward exposure, and even though it ultimately discredits virtually all its characters, it nonetheless never ceases to revere the dream itself. Moreover, Fitzgerald is less invested in a thinning exercise than in a fattening one. America is the land of the dream, because it is the only country in which people believe in self-making, believe that they are free agents, unconstrained by origin or class or birth. Fitzgerald's book is more committed to creation than it is to criticism: the creations of desire and self and language. We remember the fixation with Daisy's voice. Not only is it allied with money, but also with genesis, with naming the world into being. Words, too, can be free of referent. Fitzgerald struts his stuff verbally, offers us a splendidly "independent" language, shows word creations to be real. One of the most charming episodes of the novel is the "saga" of "Blocks" Biloxi, weird word-creature who seems a ghostly cousin of the other self-made man, Jay Gatsby. Fitzgerald is writing about the power of belief: our belief in words (the miracle of literature) and our belief in others (the miracle of desire). This belief—called "credit" in financial circles—is our covenant with reality, and it has nothing to do with realism.

Objectives—Upon completion of this lecture, you should be able to
1. Explain the ambiguous origins of Gatsby and the commentary they offer on the American dream,
2. Describe in what ways Fitzgerald links America with paradise, and
3. Summarize Daisy's role as a creative force in the novel.

Outline

I. The Great Gatsby is ultimately more concerned with the processes of creation than with those of criticism.
   A. Yes, the realist impulse is to deflate, to return large appearances to small origins, to see July 5 as the "truth" of July 4. But Fitzgerald is also poking fun at this procedure.
   B. Tom Buchanan has been doing some research on this fellow Gatsby, and we end up with our plate full of ugly disclosures. But we need to remember how Nick first characterized Gatsby.
      1. Gatsby represents promise, romantic readiness.
      2. All those fictive "origins" for Gatsby, those guesses about where he comes from, tell us that he is simply not "explainable." He cannot be reduced to a single origin.
      3. In one of the book's great speeches, Gatsby tells Nick precisely about his origins. He shows Nick the medal and the photograph. Still, we cannot miss the elements of parody and the absurd here. What is going on?
      4. Gatsby is the elemental self-made man. He has spawned himself. Here is the 1920s version of Benjamin Franklin's legacy.
      5. Gatsby is emblematic of the American dream: To be free of origin; not to be determined by the accidents of birth or class or color or race; not to be bound by the past. This is a dream of freedom and self-creation. The dream is called on to make the world.

II. This American dream is strangely and powerfully allied to the phenomenon of language.
   A. For most of us, freedom of speech connotes political freedom, the right to speak our opinions. Could it be more elemental still?
   B. Remember Daisy's voice, the voice that is full of money. It is also characterized precisely as a voice, as human speech.
      1. Fitzgerald repeatedly refers to it as a voice of promise, of possibility. It is "thrilling," "breathless," an "exhilarating ripple."
      2. The voice is what held Gatsby most of all; it was a "deathless song."
3. Daisy's voice is presented as a form of genesis, as the creation of the world, giving things a meaning they never had before and never will again. This is an artistic strategy of great ambition for a writer.

C. Fitzgerald's novel, although not formally experimental, is nonetheless committed to semiotic energy.

1. Consider Fitzgerald's madcap style in this regard: his zany, absurdist metaphors and similes, his gratuitous excesses, and flights of fantasy. The book has a ludic "musical chairs" dimension to it. The order of the artist predominates: that is America.

2. We are treated many times to Edenic passages, to America as a land of promise, of utter novelty, of new beginnings. Consider the passage on the Queensboro Bridge.

3. The highlight of the book's ludic activity is the astonishing sequence revolving around the odd figure "Blocks" Biloxi, brought into the text at a moment of maximum seriousness (the "shootout" in a hot hotel room where the two males will fight it out for the golden girl). Fitzgerald gives us the magic performance of this word-figure. His name consists of both family and place; he comes from a writer's wonderland (Biloxi, Tennessee); he triggers the strangest actions, including death; he seems to be an impostor (thereby resembling Gatsby), claiming to know Daisy and to be from Louisville; and he grandly claims to have been "president of your class at Yale." It is here that Tom Buchanan rightly links Biloxi-at-Yale to Gatsby-at-Oxford. Here are the exploits of word-men.

4. Have we not had actor-presidents? Could literature out-trump life by getting its man elected? The pure artifice and antics of Blocks Biloxi speak to us of the magic of Jay Gatsby: his aura, his career, his dream.

D. Yet Gatsby, unlike Biloxi, is flesh and blood. He is the tragic hero of belief as much as dream and desire.

1. Gatsby gives himself to the dream. He also possesses a special smile that guarantees belief, belief in others. Here is a peculiar but real form of social contract.

2. Fitzgerald saw the story of Gatsby as the story of those dreams and illusions that give glory to life, whether or not they are true.

3. That "magical glory" is no less than the capacity to dream, to be free, to make yourself, and to make your life. The novel discredits the dreamer and the woman he dreamed of, but the dream is incorruptible.

4. This is America's first and truest article of belief. It is what the Dutch sailors saw when they first came to the New World.

5. The fact that we can never realize the dream changes nothing.

Readings:
Essential: Fitzgerald, *The Great Gatsby* (Scribner's, 1960)

Topics for Further Consideration:
1. Summarize how *The Great Gatsby* continues the notion of the American dream first articulated in Franklin's *Autobiography*.

2. Describe the tug-of-war between the critical, deflating tendencies of *The Great Gatsby* and the counterforces of creation and romance.
Lecture 58

Ernest Hemingway's *The Sun Also Rises*:
Novel of the Lost Generation

Scope: As the 20th century comes to an end, Ernest Hemingway's reputation is among the most disputed in the American canon. There is much irony in this state of affairs, given Hemingway's unarguable status as the most influential American prose writer of the century. The Hemingway style can be found from the journalism of our newspapers and magazines to the minimalist writings of figures like Raymond Carver. The style is brisk, terse, cleansed of adjectives, seemingly objective, and aimed at rendering the precise moment and feeling of experience. Of course, it is the Hemingway legend—a legend that the writer cultivated all too assiduously, even tragically—that most offends today: Hemingway as Mister Macho, Hemingway as maniacal man of war, hunting, fishing, boxing, boozing, fornicating, slugging it out in one fashion or another. He was indeed larger than life. His biography spans the magic years in Paris in the 1920s, when he was the acknowledged leader of the Lost Generation of American expatriate writers; his exploits in the Spanish Civil War, "liberating" the Ritz in 1945; and, finally, his suicide in 1961, when the body could hold up no longer and the writing would not come. We will take a two-sided look at Hemingway, beginning with his first (and perhaps best) novel, *The Sun Also Rises* (1926), an unforgettable account of Americans encountering the mysteries of Paris and Pamplona. We will close with the haunting, posthumously published *Garden of Eden* (1986), which brings all the skeletons out of the Hemingway closet to offer the fullest picture of Hemingway's sexuality and writing.

We will begin with a brief account of Hemingway's career, including--his publications, life, and legend, to begin taking the measure of this phenomenon. What did Hemingway's work do that was new? What is it still doing today? We will also look at the debate concerning his importance in today's critical climate. Our central text, *The Sun Also Rises* (1926), is often regarded as Hemingway's strongest effort. We know that it is partly based on real people and real events, but the story is always seen through the prism of the author's imagination. This novel introduced Americans to Paris of the 1920s, its streets and bars and restaurants and customs; you could do worse than to read it as a guidebook. Yet, the book is insistently concerned with values, with finding something to believe in, in the aftermath of the Great War. Through the story of Jake Barnes, the tight-lipped hero who is war-wounded and impotent, Hemingway rivals Eliot's "The Waste Land" in his meditation on sickness and health.

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

1. Explain the reasons for Hemingway's fall from grace in American literary criticism,
2. Compare Hemingway's depiction of Europe with that of earlier writers, such as James, and
3. Summarize the ways in which *The Sun Also Rises* is an auto-biographical novel.

Outline

I. Arguably the most influential writer of our century, Ernest Hemingway is a giant figure in both America and Europe. Hemingway's career spans four decades and marks our century.

A. Although the value of Hemingway "stock" is currently being debated, his status as a pioneer in shaping American prose in the 20th century is indisputable.

B. There is a clear Hemingway "curve" that moves from the fresh, spare, tight-lipped early prose of the 1920s—focusing on hunting, fishing, boxing, bullfighting, war, love, and death—to an increasingly soft, unwittingly parodic prose that seeks to recapture the old greatness.

1. *In Our Time* (1925) offers an unparalleled new style of writing. It contains brief stories of Nick Adams growing up and becoming a man, spliced with still briefer vignettes of war and violence.

2. *The Sun Also Rises* (1926) is Hemingway's portrayal of the Lost Generation of American expatriates seeking their way in Paris and Pamplona. Here is the lean, taut style at its finest. Or is it?
3. *A Farewell to Arms* (1929) represents Hemingway's fateful experience on the Italian front in 1918, including his war injury and his failed love affair with Agnes von Kurowsky. All this is recast in the tragic love story of Frederick Henry and Catherine Barkley, who are caught in a world not of their making.

4. In the 1930s Hemingway produced no great novel, but wrote his great treatises on bullfighting and game hunting, *Death in the Afternoon* (1932) and *Green Hills of Africa* (1935).

5. Further successes include his epic account of the Spanish Civil War, *For Whom the Bell Tolls* (1940), and his enormously popular *Old Man and the Sea* (1952). Hemingway won the Nobel Prize in 1954.

6. Since his death in 1961, a number of works have been published, including the lyrical yet malicious *Moveable Feast* (1964), Hemingway's account of the early years in Paris from 1921 to 1926; *Islands in the Stream* (1970); and the remarkable *Garden of Eden* (1986) in which much that was repressed earlier is finally brought into the open. Watch out!

C. These titles do not take the measure of what Hemingway wrought. Swollen, pretentious, often cruel, he was a tragic personality who stamped our age.

1. Hemingway taught America about war. He felt that Stephen Crane was too literary, whereas he himself was *there*, telling us how it was and what it felt like. Hemingway’s great theme is trauma: the pain and damage meted to the body, as well as the occasional dignity and courage of men in crisis.

2. He also taught us about sports: hunting, fishing, skiing, bull-fighting, boxing. Here too was a confrontation with pain, even with death, and an opportunity for "grace under pressure." Such situations came to stand for the condition of modern man; they are a rigorous measure of who and what he was.

3. These stories also took American readers to places they had never been, such as Paris, San Sebastian, Pamplona, and the Alps. Hemingway is part of the great tradition of tour guides beginning with Twain and passing through James.

4. Inherent in all this is Hemingway’s stature as the macho figure of our century, incessantly measuring himself against all situations and against all comers and rivals. Hemingway is the artist as hero, a dreadfully public figure. Yet, Hemingway resembles Whitman in the sense of having extraordinary charisma. He was a difficult man, petty when dealing with his rivals, yet exacting when it came to himself. He seems to have been singled out for physical disaster.

D. In many of the most prestigious English departments in American universities, Hemingway is virtually unread. There are some good reasons for this: How viable is his work at the end of the 20th century? How universal is the bullfight as an image of the human condition? Who do women or minorities find for themselves in these books? How significant (or ridiculous) is machismo today?

1. Hemingway can be his own most severe critic in these areas.

2. In the posthumous *Garden of Eden*, these issues are presented in dazzling and astonishing ways.

3. Like or hate his image, one must acknowledge the legacy of Hemingway's prose. The war on the adjective, the war on complex and articulated British syntax, the value ascribed to terseness and spareness, the understanding of silences that punctuate conversation: These are Hemingway's gifts to us, and modern journalism and prose are stamped with his imprint.

II. *The Sun Also Rises* presents us with much of the Hemingway legacy: a new language, expatriate Americans in Europe, the search for a new code.

A. Initially, the novel was read as a *roman à clef*.

1. Jake Barnes was Hemingway.

2. Brett was Duff Twysden.

3. Brett's "fiancé," Mike, was Pat Guthrie, Duff's cousin/lover/banker.

4. Robert Cohn was Harold Loeb, Hemingway's early supporter in getting work published.

5. Bill Gorton was Don Stewart, Hemingway's old buddy.

B. These events actually happened "in some fashion." Hemingway may have had an affair with Duff, who did go to San Sebastian with Loeb; there was a fishing party at Burguete and a visit to Pamplona for the San Fermin.
C. Other features of the novel are more indirect, but no less drawn from life. Hemingway's relationship to Scott and Zelda Fitzgerald is replayed in this novel.
   1. Hemingway's suspicion and dislike of Zelda is reflected in the shrew-like Frances Clyne who berates Robert Cohn (a writer) in classic fashion.
   2. Zelda's famous love for all-night parties, her capacity for drink, her obsession with taking baths are all part of Brett's makeup.

D. The novel delivers Paris of the 1920s. The fuller tourist picture provided in *A Moveable Feast*—including Sylvia Beach, Gertrude Stein, Ezra Pound, James Joyce, and Scott and Zelda Fitzgerald (along with the hilarious/malicious account of Scott's hypochondria and his "measurements")—is left out of the earlier text.
   1. The first novel is outfitted with Gertrude Stein's infamous pronouncement: "You are a lost generation." Hemingway has told us what this phrase actually meant.
   2. The phrase has remained in the culture as a description of an entire slate of gifted writers finding their way in Europe after the war.
   3. Hemingway confided to Fitzgerald that he had other titles in mind for *The Sun Also Rises*. He also gave Fitzgerald a sneak preview of the plot.
   4. We must not forget that the book is equipped with a second quotation, this time from Ecclesiastes, about what endures.

E. Hemingway is our tour guide to Europe. He takes pride in his knowledge.
   1. Do you know what pernod is? Most Americans didn't.
   2. Sightseeing in Paris looms large here, although it adds little to the plot.
   3. Above all, Jake Barnes is the consummate *insider*, savvy about Paris, Pamplona, and the bullfights. He is a true aficionado.

F. Despite the book's exotica, the story retains a sense of anxiety and despair just under the surface. We sense that we are in the aftermath of the war.
   1. The funny scene with the Count is precisely about finding the right *values*.
   2. There is to be no joking about these matters, Hemingway reminds us.
   3. Hemingway is as severe as Thoreau in suggesting that we pay for our lives with the only currency we have: our lives.
   4. Hemingway's emasculated hero, Jake Barnes, is to be understood as a version of Eliot's maimed Fisher King, and the novel is about the search for healing and wholeness.
Lecture 59

The Sun Also Rises: Spiritual Quest

Scope: Although Hemingway's novel seems realistic enough on the surface, we soon realize that the plight of his Americans in Europe has symbolic overtones. The hero of the story, Jake Barnes, is a classic Hemingway protagonist: tight-lipped, wounded (sexually) in the war, vulnerable but brave. His counterpart, Robert Cohn, shows us how the Hemingway code can be breached: by not behaving well. Paris is all drinking and partying, but the book changes course midway through as Jake and his cohort head to Spain for some fishing and the famous San Fermin Festival in Pamplona, the running of the bulls and the bullfights. In these scenes, "another country" is glimpsed, beyond the apparent hedonism and excesses of Paris. The hero of this realm is Pedro Romero, the gallant young bullfighter, who is targeted by the novel's femme fatale, Lady Brett. Unlike Twain's "innocents abroad," Hemingway's Americans bring corruption to an old and pure way of life.

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

1. Outline the ways in which Jake Barnes stands as the classic Hemingway narrator,
2. Describe how The Sun Also Rises is built around a motif of pilgrimage, and
3. Explain how Hemingway reveals bullfighting to be a spiritual event.

Outline

I. Hemingway's Americans in Paris do a lot of wild partying, but they are all "sick" in some fashion.
   A. Jake Barnes is the classic Hemingway protagonist and narrator.
      1. Jake is tight-lipped, stoic, in control of things, savvy about the European world in which he lives.
      2. Jake is also wounded, rendered impotent by an injury from the war. He tries to be flippant about his injury, but his relationship with the text's female interest, Lady Brett, makes this difficult. Love without sex is a problem.
      3. Jake is hard-boiled in the daytime, but not at night, when he is vulnerable. Here is a central feature of Hemingway.
      4. A careful reading of Jake's scenes with Brett raises the question: Just how impotent is he? This text is tricky in suggesting more than meets the eye. There are important, suggestive silences between the words.
   B. Robert Cohn is presented as Jake's friend, but also as his foil.
      1. Hemingway's inimitable gift for "doing in" people in a few well-placed jabs is evident in the presentation of Cohn.
      2. Cohn is faulted most of all for not being "one of us"; he is Jewish. There is a clubby dimension to this book, and Cohn will pay for it as the "racial" outsider.
      3. At key moments of crisis, Cohn does what we expect him to do: He "behaves badly." He sleeps with Brett; he wants to go fishing with "the boys." The Hemingway code is on show.
   C. The fishing episode at Burguete is idyllic.
      1. Hemingway, great admirer of Huckleberry Finn, depicts a land-scape of camaraderie that Twain would have enjoyed.
      2. There is a religious ritual in the description of catching and cleaning the fish.
      3. Joined by an Englishman, Harris, Jake and Bill enjoy their moment of great happiness. We sense there are terrors underneath (the shadow of World War I). We can compare this scene with “Big Two-Hearted River”; there are parallels between Jake Barnes and Nick Adams.
      4. Hemingway's sentimentality is on show when the male buddies part.
II. We understand the voyage of the Americans to Spain to be something of a pilgrimage. Spain is a place where the "values" are unlike those in France. There is more of “community” there, particularly in the Basque region.

A. Even the fishing trip can now be seen as a spiritual event, better, in its way, than the famous monastery of Roncesvalles, scene of The Song of Roland.

B. The notion of pilgrimage dominates the landscape, and we sense that spiritual values are now in play.
   1. Hemingway's presentation of the Basques, even on the trip from Bayonne to Pamplona, is rich in suggestions of "community." There is a sacramental overtone in the sharing of bread and wine with the Basques.
   2. Jake, always the initiated, is close to Montoya, the hotel owner in Pamplona. Here we come to understand the concept of aficion, the spiritual passion that unites lovers of bullfighting. Jake is the only American to be part of this.
   3. Hence, bullfighting is not a sport: It is a ritual activity entailing man's encounter with death, and it is done by rigorous forms. The hero of this new dispensation is Pedro Romero, young bullfighter extraordinaire. In the descriptions of Romero's performance in the shadows of the monastery of Roncesvalles, we see the Hemingway ideals of "grace under pressure" and "purity of line," both of which describe writing (and love making), as well. He embodies Hemingway's code.
   4. There are sexual overtones to the bullfighter's “dance with death.”

C. A reversal of the usual tale of the American abroad, Hemingway's story is about the corruption of this age-old tradition of bullfighting as a spiritual event. Lady Brett is inflamed by Romero, and she enlists Jake in her efforts to "have" him. We can compare this with Twain's Innocents Abroad and James’s depictions of Americans in Europe.
   1. Cohn, enraged with jealousy (he has also slept with Brett), accuses Jake of being a pimp. Cohn is right. He has his revenge physically on Romero.
   2. Brett is one of Hemingway's triumphs of characterization. Her fiancé, Mike, calls her "an extraordinary wench," and her charm and beauty and inimitable Brit style add much to the book. In the end, she leaves Romero for fear that he would make her too "womanly," for fear of corrupting him; she takes pleasure in this renunciation and calls it her form of religion. Readers may not agree.
   3. Jake, impotent, is kept "clean" by the plot, however implicated he may be otherwise.

D. Hemingway's original title was Fiesta. We need to think of "carnaval" and its attendant meanings of liberation, transformation, and play. Pamplona is indeed "another country."
Lecture 60

Ernest Hemingway: Wordsmith

Scope: Hemingway is justly famous for his crisp, clipped, clean style. Much of the verbiage and rhetoric of "English" is banished from American prose because of his initiatives (and many American readers cannot handle or enjoy complex language and syntax for the same reasons). "One true sentence" was Hemingway's mantra for getting past writer's block; likewise, he rejected the "big" words, which he blasted for being bogus and false to experience. The prose he tried to create was to be clean and yet dimensional, even to have "fourth and fifth dimensions," if one knew how to write it. Looking at The Sun Also Rises from the point of view of language can be exhilarating. The book is saturated with references to other writers, often coded as dirty jokes. The novel is also equipped with some remarkable puns and word play. Ultimately, Hemingway's interest in double entendre moves from the word to the psyche, as the book revels in innuendo, in suggestions of dual meanings and dual sexuality. Nothing is remotely as simple or stable as it first appears, and we may need to reconceive our view of the macho writer.

Objectives—Upon completion of this lecture, you should be able to
1. Summarize the major characteristics of the "Hemingway style,"
2. Give examples of Hemingway's use of literary allusion in The Sun Also Rises, and
3. Explain the importance of Hemingway's use of puns and innuendo in his construction of a worldview.

Outline

I. Hemingway is celebrated as a clean, simple stylist.
   A. In A Moveable Feast, Hemingway reveals his lifelong mantra for breaking writer's block: "One true sentence." Are sentences true?
   B. Consider a few examples of the clean style. It has a kind of heft and solidity that make you salivate.
   C. In A Farewell to Arms, Frederick Henry delivers an impassioned critique of the "Big Words" as being obscene.
   D. In Green Hills of Africa, Hemingway speaks of the "fourth and fifth dimensions" of prose, reachable only if you have done it exactly right.
   E. One formula for "dimensionality" is to repress information. Hemingway often used this strategy, and it accounts for the brooding tone in some of his writing.
      1. The corollary to repression is the fear that "saying" something is tantamount to losing it.
      2. In this book, the presence of the Great War is often felt just behind the most idyllic scenes.

II. The Sun Also Rises is something of an echo chamber; it is larded with literary references.
   A. "Make it new" is the credo of modernism, but Hemingway also enjoyed replaying the old.
      1. Henry James makes several curtain calls in the novel. We hear echoes of Strether's famous advice to Little Bilham about "living all you can." In addition, James's experiments with American values being testing against French ones are present here. James can also be pleasantly mocked, and Hemingway is out to show that Strether's drama of sexual renunciation is nothing compared to Jake Barnes's.
      2. H. L. Mencken, the aging American arbiter of literary judgment, comes in for a scurrilous mention.
      3. And what about lesbianism and homosexuality? There is one snide reference to gays and little other overt mention of homosexuality. Yet consider the environment and friends of Hemingway: Gertrude Stein and Alice B. Toklas, Janet Flanner, Sylvia Beach, Natalie Barney and Djuna Barnes (at the Rue Jacob). Then rethink Jake Barnes, the man who cannot (will not?) "penetrate" women.
      4. Zelda Fitzgerald's belief that Ernest and Scott were lovers further heightens the fireworks behind the novel.
   B. The sexual innuendo of The Sun Also Rises is especially visible in the puns and word play.
1. How does Romero get into those pants? "Pipe down."
2. Brett's short hair is arousing. Romero wants her to cut it, but she won't; the "boyish" girl in Hemingway is erotic.
3. Fiesta is introduced by "explosion"; these explosions happen to occur between people's legs.
4. The Count asks Brett the key question: Are you joking him (Jake)? Who is joking whom? Does "joking" suggest something else?

III. *The Sun Also Rises* may be thought of as "another country," a place unto itself, beyond even Paris and Pamplona.

A. Like all novels, it is a word-world, a world of verbal constructs, jokes, games, and codes. What does "Vengo jueves, Cohn" mean? Or "globos illuminados"? Or "joke" or "festa"? Or all the French and Spanish terms in this international text?

B. Hemingway's true target, beyond the word play, is the ambiguity and multiplicity of the psyche, especially as this informs vision. The most suggestive scene of the novel occurs when Jake is knocked out by Cohn (who calls him a "pimp"); this episode of literal trauma is presented as total strangeness of vision, of revisiting things we thought we knew. Here would be the "other country."
Timeline

17th century .................. The “Great Migration” brings the Puritans and Pilgrims from England to America.

1692 ......................... John Hawthorne, an ancestor of author Nathaniel Hawthorne, officiates at a number of the infamous witch trials in Salem, Massachusetts.


1706 .......................... Birth of Benjamin Franklin.

1721 .......................... Benjamin Franklin, at age 15, starts his own newspaper, The New England Courant, and begins to write essays.

1730 .......................... Franklin is named the “Official Printer of Pennsylvania.”

1732–1757 .................. Franklin writes Poor Richard’s Almanac, the first American periodical.

1736 .......................... Franklin organizes the Union Fire Co.

1737 .......................... Franklin becomes Philadelphia’s postmaster.

1741 .......................... Franklin invents the “Franklin fireplace” (stove).

1743 .......................... Franklin proposes the idea for the American Philosophical Society.

1745 .......................... Franklin begins to conduct experiments in electricity.

1747 .......................... Franklin organizes the Pennsylvania Militia.

1749 .......................... Franklin founds the Philadelphia Academy, which later became the University of Pennsylvania.

1751 .......................... Founding of Philadelphia Hospital, with the assistance of Franklin.

1752 .......................... Franklin conducts his famous experiment proving that lightning is electrical.

1753 .......................... Franklin receives honorary master degrees from both Harvard and Yale.

1757 .......................... Franklin elected the representative of Philadelphia (Pennsylvania) to England.

1758 .......................... Jonathan Edwards dies.

1759 .......................... Franklin receives an honorary doctorate from the University of St. Andrews in Scotland.

1762 .......................... Franklin receives an honorary doctorate from Oxford University.

1771 .......................... Franklin begins writing his Autobiography.

1776 .......................... Declaration of Independence written and signed. Beginning of the Revolutionary War.

1783 .......................... End of the Revolutionary War.

1783 .......................... Birth of Washington Irving.

1790 .......................... Death of Benjamin Franklin.

1803 .......................... Birth of Ralph Waldo Emerson.

1804 .......................... Birth of Nathaniel Hawthorne.

1809 .......................... Birth of Edgar Allan Poe.


1817 .......................... Birth of Henry David Thoreau.

1819 .......................... Washington Irving publishes “The Legend of Sleepy Hollow” and “Rip Van Winkle.”

1819 .......................... Birth of Herman Melville.
1819.................................. Birth of Walt Whitman.
1821.................................. Ralph Waldo Emerson graduates from Harvard.
1829.................................. Emerson marries Ellen Tucker.
1830.................................. Birth of Emily Dickinson.
1831.................................. Emerson’s wife dies.
1832.................................. Spurred by his wife’s death, Emerson resigns his ministry.
1835.................................. Edgar Allan Poe writes “Berenice.”
1835.................................. Birth of Samuel Clemens (Mark Twain).
1836.................................. Emerson publishes his essay “Nature.”
1836.............................. Poe marries Virginia Clemm, his 14-year-old cousin.
1837.............................. Emerson makes his famous speech at Harvard, “The American Scholar.”
1837.............................. Nathaniel Hawthorne publishes his collection of stories entitled Twice-Told Tales.
1838.............................. Poe pens “Ligeia.”
1839.................................. Poe publishes “The Fall of the House of Usher,” considered the quintessential horror story, as well as Poe’s masterwork. Poe also publishes “William Wilson” during this year.
1841.............................. Emerson publishes several of his best-known essays, including “History,” “Self-Reliance,” and “Circles.”
1841.............................. Poe publishes “The Murders in the Rue Morgue,” considered one of the first detective stories, along with “Descent into the Maelstrom,” an early science fiction story.
1842.............................. Poe publishes “The Pit and the Pendulum.”
1843.............................. Poe publishes “The Black Cat” and “The Tell-Tale Heart.”
1843.............................. Birth of Henry James.
1844.............................. Emerson publishes the essay “Experience.”
1844.............................. Poe publishes “The Balloon-Hoax,” a piece that could be considered science fiction.
1845.............................. Poe publishes “The Raven,” as well as “The Purloined Letter,” considered one of the first detective stories, and “The Facts in the Case of M. Valdemar.”
1846.............................. Emerson publishes “The Poet,” his chief statement about the literary agenda of the future.
1846.............................. Henry David Thoreau spends one night in jail for his refusal to pay several years’ poll tax as protest against the role of Massachusetts in perpetuating slavery.
1846.............................. Poe’s wife dies of consumption.
1846.............................. Poe writes “The Philosophy of Composition, or How I Wrote ‘The Raven,’” the famous account (perhaps spoofing) of his poetic practice. Poe also publishes “The Cask of Amontillado.”
1846.............................. Herman Melville publishes Typee.
1847.............................. Melville publishes Omoo.
1848.............................. Thoreau publishes his essay “Civil Disobedience.”
1848.............................. Attempted revolutions fail in several European nations.
1849.............................. Poe publishes “The Bells,” “Eldorado,” and “Annabel Lee.”
1849.................................. Melville publishes *Mardi*.
1849.................................. Death of Edgar Allan Poe.
1850.................................. Hawthorne publishes *The Scarlet Letter*, perhaps his best-known work.
Also in this year, Melville publishes *White Jacket, or The World in a Man of War*.
1850.................................. Karl Marx writes *The Communist Manifesto*.
1850.................................. Passage of the Fugitive Slave Act, which required Northerners to return runaway slaves to their former masters.
1851.................................. Thoreau becomes active in the abolitionist movement.
1851.................................. Melville meets Hawthorne in person. In this same year, he publishes his masterwork, *Moby Dick*.
1852.................................. Harriet Beecher Stowe publishes *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*.
1853.................................. Melville publishes the short story “Bartleby, the Scrivener.”
1854.................................. Thoreau publishes his masterwork, *Walden*.
1855.................................. Walt Whitman publishes the first version of *Leaves of Grass*.
1856.................................. Whitman’s poem “Crossing Brooklyn Ferry” published in a version of *Leaves of Grass*.
1856.................................. Melville publishes the short story “Benito Cereno.”
1856.................................. Birth of Sigmund Freud.
1859.................................. Thoreau reads publicly “A Plea for Captain John Brown.”
1859.................................. Washington Irving dies.
1859.................................. Petroleum is discovered.
1859.................................. Whitman writes “Out of the Cradle Endlessly Rocking.”
1860.................................. Whitman publishes the collections of poems *Children of Adam* and *Calamus*.
1860.................................. Birth of Charlotte Perkins Gilman.
1861.................................. Start of the American Civil War.
1862.................................. Death of Henry David Thoreau.
1862.................................. Emily Dickinson has her literary exchange with noted critic Thomas Wentworth Higginson.
1864.................................. Death of Nathaniel Hawthorne.
1865.................................. End of the American Civil War.
1867.................................. Mark Twain publishes the short story “The Celebrated Jumping Frog of Calaveras County.”
1869.................................. Twain publishes *Innocents Abroad*.
1871.................................. Birth of Stephen Crane.
1871.................................. Franco-Prussian War.
1874.................................. Birth of Robert Frost.
1875.................................. Public reburial and dedication of Poe’s remains.
1876.................................. Twain publishes *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer*.
1879.................................. Henry James writes the first book on Nathaniel Hawthorne.
1881.................................. James publishes *A Portrait of a Lady*.
1882.................................. Death of Ralph Waldo Emerson.
1886.................................. Death of Emily Dickinson.
1885.................................. Twain publishes *Huckleberry Finn*, his acclaimed masterpiece, which was promptly banned by the Concord Public Library.
1887.................................. Charlotte Perkins Gilman gives birth to a daughter, afterward suffering from post-partum depression.
1888.................................. Birth of T. S. Eliot.
1888.................................. Birth of Eugene O’Neill.
1889.................................. Twain publishes *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur’s Court*.
1891.................................. Death of Herman Melville.
1892.................................. Death of Walt Whitman. Publication of “The Wound Dresser.”
1892.................................. Gilman publishes the short story “The Yellow Wallpaper.”
1894.................................. Twain publishes *Pudd’nhead Wilson*.
1894.................................. Robert Frost publishes his first poem.
1895.................................. Crane publishes *The Red Badge of Courage*.
1896.................................. Death of Harriet Beecher Stowe.
1896.................................. Birth of F. Scott Fitzgerald.
1896–1897........................... Crane is on steamship, *Commodore*, carrying arms for Cuban rebels, which sinks. Crane spends 30 hours in a small boat.
1897.................................. Crane covers the Greco-Turkish War.
1897.................................. Birth of William Faulkner.
1898.................................. Crane covers the Spanish-American War.
1898.................................. Crane publishes his short story “The Open Boat,” based on his ordeal at sea in 1897. Crane also pens the short story “The Blue Hotel.”
1898.................................. James publishes *The Turn of the Screw*.
1898.................................. Gilman publishes *Women and Economics*.
1899.................................. Crane publishes “The Monster.”
1899.................................. Birth of Ernest Hemingway.
1900.................................. Death of Stephen Crane.
1902.................................. James publishes *The Wings of the Dove*.
1902.................................. Birth of John Steinbeck.
1903.................................. James publishes *The Ambassadors*. 
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Event</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1904</td>
<td>James publishes <em>The Golden Bowl</em>.</td>
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<td>1910</td>
<td>Death of Mark Twain.</td>
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<td>1911</td>
<td>Birth of Tennessee Williams.</td>
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<td>1913</td>
<td>Gilman writes “Why I Wrote ‘The Yellow Wallpaper.’”</td>
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<td>1914</td>
<td>Birth of Ralph Ellison.</td>
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<td>1915</td>
<td>Birth of Arthur Miller.</td>
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<td>1916</td>
<td>Death of Henry James.</td>
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<td>1917</td>
<td>F. Scott Fitzgerald joins the army.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1920</td>
<td>Fitzgerald publishes his first novel, <em>This Side of Paradise</em>.</td>
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<td>1920</td>
<td>Eugene O’Neill publishes <em>The Emperor Jones</em>.</td>
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<td>1922</td>
<td>Eliot publishes his most influential poem, “The Wasteland.”</td>
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<td>1922</td>
<td>Fitzgerald publishes <em>The Beautiful and the Damned</em>.</td>
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<td>1922</td>
<td>O’Neill publishes <em>The Hairy Ape</em>.</td>
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<td>1925</td>
<td>Eliot publishes “The Hollow Men.”</td>
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<td>1925</td>
<td>Fitzgerald publishes his masterpiece, <em>The Great Gatsby</em>.</td>
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<td>1925</td>
<td>Ernest Hemingway publishes his first major work, <em>In Our Time</em>.</td>
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<td>1925</td>
<td>O’Neill publishes <em>Desire Under the Elms</em>.</td>
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<td>1926</td>
<td>Hemingway publishes <em>The Sun Also Rises</em>.</td>
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<td>1926</td>
<td>William Faulkner publishes his first novel, <em>Soldier’s Pay</em>.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1927</td>
<td>Eliot becomes a British citizen.</td>
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<td>1927</td>
<td>Faulkner publishes <em>Mosquitoes</em>.</td>
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<td>1929</td>
<td>Hemingway publishes <em>A Farewell to Arms</em>.</td>
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<td>1929</td>
<td>Faulkner publishes <em>Sartoris</em>, now known as <em>Flags in the Dust</em>.</td>
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<td>1929</td>
<td>Faulkner publishes <em>The Sound and the Fury</em>, considered to be his breakthrough text.</td>
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<td>1929</td>
<td>Beginning of the Great Depression.</td>
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<td>1930</td>
<td>Eliot publishes “Ash Wednesday.”</td>
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<td>1930</td>
<td>Faulkner publishes <em>As I Lay Dying</em>, the sister text to <em>The Sound and the Fury</em>.</td>
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<td>1931</td>
<td>Faulkner publishes <em>Sanctuary</em>.</td>
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<td>1931</td>
<td>O’Neill publishes <em>Mourning Becomes Electra</em>.</td>
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<td>1931</td>
<td>Birth of Toni Morrison.</td>
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<td>1932</td>
<td>Hemingway publishes his treatise on bullfighting, <em>Death in the Afternoon</em>.</td>
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<td>1932</td>
<td>Faulkner publishes <em>Light in August</em>.</td>
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<td>1934</td>
<td>Fitzgerald publishes <em>Tender Is the Night</em>.</td>
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<td>1935</td>
<td>Death of Charlotte Perkins Gilman.</td>
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1935.......................... Hemingway publishes his treatise on hunting, *Green Hills of Africa*.
1935.......................... John Steinbeck publishes *Tortilla Flat*.
1936.......................... Faulkner publishes *Absalom, Absalom!*, an epic of the Civil War.
1936.......................... O’Neill wins the Nobel Prize for Literature.
1938.......................... Death of Sigmund Freud.
1939.......................... Steinbeck publishes his masterpiece, *The Grapes of Wrath*.
1940.......................... Fitzgerald writes *The Last Tycoon*, left unfinished at his death in the same year.
1940.......................... Hemingway publishes *For Whom the Bell Tolls*.
1940.......................... Faulkner publishes *The Hamlet*.
1941.......................... End of the Great Depression; the United States enters World War II.
1942.......................... Faulkner publishes *Go Down, Moses*.
1943.......................... Eliot publishes the poem “Four Quartets.”
1945.......................... Tennessee Williams publishes *The Glass Menagerie*.
1946.......................... O’Neill publishes *The Iceman Cometh*.
1947.......................... Williams publishes *A Streetcar Named Desire*.
1947.......................... Eliot wins the Nobel Prize for Literature.
1947.......................... Arthur Miller publishes *All My Sons*.
1949.......................... Miller publishes *Death of a Salesman*.
1950.......................... Faulkner wins the Nobel Prize for Literature.
1951.......................... Williams publishes *The Rose Tattoo*.
1952.......................... Hemingway publishes *The Old Man and the Sea*.
1952.......................... Ralph Ellison publishes *Invisible Man*.
1953.......................... Ellison’s *Invisible Man* receives the National Book Award for fiction.
1953.......................... Death of Eugene O’Neill.
1953.......................... Miller publishes *The Crucible*.
1954.......................... Hemingway wins the Nobel Prize for Literature.
1955.......................... The full body of Emily Dickinson’s poetic works is published posthumously.
1955.......................... Williams publishes *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*.
1955.......................... Miller publishes *A View From the Bridge*.
1956.......................... O’Neill’s *Long Day’s Journey into Night*, which he had written in 1945, is published posthumously.
1957.......................... Williams publishes *Orpheus Descending*.
1958.......................... Williams publishes *Suddenly Last Summer*.
1959.......................... Lionel Trilling pays homage to Robert Frost on his 85th birthday, saying that Frost belongs in the great iconoclastic tradition of American literature.
1959.......................... Williams publishes *Sweet Bird of Youth*.
1961.......................... Death of Ernest Hemingway.
1961 ......................... Williams publishes *Night of the Iguana*.
1962 ......................... Steinbeck wins the Nobel Prize for Literature.
1962 ......................... Death of William Faulkner.
1963 ......................... Death of Robert Frost.
1964 ......................... Hemingway’s *Moveable Feast* published posthumously.
1965 ......................... Death of T. S. Eliot.
1968 ......................... Death of John Steinbeck.
1970 ......................... Hemingway’s *Islands in the Stream* published posthumously.
1974 ......................... Toni Morrison publishes *Sula*.
1977 ......................... Morrison publishes *Song of Solomon*.
1983 ......................... Death of Tennessee Williams.
1986 ......................... Hemingway’s final novel, *Garden of Eden*, is published posthumously.
1988 ......................... Morrison publishes her masterpiece, *Beloved*.
1992 ......................... Morrison publishes *Jazz*.
1993 ......................... Morrison wins the Nobel Prize for Literature.
1994 ......................... Death of Ralph Ellison.
1998 ......................... Morrison publishes *Paradise*. 
Glossary

Aboriginal self: A concept defined by Ralph Waldo Emerson as an existing source of universal energy in which we all partake. This self is not in us, but rather, out in the world, and we must learn to move into it.

B'hoy: An American original character, one who challenges all niceties in pieties. The female counterpart is known as the g’hal (the gal).

Boutade: French term meaning a joke, a spoof, or a setup that partially hides its true meaning.

Brahmins: Term coined in the mid-1800s by the American writer Oliver Wendell Holmes to describe a class of New England intellectuals determined on the basis of birth, education, and scholarly pursuits.

Calvinism: Christian theology of the French church reformer John Calvin. The central Calvinist tenets include belief in the absolute sovereignty of God and the doctrine of justification by faith alone.

Classic: A work of literature having lasting significance or generally recognized worth. The canonical tests of American literature stem out of vital, often unresolvable, conflicts from their own moments in history. They are bristling with ambiguities and insights that bid to challenge the reader, in their own time, in the present day, and even in the future.

Coming of age: In American literature, an event or series of events that spurs a character to reach spiritual adulthood. These stories may or may not revolve around attainment of a character’s physical adulthood.

Cosmogony: Literally, the study of the universe’s origin. In literature, the writer’s personal theory of the universe, as reflected in his or her works.

Cosmos: As defined by Walt Whitman, a brash young man, a jaunty fellow with a robust ego.

Counterculture: A subculture, especially of young people, with values opposed to that of the established culture. Henry David Thoreau is often regarded as a major American counterculture hero.

Demiurge: The deity who fashions the world, a creative force. In literature, a character of such influential personality that he or she is an overpowering force in the story being told.

Double entendre: A word or turn of phrase having double meaning, especially when the second meaning is risqué. Ernest Hemingway’s works, for instance, revel in suggestions of dual meanings and dual sexuality.

Dualism: The division of body from spirit. Whereas most religious traditions assert that spirit is superior to body, some American writers—particularly Walt Whitman—reversed that notion in their works, insisting on the naturalness and sanctity of the body.

Dysfunction: Impaired or disorderly function of a cultural system, be it a family or a larger social group.

Empowered self: Often regarded as one of America’s worst gifts to modern culture, the concept that the individual is empowered to attain all he or she desires. Ralph Waldo Emerson presents the concept of the empowered, or “imperialistic,” self in his essay “Self-Reliance.”

Epiphany: A sudden manifestation of the meaning or essence of something or a sudden intuitive realization or perception of reality.

Epistemology: A division of philosophy that investigates the nature and origin of knowledge.

Existentialism: A philosophy that emphasizes the uniqueness and isolation of the individual experience in a hostile or indifferent universe. A frequent theme in American literature, which often stresses freedom of choice and responsibility for the consequences of one’s actions.

Expressionism: An artistic movement during the late 19th and early 20th centuries that emphasized subjective expression of the artist’s inner experience. Stephen Crane and Emily Dickinson personify this approach to writing, reconfiguring the world we know by clothing it in images and metaphors.

Feminism: A doctrine advocating the same political and economic rights for women as granted to men. Charlotte Perkins Gilman was an early feminist writer, well known for “The Yellow Wallpaper.”
Fissured self: Essentially, an existential collapse, when all one knows of the world unravels.

Geworfenheit: German term meaning that we are thrust into a world not of our own making or choosing; a sense of alienation from the world around us.

Gothic: A style of fiction emphasizing the grotesque, mysterious, and desolate.

Hagiography: A biography of saints. *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, though often criticized for being overly sentimental, became a black American hagiography that was part of opera and drama.

Impressionism: A movement in painting that originated in France in the late 19th century. Impressionist painters found many of their subjects around them rather than in history, which was then the accepted source of subject matter. Instead of painting an ideal of beauty that earlier artists had defined, the Impressionists tried to depict what they saw at a given moment. To achieve the appearance of spontaneity, Impressionist painters used broken brushstrokes of bright, often unmixed colors. The colors in Impressionist paintings have an overall luminosity because the painters avoided blacks and earth colors. The Impressionists also simplified their compositions, omitting detail to achieve a striking overall effect.

Individualism: The doctrine that society is an artificial device, existing only for the sake of its members as individuals and properly judged only according to criteria established by them as individuals.

Isolationism: A policy in which a nation’s interests are best served if the nation secludes itself from other nations and avoids forming alliances with them. In literature, this concept often has been applied to individuals, as in Ralph Waldo Emerson’s suggestion that we must “cultivate” our own earth, our own substance.

Ludic: Playful in a way that is spontaneous and without any particular purpose.

Malaise: A vague feeling of depression or illness.

Manself: A term created by John Steinbeck to describe and celebrate the human species; used in place of *men* and *women*. This manself is always struggling to make a success of his or her life and will prevail, no matter how terrible circumstances are.

Metaphor: A figure of speech in which a term is transferred from the object it ordinarily designates to an object it may designate only by implicit comparison or analogy. Metaphor allows the writer to yoke together diverse areas of experience and thought. Yet metaphor may also be suspected of falsely domesticating the world by substituting the poet’s own projections and fantasies for the “hard facts.”

Metaphysics: A branch of philosophy that systematically investigates the nature of first principles and problems of ultimate reality, including ontology and often cosmology. Also, critical or speculative philosophy.

Modernism: The 20th century saw the emergence of Modernism, which responded to the world’s complexity by asserting that the individual had the potential to achieve a broader perspective than that offered by any one society or its history. At the beginning of the 19th century, American authors struggled to convince the world that they had a history; by the 20th century, American authors, like European authors, had to grapple with more than enough history.

Modus operandi: A method of operating; a particular way of doing things.

Motif: An important and sometimes recurring theme or idea in a work of literature. Also called motive.

Nantucketer: A uniquely American hero presented in Herman Melville’s works. The Nantucketer is different from familiar examples of colonial character. Homespun in his manners, he is nonetheless ruler of the sea, hence, royalty in his own way.

Naturalism: A system of thought holding that all phenomena can be explained in terms of natural causes and laws without attributing supernatural significance to them. Also, the doctrine that all religious truths are derived from nature, not from revelation. In literature, Naturalism attempts to apply scientific theories to art.

Organicism: The concept that society is analogous to a biological organism, meaning that society’s overall organization—not the functioning of its individual parts—plays the principal role in determining its processes and destiny.
Oversoul: A spiritual essence or vital force in the universe that embraces all souls, thus transcending individual consciousness.

Perspectival narration: The literary technique of viewing society from the outside. A writer may write about a historical period in retrospect, for instance, though his or her characters do not know what events are coming.

Picaresque: A literary genre in which a rogue-hero’s escapades are depicted in a context of sharp social satire. Mark Twain’s Huckleberry Finn personifies such a character.

Poet of Babel: A term used to refer to poets who make us think that poetry could be nonsense, but rather, is the sound of the brain, the fabric of consciousness. Although poetry can be a description of the world, it can also be simply the representation of the experience of living with a brain and of sensing things, thinking things, and speaking things.

Polysemy: The existence of several meanings for a single word or phrase.

Postmodernism: The literal meaning of Postmodernism is “after Modernism”; in many ways, Postmodernism constitutes an attack on Modernist claims about the existence of truth and value. In disputing past assumptions, Postmodernists generally display a preoccupation with the inadequacy of language as a mode of communication. Inaccessible ideas and impenetrable prose also characterize many Postmodern texts, although the difficulties in this case are often intentional and reflect specific claims about the nature of language and meaning.

Puritanism: Scrupulous moral sternness, especially aversions to social pleasures and indulgences. These attitudes and worldviews stem from the doctrines and practices of the Puritans.

Realism: In art and literature, an attempt to describe human behavior and surroundings or to represent figures and objects exactly as they act or appear in life. Though attempts at Realism have been made throughout history in all the arts, the term is generally restricted to a movement that began in the mid-19th century, in reaction to the highly subjective approach of Romanticism.

Rite of passage: A genre in literature based on an anthropological concept concerning rituals that a young person goes through in growing up.

Romanticism: A movement in the literature of virtually every country of Europe, the United States, and Latin America that lasted from about 1750 to about 1870, characterized by reliance on the imagination and subjectivity of approach, freedom of thought and expression, and an idealization of nature.

Self-made man: A classic hero in American literature and history, the self-made man is successful through his own actions. Benjamin Franklin personifies the concept of the wildly successful self-made man.

Semiosis: The act of translating a word or visual signal into a cultural meaning, of taking language and turning it into meaning. In literature, the concept that words are signs of natural things, which in turn, are signs of spirit.

Sentimentalism: A tendency to express obvious or powerful feelings or emotions without appealing to reason, especially self-indulgent or nostalgic writing or expression. The Sentimental tradition is the great popular literary form of the 19th century.

Social contract: A voluntary agreement among people defining the relationship of individuals with one another and with government and, by this process, forming a distinct organized society. In the 17th and 18th centuries, the theory of a social compact among individuals of a society was linked with the doctrine of natural law.

Stereotype: An oversimplified standardized image or idea held by one person or group concerning another. In literature, a character meant to typify or conform to an unvarying pattern or manner, lacking in any individuality or depth.

Stream of consciousness: A fictional narrative technique, first used in the late 19th century to evince subjective as well as objective reality. It reveals the character’s feelings, thoughts, and actions, often following an associative rather than a logical sequence, without commentary by the author.

Symbolism: The use of symbols to invest things with a representative meaning, or to represent something abstract by something concrete.
Transcendentalism: In philosophy and literature, the belief that knowledge of reality is derived from intuitive sources, rather than from objective experience. Nearly all transcendentalist doctrines stem from the division of reality into a realm of spirit and a realm of matter. Such a division is made by many of the great religions of the world. Ralph Waldo Emerson and Henry David Thoreau are considered to embody what is known as American Transcendentalism.

Trope: A word, phrase, expression, or image that is used in a figurative way, usually for rhetorical effect. Metaphor is the quintessential trope in all of poetry.

Tuition: Learned knowledge, as opposed to intuition, innate or revealed knowledge.

Un-naming: This term refers to the literary cleansing of customary labels to install fresh perception. Emily Dickinson’s poetry typifies this sort of writing.

Vagina dentata: The teethed womb that is a sexual nightmare for the male who is terrified of what it could mean to think literally about moving into the womb.

Women’s writing: Writing in a feminist vein that features language deemed to be closer to the body. Some characteristics of this kind of writing include fluidity rather than line, openness to affect and libido, suspicion of repressive order, and attention to the somatic.
Biographical Notes

**Louis Armstrong** (1901–1971): American jazz, cornet, and trumpet player, singer, bandleader, and popular entertainer. Armstrong overcame poverty, a lack of formal education, and racism to become one of the most innovative and influential musicians of the 20th century and one of the most beloved entertainers in the world. He is perhaps best known for helping to pioneer a style known as swing, which later formed the basis for most jazz and rhythm-and-blues (R&B) music. Armstrong’s music had a profound influence on Ralph Ellison’s *Invisible Man*.

**Charles Baudelaire** (1821–1867): A leading 19th-century French poet who seized on Edgar Allan Poe’s work and career as the epitome of genius, becoming Poe’s champion and translator in France. As the founder of Symbolism in poetry, Baudelaire ensured Poe’s continued impact on poetic development.

**Catherine Beecher** (1800–1878): Sister to Harriet Beecher Stowe, Catherine Beecher wrote *A Treatise on Domestic Economy*, dedicated to “the women of America in whose hands rest the real destinies of the Republic.”

**Samuel Clemens**: See Mark Twain.

**Stephen Crane** (1871–1900): American novelist and poet, one of the first American exponents of the naturalistic style of writing. Crane is known for his pessimistic and often brutal portrayals of the human condition, along with a sympathetic understanding of character.

**Emily Dickinson** (1830–1886): America’s most well known female poet and one of the foremost authors in American literature. Dickinson’s simply constructed, acutely intellectual writings examine issues vital to humanity: the agonies and ecstasies of love, sexuality, the unfathomable nature of death, the horrors of war, God and religious belief, the importance of humor, and musings on the significance of literature, music, and art.

**Thomas Eakins** (1844–1916): Regarded by most critics as the most outstanding American painter of the 19th century and, by many, as the greatest his country has yet produced, Eakins was an admirer of Walt Whitman. He was well known for his painting *The Swimming Hole*, as well as paintings of the male body and portraits of Whitman.

**Jonathan Edwards** (1703–1758): Often called the “last great Puritan,” this theologian and intellectual authored such fierce sermons as “Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God.”

**T. S. Eliot** (1888–1965): American-born writer regarded as one of the greatest poets of the 20th century. Eliot also wrote drama and literary criticism. In his plays, which use unrhymed verse, he attempted to revive poetic drama for the contemporary audience. Eliot won the Nobel Prize for literature in 1948.

**Ralph Ellison** (1914–1994): American author and educator, one of the most influential black American writers of the 20th century. Ellison uses rich, varied, and powerful language to portray the black experience in all its vitality and complexity. His best-known work, *Invisible Man*, expounds the theme that American society willfully ignores blacks and was one of the first works to describe modern racial problems in the United States from a black American point of view.

**Ralph Waldo Emerson** (1803–1882): Emerson, the guiding spirit of American Romanticism, lays the groundwork for a key tradition in American thinking and writing in his *Essays*, written from the 1830s through the middle of the century.

**William Faulkner** (1897–1962): American novelist, known for his epic portrayal, in some 20 novels, of the tragic conflict between the old and the new South. Although his intricate plots and complex narrative style alienated many readers of his early writings, Faulkner was a towering figure in American literature during the first half of the 20th century. With Ernest Hemingway, he is usually considered one of the two greatest American novelists of his era. Faulkner was particularly noted for the eloquent richness of his prose style and for the unique blend of tragedy and humor in his works.

**F. Scott Fitzgerald** (1896–1940): American writer whose novels and short stories chronicled changing social attitudes during the 1920s, a period dubbed the “Jazz Age” by the author. He is best known for his novels *The Great Gatsby* (1925) and *Tender Is the Night* (1934), both of which depict disillusion with the American dream of self-betterment, wealth, and success through hard work and perseverance.
Benjamin Franklin (1706–1790): Printer, scientist, statesman, and author in the early 18th century, Franklin personified the American concept of the “self-made man,” particularly through his Autobiography. Franklin is particularly well known for his experiments in electricity; his launching of Poor Richard’s Almanac, the first American periodical; and his role in the Revolutionary War. His is the great American story of tireless achievement, assertion, and adult responsibility in the difficult arenas of business, government, and politics.

Sigmund Freud (1856–1938): The father of psychoanalysis, Freud articulated the concepts of the unconscious and infantile sexuality and repression and proposed a tripartite account of the mind’s structure, all as part of a then—radically new conceptual and therapeutic frame of reference for the understanding of human psychological development and the treatment of abnormal mental conditions. His conclusions affected the interpretation of much American literature during and after his lifetime.

Robert Frost (1874–1963): American poet who drew his images from the New England countryside and his language from New England speech. Although Frost’s images and voice often seem familiar and old, his observations have an edge of skepticism and irony that make his work, upon rereading, never as old-fashioned, easy, or carefree as it first appears. In its embodiment of both tradition and skepticism, Frost’s poetry helped provide a link between the American poetry of the 19th century and that of the 20th century.

Margaret Fuller (1810–1850): A 19th-century feminist writer and one of the great radical women among the Transcendentalists. Fuller was a journalist and edited Dial Magazine, working closely with Ralph Waldo Emerson. Nathaniel Hawthorne may have modeled aspects of Hester Prynne’s character in The Scarlet Letter on Fuller.

Charlotte Perkins Gilman (1860–1935): American feminist and writer, best known for her book Women and Economics (1898), which has become a feminist classic. She was born Charlotte Anna Perkins in Hartford, Connecticut. She was educated at the Rhode Island School of Design and worked as a teacher and commercial artist before devoting herself to feminism.

Nathaniel Hawthorne (1804–1862): American novelist whose works are deeply concerned with the ethical problems of sin, punishment, and atonement. Hawthorne is considered America’s first great classical writer and is particularly known for his novel The Scarlet Letter.

Ernest Hemingway (1899–1961): American novelist and short-story writer, whose style is brisk, terse, cleansed of adjectives, seemingly objective, and aimed at rendering the precise moment and feeling of experience. Hemingway’s writings and his personal life exerted a profound influence on American writers of his time; in fact, Hemingway is usually considered one of the two greatest American novelists of his era (the other being William Faulkner). Many of his works are regarded as classics of American literature.

Thomas Wentworth Higginson (1823–1911): Unitarian minister, abolitionist, and well-known 19th-century literary critic with whom poet Emily Dickinson exchanged letters seeking critiques of her poems.

Washington Irving (1783–1859): Often called the father of the American short story, Irving is best known for two stories: “The Legend of Sleepy Hollow” and “Rip Van Winkle.” His work is considered to precede early writings of the great Transcendentalists—Emerson, Thoreau, and Hawthorne.

Henry James (1843–1916): American expatriate writer whose masterly fiction juxtaposed American innocence and European experience in a series of intense, psychologically complex works. James’s work is characterized by leisurely pacing and subtle delineation of character rather than by dramatic incidents or complicated plots. His major writings, highly sensitive examples of the objective psychological novel, deal with the world of leisure and sophistication he had grown to know intimately in Europe.

Toussaint L’Ouverture (1743–1803): Haitian general, now known as “the Precursor,” and leader of the Haitian slave revolt, a 1791 black slave uprising against the French colonial regime. After France abolished slavery in the territory in 1794, Toussaint supported the French rulers of the country against British invaders and was made a general in 1795. In 1801, he succeeded, after many struggles, in liberating Saint-Domingue from French control and became president-for-life of a new republic.

Herman Melville (1819–1891): American novelist and major literary figure whose exploration of psychological and metaphysical themes foreshadowed 20th-century literary concerns. His works remained in obscurity until the 1920s, when his genius was finally recognized.
Arthur Miller (1915–): American dramatist whose works are concerned with the responsibility of each individual to other members of society. Simply and colloquially written, Miller’s plays spring from his social conscience and from his compassion for those who are vulnerable to the false values imposed on them by society.

Toni Morrison (1931–): American writer whose works deal with the black experience and celebrate the black community. Morrison’s work features mythic elements, sharp observation, compassion, and poetic language and is often concerned with the relationship between the individual and society. In 1993, she won the Nobel Prize in literature.

Eugene O’Neill (1888–1953): American playwright whose work dramatizes the plight of people driven by elemental passions, by memory and dream, and by an awareness of the forces that threaten to overwhelm them. His early plays (1916–1920) helped initiate American theater’s shift away from elegant parlor dramas and toward gritty naturalistic plays.

Edgar Allan Poe (1809–1849): Best known for his poems and short fiction, Poe is credited with transforming the short story from anecdote to art. He virtually created the detective story and perfected the psychological thriller. He also produced some of the most influential literary criticism of his time—important theoretical statements on poetry and the short story.

Sir Walter Scott (1771–1832): Scottish novelist and poet considered to be the creator of the historical and the regional novel. He may have influenced the works of Nathaniel Hawthorne.

John Steinbeck (1902–1968): American writer and Nobel laureate, who described in his work the unremitting struggle of people who depend on the soil for their livelihood. Steinbeck’s novels can all be classified as social novels dealing with the economic problems of rural labor, but there is also a streak of worship of the soil in his books, which does not always agree with his matter-of-fact sociological approach.

Wallace Stevens (1879–1955): American poet whose works deal mainly with the individual’s interaction with the outside world. Stevens used sensuous, elaborate imagery and elevated, precise word choice to express subtle philosophical themes. He frequently contrasted the bleakness and monotony of modern industrialized life with the richness of nature.

Harriet Beecher Stowe (1811–1896): American author most famous for her anti-slavery novel, Uncle Tom’s Cabin, one of the most influential American texts written by either man or woman and, possibly, the first American social protest novel.

Henry David Thoreau (1817–1862): American essayist, poet, and practical philosopher, renowned for having lived the doctrines of Transcendentalism, as recorded in his masterwork, Walden, and for having been a vigorous advocate of civil liberties, as evidenced in the essay “Civil Disobedience.”

Lionel Trilling (1905–1975): American educator and influential literary critic. For most of his career, Trilling taught at Columbia University. In his books, he used psychological and sociological methods to elucidate cultural values. One of his major concerns was the relationship between the self and society. Trilling paid homage to poet Robert Frost on Frost’s 85th birthday.

Nat Turner (1800–1831): American slave and leader of a black slave revolt in 1831. As a result of Nat Turner’s revolt, southern legislatures imposed stricter control on slaves, and the movement to abolish slavery, which had previously enjoyed some support in the South, became a northern phenomenon.

Mark Twain (1835–1910): Pen name for Samuel Langhorne Clemens, American writer and humorist, whose best work is characterized by broad, often irreverent humor or biting social satire. Twain’s writing is also known for realism of place and language, memorable characters, and hatred of hypocrisy and oppression.

Vincent Van Gogh (1853–1890): Dutch Post-Impressionist painter, generally considered the greatest Dutch painter and draughtsman after Rembrandt. He powerfully influenced the current of Expressionism in modern art. Among his masterpieces are numerous self-portraits and the well-known “Starry Night.” An admirer of Whitman, Van Gogh corresponded with the American poet.

Booker T. Washington (1856–1915): American educator who urged blacks to attempt to uplift themselves through educational attainments and economic advancement.
Walt Whitman (1819–1892): American poet whose work boldly asserts the worth of the individual and the oneness of all humanity. Whitman’s defiant break with traditional poetic concerns and style exerted a major influence on American thought and literature.

Tennessee Williams (1911–1983): American playwright and two-time Pulitzer Prize winner, whose works are set largely in the American South. As a playwright, fiction writer, poet, and essayist, Williams helped transform the contemporary idea of Southern literature. He not only paved the way for other writers but also helped the South find a strong voice, where before it had been heard only as a whisper.
Comprehensive Bibliography


Classics of American Literature
Part VI

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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 master's degree 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 are research grants from the American Council of Learned Societies and the National Endowment for the Humanities. 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 an NEH-funded program in the area of national educational reform. In 1995 he was named Brown University's best teacher in the humanities. He is the recipient of a 1998-99 National Endowment for the Humanities Award for University Teachers for his work on literature and medicine.

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Hemingway's *The Garden of Eden*: Female Desire Unleashed

**Scope:** *The Garden of Eden*, published posthumously in 1986, is a fiercely edited version of a sprawling manuscript that Hemingway worked on from the late 1940s to 1958. In it, we finally see Hemingway fully address the explosive issues of sexual dynamics, androgyny, and gender-bending that one senses "behind the scenes" in so much of his other work. Here, at last, Hemingway offers us a female protagonist of staggering proportions. Catherine Bourne resembles her "sisters" in the Hemingway oeuvre, but she expresses her own subjectivity and her own sexual desire in draconian fashion. This leads to dazzling scenes of erotic play and metamorphosis in which the male protagonist, David Bourne (a writer), passively follows her lead. The project of sexual emancipation turns out to be artistic in nature as well. As such, it stands in sharp contrast to the male prerogatives to which Hemingway has accustomed us over the years. Female desire finally and fatefully comes out of the closet, commanding an authority and announcing a program of considerable reach.

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

1. Summarize the ways in which *The Garden of Eden* is autobiographical,
2. Explain Hemingway's concept of Eden, and
3. Describe the role of sexual metamorphosis in *The Garden of Eden*.

**Outline**

I. The textual history of *The Garden of Eden* requires comment, given that what we are reading is a drastically edited version of what Hemingway wrote.

   A. In 1986 Scribner's brought out a 247-page volume entitled *The Garden of Eden*, which is what Tom Jenks, a Scribner's editor, had made of Hemingway's 1,500-page manuscript.

   1. We know that Hemingway was working on this book between 1946 and 1958 and that he was experimenting with several endings, as well as commenting on the artistic scene in Paris during the 1920s.

   2. Literary scholars have trouble viewing this text as "genuine" Hemingway, because we will never know if the author would have arranged the text in any way like Jenks did. There is also a price to pay for Jenks's excisions: The Sheldon subplot is gone, the rich commentary on artists and writers is largely gone, the fuller characterization of Marita has been sacrificed, and Catherine's own verbal poise has been diminished.

   B. This novel, like all of Hemingway's work, is rich in biographical and autobiographical echoes.

   1. This is a story of a young writer living (for a while) in a *ménage à trois* with two beautiful women—his rich and glamorous wife, who is later joined by the couple's beautiful new "friend." We can hardly miss seeing a key chapter of Hemingway's "evolution" away from Hadley toward Pauline. This shift from wife #1 to wife #2 (which possessed its own amount of androgynous sexual experiment) is further complicated by the fact that it is written twenty years after the events occurred by a writer who is himself moving from wife #3 to wife #4.

   2. The crucial new interest in androgyny and lesbianism, kept in the background in *The Sun Also Rises*, is explosively out in the open in this book. We "know" that Pauline Pfeiffer's sister Jinny was an active lesbian, that Pauline herself preferred women mates after her divorce from Hemingway, and that lesbianism was part of Hemingway's personal background, as well as the Parisian setting in which he and Pauline lived.
3. Once again, Scott and Zelda Fitzgerald can also be seen in Hemingway's work. People were struck by the noticeable resemblance between Scott and Zelda—their golden hair and stylish good looks, their similar size, their propensity to dress alike—and Hemingway's book explores such "twinship." Moreover, Catherine Bourne's fierceness, her drive for power over her husband, her economic and sexual power—all parallel what we know Ernest thought about Zelda and her relationship to Scott. Yet, Hemingway seems to sense that this "warfare" is also matched by a crucial kind of interdependence that "serves" the writer.

II. Hemingway's novel seeks to imagine and to chart the dimensions and whereabouts of Eden.

A. One form of Eden is the immediacy of the good things in life, and Hemingway is unmatched in his talent for conveying the wonderful taste of food.

B. The more compelling aspect of Eden, however, has to do with physical ease and sexual innocence, and it is here that the book's female protagonist, Catherine Bourne, stakes her claim.

1. Catherine and David are young, in love, and beautiful and spend all their time eating, drinking, swimming, and making love. He is a successful writer; she has money. They are in the South of France.

2. The first sign of impending trouble comes with a pedestrian ritual, the haircut. The project is ambitious: To sculpt the body, to see the body as the work of art.

3. Consider the parade of short-haired women in Hemingway: The wife with cropped hair in "Cat in the Rain"; Brett in *The Sun Also Rises*, who refuses to let her hair grow long, even though Romero asks her to; and Maria, whose head was shaved by fascists in *For Whom the Bell Tolls* and whose short hair is caressed by Robert Jordan as his throat "thickens." The girl with short hair, the "boyish" girl, is highly erotic in Hemingway.

4. Knowing Catherine's "sisters" still does not prepare us for the draconian lengths to which she goes to remake her identity. Here we deal squarely with androgyny and sexual metamorphosis.

5. This theme is not new either, although it exists only in fragmented form in the earlier novels. It seems as if Hemingway's women were always tempted by androgyny, by a special "fusion" with the male lover, in which each one becomes the other and loses his or her "prior" markings. Is this fusion self-pleasure or love, sexual high or pure empathy?

6. Whereas *The Sun Also Rises* labors under the sign of sexual impotence, *The Garden of Eden* explodes in sexual doing; Hemingway's style is perfectly suited to convey this.

7. The great theme of sexual metamorphosis is to be understood as both "fusion" and "confusion," of reconceiving gender roles and sexual conventions, of learning to approach sexuality "from the other side." The project sometimes seems like a desperate effort at self-recovery, as we saw in Hawthorne's bizarre tale, "Wakefield." At other times, it resembles a massive effort of reclamation, entailing markings of race and even species.

8. Hemingway's tale of sexual experiment and "alternative" sexual practices seems strangely familiar in post-1960s America, but we can trace this kind of situation further back, as well, to the pyrotechnics of the famous Rimbaud-Verlaine homosexual love affair. Moreover, the obsession with darkness and blondness harks back to the stereotypical models of blond and brunette that inhabit American literature (and male fantasies) in Cooper, Hawthorne, and Melville. Above all, Hemingway's morphological adventure calls to mind the pages of Proust and Joyce that are devoted to sexual transformation, as performance at once libidinal and verbal. One thinks of the primitivism of the early Picasso here; there is a comparable meditation about the constraints of civilization.

9. Hemingway takes his plot to the logical conclusion by providing a "swing figure," the beautiful Marita, who loves both David and Catherine, is bisexual and active with each, and functions as a weird "mirror" for all the parties.

10. The big question is: How does David—male, author—take to all this? He instigates nothing. Catherine is the female goddess and ruling shape-shifter of the text. And is Hemingway the writer?
Lecture 62

The Garden of Eden: Combat Zone

Scope: The most pungent writing in Hemingway's novel depicts the gathering warfare between David and Catherine. Some of the withering attacks on David reveal Hemingway's profound sense of his own vulnerability. This war would seem to be inevitable. After all, if Catherine takes the lead sexually, what is David’s arena? Where does he have authority? The answer is obvious: In his writing. Thus, we are witness to a struggle for control of the writing. Catherine wants David to write "their" story of sexual transformation, whereas David elects to write "African stories" about his childhood, his coming-of-age. David knows that writing is "his" terrain, but we gradually understand that his greatest African story, the tale of a fabled elephant hunt, is about the same issues of perception and fusion that were central to the sexual experiments: To see life from the other side. As the book reaches its fateful impasse, the reader is left uncertain about whether the warfare here is ultimately inimical or empowering. In putting this drama front and center, Hemingway gives us his boldest and frankest account of the warring yet interdependent forces of sexual experiment, androgyny, and creative writing that we will ever have.

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

1. Summarize the role that writing plays in creating and destroying identity in The Garden of Eden,
2. Explain the source of the "war between the sexes" according to Hemingway, and

Outline

I. Hemingway sketches the dimensions of war, just as he does of Eden.
   A. The terrain of battle is often verbal, a kind of sparring that can be hilarious or hideous.
      1. David's vocabulary (Hemingway's manner!) is targeted.
      2. In other scenes of combat, Catherine tells off David royally, essentially annihilating the entire Hemingway persona (which the author had taken a lifetime to construct).
   B. Sometimes, the terrain is economic. Here, too, Hemingway knew all too much, given the bankrolling done by so many of his wives.
      1. Catherine can be the consummate shrew, speaking words that must have been Hemingway's worst nightmare.
      2. Catherine sweetly offers to organize and market David's work (which horrifies him), but only on the condition that he drop his African stories to write exclusively about himself and Catherine.
   C. Other skirmishes entail no less than the whole Hemingway facade.
      1. Superman can be dismantled, we see. There is an amazing form of self-criticism at work here.
      2. We even learn that Mr. Savvy can't speak proper French. One senses, again and again, something confessional and purgative in this story, as if it all had to get said, at least once.

II. David finally resists Catherine, because he knows he has no authority or initiative whatsoever in the sexual arena; hence, his field of "doing" has to be writing.
   A. David's sense of being besieged can be offset only by turning to writing.
      1. This is the only terrain he can control. Here he can make sense.
      2. He elects to write the "hardest" story he can: About his own father.
      3. Writing shores David up; it is indeed his core, the place in him where no division is possible.
   B. David's artistic project consists of writing the African stories about his childhood. We see, as well, an account of the father, which calls to mind Hemingway himself, not the author's father.
      1. Catherine cannot bear this "distraction."
2. Hemingway shows us, with great brilliance, that David is "living" in his writing. We watch the story-within-the-story start to take over, to become the real terrain of David's life.

3. Writing about his childhood also allows David to recreate himself, rather than letting Catherine do it in her sexual manner.

4. The story of the elephant hunt is the core of the African material. Hemingway is after big game here, in literary terms, as he rivals Melville's whale hunt and Faulkner's bear hunt.

5. The pursuit of the elephant is rich in moral and emotional truths. It represents Hemingway's feelings about betrayal, about the ways in which the hurting heart always gives us away, makes us targets for others.

6. In a magnificent passage, we see David brooding over his crucial discoveries and revelations in the elephant hunt, and the entire project of writing is illuminated here: How do we transform event into language? How do we recapture the past? How do we understand fields of vision that are not our own? How can we make art without cheating? Such is the grandeur of writing, a la Hemingway.

III. Ultimately, predictably, war breaks out between Catherine and David.

A. Catherine does the intolerable. She goes beyond name-calling and destroys the cahiers, the notebooks where David's writing exists.

1. David is unhinged; this is the cruelest blow of all.

2. In a passage of rare male anger, David tells her he is ready to kill her.

3. Catherine may be understood as the mad Zelda Fitzgerald, who wanted to wreck her man. Or she may be Hadley Hemingway, who lost the famous cahiers of her young husband at the Gare de Lyon, which may have been the greatest trauma of Ernest's life, greater even than the war injury he suffered in 1918.

4. Finally, we may decide that the destruction of the writing is a kind of severe moral judgment meted out as punishment for precisely the sexual liberties and experiments of the story. We cannot live in the Garden of Eden. Sexual desire is understood by Hemingway to be awful, as well as irresistible.

5. Yet, as we finish this book and reflect on it, Hemingway the author, the man who created both David and Catherine, comes across as a complex and full human being.

Readings:
Essential: Hemingway, The Sun Also Rises (Scribner's, 1986), The Garden of Eden (MacMillan, 1987)

Recommended: Hemingway, A Farewell to Arms, A Moveable Feast (Scribner's, 1964); Kazin, An American Procession (Vintage, 1985); Weinstein, Nobody's Home (Oxford University Press, 1993)

Topics for Further Consideration:
1. Discuss The Sun Also Rises as a quest narrative modeled loosely on Eliot's "The Waste Land."
2. Describe how The Garden of Eden stages a war between the power of sexuality and the power of writing.
Lecture 63
William Faulkner's *The Sound and the Fury*:
The Idiot's Tale

Scope: Of all modern American writers, William Faulkner occupies a place unto himself as a giant in the field of Western narrative. His greatest novels—*The Sound and the Fury*, *As I Lay Dying*, *Sanctuary*, *Light in August*, *Absalom, Absalom!*—appeared from 1929 to 1942. These works simply reinvent the form of the novel and deliver a testament to the dignity of the human enterprise. Faulkner is tirelessly experimental, beginning with the pyrotechnics of interior monologue a la Joyce, and moving on toward a rich, often baroque, Southern vernacular idiom that is capable of great power and passion. Faulkner's impact on modern fiction is enormous. He was the seminal writer for the Latin American boom and its spate of magic realists, and he profoundly influenced the shape of the European novel, as well. Faulkner's themes range from trauma and decay in the Old South to an increasingly complex engagement with issues of race, coming of age, and adaptation in a conflicted South that is living "the nightmare of history." Faulkner's books are not easy fare for modern readers, and he has fashioned an arsenal of narrative strategies for complicating our access and involvement with his stories. The upshot of these techniques, however, is a reading experience that can be unbearably intense and galvanizing, as we "enter" the writer's fictive precincts and attempt to process the violent moral and emotional crises at hand. Given the fact that Faulkner is "situated" as a white male writer in the American South in the early decades of the 20th century, we can hardly be surprised that his views on race (and gender) stick in the craw of many critics and readers today. Hence, Faulkner's "stock" is probably less exalted now than it was a few decades ago, but even on these issues, his books are prodigiously informative.

An overview of Faulkner's career shows us a writer who was active from the mid-1920s until his death in 1962, but his masterpieces date from the period when he was, in his own words, "hot": 1929-1942. The great breakthrough text, when Faulkner becomes Faulkner, is *The Sound and the Fury* (1929). This account of a Southern family's decline opens with the most famous piece of American prose in the 20th century—the idiot's monologue. In presenting the vision and voice of Benjy Compson, Faulkner fashions a prose of lyrical beauty and startling immediacy, through which we the (jaded) readers recover something of the strangeness and violence of our world. Yet, Benjy is also an essential part of the novel's moral economy, in that Faulkner uses him to tell a simple but profound story about the loss of love. What is happening here is no less than the creation of a new kind of cogency, an affective logic of the senses and the feelings that turns out to be almost intolerably coherent, once we "enter" this field of vision. Perhaps this is the ultimate goal of art itself: To lend us eyes, to school our emotions, to lead us into worlds we cannot otherwise enter.

Objectives—Upon completion of this lecture, you should be able to
1. Describe the general arc of Faulkner's career,
2. Give examples of how *The Sound and the Fury* breaks with the conventions of narrative prose, and
3. Explain how Benjy's narration explores the Faulknerian theme of inside/outside.

Outline

I. From 1929 to 1942, William Faulkner published six of the strongest novels written in English in this century; his career spans an even longer period of time.
   A. The early Faulkner is still a regionalist writer trying to find his way, although signs of his future themes can be seen.
      1. *Soldier's Pay* (1926), Faulkner's first novel, introduces the issues of trauma.
      3. *Sartoris* (1929)—now known as *Flags in the Dust*—is the first rendition of Yoknapatawpha, that "postage stamp of soil" that Faulkner created and developed over the coming decades.
B. Then come the masterpieces, mixed with other ambitious but flawed and provocative texts.

1. *The Sound and the Fury* (1929) is the true birth of Faulkner the novelist. It is a modernist explosion, incorporating interior monologue, tricks with time, play of memory, a saga of decay, and a rendition of lost love. Faulkner referred to it as his "heart's darling," and it remains that for many American readers as well.

2. *As I Lay Dying* (1930) is the sister text to *The Sound and the Fury*. It consists exclusively of first-person vignettes recounting the astonishing events surrounding the death of Addie Bundren and the ensuing pilgrimage to get her body into the ground in Jefferson. This is Faulkner's most grotesque and philosophical story.

3. *Sanctuary* (1931) is Faulkner's potboiler, a cold, nasty, and brilliant story of sexual violence and genteel pretensions. There is much misogyny on show here, including the famous corncob rape scene. Faulkner is now beginning to see the community itself as a party to rot and violence.

4. *Light in August* (1932) is the first full entry into the problems of race, adding still more complexity to the constructs of identity and cultural scripts. This is Faulkner's "hottest" book, packed with considerable violence directed at women and blacks, yet seeking some kind of reprieve, some redemptive vision beyond the carnage at hand.

5. *Absalom, Absalom!* (1936) is an epic of the Civil War, as Faulkner broadens and deepens his canvas, learns to see his familial stories as more echoing, more extended into the past, than first appeared. Here he revisits Quentin Compson of *The Sound and the Fury* and enlists him as co-narrator in an effort to make sense of the war. This is Faulkner's most baroque novel.

6. *The Hamlet* (1940) is the most bucolic of the masterpieces, yet it too is saturated with violence and rage. This is Faulkner's first presentation of the Snopes family, the emblematic figures for the New South that he both fears and hates. Here also is Ratliff, Faulkner's mellowest and most endearing narrator.

7. *Go Down, Moses* (1942) completes the string of pearls. Faulkner referred to these as his "nigger stories" and, although that term offends, we realize that it points to the continued growth of the writer: To depict (at long last) black subjectivity.

8. Faulkner produced many other works of interest, including *Pylon* and *The Wild Palms* in the 1930s, *The Town* and *The Mansion* as final installments in the Snopes saga, the bloated allegorical disaster of *A Fable* in the 1950s, and the fine, mellow final book of rites of passage, *The Reivers*.

C. Faulkner won the Nobel Prize in 1950, but it is fair to say that his critical reputation was created, in part, by the enthusiastic reception he received in France in the 1930s. Today, his reputation is the subject of considerable debate.

1. Race is one of Faulkner's great themes, but he is rarely polemical on this issue, and his best work—like that of Twain—succeeds largely in presenting black people as humans. Like all people, Faulkner was the product of his culture. In this case, that culture was in the midst of a growing debate on race matters in the South in the early decades of this century. Black readers may well have a different view of his novels, may be less disposed to accept his portraits of black people or of a culture that is inherently racist in its assumptions.

2. Gender is equally problematic for today's readers of Faulkner. One might argue that he never created a fully successful (or "acceptable") female character, although there are some unforgettable ones, including Caddy Compson, Temple Drake, Lena Grove, and Rosa Coldfield.

3. These are serious matters, and it is instructive to read Faulkner both "with" him and "against the grain" to question a number of issues that he presents as givens.

4. Of course "reading" Faulkner at all is the greatest of our obstacles and, perhaps, the sin for which he is least forgiven. In an age of immediate gratification via video games, film, and computers, reading Faulkner can seem like a form of exotic torture. He is perhaps most politically incorrect here, by demanding of us a kind of intellectual labor and engagement that not everyone (perhaps, not anyone) is willing to put forward.
II. *The Sound and the Fury* is Faulkner's first text that is nearly incoherent, and we need to understand how and why the story is presented in this manner.

A. In this novel, Faulkner breaks with all the familiar conventions of realist narrative prose (and thus makes us see them as conventions).

1. There is no omniscient voice—just voices. Here is perspective with a vengeance, and it tells us there can be no credible panoptic vision.

2. The plot of this novel does not go forward. The fictions of Hawthorne, Melville, and Twain may present problems, but they move in a linear direction. Here, past and present are a confusing jumble. Faulkner signals the shifts from one to the other using italics. We may detect Freud here, as well, in the sense that we are always working through materials of the past, materials that "inhabit" us and "speak." This view is bleak for meaningful projects or any kind of future.

3. This type of narrative is perfectly suited to the story Faulkner wants to tell of the decay of a family and the decline of the South. The novel is about a dysfunctional family, the Compsons.

4. Most acutely, Faulkner attends to the fate of the young. He tells the story of the three Compson brothers trying to cope with the great trauma of their lives—the defection of their spunky, willful sister, Caddy. In the novel, we meet Benjy, the youngest, who is an idiot; Quentin, the eldest, who goes to Harvard and commits suicide; and Jason, the pragmatist, who stays home to grow up and become ugly.

5. Faulkner's story is simple yet complex. It is a story of the loss of love and it will be told in an astonishing way.

B. The Benjy narrative is the novel's most extreme performance.

1. How does one process this kind of prose? Is Faulkner just attempting an experiment here? Why is the book written this way?

2. Consider the first page: "Waiting for Caddy." The text restores to us the immediacy of the world before we attach labels to it.

   a. What does "through the fence" ultimately mean?

   b. Why does the golf course become a pasture?

   c. What do we know that Benjy doesn't? "Golf"? "Hitting"?

   d. What does Benjy know that we don't?

   e. Could "moaning" be a language?

   f. Who or what is "caddie"?

3. Benjy is presented as our guide to key events and characters in the novel; there is nothing incoherent about this.

4. Benjy is also the conduit for pure sensory experiences that are then passed on "live" to us as readers, as in the narration of his drunkenness.

5. Above all, Benjy is rendering a story of excruciating *loss*. Faulkner's art consists in showing—in unprecedented graphic and economic fashion—what it is that Benjy has lost.

6. The gambit of the novel is that we readers end up on the "inside," with a full understanding of what Benjy is experiencing, while seeing that the "outside" public world can never know this. The essential project here is: "Trying to say." This is Faulkner's signature.
**Lecture 64**

*The Sound and the Fury: Failed Rites of Passage*

**Scope:** In the second segment of the novel, Quentin's section, Faulkner enlists the stream-of-consciousness technique to explore the gathering drama of a young man's agonized sense of personal and cultural failure. Whereas Benjy has no rational powers and cannot distinguish (logically) between cause and effect or then and now, Quentin is the novel's tortured intellectual. His mind is effectively awash in cultural and literary baggage, in (frighteningly) large dosages of Father's counsel and philosophy, in an entire welter of do's and don't's that slug it out with the other noises in his brain, including his childhood, his tumultuous and fateful relationship with his sister, and his acute memories of failure. In this chapter, Faulkner is graphing no less than the dynamics of repression: The very system of keeping those things and events of our life "down" and out of sight, so that we can go on with the business of living. At Harvard, Quentin's past will overflow, and he will go under.

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

1. Summarize how Faulkner presents a sense of layered consciousness in Quentin's narration,
2. Explain how Quentin embodies the Faulknerian project of private and public selves, and
3. Describe the role of the past in Quentin's demise.

**Outline**

**I.** How does one go about "reading" the Quentin section? It is an interior monologue recited on his "death day."

- As with Benjy's section, the reader cannot (and should not try to) retrieve whole eggs out of the omelet. We must attend to Faulkner's presentation in its jagged lines and opaque texture.
  1. For Benjy, the words “Here, Caddy” are very important.
  2. The two scenes—Caddy in the swing with her boyfriend and her illegitimate daughter on the swing years later—frame Benjy’s experience.
  3. We have the seminal image of a little girl with muddy drawers.

- Yet, the Quentin section differs from the idiot's monologue in that it is utterly self-conscious, larded with literary and cultural references, as befits the consciousness of an intellectual. This is rougher going.
  1. As the family's crown prince, Quentin is destined for big things. He must measure up to the standards that his family and his society hold, standards that exist within him (rather than in some convenient "outside" place). He has succeeded in getting into Harvard, but he has some notable failures on his hands. He has not defended and cannot defend the Compson honor by keeping his sister, Caddy, a virgin (as the code requires). Worse still, his own attitude toward sexuality in general and Caddy in particular is deeply, tragically conflicted.
  2. In Quentin, Faulkner depicts what it feels like when the codes (*e.g.* the “manhood code”) do not fit, when your life does not measure up. Quentin’s relationship with his family is killing him. Identity is eroded.
  3. By writing "together," in unbroken prose, various layers of Quentin's experience—words spoken and heard, thoughts, and memories—Faulkner gives us the rich chorus of consciousness. The drama here is astounding and, although it looks complicated on the page, it doubtless holds true for any thinking person in real life.
    a. Consider the exchange between Mrs. Compson and Herbert Head, the suitor who is going to marry Caddy, who is secretly pregnant.
    b. Consider Faulkner's bizarre economy in getting his characters "in" this way. Mrs. Compson and Caddy are deftly contrasted as maternal figures.
c. Consider some of Quentin's locutions, such as "Father I have committed." What does this remind you of?

4. Quentin's chapter (consciousness) can be thought of as divided into at least three distinct arenas: (1) His present-day existence at Harvard, (2) specific memories that he consciously recalls, such as stories or events from the past (and these are anything but random or innocuous), and (3) unbidden but unstoppable fragments from events of the past that are now beginning to well up, initially in small pieces, increasingly in larger doses.

5. The presence and role of Father (Mr. Compson) are highly significant here, in terms of his (Mr. Compson's) own failures, as well as his values and "legacy." Consider Quentin's views on women and female sexuality and bear in mind attitudes on this subject ever since Hawthorne, James, Eliot, and Hemingway.

6. What begins to coalesce here is a portrait of profound sexual malaise, not to say terror, that is acutely focused in the ongoing liberation drama of Caddy and Quentin's inability to have an effect on it. Quentin seeks a never-never land where he can protect Caddy forever.

7. We do not see Quentin's actual suicide.

II. Faulkner's presentation of Quentin's "death-day" is especially illuminating in the dialectic it creates between "private" and "public."

A. All of us live in two worlds: The one inside our heads, where thoughts, feelings, and times past, present, and possible all mix together, and the other public space, where we walk and talk and interact with others. Other people can see only the second realm.

B. Quentin is a perfect candidate for this presentation, because he is sitting on a garbage can of past issues, events, and voices that is going to overflow. He is going to go under.

1. The most ominous sign of Quentin's impending capsizing comes when he meets the little girl whom he calls "sister." A good reader senses immediately that he is in big trouble. A major confusion of realms is beginning to take place.

2. Quentin's walk with the little girl is larded with details that suggest libidinal problems and displacements.

3. One begins to see that Quentin's public space is going out of business, that his private agenda is taking over everything and scripting everything that happens.

4. Faulkner cuts this episode with charged materials from the past. The first is a remembrance of adolescent sexual experimentation with Natalie.

5. At last we see the devastating fuller picture of the past fiasco with Caddy, the multiple failures of Quentin (to control or to "meet" his sister's sexuality), now writ large, usurping the present with their story of the past. Caddy is only seen through the tragic eyes of her brother.

6. Quentin's final memory consists of Father's jaded philosophy of "temporary"—a version of "this too will pass, will not matter." Quentin cannot live with this point of view.
Scope: Faulkner's third section belongs to Jason, the son who stayed home, the realist who has grown up as a bitter, bilious, enraged adult. Benjy and Quentin have lost love; Jason has lost a job. His jaundiced musings and adventures add an unforgettable element of black humor to the novel, as well as illustrate the title theme of sound and fury. The last segment of the novel is narrated in the third person, thereby changing entirely what the reader sees. Significantly, the last segment brings issues of community into this drama of a sick and dying nuclear family. The highlight of this chapter occurs in the Easter sermon (the whole novel is structured around Easter weekend) delivered by the black Reverend Shegog. It is here that Faulkner begins to frame his fragments and shards and to suggest, by reference to the oldest story we know of love and loss, ways in which the Compson tragedy can be understood, if not altered. We sense, as well, that the drama of consciousness itself—the *modus operandi* of the novel—is now coming into some kind of new focus.

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

1. Summarize how Jason's narration further develops the Compson saga,
2. Describe the role of the Easter sermon in Faulkner's resolution of the novel, and
3. Explain the role of the collective vision in Faulkner's sense of redemption.

Outline

I. Faulkner claimed that no section of the novel achieved what he wanted, but the Jason section has, at last, the signs and syntax of sanity. Most readers are grateful.
   A. Yet Faulkner is illustrating just how bankrupt Jason's form of clarity can be. His world is stamped by one-liners that exhibit the stranglehold of his culture, as well as the alibi to mask his own failures.
   B. Where Benjy and Quentin have lost love—lost Caddy—Jason has lost the job that he might have had if Caddy and Herbert had stayed married.
   C. Jason is a prime candidate for the book's title, because his behavior is the most manic in the novel.
      1. He furiously chases his niece, Quentin (Caddy's illegitimate daughter who is being raised by Mrs. Compson), all over town to prevent her sexual liaisons.
      2. He is losing money quickly in the stockmarket.
      3. He drives a vehicle that gives him vicious headaches.
      4. His crescendo comes when he corners a "little old man," thinking to find (the female) Quentin and her lover. The old man almost kills him.
   D. Yet Jason is conceivably one of Faulkner's greatest creations, and his vitriolic opinions provide some badly need humor for this book.
      1. Jason is not fond of Jews and is critical of Harvard and Easterners in general.
      2. Jason also has some sharp views about his own family.
      3. He is misogynistic and confused about women.
   E. Jason comes to a bad end. He has been blackmailing Caddy for money she thinks is being spent on her daughter, but is being pocketed by Jason. This money is stolen from Jason by the female Quentin when she finally bolts.

II. Ultimately, we must look to the fourth, or Dilsey, section if we are to find some kind of "order" for this tragic story.
   A. Calling this last chapter the Dilsey section is misleading, because Dilsey, the black mammy, has very few words. But why is this?

2. Dilsey's family constitutes a large black presence in this novel. They are wholesome and decent people who take care of the sick and selfish white Compsons. This is business as usual in Mississippi in the 1920s, whatever one may think of it today.

3. Faulkner looks on the blacks with a mixture of love and nostalgia. Yet he does not (cannot?) grant them subjectivity or go into their minds. They are secure, stable, and serene. They have none of the "sound and fury" that he has been graphing as the very terrain of consciousness for the Compsons. Faulkner is only interested in race as a backdrop at this point in his career.

B. This entire chapter is written in the third person, which means that we (finally) see these characters from the outside.

C. Dilsey herself is depicted in a language, however, that we can scarcely call "objective."
   1. Faulkner significantly contrasts the black mammy with the dysfunctional Mrs. Compson.
   2. The scene where Dilsey is shown making biscuit on Easter morning is sacramental.

D. The centerpiece of this section, perhaps of the entire novel, is the Easter sermon.
   1. The novel is structured over Easter weekend 1928.
   2. The visiting preacher, Reverend Shegog, is an unusual orator; his performance is filled with reversals and surprises.
   3. At a key moment, the sermon refers to "brothers and sisters," then to "breddrun and sisteren." We are to remember the Compson brothers and sister.
   4. The sermon is described as something beyond words, but what does this mean? That, after all, is the very aim of Faulkner's prose.
   5. The sermon moves far back into the past, heralding a vision of Calvary. Here, too, we cannot avoid seeing parallels with the Compson story.
   6. Ultimately, this sermon is about a kind of love that would be different from the sort that the Compsons have lost: A love that would be "giving" rather than "consuming."
   7. Dilsey seems to know that this wraps up the story of their lives.

E. Faulkner is presenting an epiphany here, a redemptive scene that focuses insistently on *vision* and "saving" love. The story of the ravenous Compsons is being illuminated.
   1. The Compson brothers have all *desired* Caddy, sought to possess her in some fashion, to prevent her from growing into maturity or pleasure.
   2. The novel is larded with images of defective "seeing," of the failure to "see" from the other side.
   3. The entire burden of the interior monologue form is to convey the inner vision, to bring the reader inside the "fence" of consciousness.
   4. What is the first person if not a fence? In Faulkner's novel, not only are the Compsons conscious of their doom, but in the words of Robert Penn Warren, their consciousness *is* the doom.
   5. The vision of the Easter sermon is a collective vision. This is how love is to be understood: To see through others' eyes. This is arguably the miracle of art.
Lecture 66

Absalom, Absalom!: Civil War Epic

Scope: Absalom, Absalom! (1936) ranks as Faulkner's richest, most baroque, and most complex novel. In this sumptuous compendium of narrative wizardry, Faulkner reconceives the family tragedy of The Sound and the Fury in larger, deeper, more historical, and more resonant terms. It is as if he now understood that all personal hurt can be seen as the surface layer of a deeper wound. In this case, the wound is the founding trauma of the United States—the Civil War. Thus, Quentin Compson and his roommate, Shreve, seek to make sense, at forty-five years' distance from the events, of the fratricidal war that altered the nation and toppled the South. The emerging story of the plantation owner, Thomas Sutpen, comes to us as a quasi-mythic event, with unmistakable echoes of the Biblical story of David and Absalom and the Greek story of Agamemnon and Clytemnestra. Unlike the legendary fables of the past, however, this bloody account of love and death, of fathers and sons, is bathed in uncertainty and riddle, refracted through a series of narrators. This approach suggests that, for Faulkner, the past is not so much a given body of material as a creative shaping venture.

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

1. Compare the thrust of Absalom, Absalom! with its contemporary, Gone With the Wind,
2. Give examples of Faulkner's uses of ancient literature as a basis for the plot of Absalom, Absalom!, and
3. Summarize how Faulkner uses modernist principles in his narration of Absalom.

Outline

I. Faulkner focuses his meditation about the Civil War on the paradigmatic fortunes of a single "cursed" family—Thomas Sutpen and his "house divided."
   
   A. Absalom is by all standards the richest, most opulent, and history-drenched of Faulkner's fictions; it can also be the most maddening, given its narrative high jinks.
      1. Faulkner elects to go beyond the nuclear family of the Compsons in The Sound and the Fury, so that he can paint more broadly and more deeply, recasting the private elements of tragedy into a cultural narrative of great scope: The Civil War, the founding trauma for the author and his country. Still, Faulkner revisits The Sound and the Fury and "resurrects" Quentin Compson.
      2. We know that the historian works by historical research, seeking empirical data from which to construct the story of the past. This will not be Faulkner's procedure.
      3. Absalom was published in 1936, the same year as Margaret Mitchell's Gone With the Wind. The contrasts here are instructive. Mitchell's romance has an omniscient narrative voice, a clear sense of past events, a forward-moving story, a set of larger-than-life figures, an immortal love story, and a sharp distinction between now and then, black and white. Absalom collapses all these distinctions and demarcations. It encompasses conjecture not certainty; a story that moves backwards, forwards, and sideways; a failure to "master" the past; and a radical uncertainty about such categories as black and white. The book is fragmentary, perhaps reflecting Faulkner's own view of history.
      4. One impact of the Civil War was to make the South into an area unlike any other part of the United States. It suffered occupation, humiliation, despoiling, and misery, as well as a lingering sense of bitterness and defeat. This is Faulkner's legacy.
      5. Faulkner bases his story on a set of conversations about the enigmatic Sutpen. Some of this talk precedes Quentin's arrival at Harvard; some of it is with his roommate, Shreve.
      6. Shreve, a Canadian, thinks the South is a circus. Faulkner is shrewdly putting his critics into his narrative. Moreover, this "conversation" between a Southerner and a Northerner reenacts the crucial drama of understanding and conflict at the core of the war.

   B. Faulkner clearly draws on Lincoln's famous speech about impending war in which he described the nation as a "house divided."
1. Faulkner devises a story that plays out all the conflicts of Lincoln's divided house: Black versus white, North versus South, and the specter of miscegenation.

2. Faulkner repeatedly referred to this novel as the story of a man who wanted sons and got too many of them—a dynastic story.

3. The novel's title clearly refers to the Biblical story of the House of David. David's son, Absalom, kills his brother, Amnon, who fornicated with the sister, Tamar. Absalom later rebels against his father and is finally killed, at which point David grieves for his death. Faulkner will replay all these elements: incest, fratricide, parricide, infanticide. And he will add race to the story.

4. Faulkner also seems to have in mind the Greek story of Agamemnon, who sacrificed his daughter for success in the Trojan War. This transgression led his wife, Clytemnestra, to plan his murder, which was then avenged by the two children, Electra and Orestes. Many echoes abound here, e.g. the black girl Clytemnestra.

5. The final "house" here is our own—the home of the brave. Faulkner's story is as American as it is Southern, and his plantation owner, Sutpen, resembles Fitzgerald's Gatsby. Like Gatsby, Sutpen is a man with a dream/design, a man from humble origins who becomes a colossal success. Faulkner is especially interested in the kinds of "innocence" at play here.

II. Faulkner is the modernist in his complex awareness of how much mediation exists between us and the past. We cannot simply "call it up."

A. The novel opens with Quentin Compson called in by the spinster Rosa Coldfield in Jefferson, Mississippi, in September 1909, just before going to Harvard. Rosa wants to tell Quentin about Sutpen.
   1. Rosa seems haunted, virtually inhabited by this man, and we sense she needs to "deliver" him. Hence, Sutpen bursts on the scene as a ghost.
   2. His "arrival" (both in the novel and in Jefferson) is coded in terms that remind us of genesis. Why? We shall see frequent descriptions of strange characters that seem to come out of nowhere onto the scene.
   3. As Quentin listens to the old lady, he tries to process what she is saying. We do too, and we note that a mix of factual information is given, but it is larded with huge gaps and holes. The novel presents an enigmatic search for origins.
   4. Rosa vents her rage which is still alive after forty-three years, yet her exaggerations—"her" Sutpen is an ogre, a djinn, a demon—are an eloquent index of what this man has done.

B. Rosa's narrative is followed by the more nuanced, stately account of Mr. Compson, whose father knew and befriended Sutpen.
   1. The chief obstacle that needs explaining is a murder. We know that Sutpen's son, Henry, met a young man, Charles Bon, at the University of Mississippi, brought him home to Sutpen's Hundred, and encouraged his courtship of the daughter, Judith. But, at the outbreak of the war, Sutpen forbade the marriage of Charles and Judith, causing Henry to break from his father and go with Charles to New Orleans. Both young men enlisted.
   2. This account is coherent, whereas Faulkner's rendition is much rougher going. His narrative emphasizes conjecture and guesswork, yet strangely, this authenticates his story.
   3. In 1865, when the war is over, Henry and Charles make their way back to Sutpen's Hundred, where Henry shoots Charles at the gate. Why?
   4. Mr. Compson's elegant version of these events sketches for us the backgrounds of Henry and Charles. One is a homespun, angular, straight, Mississippi country boy; the other is a sensual, worldly, sophisticated, endlessly seductive young man from New Orleans. We also learn that Charles already has a wife and child. His wife is an octaroon—one-eighth black—and his son is one-sixteenth black.
   5. Mr. Compson acknowledges that his account is insufficient and he states the enormous challenge of ever making sense of the past. How can we really know what happened when the parties are dead? The rational, analytic approach is doomed.
   6. Still, this nuanced narrative of the two young men is rich fare, with beautiful and moving sequences.
7. But Faulkner seems to revel in putting obstacles between us and events, overtly complicating our access to the story. What actually happens to our reading experience when we are obliged to negotiate Faulknerian techniques? How should we read material like this?
Lecture 67

Absalom, Absalom!: The Languages of Love

Scope: In this lecture, we will attempt to understand why Faulknerian prose is crafted as it is. His narrative is intentionally disjointed, filled with delayed disclosures, informed at every stage by an imperious drive to keep the reader guessing, to hold off the final information, to make us process long bouts of language before knowing exactly what the take is. Yet, this "projective" prose is matched by other styles as well, and nothing is more spectacular than the central chapter of this novel, devoted to Rosa Coldfield's dithyramb to love. The embattled spinster of the book's beginning now comes across as its goddess of human touch and sexuality, as she celebrates the giddy promise of youth and desire. This promise came to nought, but it existed nonetheless. Faulkner is asking a difficult question here: What is the status of desire, of all those projects of our lives that do not come to fruition? Do they belong in history? How do we know about them? This is no idle issue; it is crucially connected to the fall of Sutpen, even of the South.

Objectives—Upon completion of this lecture, you should be able to
1. Explain Faulkner's use of "false alternatives."
2. Summarize the respective roles of class and race in Absalom, Absalom!, and
3. Summarize how Rosa, a virgin, comes to represent the sexual principle of the novel.

Outline

I. Faulkner's style in this novel is awesomely reader-intensive.

A. One of his favorite tricks is to keep us guessing, to hold off right up to the end. Such prose produces a narration of extended expectations.

B. Another equally striking feature is Faulkner's use of "false alternatives." He is a master of the "not this . . . but that" phrase, forcing us to process images that are not true. He opens up the utterance of narrative.

C. A final noteworthy aspect of Faulkner's prose is his proclivity for "bypass," for stopping in mid-sentence with something and finishing it later. This technique reflects a prodigious refusal of closure.

   1. Consider, for example, the crucial scene in which the boy Sutpen is initiated into the structures of class and race. Faulkner narrates this determining encounter in a very unusual way. He is committed to packing in as much verbal material as possible before wrapping up his thought.

   2. Sutpen is becoming aware of himself as white trash. This is an extended primer about what class means. Faulkner engages in a series of delayed disclosures.

   3. This enables both the character and the reader to gain a "reverse" perspective.

II. The crown jewel of Absalom or, at the least, its "heart," is the fifth chapter, which is written entirely in italics and devoted to Rosa Coldfield's dithyramb to love.

A. Rosa punctuates this sequence with two phrases: "What they will have told you," and "what they cannot have told you." She is talking about the mission of literature to get onto the page precisely those things that elude history or any form of empirical notation.

   1. It is crucial that Rosa's memories take place when she was fourteen; i.e., at puberty, able to produce life. That is, in some sense, what she is going to do.

   2. This chapter is the book's tribute to—indeed, its creation of—a green world, a lyrical garden. The dominant metaphors here are "seed" and "urge." We are being told about the sources of life.

   3. Rosa treats us to the two great aborted creations of her life: Her "love" for Charles Bon (whom she never saw) and her willingness to love Thomas Sutpen. Again, what status can such transactions have? How much of our lives exist in terms of what didn't happen? What is the role of "possibility"?

   4. The imagery of seeds is combined with that of life and desire. Very elemental forces are in play. Rosa's life is written as a garden that was never seeded.
5. This belief in creation is inseparable from the purposes of literature. Rosa speaks to us about the great redemptive force of this story of war—what "might have been." And, in this story, what might have been is more true than truth.

6. Rosa, the book's grim virgin, has the imagination of sexuality and touch. Her speech about the power of human touch is a philosophical marvel, because it inverts our pieties about mind versus body and suggests that only physical touch will bring down the vicious codes that keep us apart. Here, too, we are learning something crucial about the doings and misdoings of the Sutpen saga.

7. Rosa's celebration of love is not psychological but elemental, as basic as photosynthesis and the life of plants and animals. This is also a startling form of writing, a use of language that is at loggerheads with our ordinary discursive prose. Sutpen's legalistic thinking is its precise opposite number.

8. Rosa is, as we've seen, the sexual principle, and this carries all the way into her storytelling, her involvement with the events at Sutpen's Hundred.

9. Isolated in the middle of the novel, Rosa's section, like Rosa herself, stands alone, yet it stamps the novel. She speaks of a "world of living marriage," of a "marriage of speaking and hearing." These lessons will bear fruit in the forthcoming narrative efforts of Quentin and Shreve.

10. Finally, at the book's close, we follow Quentin out to Sutpen's Hundred with Rosa, where he meets the still-living ghosts of this saga. This is a key moment, in which teller and tale encounter each other. Quentin meets Henry Sutpen. Faulkner is up to the challenge. Even here, we may be mystified about what is ultimately happening.
Absalom, Absalom!: The Overpass to Love

Scope: If Rosa Coldfield's impassioned paean to love occupies the center of the novel, it remains for the two youthful narrators living in the present, the Mississippian and the Canadian in their Harvard dormitory, to ultimately come to terms with the Sutpen saga. In doing so, they epitomize the novel's deepest concerns—how we process the past, what we bring "with" us when we enter the lives of other people and other times—and their joint narrative heroics constitute Faulkner's noblest utterance about what literature portends. The story imagined by these two boys posits love in each crucial gap of the Sutpen story. We now see a horribly coherent gathering of events, a tragic repetition of blindness and egoism, based on the refusal to grant full humanity to others, even if those others are your own blood kin. The fratricidal war comes home to us here in the account of a man killing his brother, because their father could not say, "my son." This dark interpretation of events is also richly satisfying, yet we see it to be the result, not of some merely imaginative or cerebral act, but of what Faulkner memorably calls "the overpass to love."

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

1. Describe how Quentin and Shreve function as symbols of the past,
2. Explain how Faulkner's insistence on "the overpass to love" still leads to a grim ending, and
3. Summarize how miscegenation, not incest, is at the real heart of the novel.

Outline

I. The joint activity of Quentin and Shreve may be fruitfully regarded as a "marriage of speaking and hearing."
   We shall see the fruits of this marriage.
   
   A. The last four chapters of the novel are set in a Harvard dormitory and consist of the conversation between Quentin and Shreve as they piece together the Sutpen story.
      1. First, the two boys, who are from different parts of the continent, must move beyond the mockery exhibited in Shreve's initial comments on the South.
      2. In a memorable passage, Faulkner positions the youths geographically, unmistakably placing them in their symbolic roles.
      3. We are also meant to grasp the growing intimacy between these two roommates as they get ready for bed on a cold New England night.
      4. Their storytelling is astonishingly dialogic. We might reflect on how crucial dialogue is in this story and how closely related to gender it is. Men's conversations are easy and rewarding; women are invariably depicted as alone. Moreover, the book's most passionate interest is extended toward male relationships and conversations.
      5. As a logical consequence, the supreme categories of intimacy in Absalom, Absalom! are those of father and son, brother and brother. This is what the story has been concealing: Quentin Compson has traveled to Sutpen's Hundred with Rosa Coldfield and learned that Charles Bon is Thomas Sutpen's son. Charles is Henry Sutpen's brother. The mystery of the murder, the fratricide really, is beginning to come into focus, but only just beginning.
      6. What is central in the dialogue between Quentin and Shreve is not so much "information" as such, but the more crucial question: How does information become moral knowledge? How do we move from facts to understanding? What is required is more than curiosity or research. Faulkner calls it "the overpass to love" in one of the most beautiful passages in all of fiction. The implications of this position in terms of ethics, narrative, and history are enormous. Love is posited as the ultimate (and only) access to others—others in the past, others in the present. History itself as research and information is reconceived.
7. It is also crucial that this stipulation of love must be present in the narrative scene itself, must ultimately animate and drive the dialogue, generate the story. Quentin and Shreve must, at least momentarily, experience love, if they are then to posit it as the missing ingredient of the Sutpen story. The narrative performance is beginning to emerge as a symbolic corrective to the carnage of the past.

8. Rosa Coldfield is remembered in these exchanges, especially in her passionate conviction that truth has nothing to do with empirical data and testable postulates; truth is something we make. Think about that: Truth, at least those truths that matter, is something we make. The entire scientific tradition takes a beating here.

B. The story imagined by Quentin and Shreve, like those imagined by Rosa and Mr. Compson, resembles the narrators themselves.
   1. "Their" version of Charles Bon is as a young man who wants nothing so much as touch (shades of Rosa Coldfield!) and recognition from his father.
   2. This Charles Bon, who desires only to be recognized as a son, brings the Sutpen story into a dreadful kind of coherence, because we can now see the horror of Sutpen's design, the awful propriety of his life. Sutpen encountered a closed front door in his childhood and, out of his hurt, drew up his design to become the big man in the big house who then closed the same door to his own son. This is more than "the birds coming home to roost." It is the repetition of a tragic and inhuman crime: Not recognizing the humanity of others.
   3. Yet, Quentin and Shreve make this story unbearably poignant by inserting love in each relationship. Their Charles Bon would have left, abandoned the scene, if his father had recognized him. The formerly Greek story of fate is turned into a "might have been" of freedom and choice and a Christian story of transgression.

II. Faulkner's interest, as a writer, as a Southerner, and as a human being, is in how we can get from the present to the past.
   A. The dominant motif in this story of "overpass" is that of doors, closed doors that wall us off.
      1. Rosa's childhood is depicted in these terms.
      2. We may understand the secrets of the past as being behind doors we cannot open.
      3. Of course, Sutpen's determining life experience is that of standing in front of a door to a mansion and being told to come around the back way. This is the fundamental experience of exclusion that he then inflicted on his own son.
   B. But the novel is no less committed to opening these doors, to moving into the past and into others.
      1. At some absolutely basic level, this is what history and literature are about: How can words move us into the past and into others? Can it be done?
      2. Faulkner's work, which appears to revel in inside information and interior monologues, takes its own pulse here.
      3. In a spellbinding passage, Faulkner enlists the oldest trope of all to show our fluidity, our circulation into other lives—blood.
      4. The novel reaches its moral and narrative crescendo when we witness Quentin and Shreve make their fateful entry into the past of forty-five years earlier. The Harvard students enter the Civil War. As they now close in on Thomas and Henry Sutpen and Charles Bon, they will make/discover the awful secret that accounts for the murder at the gate. They will at last understand why a father cannot recognize his son, why a brother shoots a brother. Miscegenation, not incest, is at the heart of the tragedy.
   C. As beautiful and inspirational as the overpass to love is, it also gives real pause. The novel closes darkly indeed. Love does not carry the day. We see the collapse of this "marriage of speaking and hearing," as the two inspired storytellers come apart in anger and anguish. We see the impossible bind of Quentin Compson, doomed to die before the book even began, doomed now again by the South and his feelings toward it.

Readings:

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**Topics for Further Consideration:**

1. Discuss the importance of Caddy—morally and structurally—in *The Sound and the Fury*.
2. Explain what views on history and historiography are put forth (or implied) in *Absalom, Absalom!*.
Lecture 69

The Grapes of Wrath: American Saga

Scope: Whereas John Steinbeck is a towering figure in the minds of most literate Americans of a certain age, his reputation in the academic world has suffered considerably over the years. Steinbeck's great work stems largely from a single decade, the 1930s, the time when he published his most endearing shorter pieces, Tortilla Flat and Of Mice and Men, closing with his masterpiece, The Grapes of Wrath, in 1939. Steinbeck's mix of folklore, politics, and moral indignation does not sit well with all readers, and his depictions of a bygone America have not always weathered the passing of time. Yet Steinbeck will be remembered as a California scribe, as the man who told the story of the American dream of going West, of the promised land that seems to be American destiny. In The Grapes of Wrath he offers us unforgettable images of a key chapter in our national history: The crisis of the Depression, the ingredients of a national disaster meted out by an economic order turned monstrous, the joint plights of the Okies on the road and the migrant workers in California. The depiction of the Joad family's pilgrimage across America ends up being a story about our relation to the land and our relation to each other. Steinbeck's themes of upheaval and brutality, of the violence of both nature and the economic system, are timeless, and his voice, which captures the accents of both rural America and life on the road, continues the Whitman legacy, but in a new key: Pungent, proud, and hurt.

Published in 1939, The Grapes of Wrath became a literary sensation overnight, causing both jubilation and protest and selling over 430,000 copies in its first year. Steinbeck captured a key moment in our history—the uprooting of hundreds of thousands of people by the Depression, especially the Okies who were chased off their farms in the dust bowl. The pilgrimage of the Joad family to California is presented by Steinbeck in a variety of ways: As documentary testimonial, based on current events of the 1930s; as convulsion and cataclysm of the American economic and social order; and as a chapter in the American dream of moving West, seeking to return to the Garden. Above all, Steinbeck bears witness to the destruction of an earlier mode of life, an earlier covenant between man and the land, annihilated by the coming of a new industrial paradigm.

Objectives—Upon completion of this lecture, you should be able to
1. Summarize the ways in which The Grapes of Wrath is a "documentary" novel,
2. Describe the role of the land in Steinbeck's novel, and
3. Explain how The Grapes of Wrath is a retelling of the story of the Civil War.

Outline

I. The Grapes of Wrath, published in 1939, was an explosive literary event.
   A. The novel was second only to Uncle Tom's Cabin in its record sales, yet it incited violent reactions and repudiations in both California and Oklahoma.
      1. In California, there was a move to stop filming of the novel by John Ford; it was routinely labeled "obscene."
      2. Other books and articles were quickly published to rebut the scathing story it told about farmers' and workers' conditions.
      3. However, Franklin D. Roosevelt and Eleanor Roosevelt both vindicated the vision of Steinbeck's novel.
   B. Steinbeck's career took a decisive turn after this publication, because he left California. Almost all his earlier books had dealt with the vision of California as a kind of Eden.
      1. Whereas earlier books were grounded in California, The Grapes of Wrath focused on the epic struggle of getting there, of crossing the United States to come to the Promised Land.
      2. After he left California, Steinbeck continued to write, and he achieved celebrity status even if he would never quite reach the same level in his work. He finally received the Nobel Prize in 1962.
3. It makes sense to see him as the great chronicler of the Depression, of the convulsive social changes brought about in the 1930s.

II. We can read *The Grapes of Wrath* as an epic saga of America in this period.

A. The successive crop failures in the Panhandle, the phenomenon of the dust bowl, the displaced farmers, the families on the road, the plight of the migrant workers in California—these are the ingredients of a rich and desperate story.

B. Steinbeck's inspiration and practice owe a great deal to the use of documentaries in this period. He worked closely with the Farm Security Administration and was familiar with government reports and photographic documentation, as a journalist covering strikes in California.

1. Documentary practice tends to look scientific and objective—ocular proof for the argument at hand—but it is intended to move people's emotions as well.

2. This style flourishes in moments of social crisis, and it seeks to adumbrate a new social order.

C. Steinbeck has been much criticized for his sentimentalism, editorializing, and mushy philosophizing.

III. *The Grapes of Wrath*, however, clearly embodies a perspective and an imperative that go beyond documentary criticism. The novel tells of the great move westward, which is understood as a spiritual journey toward a better world. Steinbeck termed it “westering.”

A. The pilgrimage of the Joads can be interpreted as a form of "pilgrim's progress," or the homecoming in Homer's *Odyssey*, or the search of the Jews for the Promised Land, or simply the return to Eden.

B. California may well be thought of as a candidate for Eden, and the early references to it, made by Oklahomans who had never been there, allude to its natural grace.

C. Yet, Steinbeck's story is about the destruction of Eden, not so much by God's indictment as by social and political forces. The novel is "Old Testament" in its indictment of California as a failed paradise. The land produces great riches, but we only produce a harvest of wrath.

IV. *The Grapes of Wrath* is a formidable ideological diatribe, but it is also a formidable verbal artifact, and this aspect of Steinbeck's writing is noteworthy. The story treats of the dispossessed who labor, almost no better than slaves.

A. One of the central tenets of the book is the bond between the farmer and the land, a bond that is destroyed by the capitalist system of ownership and by the coming of the machine. Steinbeck finds a remarkable metaphor to convey this act of destruction.

1. Tractor and harrow blades perform “surgery.”

2. Seeders as “iron penes” rape the land.

B. We soon understand that the American economic order, with the bank as its central institution, is another form of machine that monstrously devours human beings, while remaining soulless. This is the overriding insight of the 1930s. The writing is elegiac in its portrayal of the broken covenant with the land.

C. The book urges us to see that the land is inseparable from the life of the people who live on it (as opposed to those who may "own" it).

1. Living and dying on a place constitute a new form of ownership, whether or not the banks acknowledge it.

2. The Joads' friend, Muley, refuses to leave the land. We see that the land becomes a strange sort of "text," a place where this man's life is written.

3. Steinbeck is showing us that "things" are resonant, are "storied."

4. The question then is: Is this not a form of self-mutilation?

5. Steinbeck's long novel, with its grotesquely loaded-down cars traveling Highway 66, carrying multiple generations and their earthly belongings, tells an American story we may not like to recognize—a story of dispossession. In the war stories of Hemingway in the 1920s or in our contemporary TV reports on war-torn Bosnia and Africa, we are accustomed to seeing entire groups of people displaced with their belongings on their backs. But does this happen in America?
6. Steinbeck's America of the 1930s is a place of border guards, a "United States" with considerable variation and suspicion from state to state. His book is a retelling of the Civil War, but now understood as the warring relations between landowners and migrant workers, between people and the authorities.
Lecture 70

John Steinbeck: Poet of the Little Man

Scope: Although he has been maligned as a superficial writer who deals in stereotypes rather than credible characters, Steinbeck has a kind of bite and pungency that are remarkable. His people possess a rich vein of humor, and they are wise about strategies of survival. John Ford's famous film of *The Grapes of Wrath* focuses entirely on the travails of the Joad family, but the novel itself is more stereophonic. It cuts the story of individuals with a more documentary, panoramic narrative of "America," giving us the collective voice of a nation and the systems that govern it. We hear the song of Highway 66, the voices from the car salesmen and the diners along the road. Continuing Walt Whitman's "song of America," Steinbeck moves from nostalgia to a call to arms; yet his political program is informed by a sense of reality, of the pride and dignity of the little man who believes in individualism first and foremost. Could one move beyond this belief? In the figures of the ex-preacher, Casy, and the matriarch, Ma Joad, Steinbeck sketches his new belief systems.

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

1. Give examples of Steinbeck's expert use of the vernacular,
2. Explain Steinbeck's complex attitude toward socialism in *The Grapes of Wrath*, and
3. Summarize the "new paradigm" the writer offers by the end of the novel.

Outline

I. Steinbeck is often slighted as facile and superficial, as incapable of giving us complex human figures. Yet, his people are uncommonly vivid at times. Perhaps our notions of "depth" are misplaced.
   
   A. Nowhere is Steinbeck's pungency more on show than in the direct and vibrant speech of his country folk.
      1. Grandpa Joad is a feisty fellow that no reader will soon forget.
      2. Casy, the ex-preacher, the man who will carry much of the book's ideological baggage, is also presented as a man of the people with a body and appetites to go with the role. Is this a new view of preaching?
      3. Tom Joad upbraids a self-pitying man with one eye in a wonderful expression of the vernacular.
   
   B. These country people are rich in metaphors and homely idioms to express significant social and political truths.
      1. Casy knows that the country is sick, and he knows how to "say" that sickness.
      2. Steinbeck is good at overhearing bits of conversation and rendering the poetry of small talk and reminiscence.

II. The narrative strategy of *The Grapes of Wrath* is contrapuntal. The central story of the Joad family is sandwiched by "universalizing" chapters about life in America. Here is the documentary Steinbeck, the panoramic observer, and the remarkable ventriloquist.
   
   A. We discover the poetry of Highway 66, which will remain with us in American culture via such singers as Bob Dylan.
   
   B. Steinbeck is a cultural historian. He records voices and echoes almost like a Greek chorus, giving us ultimately a kind of American quilt.
   
   C. We can listen to the harmony and cacophony of capitalism itself in Steinbeck's evocation of the used car lots and the diners. We hear slogans, jingoism, greed, but music nonetheless.
   
   D. The evocation of Americans on the road reminds us of Whitman, conveying an image of multicultural America, an America of remarkable variety and color.
   
   E. The author's strong political opinions and indictments are not hushed in these chapters as he blasts the excesses and evils of "business."
1. The businessman is dispatched rather brutally.
2. Steinbeck's song of the earth can be embarrassingly purple and inflated.
3. The political vision frequently comes across as trumped up, jingoistic, and naive. These are real problems.

IV. The appeal of *The Grapes of Wrath* is inseparable from its profound sense of human dignity in tough times. If Hemingway set out to describe "grace under pressure," Steinbeck wants to show the heroism of little people with hearts.

A. Like Faulkner, Steinbeck understands pride. Taking charity can destroy the spirit.

B. Hence, the government camp, Weed Patch, emerges as the vision of dignity. Based on a real camp, it embodies most of the political principles Steinbeck is promoting—free access to resources, self-policing, responsibility, group ownership, and guaranteed decency.

C. Yet, Steinbeck has no illusions that such a "socialist" model will be easily accepted by the common people. His book is about the need for a "new paradigm" to come into being.

1. Pa Joad is not likely to be converted, no matter how many hard knocks he has had.

2. Casy, however, begins this novel knowing that the old principles no longer work and that a new vision is necessary. As a preacher, he wants to reject notions such as "sin" and articulate a view of salvation that is focused on this life, not some other life. He is compared, significantly, to Jesus, in his ruminations.

3. The book's supreme survivor and fount of strength is its matriarch, Ma Joad, whose values and authority come increasingly into play as the plot unfolds. Steinbeck, rarely credited for his women characters, is making a powerful gender argument here. Ma Joad comes to understand that men and women see the world differently; she is the voice of continuity, an embodiment of female wisdom.
Lecture 71

_The Grapes of Wrath:_
Reconceiving Self and Family

**Scope:** In giving his book an overtly religious title, Steinbeck urges us to see his social fable in the broadest possible terms. This story of brutal economic and political conditions, in which a representative family is repeatedly coerced by inhuman and evil forces, asks to be read as a story of death and birth. The death is of much that is traditional, but perhaps the birth is of something new and redemptive. Will the revenge implied by the title actually come? Does injustice cease? Is there a reward for the innocent? Wisely, Steinbeck refrains from answering these questions, but we do measure just how corrupt his California Garden of Eden is. We also measure, with the help of Casy and Ma Joad and Tom Joad, the makings of a new vision. Casy, restlessly seeking a new doctrine, aware that the old covenants are broken, becomes a social and political activist, urging a new collective philosophy. He is unmistakably outfitted with Christ-like echoes. Tom, the book's central example of a "good man," is gradually converted to Casy's political vision as well, and the scenes between Tom and his mother spell out the implications of this new humanism. Yet, the book's most notorious sequence is the closing scene in which Rose of Sharon delivers a dead child but then offers her milk to a dying stranger. It is here that the family paradigm is stunningly reconceived.

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

1. Summarize the role of Jim Casy as a redemptive figure in the novel,
2. Explain the religious symbolism behind the relationship between Ma Joad and Tom, and
3. Explain how Rose of Sharon symbolizes Steinbeck's sense of the larger human family.

**Outline**

I. Steinbeck's title is ominous in its suggestion that there will be revenge and retribution. Can this be delivered? What kind of fiction is this?
   A. Steinbeck chronicles with utmost rigor the onslaught of injustices and coercions visited upon the Joads and, indeed, upon all the victims of the times. We see the systemic nature of this misery, as well. We see the denaturalization of God's plan.
   B. Repeatedly, the book hints at awesome changes to come, at the day of retribution. But how can such a Last Judgment be enacted in a realist novel? Can God's plan be actualized?

II. Steinbeck's key figures come to a new vision and realize a destiny they had not foreseen.
   A. Jim Casy, who has the initials of Jesus Christ, goes on to play out the role for which he is named.
      1. Casy gradually moves from man of thought to man of action, realizing that salvation is for this life.
      2. At a key moment, Casy makes his existential move—delivers himself to the police—to save Tom.
      3. We see Casy, last and fatefuly, as leader of the political agitators, brutally slaughtered by the police, seeming more and more like Jesus. Here, indeed, is Steinbeck's version of Jesus: A simple man who tried to change things.
   B. Casy's own evolution serves as a lead-in to the equally significant changes taking place in the central protagonist of the novel, the level-headed Tom Joad. His stint in prison has taught him the necessity of discipline and patience.
      1. Ma Joad understandably worries about whether prison has brutalized her son, made him "mean" in some definitive fashion.
      2. Over and over, Tom resists violence, tries to keep in his rage; he is sorely tempted, however.
      3. Witnessing Casy's murder catalyzes Tom's own life. He immediately avenges Casy's death by killing the murderer.
4. Tom delivers the book’s most stirring speech about the reality of spirit and the need for a new kind of individualism—one committed to the lives of others. In this moment, the Emersonian oversoul receives its political baptism.

5. Ma Joad's intense emotional bond with her son resonates throughout this novel, and we see echoes of Mary and Jesus in their encounters. On the lam, living now in a culvert, Tom is visited by Ma Joad in a moving scene. Steinbeck writes these scenes at the top of his form. Here, too, is a picture of family that haunts American fiction.

III. Ultimately, The Grapes of Wrath sets out to reconceive the family.

A. Ma Joad's purpose throughout the narrative is to keep her family together, but we gradually realize that this cannot be done.
   1. Early on, Pa suggests the family split up, and Ma furiously upbraids him.
   2. Later, she strikes the same note, urging Tom to stay.
   3. Yet she, too, comes to understand that something new and strange is coming into being. This story of suffering both bursts and "remakes" the family.

B. The novel opens with drought and closes with flood. Steinbeck may be echoing Eliot's "The Waste Land," but he has real-life places and events to build on, such as the dust bowl and the California floods. Yet, his purpose is clearly biblical. The flood comes as God's final test.
   1. Once again, what can the puny individuals do? They can work. The scene of the men trying to build a dike to prevent the flooding of their precarious life in the boxcar is a radiant image of human labor.
   2. This account of men in labor is rigorously cut with an account of a woman in labor—Rose of Sharon trying to deliver her baby. Like the men who cannot prevent the flood, she will fail, giving birth to a dead baby, a "mummy." It would seem that the story of the family reaches its lowest point here. The birth of a dead child is the very language of doomsday and apocalypse.
   3. Once again, Steinbeck shows us that the concept of family encompasses more than the blood relations we have. Ma takes Rose of Sharon out of the flooded boxcar onto higher ground, into an abandoned barn that begins to resemble a manger. There Rose gives her milk to a starving older man she does not know. The human family is remade. The milk of human kindness is the fluid that remakes the world.

Readings:
Essential: Steinbeck, The Grapes of Wrath (Viking, 1958)

Topics for Further Consideration:
1. Respond to the charge that Steinbeck's work is weakened by superficiality, filled with stereotypes and empty or inflated rhetoric.
2. Discuss the rationale of Steinbeck's contrapuntal strategy for The Grapes of Wrath. Why does he juxtapose the story of the Joads with chapters that speak of "America"?
Lecture 72

Invisible Man: Black Bildungsroman

Scope: A half century after its publication, Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man* is regarded by many as a milestone in American literature, even as a candidate for the greatest novel of the century. Yet, Ellison's depiction of a black man's coming of age in America has not always had an easy reception. When it appeared, with its sophisticated modernist techniques of parody, allusion, and myth, many critics—especially critics of the left and scholars of the "social realist" school—felt that the book had no moral bite to it. They charged that the work catered to an elitist, academic literary public, while abandoning the crucial struggles of black people, as seen (for example) in the work of Richard Wright. Ellison's literary "ancestors" are indeed Eliot, Joyce, and company, but he has adapted their formalist experiments to his own enterprise: The fashioning of a rich, multilayered narrative language to "speak" the black story that had gone untold. At stake are the competing claims of race and class, each offering an alternate version of history and, indeed, of language. *Invisible Man* is an ambitious, even epic, undertaking. It situates its protagonist's search for identity in an American landscape that includes innumerable voices, from South and North, black and white, country and city. This modern *Bildungsroman* possesses a rare verbal exuberance, incorporating song, joke, sermon, doctrine, myth, jive, and blues. Ellison is the great musician of American literature, and his novel ushers jazz itself—the improvisational art of our century, created by black artists like Louis Armstrong—into our narrative tradition.

Ellison's *Invisible Man* appeared at a moment when Richard Wright's *Native Son* seemed to epitomize the goals of black writing. Wright's work was a tragic, brilliant account of conflict, depicted in a largely "social-realist" mode. Ellison's extravaganza, replete with allusions and echoes from the entire Western tradition, seemed too belletristic for many critics and readers. Yet, Ellison was consciously seeking an idiom that would be in proportion with the rich, multileveled story he wanted to tell. We begin our study of this novel by focusing on its allegorical plot. In the novel, we see the expulsion from the Garden of Eden, reconceived as a black youth's expulsion from the innocence and shelter of an educational institution founded on the doctrines of submission of Booker T. Washington. In examining the protagonist's various encounters with authority figures, both black and white, we can measure the remarkable range of voices and perspectives that Ellison packs into his rites-of-passage story.

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

1. Summarize the difference in Ellison's mind between his literary "ancestors" and his literary "relatives,
2. Explain how the Battle Royale prepared the protagonist for many of the adventures to follow in *Invisible Man*, and

Outline

I. A pilgrimage, a musical, an acrobatic performance—all these describe *Invisible Man*. It is considered by some to be the greatest American novel of the century. The critical reception of *Invisible Man* clearly illustrates the political stakes of literary criticism.
   A. Ellison was befriended and aided by the major black novelist Richard Wright, whose *Native Son* stands as a triumph of social realism and protest.
   B. The overt experimentalism of *Invisible Man* testifies to Ellison's indebtedness to the innovations of the great modernists Eliot and Joyce, as well as Dostoyevsky, Freud, and many other key figures in the Western tradition.
      1. Ellison distinguished between his "relatives," the black writers of his day, and his "ancestors," the modernists who served ultimately as models. Eliot's seminal essay, " Tradition and the Individual Talent," is especially central to Ellison's view of his role as writer.
      2. Critics on the left, as well as those seeking social change, blasted *Invisible Man* for its formal excesses, its shying away from straightforward social criticism.
3. Ellison sought a narrative framework to tell the complex, multi-tongued story of black people, including their aspirations, their pasts, and their identities. Modernism gave him the tools.

II. *Invisible Man* is a coming-of-age story for blacks.

A. Ellison situates the early years of his protagonist in an environment that reflects the Booker T. Washington's doctrines on the virtues of education, humility, and racial uplift.

1. The first crucial episode, narrating the graduation experience of the protagonist, mirrors these same values, but it is spliced with Ellison's carnival-like account of white rituals, revealing a sharp dichotomy between the hero's assumptions and the world he inhabits.

2. We have key references, as well, to the grandfather's strange doctrine of revolt, expressed by "yessing" white folks to death. There is a link here with the well-known theory of "double consciousness," articulated by the black philosopher DuBois.

3. All these issues come to expression in the account of the "Battle Royale" episode at graduation. The earnest protagonist expects to deliver his oration to the leading white citizens at a smoker, but discovers that something quite different is in store for him. He and the other black youths, outfitted in boxing trunks, encounter a nude blonde dancer and are then thrown into a ring to fight each other while blindfolded; all of this closes with an electrified rug that shocks the youths when they fall. This episode, which illuminates the complex fun and games of the white community, their rituals of sex and violence and displacement, closes with the hero's (docile) speech and his award of a briefcase and a scholarship for study at the college.

B. The next key episode takes place at the college (modeled unmistakably on Booker T. Washington's Tuskegee Institute), three years later, when the hero is selected as a driver for the rich, white trustee, Mr. Norton, who has come to visit the school. This will end in disaster.

1. The first misadventure is the encounter with the black share-cropper, Trueblood, who gives a remarkable account of his incestuous union with his daughter (now pregnant, as is the mother). This astonishing story, with dream visions of both social and sexual transgression, darkly mirrors Norton's own repressed feelings for his (dead) daughter and serves to confirm the whites' views of black turpitude. It is also the book's most straightforward account of black sexual power. Significantly, Trueblood's story closes with a reference to the blues, hinting at a major strategy in the novel.

2. Shaken by this encounter, Norton asks for "stimulant," and the hero drives him to the Golden Day, a brothel and bar that services the mix of damaged veterans and asylum inmates who inhabit the area around the college. In the novel's most rambunctious and hilarious episode, Norton encounters pure mayhem and violence at the Golden Day, while Ellison manages to mix social criticism and circus narrative.

C. These blunders on the part of the hero will not be tolerated at the college. In narrating the protagonist's expulsion from what he takes to be Eden, Ellison reaches still further into his bag of rhetorical tricks.

1. The hero listens to the lush, intensely rhetorical performance of Homer Barbee, a black minister invited to the college for this big day. This speech presents the exploits of the founder (again, based on Booker T. Washington) in mythic terms, recalling Jesus and Moses and pulling out all the stops of preacherly rhetoric.

2. After sampling Barbee's exalted vision of college-Eden, the hero goes to his fateful meeting with the president of the institution, the formidable Dr. Bledsoe. Bledsoe is the novel's consummate player, the master of racial Realpolitik, and he upbraids the student for his naivete and gullibility in tones that are unforgettable. Bledsoe, often criticized by ideological readers, proffers nonetheless a compelling view of power as a source of energy that is kept in the dark. Bledsoe is in the same line of double consciousness as the grandfather was.

4. Bledsoe rebukes the protagonist and informs him that he is expelled from the college. Invoking images of Candide leaving "the best of all possible worlds," Ellison prepares us for the hero's subsequent adventures in the world beyond the college.
Timeline

17th century ....................... The “Great Migration” brings the Puritans and Pilgrims from England to America.

1692.................................. John Hawthorne, an ancestor of author Nathaniel Hawthorne, officiates at a number of the infamous witch trials in Salem, Massachusetts.


1706.................................. Birth of Benjamin Franklin.

1721.................................. Benjamin Franklin, at age 15, starts his own newspaper, The New England Courant, and begins to write essays.

1730.................................. Franklin is named the “Official Printer of Pennsylvania.”

1732–1757........................ Franklin writes Poor Richard’s Almanac, the first American periodical.

1736.................................. Franklin organizes the Union Fire Co.

1737.................................. Franklin becomes Philadelphia’s postmaster.

1741.................................. Franklin invents the “Franklin fireplace” (stove).

1743.................................. Franklin proposes the idea for the American Philosophical Society.

1745.................................. Franklin begins to conduct experiments in electricity.

1747.................................. Franklin organizes the Pennsylvania Militia.

1749.................................. Franklin founds the Philadelphia Academy, which later became the University of Pennsylvania.

1751.................................. Founding of Philadelphia Hospital, with the assistance of Franklin.

1752.................................. Franklin conducts his famous experiment proving that lightning is electrical.

1753.................................. Franklin receives honorary masters degrees from both Harvard and Yale.

1757.................................. Franklin elected the representative of Philadelphia (Pennsylvania) to England.

1758.................................. Jonathan Edwards dies.

1759.................................. Franklin receives an honorary doctorate from the University of St. Andrews in Scotland.

1762.................................. Franklin receives an honorary doctorate from Oxford University.

1771.................................. Franklin begins writing his Autobiography.

1776.................................. Declaration of Independence written and signed. Beginning of the Revolutionary War.

1783.................................. End of the Revolutionary War.

1783.................................. Birth of Washington Irving.

1790.................................. Death of Benjamin Franklin.

1803.................................. Birth of Ralph Waldo Emerson.

1804.................................. Birth of Nathaniel Hawthorne.

1809.................................. Birth of Edgar Allan Poe.


1817.................................. Birth of Henry David Thoreau.

1819.................................. Washington Irving publishes “The Legend of Sleepy Hollow” and “Rip Van Winkle.”

1819.................................. Birth of Herman Melville.
1819 .................................. Birth of Walt Whitman.
1821 .................................. Ralph Waldo Emerson graduates from Harvard.
1829 .................................. Emerson marries Ellen Tucker.
1830 .................................. Birth of Emily Dickinson.
1831 .................................. Emerson’s wife dies.
1832 .................................. Spurred by his wife’s death, Emerson resigns his ministry.
1835 .................................. Edgar Allan Poe writes “Berenice.”
1835 .................................. Birth of Samuel Clemens (Mark Twain).
1836 .................................. Emerson publishes his essay “Nature.”
1836 .................................. Poe marries Virginia Clemm, his 14-year-old cousin.
1837 .................................. Emerson makes his famous speech at Harvard, “The American Scholar.”
1837 .................................. Nathaniel Hawthorne publishes his collection of stories entitled Twice-Told Tales.
1838 .................................. Poe pens “Ligeia.”
1839 .................................. Poe publishes “The Fall of the House of Usher,” considered the quintessential horror story, as well as Poe’s masterwork. Poe also publishes “William Wilson” during this year.
1841 .................................. Emerson publishes several of his best-known essays, including “History,” “Self-Reliance,” and “Circles.”
1841 .................................. Poe publishes “The Murders in the Rue Morgue,” considered one of the first detective stories, along with “Descent into the Maelstrom,” an early science fiction story.
1842 .................................. Poe publishes “The Pit and the Pendulum.”
1843 .................................. Poe publishes “The Black Cat” and “The Tell-Tale Heart.”
1843 .................................. Birth of Henry James.
1844 .................................. Emerson publishes the essay “Experience.”
1844 .................................. Poe publishes “The Balloon-Hoax,” a piece that could be considered science fiction.
1845 .................................. Poe publishes “The Raven,” as well as “The Purloined Letter,” considered one of the first detective stories, and “The Facts in the Case of M. Valdemar.”
1846 .................................. Emerson publishes “The Poet,” his chief statement about the literary agenda of the future.
1846 .................................. Henry David Thoreau spends one night in jail for his refusal to pay several years’ poll tax as protest against the role of Massachusetts in perpetuating slavery.
1846 .................................. Poe’s wife dies of consumption.
1846 .................................. Poe writes “The Philosophy of Composition, or How I Wrote ‘The Raven,’” the famous account (perhaps spoofing) of his poetic practice. Poe also publishes “The Cask of Amontillado.”
1846 .................................. Herman Melville publishes Typee.
1847 .................................. Melville publishes Omoo.
1848 .................................. Thoreau publishes his essay “Civil Disobedience.”
1848 .................................. Attempted revolutions fail in several European nations.
1849 .................................. Poe publishes “The Bells,” “Eldorado,” and “Annabel Lee.”
1849..............................Melville publishes *Mardi*.
1849..............................Death of Edgar Allan Poe.
1850..............................Hawthorne publishes *The Scarlet Letter*, perhaps his best-known work.
   Also in this year, Melville publishes *White Jacket, or The World in a Man of War*.
1850..............................Karl Marx writes *The Communist Manifesto*.
1850..............................Passage of the Fugitive Slave Act, which required Northerners to return runaway slaves to their former masters.
1851..............................Thoreau becomes active in the abolitionist movement.
1851..............................Melville meets Hawthorne in person. In this same year, he publishes his masterwork, *Moby Dick*.
1852..............................Harriet Beecher Stowe publishes *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*.
1853..............................Melville publishes the short story “Bartleby, the Scrivener.”
1854..............................Thoreau publishes his masterwork, *Walden*.
1855..............................Walt Whitman publishes the first version of *Leaves of Grass*.
1856..............................Whitman’s poem “Crossing Brooklyn Ferry” published in a version of *Leaves of Grass*.
1856..............................Melville publishes the short story “Benito Cereno.”
1856..............................Birth of Sigmund Freud.
1859..............................Thoreau reads publicly “A Plea for Captain John Brown.”
1859..............................Washington Irving dies.
1859..............................Petroleum is discovered.
1859..............................Whitman writes “Out of the Cradle Endlessly Rocking.”
1860..............................Whitman publishes the collections of poems *Children of Adam* and *Calamus*.
1860..............................Birth of Charlotte Perkins Gilman.
1861..............................Start of the American Civil War.
1862..............................Death of Henry David Thoreau.
1862..............................Emily Dickinson has her literary exchange with noted critic Thomas Wentworth Higginson.
1864..............................Death of Nathaniel Hawthorne.
1865..............................End of the American Civil War.
1866..............................Mark Twain publishes the short story “The Celebrated Jumping Frog of Calaveras County.”
1869..............................Twain publishes *Innocents Abroad*.
1871..............................Birth of Stephen Crane.
1871..............................Franco-Prussian War.
1874..............................Birth of Robert Frost.
1875.................................. Public reburial and dedication of Poe’s remains.

1876.................................. Twain publishes *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer*.

1879.................................. Henry James writes the first book on Nathaniel Hawthorne.

1881.................................. James publishes *A Portrait of a Lady*.

1882.................................. Death of Ralph Waldo Emerson.

1886.................................. Death of Emily Dickinson.

1885.................................. Twain publishes *Huckleberry Finn*, his acclaimed masterpiece, which was promptly banned by the Concord Public Library.

1887.................................. Charlotte Perkins Gilman gives birth to a daughter, afterward suffering from post-partum depression.

1888.................................. Birth of T. S. Eliot.

1888.................................. Birth of Eugene O’Neill.

1889.................................. Twain publishes *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur’s Court*.

1891.................................. Death of Herman Melville.

1892.................................. Death of Walt Whitman. Publication of “The Wound Dresser.”

1892.................................. Gilman publishes the short story “The Yellow Wallpaper.”


1894.................................. Twain publishes *Pudd’nhead Wilson*.

1894.................................. Robert Frost publishes his first poem.

1895.................................. Crane publishes *The Red Badge of Courage*.

1896.................................. Death of Harriet Beecher Stowe.

1896.................................. Birth of F. Scott Fitzgerald.

1896–1897.......................... Crane is on steamship, *Commodore*, carrying arms for Cuban rebels, which sinks. Crane spends 30 hours in a small boat.

1897.................................. Crane covers the Greco-Turkish War.

1897.................................. Birth of William Faulkner.

1898.................................. Crane covers the Spanish-American War.

1898.................................. Crane publishes his short story “The Open Boat,” based on his ordeal at sea in 1897. Crane also pens the short story “The Blue Hotel.”

1898.................................. James publishes *The Turn of the Screw*.

1898.................................. Gilman publishes *Women and Economics*.

1899.................................. Crane publishes “The Monster.”

1899.................................. Birth of Ernest Hemingway.


1900.................................. Death of Stephen Crane.

1902.................................. James publishes *The Wings of the Dove*.

1902.................................. Birth of John Steinbeck.

1903.................................. James publishes *The Ambassadors*.  

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1904.................................. James publishes *The Golden Bowl*.
1910.................................. Death of Mark Twain.
1911.................................. Birth of Tennessee Williams.
1913.................................. Gilman writes “Why I Wrote ‘The Yellow Wallpaper.’”
1914.................................. Birth of Ralph Ellison.
1915.................................. Birth of Arthur Miller.
1916.................................. Death of Henry James.
1917.................................. F. Scott Fitzgerald joins the army.
1920.................................. Fitzgerald publishes his first novel, *This Side of Paradise*.
1920.................................. Eugene O’Neill publishes *The Emperor Jones*.
1922.................................. Eliot publishes his most influential poem, “The Wasteland.”
1922.................................. Fitzgerald publishes *The Beautiful and the Damned*.
1922.................................. O’Neill publishes *The Hairy Ape*.
1925.................................. Eliot publishes “The Hollow Men.”
1925.................................. Fitzgerald publishes his masterpiece, *The Great Gatsby*.
1925.................................. Ernest Hemingway publishes his first major work, *In Our Time*.
1925.................................. O’Neill publishes *Desire Under the Elms*.
1926.................................. Hemingway publishes *The Sun Also Rises*.
1926.................................. William Faulkner publishes his first novel, *Soldier’s Pay*.
1927.................................. Eliot becomes a British citizen.
1927.................................. Faulkner publishes *Mosquitoes*.
1929.................................. Hemingway publishes *A Farewell to Arms*.
1929.................................. Faulkner publishes *Sartoris*, now known as *Flags in the Dust*.
1929.................................. Faulkner publishes *The Sound and the Fury*, considered to be his breakthrough text.
1929.................................. Beginning of the Great Depression.
1930.................................. Eliot publishes “Ash Wednesday.”
1930.................................. Faulkner publishes *As I Lay Dying*, the sister text to *The Sound and the Fury*.
1931.................................. Faulkner publishes *Sanctuary*.
1931.................................. O’Neill publishes *Mourning Becomes Electra*.
1931.................................. Birth of Toni Morrison.
1932.................................. Hemingway publishes his treatise on bullfighting, *Death in the Afternoon*.
1932.................................. Faulkner publishes *Light in August*.
1934.................................. Fitzgerald publishes *Tender Is the Night*.
1935.................................. Death of Charlotte Perkins Gilman.
1935.......................... Hemingway publishes his treatise on hunting, *Green Hills of Africa*.
1935.......................... John Steinbeck publishes *Tortilla Flat*.
1936.......................... Faulkner publishes *Absalom, Absalom!*; an epic of the Civil War.
1936.......................... O’Neill wins the Nobel Prize for Literature.
1938.......................... Death of Sigmund Freud.
1939.......................... Steinbeck publishes his masterpiece, *The Grapes of Wrath*.
1940.......................... Fitzgerald writes *The Last Tycoon*, left unfinished at his death in the same year.
1940.......................... Hemingway publishes *For Whom the Bell Tolls*.
1940.......................... Faulkner publishes *The Hamlet*.
1941.......................... End of the Great Depression; the United States enters World War II.
1942.......................... Faulkner publishes *Go Down, Moses*.
1943.......................... Eliot publishes the poem “Four Quartets.”
1945.......................... Tennessee Williams publishes *The Glass Menagerie*.
1946.......................... O’Neill publishes *The Iceman Cometh*.
1947.......................... Williams publishes *A Streetcar Named Desire*.
1947.......................... Eliot wins the Nobel Prize for Literature.
1947.......................... Arthur Miller publishes *All My Sons*.
1949.......................... Miller publishes *Death of a Salesman*.
1950.......................... Faulkner wins the Nobel Prize for Literature.
1951.......................... Williams publishes *The Rose Tattoo*.
1952.......................... Hemingway publishes *The Old Man and the Sea*.
1952.......................... Ralph Ellison publishes *Invisible Man*.
1953.......................... Ellison’s *Invisible Man* receives the National Book Award for fiction.
1953.......................... Death of Eugene O’Neill.
1953.......................... Miller publishes *The Crucible*.
1954.......................... Hemingway wins the Nobel Prize for Literature.
1955.......................... The full body of Emily Dickinson’s poetic works is published posthumously.
1955.......................... Williams publishes *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*.
1955.......................... Miller publishes *A View From the Bridge*.
1956.......................... O’Neill’s *Long Day’s Journey into Night*, which he had written in 1945, is published posthumously.
1957.......................... Williams publishes *Orpheus Descending*.
1958.......................... Williams publishes *Suddenly Last Summer*.
1959.......................... Lionel Trilling pays homage to Robert Frost on his 85th birthday, saying that Frost belongs in the great iconoclastic tradition of American literature.
1959.......................... Williams publishes *Sweet Bird of Youth*.
1961.......................... Death of Ernest Hemingway.
1961.......................... Williams publishes Night of the Iguana.
1962.......................... Steinbeck wins the Nobel Prize for Literature.
1962.......................... Death of William Faulkner.
1963.......................... Death of Robert Frost.
1964.......................... Hemingway’s Moveable Feast published posthumously.
1965.......................... Death of T. S. Eliot.
1968.......................... Death of John Steinbeck.
1970.......................... Hemingway’s Islands in the Stream published posthumously.
1974.......................... Toni Morrison publishes Sula.
1977.......................... Morrison publishes Song of Solomon.
1983.......................... Death of Tennessee Williams.
1986.......................... Hemingway’s final novel, Garden of Eden, is published posthumously.
1988.......................... Morrison publishes her masterpiece, Beloved.
1992.......................... Morrison publishes Jazz.
1993.......................... Morrison wins the Nobel Prize for Literature.
1994.......................... Death of Ralph Ellison.
1998.......................... Morrison publishes Paradise.
Glossary

**Aboriginal self**: A concept defined by Ralph Waldo Emerson as an existing source of universal energy in which we all partake. This self is not in us, but rather, out in the world, and we must learn to move into it.

**B’hoy**: An American original character, one who challenges all niceties in pieties. The female counterpart is known as the g’hal (the gal).

**Boutade**: French term meaning a joke, a spoof, or a setup that partially hides its true meaning.

**Brahmins**: Term coined in the mid-1800s by the American writer Oliver Wendell Holmes to describe a class of New England intellectuals determined on the basis of birth, education, and scholarly pursuits.

**Calvinism**: Christian theology of the French church reformer John Calvin. The central Calvinist tenets include belief in the absolute sovereignty of God and the doctrine of justification by faith alone.

**Classic**: A work of literature having lasting significance or generally recognized worth. The canonical tests of American literature stem out of vital, often unresolvable, conflicts from their own moments in history. They are bristling with ambiguities and insights that bid to challenge the reader, in their own time, in the present day, and even in the future.

**Coming of age**: In American literature, an event or series of events that spurs a character to reach spiritual adulthood. These stories may or may not revolve around attainment of a character’s physical adulthood.

**Cosmogony**: Literally, the study of the universe’s origin. In literature, the writer’s personal theory of the universe, as reflected in his or her works.

**Cosmos**: As defined by Walt Whitman, a brash young man, a jaunty fellow with a robust ego.

**Counterculture**: A subculture, especially of young people, with values opposed to that of the established culture. Henry David Thoreau is often regarded as a major American counterculture hero.

**Demiurge**: The deity who fashions the world, a creative force. In literature, a character of such influential personality that he or she is an overpowering force in the story being told.

**Double entendre**: A word or turn of phrase having double meaning, especially when the second meaning is risqué. Ernest Hemingway’s works, for instance, revel in suggestions of dual meanings and dual sexuality.

**Dualism**: The division of body from spirit. Whereas most religious traditions assert that spirit is superior to body, some American writers—particularly Walt Whitman—reversed that notion in their works, insisting on the naturalness and sanctity of the body.

**Dysfunction**: Impaired or disorderly function of a cultural system, be it a family or a larger social group.

**Empowered self**: Often regarded as one of America’s worst gifts to modern culture, the concept that the individual is empowered to attain all he or she desires. Ralph Waldo Emerson presents the concept of the empowered, or “imperialistic,” self in his essay “Self-Reliance.”

**Epiphany**: A sudden manifestation of the meaning or essence of something or a sudden intuitive realization or perception of reality.

**Epistemology**: A division of philosophy that investigates the nature and origin of knowledge.

**Existentialism**: A philosophy that emphasizes the uniqueness and isolation of the individual experience in a hostile or indifferent universe. A frequent theme in American literature, which often stresses freedom of choice and responsibility for the consequences of one’s actions.

**Expressionism**: An artistic movement during the late 19th and early 20th centuries that emphasized subjective expression of the artist’s inner experience. Stephen Crane and Emily Dickinson personify this approach to writing, reconfiguring the world we know by clothing it in images and metaphors.

**Feminism**: A doctrine advocating the same political and economic rights for women as granted to men. Charlotte Perkins Gilman was an early feminist writer, well known for “The Yellow Wallpaper.”
**Fissured self:** Essentially, an existential collapse, when all one knows of the world unravels.

**Geworfenheit:** German term meaning that we are thrust into a world not of our own making or choosing; a sense of alienation from the world around us.

**Gothic:** A style of fiction emphasizing the grotesque, mysterious, and desolate.

**Hagiography:** A biography of saints. *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, though often criticized for being overly sentimental, became a black American hagiography that was part of opera and drama.

**Impressionism:** A movement in painting that originated in France in the late 19th century. Impressionist painters found many of their subjects around them rather than in history, which was then the accepted source of subject matter. Instead of painting an ideal of beauty that earlier artists had defined, the Impressionists tried to depict what they saw at a given moment. To achieve the appearance of spontaneity, Impressionist painters used broken brushstrokes of bright, often unmixed colors. The colors in Impressionist paintings have an overall luminosity because the painters avoided blacks and earth colors. The Impressionists also simplified their compositions, omitting detail to achieve a striking overall effect.

**Individualism:** The doctrine that society is an artificial device, existing only for the sake of its members as individuals and properly judged only according to criteria established by them as individuals.

**Isolationism:** A policy in which a nation’s interests are best served if the nation secludes itself from other nations and avoids forming alliances with them. In literature, this concept often has been applied to individuals, as in Ralph Waldo Emerson’s suggestion that we must “cultivate” our own earth, our own substance.

**Ludic:** Playful in a way that is spontaneous and without any particular purpose.

**Malaise:** A vague feeling of depression or illness.

**Manself:** A term created by John Steinbeck to describe and celebrate the human species; used in place of *men* and *women*. This manself is always struggling to make a success of his or her life and will prevail, no matter how terrible circumstances are.

**Metaphor:** A figure of speech in which a term is transferred from the object it ordinarily designates to an object it may designate only by implicit comparison or analogy. Metaphor allows the writer to yoke together diverse areas of experience and thought. Yet metaphor may also be suspected of falsely domesticating the world by substituting the poet’s own projections and fantasies for the “hard facts.”

**Metaphysics:** A branch of philosophy that systematically investigates the nature of first principles and problems of ultimate reality, including ontology and often cosmology. Also, critical or speculative philosophy.

**Modernism:** The 20th century saw the emergence of Modernism, which responded to the world’s complexity by asserting that the individual had the potential to achieve a broader perspective than that offered by any one society or its history. At the beginning of the 19th century, American authors struggled to convince the world that they had a history; by the 20th century, American authors, like European authors, had to grapple with more than enough history.

**Modus operandi:** A method of operating; a particular way of doing things.

**Motive:** An important and sometimes recurring theme or idea in a work of literature. Also called *motive*.

**Nantucketer:** A uniquely American hero presented in Herman Melville’s works. The Nantucketer is different from familiar examples of colonial character. Homespun in his manners, he is nonetheless ruler of the sea, hence, royalty in his own way.

**Naturalism:** A system of thought holding that all phenomena can be explained in terms of natural causes and laws without attributing supernatural significance to them. Also, the doctrine that all religious truths are derived from nature, not from revelation. In literature, Naturalism attempts to apply scientific theories to art.

**Organicism:** The concept that society is analogous to a biological organism, meaning that society’s overall organization—not the functioning of its individual parts—plays the principal role in determining its processes and destiny.
**Oversoul**: A spiritual essence or vital force in the universe that embraces all souls, thus transcending individual consciousness.

**Perspectival narration**: The literary technique of viewing society from the outside. A writer may write about a historical period in retrospect, for instance, though his or her characters do not know what events are coming.

**Picaresque**: A literary genre in which a rogue-hero’s escapades are depicted in a context of sharp social satire. Mark Twain’s *Huckleberry Finn* personifies such a character.

**Poet of Babel**: A term used to refer to poets who make us think that poetry could be nonsense, but rather, is the sound of the brain, the fabric of consciousness. Although poetry can be a description of the world, it can also be simply the representation of the experience of living with a brain and of sensing things, thinking things, and speaking things.

**Polysemy**: The existence of several meanings for a single word or phrase.

**Postmodernism**: The literal meaning of *Postmodernism* is “after Modernism”; in many ways, Postmodernism constitutes an attack on Modernist claims about the existence of truth and value. In disputing past assumptions, Postmodernists generally display a preoccupation with the inadequacy of language as a mode of communication. Inaccessible ideas and impenetrable prose also characterize many Postmodern texts, although the difficulties in this case are often intentional and reflect specific claims about the nature of language and meaning.

**Puritanism**: Scrupulous moral sternness, especially aversions to social pleasures and indulgences. These attitudes and worldviews stem from the doctrines and practices of the Puritans.

**Realism**: In art and literature, an attempt to describe human behavior and surroundings or to represent figures and objects exactly as they act or appear in life. Though attempts at Realism have been made throughout history in all the arts, the term is generally restricted to a movement that began in the mid-19th century, in reaction to the highly subjective approach of Romanticism.

**Rite of passage**: A genre in literature based on an anthropological concept concerning rituals that a young person goes through in growing up.

**Romanticism**: A movement in the literature of virtually every country of Europe, the United States, and Latin America that lasted from about 1750 to about 1870, characterized by reliance on the imagination and subjectivity of approach, freedom of thought and expression, and an idealization of nature.

**Self-made man**: A classic hero in American literature and history, the self-made man is successful through his own actions. Benjamin Franklin personifies the concept of the wildly successful self-made man.

**Semiosis**: The act of translating a word or visual signal into a cultural meaning, of taking language and turning it into meaning. In literature, the concept that words are signs of natural things, which in turn, are signs of spirit.

**Sentimentalism**: A tendency to express obvious or powerful feelings or emotions without appealing to reason, especially self-indulgent or nostalgic writing or expression. The Sentimental tradition is the great popular literary form of the 19th century.

**Social contract**: A voluntary agreement among people defining the relationship of individuals with one another and with government and, by this process, forming a distinct organized society. In the 17th and 18th centuries, the theory of a social compact among individuals of a society was linked with the doctrine of natural law.

**Stereotype**: An oversimplified standardized image or idea held by one person or group concerning another. In literature, a character meant to typify or conform to an unvarying pattern or manner, lacking in any individuality or depth.

**Stream of consciousness**: A fictional narrative technique, first used in the late 19th century to evince subjective as well as objective reality. It reveals the character’s feelings, thoughts, and actions, often following an associative rather than a logical sequence, without commentary by the author.

**Symbolism**: The use of symbols to invest things with a representative meaning, or to represent something abstract by something concrete.
Transcendentalism: In philosophy and literature, the belief that knowledge of reality is derived from intuitive sources, rather than from objective experience. Nearly all transcendentalist doctrines stem from the division of reality into a realm of spirit and a realm of matter. Such a division is made by many of the great religions of the world. Ralph Waldo Emerson and Henry David Thoreau are considered to embody what is known as American Transcendentalism.

Trope: A word, phrase, expression, or image that is used in a figurative way, usually for rhetorical effect. Metaphor is the quintessential trope in all of poetry.

Tuition: Learned knowledge, as opposed to intuition, innate or revealed knowledge.

Un-naming: This term refers to the literary cleansing of customary labels to install fresh perception. Emily Dickinson’s poetry typifies this sort of writing.

Vagina dentata: The teethed womb that is a sexual nightmare for the male who is terrified of what it could mean to think literally about moving into the womb.

Women’s writing: Writing in a feminist vein that features language deemed to be closer to the body. Some characteristics of this kind of writing include fluidity rather than line, openness to affect and libido, suspicion of repressive order, and attention to the somatic.
Biographical Notes

**Louis Armstrong** (1901–1971): American jazz, cornet, and trumpet player, singer, bandleader, and popular entertainer. Armstrong overcame poverty, a lack of formal education, and racism to become one of the most innovative and influential musicians of the 20th century and one of the most beloved entertainers in the world. He is perhaps best known for helping to pioneer a style known as swing, which later formed the basis for most jazz and rhythm-and-blues (R&B) music. Armstrong’s music had a profound influence on Ralph Ellison’s *Invisible Man.*

**Charles Baudelaire** (1821–1867): A leading 19th-century French poet who seized on Edgar Allan Poe’s work and career as the epitome of genius, becoming Poe’s champion and translator in France. As the founder of Symbolism in poetry, Baudelaire ensured Poe’s continued impact on poetic development.

**Catherine Beecher** (1800–1878): Sister to Harriet Beecher Stowe, Catherine Beecher wrote *A Treatise on Domestic Economy,* dedicated to “the women of America in whose hands rest the real destinies of the Republic.”

**Samuel Clemens:** See *Mark Twain.*

**Stephen Crane** (1871–1900): American novelist and poet, one of the first American exponents of the naturalistic style of writing. Crane is known for his pessimistic and often brutal portrayals of the human condition, along with a sympathetic understanding of character.

**Emily Dickinson** (1830–1886): America’s most well known female poet and one of the foremost authors in American literature. Dickinson’s simply constructed, acutely intellectual writings examine issues vital to humanity: the agonies and ecstasies of love, sexuality, the unfathomable nature of death, the horrors of war, God and religious belief, the importance of humor, and musings on the significance of literature, music, and art.

**Thomas Eakins** (1844–1916): Regarded by most critics as the most outstanding American painter of the 19th century and, by many, as the greatest his country has yet produced, Eakins was an admirer of Walt Whitman. He was well known for his painting *The Swimming Hole,* as well as paintings of the male body and portraits of Whitman.

**Jonathan Edwards** (1703–1758): Often called the “last great Puritan,” this theologian and intellectual authored such fierce sermons as “Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God.”

**T. S. Eliot** (1888–1965): American-born writer regarded as one of the greatest poets of the 20th century. Eliot also wrote drama and literary criticism. In his plays, which use unrhymed verse, he attempted to revive poetic drama for the contemporary audience. Eliot won the Nobel Prize for literature in 1948.

**Ralph Ellison** (1914–1994): American author and educator, one of the most influential black American writers of the 20th century. Ellison uses rich, varied, and powerful language to portray the black experience in all its vitality and complexity. His best-known work, *Invisible Man,* expounds the theme that American society willfully ignores blacks and was one of the first works to describe modern racial problems in the United States from a black American point of view.

**Ralph Waldo Emerson** (1803–1882): Emerson, the guiding spirit of American Romanticism, lays the groundwork for a key tradition in American thinking and writing in his *Essays,* written from the 1830s through the middle of the century.

**William Faulkner** (1897–1962): American novelist, known for his epic portrayal, in some 20 novels, of the tragic conflict between the old and the new South. Although his intricate plots and complex narrative style alienated many readers of his early writings, Faulkner was a towering figure in American literature during the first half of the 20th century. With Ernest Hemingway, he is usually considered one of the two greatest American novelists of his era. Faulkner was particularly noted for the eloquent richness of his prose style and for the unique blend of tragedy and humor in his works.

**F. Scott Fitzgerald** (1896–1940): American writer whose novels and short stories chronicled changing social attitudes during the 1920s, a period dubbed the “Jazz Age” by the author. He is best known for his novels *The Great Gatsby* (1925) and *Tender Is the Night* (1934), both of which depict disillusion with the American dream of self-betterment, wealth, and success through hard work and perseverance.

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Benjamin Franklin (1706–1790): Printer, scientist, statesman, and author in the early 18th century, Franklin personified the American concept of the “self-made man,” particularly through his Autobiography. Franklin is particularly well known for his experiments in electricity; his launching of Poor Richard’s Almanac, the first American periodical; and his role in the Revolutionary War. His is the great American story of tireless achievement, assertion, and adult responsibility in the difficult arenas of business, government, and politics.

Sigmund Freud (1856–1938): The father of psychoanalysis, Freud articulated the concepts of the unconscious and infantile sexuality and repression and proposed a tripartite account of the mind’s structure, all as part of a then–radically new conceptual and therapeutic frame of reference for the understanding of human psychological development and the treatment of abnormal mental conditions. His conclusions affected the interpretation of much American literature during and after his lifetime.

Robert Frost (1874–1963): American poet who drew his images from the New England countryside and his language from New England speech. Although Frost’s images and voice often seem familiar and old, his observations have an edge of skepticism and irony that make his work, upon rereading, never as old-fashioned, easy, or carefree as it first appears. In its embodiment of both tradition and skepticism, Frost’s poetry helped provide a link between the American poetry of the 19th century and that of the 20th century.

Margaret Fuller (1810–1850): A 19th-century feminist writer and one of the great radical women among the Transcendentalists. Fuller was a journalist and edited Dial Magazine, working closely with Ralph Waldo Emerson. Nathaniel Hawthorne may have modeled aspects of Hester Prynne’s character in The Scarlet Letter on Fuller.

Charlotte Perkins Gilman (1860–1935): American feminist and writer, best known for her book Women and Economics (1898), which has become a feminist classic. She was born Charlotte Anna Perkins in Hartford, Connecticut. She was educated at the Rhode Island School of Design and worked as a teacher and commercial artist before devoting herself to feminism.

Nathaniel Hawthorne (1804–1862): American novelist whose works are deeply concerned with the ethical problems of sin, punishment, and atonement. Hawthorne is considered America’s first great classical writer and is particularly known for his novel The Scarlet Letter.

Ernest Hemingway (1899–1961): American novelist and short-story writer, whose style is brisk, terse, cleansed of adjectives, seemingly objective, and aimed at rendering the precise moment and feeling of experience. Hemingway’s writings and his personal life exerted a profound influence on American writers of his time; in fact, Hemingway is usually considered one of the two greatest American novelists of his era (the other being William Faulkner). Many of his works are regarded as classics of American literature.

Thomas Wentworth Higginson (1823–1911): Unitarian minister, abolitionist, and well-known 19th-century literary critic with whom poet Emily Dickinson exchanged letters seeking critiques of her poems.

Washington Irving (1783–1859): Often called the father of the American short story, Irving is best known for two stories: “The Legend of Sleepy Hollow” and “Rip Van Winkle.” His work is considered to precede early writings of the great Transcendentalists—Emerson, Thoreau, and Hawthorne.

Henry James (1843–1916): American expatriate writer whose masterly fiction juxtaposed American innocence and European experience in a series of intense, psychologically complex works. James’s work is characterized by leisurely pacing and subtle delineation of character rather than by dramatic incidents or complicated plots. His major writings, highly sensitive examples of the objective psychological novel, deal with the world of leisure and sophistication he had grown to know intimately in Europe.

Toussaint L’Ouverture (1743–1803): Haitian general, now known as “the Precursor,” and leader of the Haitian slave revolt, a 1791 black slave uprising against the French colonial regime. After France abolished slavery in the territory in 1794, Toussaint supported the French rulers of the country against British invaders and was made a general in 1795. In 1801, he succeeded, after many struggles, in liberating Saint-Domingue from French control and became president-for-life of a new republic.

Herman Melville (1819–1891): American novelist and major literary figure whose exploration of psychological and metaphysical themes foreshadowed 20th-century literary concerns. His works remained in obscurity until the 1920s, when his genius was finally recognized.
Arthur Miller (1915–): American dramatist whose works are concerned with the responsibility of each individual to other members of society. Simply and colloquially written, Miller’s plays spring from his social conscience and from his compassion for those who are vulnerable to the false values imposed on them by society.

Toni Morrison (1931–): American writer whose works deal with the black experience and celebrate the black community. Morrison’s work features mythic elements, sharp observation, compassion, and poetic language and is often concerned with the relationship between the individual and society. In 1993, she won the Nobel Prize in literature.

Eugene O’Neill (1888–1953): American playwright whose work dramatizes the plight of people driven by elemental passions, by memory and dream, and by an awareness of the forces that threaten to overwhelm them. His early plays (1916–1920) helped initiate American theater’s shift away from elegant parlor dramas and toward gritty naturalistic plays.

Edgar Allan Poe (1809–1849): Best known for his poems and short fiction, Poe is credited with transforming the short story from anecdote to art. He virtually created the detective story and perfected the psychological thriller. He also produced some of the most influential literary criticism of his time—important theoretical statements on poetry and the short story.

Sir Walter Scott (1771–1832): Scottish novelist and poet considered to be the creator of the historical and the regional novel. He may have influenced the works of Nathaniel Hawthorne.

John Steinbeck (1902–1968): American writer and Nobel laureate, who described in his work the unremitting struggle of people who depend on the soil for their livelihood. Steinbeck’s novels can all be classified as social novels dealing with the economic problems of rural labor, but there is also a streak of worship of the soil in his books, which does not always agree with his matter-of-fact sociological approach.

Wallace Stevens (1879–1955): American poet whose works deal mainly with the individual’s interaction with the outside world. Stevens used sensuous, elaborate imagery and elevated, precise word choice to express subtle philosophical themes. He frequently contrasted the bleakness and monotony of modern industrialized life with the richness of nature.

Harriet Beecher Stowe (1811–1896): American author most famous for her anti-slavery novel, *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, one of the most influential American texts written by either man or woman and, possibly, the first American social protest novel.

Henry David Thoreau (1817–1862): American essayist, poet, and practical philosopher, renowned for having lived the doctrines of Transcendentalism, as recorded in his masterwork, *Walden*, and for having been a vigorous advocate of civil liberties, as evidenced in the essay “Civil Disobedience.”

Lionel Trilling (1905–1975): American educator and influential literary critic. For most of his career, Trilling taught at Columbia University. In his books, he used psychological and sociological methods to elucidate cultural values. One of his major concerns was the relationship between the self and society. Trilling paid homage to poet Robert Frost on Frost’s 85th birthday.

Nat Turner (1800–1831): American slave and leader of a black slave revolt in 1831. As a result of Nat Turner’s revolt, southern legislatures imposed stricter control on slaves, and the movement to abolish slavery, which had previously enjoyed some support in the South, became a northern phenomenon.

Mark Twain (1835–1910): Pen name for Samuel Langhorne Clemens, American writer and humorist, whose best work is characterized by broad, often irreverent humor or biting social satire. Twain’s writing is also known for realism of place and language, memorable characters, and hatred of hypocrisy and oppression.

Vincent Van Gogh (1853–1890): Dutch Post-Impressionist painter, generally considered the greatest Dutch painter and draughtsman after Rembrandt. He powerfully influenced the current of Expressionism in modern art. Among his masterpieces are numerous self-portraits and the well-known “Starry Night.” An admirer of Whitman, Van Gogh corresponded with the American poet.

Booker T. Washington (1856–1915): American educator who urged blacks to attempt to uplift themselves through educational attainments and economic advancement.
Walt Whitman (1819–1892): American poet whose work boldly asserts the worth of the individual and the oneness of all humanity. Whitman’s defiant break with traditional poetic concerns and style exerted a major influence on American thought and literature.

Tennessee Williams (1911–1983): American playwright and two-time Pulitzer Prize winner, whose works are set largely in the American South. As a playwright, fiction writer, poet, and essayist, Williams helped transform the contemporary idea of Southern literature. He not only paved the way for other writers but also helped the South find a strong voice, where before it had been heard only as a whisper.
Comprehensive Bibliography


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Classics of American Literature
Part VII

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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 master's degree 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 are research grants from the American Council of Learned Societies and the National Endowment for the Humanities. 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 an NEH-funded program in the area of national educational reform. In 1995 he was named Brown University's best teacher in the humanities. He is the recipient of a 1998-99 National Endowment for the Humanities Award for University Teachers for his work on literature and medicine.

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Lecture 73

Invisible Man: Reconceiving History and Race

Scope: Much of the drama of Ellison's story of growing up is rooted in the search for authority that governs the text. The protagonist inevitably begins his pilgrimage by seeking to ingratiate himself with "white fathers." This quest ranges from the white executives to whom Bledsoe has (falsely) promised to introduce him, to the white doctor-engineers at Liberty Paints, to the crucial stint with the Brotherhood, Ellison's version of communist organizers, with whom the protagonist finds work as their man in Harlem. In every case, the hero rediscovers his "invisibility," his status as a pawn. These bouts of futility and exploitation are insistently counterbalanced by moments of passion and self-discovery, invariably centered on the hero's exploits as a mesmerizing speaker and political visionary, rediscovering his identity as a Southern black. Ellison graphically illustrates this key sense of identity by pairing or doubling the hero with a number of other black men—Ras the Exhorter, a militant; Rinehart, the consummate actor and mask; and Tod Clifton, the emblematic sacrificial victim—all of whom serve as alter egos in this narrative of identity.

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

1. Summarize the relationship of the hero in Invisible Man with authority figures
2. Explain the role of the Brotherhood in the hero's education, and
3. Describe how Todd Clifton embodies heroic elements in the novel.

Outline

I. The hero's quest, once he has been expelled from the Garden, begins as a search for "white fathers," figures of authority with whom he can make his career.

A. Carrying sealed letters of introduction from Bledsoe with him to New York to get a job, the hero fails over and over to land an interview.

B. Finally, the hero takes his last letter to Mr. Emerson, where he has a remarkable exchange with the magnate's homosexual son. (Ellison is piling on the literary references here.) The exchange closes with a look at the actual letter, a look under the surface at last, and the hero discovers that Bledsoe has sold him down the river, that he is a classic victim of the system.

C. This discovery sends him to a job at Liberty Paints, where still further adventures are in store.

1. To his amazement, the hero discovers that the power behind the scenes at this factory that specializes in a paint called "Optic White" is an uneducated black man, Lucius Brockaway. Once again, we hear echoes of Bledsoe's philosophy of black power, but the protagonist cannot fathom it.

2. Suspected of being a union spy, the protagonist has a violent altercation with Brockaway that closes with an even more violent explosion of machines.

3. In the novel's most chilling sequence, the protagonist is then subjected to medical experiments involving nonsurgical prefrontal lobotomy and electric shock therapy, which effectively "erase" his sense of who he is. He begins to recover his identity via black folklore.

D. The protagonist's next stint is the decisive one with the Brotherhood, Ellison's version of communist intellectuals. The members of the Brotherhood are planning political agitation and hire the hero as their man in Harlem.

1. Ellison spends a good deal of time attending to the hero's political education in an effort to convey the political culture and climate of the 1930s and 1940s, especially the prestige of Marxism among intellectuals and some of the manic anxieties of the Cold War period.

2. This political education consists of reconceiving history as a form of dialectical materialism, in which such notions as the "individual" and even "race" are considered either secondary or irrelevant.

3. Eventually, the protagonist discovers the cynicism of the Brotherhood and the members' desire to "use" Harlem to their political advantage. In a charged encounter, he makes his own "separate truce." Here, too, he has been invisible.
II. The follow-up to the failure with "white fathers" can be understood as an exploration of "black brothers." Ellison is signifying the notion of "brotherhood." The text offers three distinct candidates for this exploration.

A. The most extreme black brother is Ras the Exhorter, who offers a gripping portrait of a black militant from the West Indies. Ras blasts the Brotherhood for hypocrisy, urging the hero to reclaim his racial identity and join in the struggle against the real enemy—whites.

B. The most fascinating black brother is the amazing Rinehart, a person whom we never actually see. We get to know Rinehart in his various disguises, precisely because the protagonist, in shades, is repeatedly mistaken for the strange confidence man. Rinehart comes to represent a kind of pure freedom, a fluid sense of energy that mocks any definition or fixed role.
   1. As "Rinehart," the protagonist is surrounded by desiring women, giving him a libidinal punch that he otherwise doesn't have.
   2. "Rinehart" is also a numbers runner, suggesting still another identity for our hero.
   3. "Rinehart" is further named as a leader in "spiritual technology," a master at negotiating relations between matter and spirit.

C. The most poignant and significant of the black brothers is Tod Clifton, the hero's colleague at the Brotherhood, who bolts from the organization and declares his own weird independence.
   1. Clifton is the book's Christ: He is adored by Ras and loved by the hero. He seems to represent the future of the race.
   2. In an unforgettable sequence, the hero comes upon Clifton running a spiel in Harlem, doing a number with Sambo dolls. The dolls seem to remind us of the Grandfather's early advice about "yessing" white folks to death. But this game, which initially both fascinates and repulses the hero, ends in tragedy when Clifton is bullied by a white cop, responds, and is shot to death.
   3. The hero ultimately recognizes in Clifton, and in Clifton's strange game, a new kind of freedom, a kind of racial bonding that is utterly alien to the Brotherhood. This recognition is capped with a spellbinding oration delivered by the hero at Clifton's funeral, clearly modeled on Marc Antony's funeral oration for Caesar. History is rediscovered.
Lecture 74

_Invisible Man:_
"What Did I Do, to Be So Black and Blue"?

**Scope:** As my title suggests, the patron saint of Ellison's book and his artistic vision is Louis Armstrong, king of jazz. Armstrong's music is composed of bits and pieces of black history, including suffering; is improvisational rather than rigid or fixed; and is adept at recycling and "signifying." A similar new aesthetic reigns in this novel. The challenge that the hero must meet is to understand his true identity, which is made up of the past, including the old black South. Every major scene of empowerment and eloquence depends precisely on this kinship, this new sense of family identity. Once the Brotherhood vision of economic history is rejected, a fuller picture of racial solidarity and resources comes into view. But Ellison respects secular history as well, and the book closes with an unforgettable evocation of riots in Harlem. This ends the hero's education and sends him, prophetically, underground for his period of "hibernation" (which is also where the book began).

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

1. Summarize how the influence of jazz can be felt in a reading of _Invisible Man_,
2. Explain the relationship, according to Ellison, between hibernation and writing, and
3. Compare Ellison's narrative of the discovery of identity with that of earlier American writers, such as Franklin.

**Outline**

I. Jazz comes across as the key to _Invisible Man_, not because Ellison was trained in music or because Louis Armstrong is mentioned in the text, but because jazz and the blues represent indigenous black art forms that typify Ellison's achievement. Both the music and the writing are characterized by improvisation, suffering, form that is supple rather than rigid, and many voices.

   A. The great moments of the text involve the hero's recognition of his black and Southern identity, when his deep memories and feelings begin to come to the surface. This recognition is contrary to the teachings of both Booker T. Washington and the Brotherhood. The book's repeated scenes of violence also make more sense in this light.

   1. The hero's first great speech entails his revulsion at the sight of an old black couple being evicted in Harlem. This reaction triggers a meditation on possession (their belongings are on the street) and dispossession, i.e., the hero's own repressed past and tradition.

   2. The book has a number of "polysemous" objects to which Ellison gives significance. These objects become icons in Ellison's treatment. The leg iron that Bledsoe has in his office, which the old man Tarp also has, are material remnants of the escape from bondage. The grinning Negro face of the piggy bank, which the hero cannot seem to get clear of, is also significant. Ellison is out to show how "rich" these icons are, how much content and tradition they carry within them. The project consists of liberating the indwelling music that is here.

II. One of the high points of Ellison's narrative is his account of the Harlem race riot, a real event in history that is also inevitable in this book's logic.

   A. At last, Ellison stages the submerged Oedipal drama of his book: The black sons are to slay the white fathers. This battle will be symbolic, waged through the destruction of property and the war with the police. Here is revenge on a massive scale.

   B. Ellison develops a brilliant, dreamlike prose style to render the looting and excitement of the riot. We return to the theme of dispossession, now reversed in scenes of re-possession, of blacks filling up "cotton sacks" with stolen goods. The piggy bank is coming back into play.

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C. One of the climaxes of the riot scene is the torching of a tenement building by the men who have lived there. This scene has a sharp political edge to it—here is "organization" quite unlike anything preached by the Brotherhood—and it has a Promethean dimension; i.e., bringing fire to the prison.

D. No less astounding is the final avatar of Ras the Exhorter, now Ras the Destroyer, who has become a mythic figure of racial revenge, a kind of black god whose moment has come.

1. Ras sees the protagonist and attacks him with a spear. In a beautiful sequence, the hero hurls the spear back at Ras, making us feel that we are thrust into mythic times, witnessing some strange legend.

2. To cap off this over-the-top sequence, Ellison effectively sets it to music. As the scene is retold by black onlookers and storytellers, we see the great dynamic of jazz set in. The speakers rival with each other, improvise a version of events that we have just witnessed, cut the story down to street level, and turn it into song. This is what the book has done at every turn.

III. The book closes with an Epilog, just as it opened with a Prolog, each time set in the underground (shades of Dostoyevsky) with a hibernating narrator.

A. We are now in a position to better understand the book's bid for freedom. This underground, which is a kind of border area, is authentic American wilderness, much like that sought in Thoreau, Twain, and Hemingway. This narrator is an American "thinker/tinker" in the tradition of Benjamin Franklin and, like his famous forebear, he too steals light.

B. We also understand this hibernation to be connected with the birth of writing, as if fire had to become light in order to become language, and then song.

C. Finally, Ellison is completing his story of identity formation, which comes about through language, as if language were the ultimate tool that allowed us access to ourselves—as part of a past and a community.

1. We think of Franklin's *Autobiography*, of all the self-positing gestures in American literature.

2. One brief but lovely passage evokes the ex-slave Frederick Douglass, who liberated himself both in reality and in language.

3. In keeping with the great tradition, Saul's metamorphosis into Paul is also referenced as a version of becoming who you are.

D. One understands as well a kind of transformation of sexual energy into song. We recall Louis Armstrong, a genius with a trumpet, a man who works the tradition to speak himself and to speak us. We also recall the story of Trueblood's sexual transgression that culminated in the blues. Ellison closes his book on this note. His story of a black man finding himself and his world is also our story.

Readings:


Topics for Further Consideration:

1. Place Ellison's *Invisible Man* in an American tradition of coming-of-age texts, ranging from Twain, Crane, Hemingway, and Faulkner to Morrison.

2. Discuss *Invisible Man* as a modernist text that makes use of formal devices, such as allusion, echo, song, folklore, myth, and history.
Eugene O'Neill: Great God of American Theater

Scope: Eugene O'Neill is America's premier dramatist, even though this fact sticks in the throats of some literary scholars. Producing an astounding body of work during the entire first half of the 20th century, O'Neill spans every movement in theater: Realist, naturalist, expressionist, surrealist, psychological, mythic, intimate. From The Emperor Jones and The Hairy Ape all the way to The Iceman Cometh and Long Day's Journey Into Night, O'Neill invents and reinvents American drama. He gives us accounts of his travels as a sailor, his sense of our class arrangements, his profound understanding of the American dream of innocence and rebirth, and his equally profound sense of his own paralysis and struggle with private demons, ranging from illness and alcoholism to the morass of family love and hate and marital tumult. O'Neill has never been forgiven in some quarters for his everyday language and stammering repetitions, but he is our unrivaled master in bringing the entire tradition of theater—from the Greeks through Shakespeare, Ibsen, Strindberg, and Chekhov—to bear on American subjects and American lives. Above all, we must learn to hear the music of O'Neill's harsh and dreary settings, to catch the lilt and shimmering of the heart in his stories of struggle and decay. In examining his masterpiece, Long Day's Journey Into Night, we will discover the remarkable plenitude and dimensionality of O'Neill's project, in which the notation of coercive circumstance and failed life is shot through with wonder and dream, exploding our limiting ideas about time and space, about where we really live.

Although O'Neill has been attacked for his pedestrian language by literary scholars, he has always been loved in the theater, where he single-handedly created an entire repertory of plays and techniques that represent the best of the Western tradition. The early expressionist work, the efforts to reproduce Greek tragedy in American dress, the harrowing and relentless accounts of "pipe dreams" and failed lives—span the entire gamut of theatrical form. O'Neill's life was as tumultuous as that of some of his characters, filled with adventure, mercurial emotions, and crippling bouts of alcoholism and ill health. His talent, however, was unmistakable, winning him early recognition, including several Pulitzer Prizes and the Nobel Prize in 1936. Long Day's Journey Into Night (written in 1945, first published and staged in 1956) was O'Neill's great effort at love, forgiveness, and family portraiture. The play picks up the 19th-century legacy of Ibsen and Strindberg—the insidious hold of the past, the dialectics and antics of marriage—and recasts them in a new form that is altogether more stereophonic and musical, better able to transmit the rich story of a family life in time.

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

1. Explain how O'Neill's own life informed the plot of Long Day's Journey Into Night,
2. Summarize the influence of the Scandinavian playwrights Ibsen and Strindberg on O'Neill, and
3. Give examples of where echoes of Greek tragedy can be found in O'Neill's work.

Outline

I. Eugene O'Neill is America's greatest playwright, even though his writing is a sore spot for many critics.
   A. His plays are almost invariably stageworthy, and theater critics have never questioned his stature.
   B. O'Neill is a dramatist of all styles, evincing a kind of professional curiosity, suppleness, inventiveness, and downright genius that is unique.
      1. His two great plays of the 1920s, The Emperor Jones and The Hairy Ape, have a kind of formal and thematic virulence that adds a new tone and dimension to American theater.
      2. O'Neill's own career as sailor, roustabout, and frequent patron of bars and brothels, allowed him to bring vitality, low life, and charm to the American repertory. He also brought in dialects and languages, reminding us that we are a country of immigrants, with all of the class issues that entails.
3. O'Neill is a dramatist of unparalleled ambitions, seeking to create a religious and mythic American theater on the order of the Greeks. *Desire Under the Elms* follows Euripides, but his most ambitious effort at Greek tragedy is *Mourning Becomes Electra*, the story of the fall of a great house during the time of the Civil War, which has close parallels to Faulkner's *Absalom, Absalom*.

4. Yet, most would agree that O'Neill's finest works are his late plays, notably *The Iceman Cometh* and *Long Day's Journey Into Night*. In these plays, he returns to everyday people and everyday diction, with considerable doses of Irish wit and blarney, to do battle with the demons of his life—failed dreams, family warfare, and the erosions caused by time and despair.

5. O'Neill's career was long and tortured. Born in 1888, the son of a famous actor, the young O'Neill was admitted to Princeton, but flunked out. He frequented bars and brothels, especially under the tutelage of his older brother, Jamie. O'Neill was a voracious reader, particularly of the new philosophy and literature (including Ibsen, Nietzsche, Baudelaire, Schopenhauer, Strindberg, and others). He was also a sailor, prospected for gold, and sought out other adventures. He contracted tuberculosis in 1912 (the period dramatized in *Long Day's Journey*), studied playwriting at Harvard in 1914, began his fertile career as a dramatist, helped found the Provincetown Players in 1916, and went on to write some of the most distinguished plays of our century from 1920 to his death in 1953. The key events of his life—family upbringing, drinking, poor health, tortured human relationships, lost dreams, and irretrievable innocence—are central to many of his plays.

II. *Long Day's Journey Into Night* is the story of O'Neill's family life in 1912. It is a family portrait of the Tyrones.

A. O'Neill is clearly building on the legacies of Ibsen and Strindberg.
   1. We see here Ibsen's ghosts, his themes of inheritance and legacy.
   2. Strindberg is most visible in the depiction of marriage, which is understood as a dance over time, as endless theater.

B. Yet, O'Neill goes beyond his sources by creating something altogether larger and more stereophonic: The family as echo chamber and torture chamber.
   1. The play graphs a life over time, even though it focuses on one day's events. We learn how each of the Tyrones has been molded.
   2. We learn most of what we know by the endless recriminations that the Tyrones articulate regarding the family. The father, the mother, and each of the brothers have failed one another in multiple ways. As we hear these indictments, especially concerning the mother's relapse into drugs, a family portrait starts to appear.
   3. If Greek tragedy depends on loved ones slaying one another, this family story plays out that drama over and over.
   4. Given the weight of time in this story, the grim sense of how life has not panned out for the Tyrones, it is questionable whether this play can be fully appreciated by the young.
   5. O'Neill's triumph is to liberate the poetry of this story, to freight the echoes and moments of the past into these recriminations, to bring history to life. He is also a genius for representing the countless games and coverups that characterize our dealings with one another, even with ourselves. We begin to realize that a family conversation is little less than a mine field: Every step is precarious.
   6. Yet, through all the pain of this story, there is a ballet-like dimension to these exchanges. O'Neill's peculiar eloquence is not so much linguistic as it is gestural and tonal.
   7. The scenes of confrontation—dodge and accusation, acceptance and denial—are the life of the family. Everything resonates in this depiction of past hurts and present dilemmas. The fatalism of Greek drama is evident. There is a dark grandeur in this recounting of family tragedy.
   8. Our relation with ourselves is theatrical. In O'Neill, there are no deceptions—all things that are hidden are known to be hidden.
Lecture 76

*Long Day's Journey Into Night: There's No Place Like Home*

**Scope:** As dark as O'Neill's story of family reckoning is, it contains brilliant flashes of humor and raffish charm. But O'Neill's genius lies in his theatrical vision, his ability to transform the simplest items—a car, a lightbulb, fog or a fog horn, the act of eating or drinking—into shimmering symbols, resonant with feeling and history, telling a story of their own. O'Neill's project is to unpack the Tyrones, to make the temporal density of their lives, the crucial events that formed and deformed them, visible in their smallest exchanges. These temporal reaches are matched by the strange spatial extensions of the play, especially in the story of the mother, Mary, who retreats ever further into her drug-induced visions of childhood bliss. The central motif of the play is the loss of innocence, understood as the loss of soul, and O'Neill shows us the terrible beauty of our ceaseless efforts at retrieval. By the end of this story of accusation and revelation, each Tyrone bares his or her soul, and we understand, in these moments of catharsis and epiphany, what the theater can do.

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

1. Give examples of O'Neill's deft use of symbols,
2. Summarize the role of home in the Tyrone family tragedy, and
3. Explain the interaction of space and time in *Long Day's Journey Into Night*.

**Outline**

I. O'Neill is the master of Irish humor and blarney, as well as the tragic dramatist.
   
   A. Consider the story of Shawnessy, the little man who effectively challenges Standard Oil.
      1. Shawnessy's pigs bathe in a neighboring millionaire's ice pond.
      2. Shawnessy backs the millionaire down by turning the tables.
   
   B. Still lovelier is the saga of the lightbulbs, revolving around the legendary stinginess of James Tyrone. O'Neill performs a kind of magic in these scenes, as Edmund confronts his father.
      1. The house is habitually dark. Edmund wants it to be brighter, which precipitates an argument.
      2. Father says "lets them burn," leading to an opening up between father and son that covers a long stretch of the text.
   
   C. A final example is the car that Tyrone has bought for Mary. Her remarks on this score might seem utterly banal, yet they carry the mellowness of an entire lifetime of marriage.

II. O'Neill succeeds in liberating the poetry and resonance of the simplest things, the simplest rituals.
   
   A. This family's life, like the lives of so many families, is structured around the basics of food and drink. Here is the social pulse of life, the time for verbal exchange, whether loving or hateful. There is also an undercurrent of danger in the drinking early in the day, leading to the eventual drug use by Mary.
   
   B. Perhaps the most sustained realist/poetic motif of the play is that of the fog and the fog horn.
      1. Is this realism? Yes. After all, in a summer house by the sea, fog seems natural enough.
      2. Yet, O'Neill also unpacks the fog's rich symbolic meanings. Mary loves fog, because it blurs all contours, allows her to hide, escape, and find shelter. This is symbolic of the play's title.
      3. The relentless fog horn, however, is the sound that punctuates this play. It is the reminder, the recall, the arrest. It represents the act of being found out and brought back to reality, to others, and to one's self.
III. If Shakespeare said that the world is a stage, O'Neill shows that the stage is a world, a place of astonishing proportions.

A. O'Neill's characters have a remarkable dimensionality—they move back and forth through time. He seems to be showing us that the present is a mirage, that we are always living in the past and in the realm of what might have been.
1. A kiss is enough to cause a trip through time. Here is the mobility of the play.
2. O'Neill's stage directions stress this fluidity over and over.
3. Hence, commonsensical lines, such as "forget the past," are rightly seen as naive and impossible in a scheme like O'Neill's.

B. O'Neill's characters seem to move through space as well, despite the realist decor of the play.
1. Consider the repeated emphasis on James Tyrone's bad real estate deals; O'Neill is talking about space.
2. Mary, returning to her drug habit, seems increasingly on a voyage "to other places" in this play; she is on the move, into the fog and the night.
3. In Mary's final exit, Jamie "serenades" her with Swinburne's poem, "The Leave-taking."

C. As a counterpoint to this scheme of exit, we hear Mary's repeated plaint about the loss of home. Home is understood as the idyllic but absent center of her life.
1. Home is what her husband has never given her.
2. Home is where everything would have been different, especially the children.
3. Mary's has lost her soul. She seeks it throughout the play, and it is beautifully illustrated in the image of her wedding gown.
4. Yet, the play tells us again and again that there is no exit, no reprieve, no way of denying the ravages of time.

D. Nonetheless, O'Neill chooses to end his tragic story with four bursts of catharsis and light. It is here that the haunted Tyrones move deepest into their lost selves and share what they find. Actually, it's a journey not to "night," but to "light."
1. James, the father, confesses to Edmund that his life has been a failure, that he might have been the greatest actor of his day, but he took the easy way out.
2. Edmund (the young Eugene O'Neill) gives the most lyrical speech of the play, describing his visions and ecstatic moments of release on the seas. He is the family poet in all senses.
3. Then, Jamie confesses to Edmund his horribly mixed motives, his desire to maim and kill his brother, as well as his love.
4. Finally, Mary, the play's living ghost, the mad Ophelia, enters with her wedding gown, still seeking what she has lost. Her evocation of childhood innocence in the convent is the perfect closure to this play: She has entered the night and fog, but also the light of language and vision.
5. There is no way for the Tyrones to solve their problems, but the play does end on a muted note, if not of resolution, at least of a certain acceptance.

Readings:
Essential: O'Neill, Long Day's Journey Into Night (Yale University Press, 1965)


Topics for Further Consideration:
1. Discuss the notion of fatalism in Long Day's Journey Into Night and whether O'Neill's view is utterly tragic and deterministic or redemptive.
2. Explain how O'Neill opens up the closed precincts of time and space in Long Day's Journey Into Night.
Lecture 77

Tennessee Williams: Managing Libido

Scope: The small list of American dramatists of the first rank has to place Tennessee Williams very close to the top. Unlike the technically experimental but stammering O'Neill, Williams has a vivid, exotic coloration. His special talent lies in working realist material in prismatic fashion, so that we are aware of echoes of myth and legend and the stage itself becomes powerfully expressive in its lighting, music, and special effects. Like O'Neill, Williams too has one central story to tell: That of the lonely but gifted outsider, the often subversive, often pitiable, often tragic figure of the poet/outcast, who nourishes a dream of great beauty that can never be actualized or is indeed a relic of the past. If loneliness is Williams's theme, dysfunction seems to be the modus operandi in his plays. Characters are frozen in time, are in a losing struggle with the harsh, unremitting, insistently unpoetical forces of reality. Finally, there is a powerful libidinal undercurrent in Williams's work, a tortured sense of sexuality in league with either death or corruption, that seems to move his figures toward some kind of fateful rendezvous. –This stems unmistakably from the author's own fitful sexual identity as a homosexual in a repressive American culture. Williams, like O'Neill and Miller, is an elegiac writer, attuned to the themes of loss and dream, at war with the ravages of time, bent on graphing his version of the Fall. His greatest play, A Streetcar Named Desire, fuses all these motifs into a spellbinding story of the death of romance and the life of the body.

Williams's body of work appeared largely in the wake of World War II, from 1945 (The Glass Menagerie) to 1961 (Night of the Iguana). Even though he is wonderfully inventive, we nonetheless recognize the recurring pattern of his work: The lonely outsider, the countercultural figure, who brings either beauty or disturbing sexuality to a harsh, conformist society. Williams brings echoes of myth and legend into his fables of the Fall, but his depiction of the warfare between gifted but paralyzed humans who are stuck in coercive circumstances has a distinctly American ring to it. Very often, the plot has been played out in the past, the damage has already been done, and the burden of the play is to return to the wound, not just through memory, but through devastating replay or degraded reenactment in the present. We will first examine Williams's most poetic text, The Glass Menagerie, as an exemplary tale of misfits and the damaged psyche that is refracted in each major character—Amanda, Laura, and Tom. Yet, this play is not burdened with the poisonous and vital sexual cargo that stamps all Williams's other major works. A look at some of these texts will prepare us for examining his finest play, A Streetcar Named Desire.

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

1. Describe Williams's general treatment of romance,
2. Explain the role of appetite in Williams's work, and
3. Explain why New Orleans is the perfect setting for A Streetcar Named Desire.

Outline

I. O'Neill stands out as the dramatist of pipe dreams and family tragedy, whereas Tennessee Williams inevitably focuses on the fate of the lonely but gifted individual, the marginalized figure of beauty or sexuality, in a conformist American culture.


B. Like O'Neill, Williams experiments brilliantly with dramatic form, and his work makes ingenious use of lighting, music, and stage effects. Yet, at every turn, Williams pushes his realist materials into something that approaches expressionism. The theater is a place of memory and desire, a place where illusion becomes visible. His work also fuses the story itself with echoes of myth and legend, suggesting an archetypal kind of theater, replete with ritual events.
C. A key component of Williams's work is the tormented sexuality of the author, who was gay at a time when American society seemed most oppressively straight. The theme of sexual malaise and subversion is found everywhere in his work. Sexuality is often tainted as something dirty or diseased, the opposite pole of a kind of impossible purity that many of his figures yearn for. Williams's treatment of these issues is accompanied by a concern with American politics and power. We find numerous instances in which the subversive individual is either killed or coerced by forces of authority.

D. At the core of Williams's vision is a tragic view of romance.

1. Often this view is embodied in his loners' cherished memories of some earlier phase of life. These memories frequently make the characters dysfunctional in their present lives, which are often presented in degraded tones.

2. Amanda Wingfield in The Glass Menagerie is perhaps the most charming exemplar of this obsession with a glorious past. For her, life peaked one Sunday afternoon in Blue Mountain.

3. This mythic remembrance contrasts with the dreary and sordid condition of the Wingfields' circumstances in St. Louis in the 1930s, replete with references to gathering cataclysmic events of the coming war. The memory also becomes the obsessive and deforming pattern for the daughter, Laura, causing her ultimately to retreat ever further into a shadow land.

4. The play enacts the arrival of Laura's Gentleman Caller, himself now in straitened circumstances, as Williams plays out his major theme—a mythic memory replayed in a lower, even degraded key. We see here an ongoing dialectic between past and present, as well as a formula for dramatic action.

5. The Glass Menagerie offers three versions of romance: Amanda as the "Scarlett O'Hara" model, Laura with her fragile and tender otherworldliness, and Tom (appropriately called "Shakespeare" and obviously standing in for Williams), who both narrates and acts in this "memory play." We close our analysis with a consideration of Tom's escape strategy, described in a brilliant but scary speech.

E. The Glass Menagerie treats the need for love, but it is Williams's only major text to be untroubled by sexuality. The others are far more lurid and desperate on this front.

1. Sweet Bird of Youth focuses on Chance Wayne, a formerly beautiful young man who was in love with the town boss's daughter, but has now fallen on bad times. He is a gigolo with thinning hair, desperate to fight the clock and the community. At the end, Chance Wayne will be dismembered, castrated. Here is the punitive streak in Williams, the dark view of sexual comeuppance that chastises desire and freedom.

2. Suddenly Last Summer is darker still. Here we learn (gradually) the strange fate of Sebastian Venable, who is mysteriously dead. The plot considers whether or not to lobotomize Sebastian's cousin, Catherine, who wants to speak the horrible truth about the vampirish activities she has witnessed and abetted. This play moves directly into myth with its replay of the fate of Orpheus, who was dismembered by the maenads, but whose severed head floated, singing, to Lesbos. A central concern here is whether this story can be told. Sebastian's mother does not want to know it, nor does the "straight" American public of 1958.

3. Orpheus Descending recounts the story of another subversive figure, Val Xavier, unforgettably outfitted in his snakeskin jacket. He is another sexual singer who threatens the status quo and will be punished for it.

4. There is also a more affirmative comic side to Williams, on show in plays like The Rose Tattoo and Cat on a Hot Tin Roof. In these plays, sexuality is allied to the life force and accommodation and sexual union are ultimately promoted to heal the wounded and make the dysfunctional functional once again.

5. Williams reaches back to an exalted view of human sensation, a vision of how people can be driven by their appetites.

II. In Williams's masterpiece, A Streetcar Named Desire, all these elements are fused.

A. Set in New Orleans, site of moral and sexual freedoms (that Williams himself experienced when he arrived there in 1938), this story is infused with a mix of sensuality, lyricism, fantasy, and longing. But ultimately, the city will be shown to be a jungle.
1. The first notation of the city's voice is "Red Hot." The street is Elysian Fields. Heat, flesh, and the gods will play out here.

2. The protagonist, Blanche Du Bois, thinks she has lost her way in taking this "streetcar," but she is on the track that Williams has set for her. The echoes of Edgar Allan Poe will make sense.

3. Here is the home for open, insistent, almost epidemic, sexuality—the place for coupling, not conducted romantically, but brutally and irresistibly.

4. This is the setting for Williams's most sustained passion play about Eros and Thanatos, love and death, comedy and tragedy. We shall see, however, that these forces are complex, intermixed, hard to sort out with any finality.

B. All of this is to say that New Orleans is the right place for Blanche Du Bois to meet Stanley Kowalski. This is a rendezvous of destiny that illuminates all of Williams’s genius and tortured sensibility. Blanche is a more tragic version of Amanda Wingfield (with her dreams of past glamour and beauty). Stanley is the new Mr. America, an astonishing portrait of easy, confident, and brutal sexuality, but also a portrait of American pragmatism, the archenemy of the romantic vision.

1. Blanche, formerly of Belle Reve, comes to New Orleans to visit her married sister, Stella, who has found happiness with Stanley. Yes, he beats her occasionally, but she says it is worth it.

2. "Haven't you ever ridden on that streetcar?" is the echoing question of the play. Libido is the energy that drives both life and death, and Williams charts it with brilliance.
Lecture 78

A Streetcar Named Desire: The Death of Romance

Scope: In Blanche Du Bois and Stanley Kowalski, Tennessee Williams enriches our repertory of American types, not only because they neatly define the polarities of his own vision, but because they negotiate an American battle about the place of beauty and poetry in a harsh, pragmatic culture. Blanche epitomizes Williams's view of being "stuck" in the past: Not only has she lost her youth, but we learn (in driblets) that she has lost her love too, under circumstances of betrayal that will be reenacted by the play's plot. It is here that Williams discreetly touches on homosexuality, but above all, we see a pathetic fight against time, as Blanche tries to hold to her beliefs and sanity. This losing battle comes to us as an allegory of art itself—art as decorous form, as creation of beauty where there was plainness. Stanley is her opposite number in every respect. He is sexually brash and comfortable, pragmatic, shrewd, suspicious of "airs" of any sort, the new American who mesmerizes Williams. In their encounter, we see a duel of epic proportions and resonance. Finally, this agony is presented precisely as theater, a contest between roles and images, as mounting and dismounting of the facades and structures that form and deform life.

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

1. Explain how Blanche Du Bois is the "artist" of the play,
2. Summarize the role of the past in Blanche's twisted vision of the world, and
3. Describe how Stanley Kowalski represents the new American man.

Outline

I. Blanche Du Bois is Tennessee Williams's most moving and tragic figure.
   A. She resembles many of his protagonists in her fixation on the romanticized past, which in this case is Belle Reve, the now lost "home."
      1. Belle Reve has clear echoes of Eden, from which Blanche has been expelled. Yet, we must also come to terms with the insistence on death as a component of Belle Reve.
      2. Exactly how Blanche lost Belle Reve is of great concern to Stanley Kowalski, and her explanation deserves scrutiny: "Epic fornication."
   B. The lost past contains more than Belle Reve. We also learn about Blanche's tragic marriage of long ago.
      1. In time-release fashion, Williams constructs for us Blanche's emotional past, a series of events that will return.
      2. Blanche was married, young and infatuated, to the mysterious Allen Grey, who has (we later learn) committed suicide. Blanche feels that she is responsible for this suicide.
      3. Allen's "transgression" is homosexuality, and Williams's attitude toward it is anything but clear. Lovers die in this play; even Mitch's former girlfriend died. Is there something punitive at hand?
      4. Given the implacable rhythms of Williams's vision, we can expect Blanche's "betrayal" of Allen to return.
      5. Late in the play, a blind Mexican woman is calling, "Flores. Flores. Flores para los muertos." Can Death be honored? Tamed? Concealed? By flowers? The play stages the war between death and desire.
   C. Blanche's own truest enemy is not Stanley, but death.
      1. She is on the same treadmill as all of us. Obsessed with time, she recalls Williams's other title, Sweet Bird of Youth. Age matters in this play. One loses one's beauty. Softness, muted light, gentleness are needed to shield us from the brutality of facts and time.
      2. Blanche is drawn, almost like a vampire, to youth. We hear of scandalous misdeeds in the past, and Williams has given us a haunting vignette here in New Orleans of Blanche's hunger.

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Blanche is the play's artist. But can time and fact be outwitted or clothed in beauty?

1. In pure "Scarlet O'Hara" fashion, Blanche spins yarns about her eager beaux, especially one Shep Huntleigh of fabulous Texas wealth.
2. In a desperate but moving speech, Blanche articulates her peculiar trumps, what she has to offer in this face-off against time: Refinement, a sense of art and beauty—qualities that cannot go stale.
3. Blanche's signature move is her obsession with the colored paper that she puts over the lightbulb. This is her emblematic effort to filter, soften, mute, and idealize the harshness of raw, unforgiving light.
4. It is no surprise that Blanche seeks help and refuge in drink as well, as a buffer against the enemy.
5. Her most pathetic feature is her neediness, her yearning for kindness and gentleness among strangers.

II. Blanche's fate is to encounter her sister's husband, Stanley Kowalski.

A. Stanley is among Williams's most magnificent creatures—healthy, happy, robust, animalistic in his power and authority (so unlike what we know Williams to have been).
   1. We first glimpse Stanley in paradigmatic fashion. He throws meat to Stella.
   2. Stella calls him, appropriately, "a different species," and she is right. He is decked out in brilliant colors, strips down whenever he can; Stella even enjoys going to watch him bowl. Williams stages him with his fellows in a poker game that emphasizes male camaraderie, virility, and primary colors.
   3. Even Blanche recognizes Stanley's special strength—his sexuality. Yet she upbraids Stella for sinking to such a level, and she offers a bitter, Darwinian analysis of her sister's "fall."
   4. Nonetheless, Stella loves Stanley, and Stanley loves Stella. Even after he beats her (when she is pregnant), she comes back for more. Their sexual fireworks (only referred to) anchor this marriage and speak for values unlike any that Blanche has known.

B. Stella and Stanley represent the rhythm of comedy, of life, of marriage and reproduction and children and the future. A baby will be born in this story. The dying die, and the living live.

C. Yet Stanley is more than the sexual principle. He is also the new man—brash, vulgar, utterly prosaic, pragmatic, shrewd, and industrious. He is the captain of the bowling team, and Stella is right that he is going places. He is a serious antagonist in this drama.
   1. He is suspicious about the supposed "sale" of Belle Reve and wants to see the documents.
   2. He speaks the most perfect lingo imaginable for puncturing Blanche's rhapsodies.
   3. He is proud of being an American and will take no guff from these women.
   4. We may see in him Williams's fondest dreams and worst nightmares about manhood: Sexual poise and innocence and power combined with the brutal enemy of art, dream, and beauty.

III. The play reaches its crescendo in the scenes where Stanley and Blanche perform their pas de deux.

A. "Make Believe," Blanche's song, is juxtaposed against Stanley's deflating research into her past.
B. Stanley's rape of Blanche is indeed the play's awaited rendezvous, and it caps Williams's dialectical drama.
C. Blanche's final exit into madness is pure art: A final victory of the colored paper that alters the raw light, leaving her at last to "the kindness of strangers." Exit Blanche; enter baby and loving parents.

Readings:
Recommended: R. B. Parker, 20th Century Interpretations of The Glass Menagerie; Thompson, Tennessee Williams' Plays (Peter Lang, 1987)

Topics for Further Consideration:
1. Williams's plays are said to follow a particular formula: The romantic dream, situated in the past, will be reenacted, in degraded form, in the present. Apply this formula to A Streetcar Named Desire.
2. Discuss the notion that A Streetcar Named Desire stages the collision (or dialectic) between desire and death.
Lecture 79

Death of a Salesman: Death of an Ethos?

Scope: Arthur Miller, along with Eugene O'Neill and Tennessee Williams, completes the great triad of American dramatists. Active throughout the latter half of the 20th century, he is best known for his work in the 1940s and 1950s. His masterpiece, Death of a Salesman, is recognized as a classic American story about the culture of capitalism. Miller consciously strives to merge the personal and the political, to focus the issues of the age by depicting the drama of a representative man. Such a procedure could well be didactic and allegorical, but Miller's rich sense of compassion and humor, as well as his often lyrical and moving voice, transform his stories into something heartfelt and, at times, unbearably moving. More than any other major playwright, Miller has been our national conscience, aiming not so much to admonish us as to show us where we are, where we've been, and where we're going. Death of a Salesman merges techniques of realism and expressionism to convey the gathering crisis of Willy Loman's life—a crisis of values and feeling. By bringing the past, even the dreams, of Loman into theatrical language, Miller fashions an unforgettable story of a man taking the final measure of his life. Loman's story turns out to be inescapably our fable as well: Our pursuit of success, our belief in our children, our capacity to dream.

Miller's greatest play, Death of a Salesman, was written and staged in 1949, and we cannot fail to see in it the fabric of life in mid-century America. This was a time of economic striving, of purchases on the installment plan, of high school heroes and parental dreams, of the little man's yearning for success. Willy Loman, traveling salesman, looks a bit like a dinosaur to us today, in our culture of telemarketing, Internet transactions, and catalog shopping. The pathos of Miller's story derives from Loman's agonizing sense that he is becoming obsolete in his own lifetime, that "selling" is not what it used to be, that his views on success are cruelly mocked by the passing of time, that his children—so promising in youth, so much the mainstay of his life—have failed in their lives. We begin our study of the play by measuring its documentary status as a story of 1950s America, with its middle class dreams of the good life. We close with an account of Loman's decline, his elegiac view of "salesmanship" as a doomed ethos—a way of life and a set of values that no longer make sense.

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

1. Summarize how Miller's plays use a European approach to expressing political values,
2. Describe how Death of a Salesman is an example of expressionism, and
3. Explain how Willy Loman is both a modern Everyman and a modern Oedipus.

Outline

I. In all his major work, Arthur Miller strives to fuse the personal and the political, much in the European fashion, to tell the story of individual lives that exemplify for us the social conflicts of their times.

A. All My Sons (1947) is a story of family loyalty recognized as national betrayal. Its message is stated in the title: One must acknowledge the larger family, all one's sons.

B. The Crucible (1953) recasts the Salem witch trials in the light of McCarthyism and the paranoia of the Red Scare of the 1950s. The play illustrates Miller's uncanny ability to revisit our history to show us where we are today.

C. A View From the Bridge (1955) is Miller's explicit effort to reconceive Greek tragedy, but here the concern with incest leads to a view of ethical transgression that is finally understood as social transgression.

D. In later life, Miller has continued to write plays and exercise his role as a major American intellectual figure. For our purposes, it is instructive to consider his criticisms of his two great rivals in the theater, Tennessee Williams and Eugene O'Neill.

1. Miller faulted Williams for his obsession with the personal at the expense of the political, for creating a body of work that is too narrow.

2. Miller criticized O'Neill for being too confessional, too concerned with private salvation.
II. *Death of a Salesman* (1949) is Miller's masterpiece, and it offers us a portrait of mid-century America.

A. In an age of shopping on the Internet, telemarketing, and catalog sales, Miller's traveling salesman, Willy Loman, may seem like a dinosaur to us.

1. Yet, Loman reminds us of an America that used to exist, even if only in the fond dreams of its believers: A place of safe cities and genuine camaraderie, a place where the salesman was a figure of stature well known to all.
2. This sepia America comes to us as a culture founded on the installment plan. All that you owned in the way of material products (house, cars, appliances, etc.), you paid for in monthly installments.
3. Loman has almost finished paying for his modest house, but he is surrounded by an ominous apartment complex. His dreams of retirement in the country ring true even today.
4. Miller's vision is surprisingly cued to technological developments. One of the play's most intriguing scenes has to do with the fascination with gadgets that record the human voice.
5. Loman's own insecurities, his malaise about the passing of an age, are inseparable from the evolving material and technological culture of which he is a part.
6. The centerpiece of the Loman payoff scheme is, of course, the mortgage. Owning your own house is a fond American dream. What happens then?

B. We realize that the race against time that governs your appliances and your car also governs your own mortality and ability to function. Willy Loman is exhausted. He is coming apart.

1. He has, intermittently, a devastating sense of his own failures, of just how flawed he is, in the eyes of others.
2. Being a salesman is lonely work; Willy can barely manage it.
3. Yet, there was a time when salesmen were civic heroes, men at the core of the community, known to all, loved by all. Dave Singleman was such a man.
4. Can Willy Loman be Dave Singleman, who died "the death of a salesman"? Who will come to Willy's funeral?

C. Willy Loman's impending breakdown is depicted by Miller in terms of visiting ghosts and apparitions from the past and from dreams. The expressionist staging of this play is designed to show that the ultimate locus of events here is the "mind" of Loman himself:

1. The most prestigious apparition is Willy's legendary brother, Ben, the great American success. Ben is presented as a kind of frontier Ben Franklin, a man wrestling a fortune from Alaska and Africa. Ben also represents the absent father of Loman's life, a role that Loman is seeking, pathetically, to play out for his two sons.
2. Ben was Willy's great missed opportunity. Yet, Ben's success is shown to be disturbing in other ways, as in his scrapping with Biff.
3. Miller's theatrical brilliance allows him to "fuse" Ben with other realist figures, such as Willy's friend Charley, also a "success" and therefore a foil. Charley's "nerd" son, Bernard, is a foil to Willy's splendid sons, Biff and Happy; yet, they have not gotten on in life. Why?

D. Willy's greatest article of belief is personal charisma. His beautiful children are naturally endowed. Of course they will succeed.

1. Bernard cannot (should not), therefore, hold a candle to Biff.
2. Biff Loman, super athlete and loving son, represents the godlike promise that "all our sons" have for us. Yet, his life has gone wrong.
3. The pathos of these scenes is underscored by all the characters' recognition that Willy Loman is somehow a representative man. He is a modern Everyman, but also a modern Oedipus and a modern Lear, an old man who has lived and has now come to take the measure of his life. Here is Miller's tragedy about "human suffering in the Industrial Age." It is about life in a secular, material world.
Lecture 80

*Death of a Salesman:* 
Tragedy of the American Dream

**Scope:** Yes, Miller's story is about America of the 1950s, but it is also an insistent tragedy of the modern age. It poses the awful question of belief in a material, secular world that has replaced God with two desperate substitutes—work and children. "What are you building?" Ben asks Willy, and what answers can he, or anyone, give? Success is on the docket in this play: How do you gauge it? How do you get it? Does time erode it? Miller's most moving theatrical moments depict the beauty and promise of Loman's two boys, especially Biff, the star athlete and loving son. Time and life are cruel in their undoing of dreams, but Miller wants us to see that Willy himself is crucially involved in Biff's failures. In one of the play's most dazzling episodes, the transgressions of the past return to the scene, as we realize that theater is precisely the medium for showing us that nothing is ever over, that we are all haunted creatures.

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

1. Explain the irony of Willy Loman's "legacy,"
2. Summarize the dilemma of Linda's freedom at the end of the play, and
3. Explain Miller's complex view of the role of dream.

**Outline**

1. Miller is exploring more than the 1950s in America. His larger prey has to do with the nature of belief in a desacralized world. How do we define "success" in a materialist culture? What happens to our belief in our children?
   
   A. Success is the tragic theme of *Death of a Salesman*. In a modern, democratic, classless society, your ambition (your curse?) is to succeed, to "make" something of your life.
      1. Ben asks Willy, "What are you building?" It is a devastating question. Who can answer it?
      2. If money is the only sure index to success, then life insurance is the only tangible investment some people, have.
      3. Willy Loman wants to "seed," to plant gardens. His insurance policy will, in a sense, be such a legacy.
   
   B. It is also crucial to understand that Willy Loman has already "seeded." His truest "product" is his two children, Biff and Happy. They are his future; they are the magic of his life. Nothing in modern theater is more moving than Miller's rendition of this family's dreams. These boys will conquer the world. Yes?
      1. We are to understand that this was a loving family. They are bitter today, but Miller brings that warm (poisoning?) past back.
      2. Biff was the almost divinely gifted older son. He and Happy are, after all, the Loman Brothers, who have designs to sell sporting goods.
      3. In a lovely sequence, Miller allows us to glimpse Biff's great moment of glory on the gridiron. This came to nought, but it was real.
      4. For Miller, perhaps our belief in the promise of our children is the quintessential dream of life.
      5. In *Death of a Salesman*, this dream has become a nightmare. The warnings were there: Biff was a poor student, he had a tendency to steal, he cannot settle down. Unlike Charley's son, Bernard, Biff has failed in his life. He asks one of the play's hardest questions: What are you supposed to want? Miller is asking: Why has he failed?
      6. Yet, Miller has motivated his drama in a more sensational way. Willy himself has betrayed his son by his adultery. The most harrowing moments of the play have to do with the staging and emergence of this "secret" material. It simply thrusts itself into the story as something that cannot be repressed.
         a. Willy has told us he was "vital in New England," and we will see this is true in a surprising way.
b. Biff, after learning that he will not graduate, bolts to Boston to find his father and get help. He stumbles onto more than he expected.

c. Miller brilliantly stages the Boston revelation in driblets, as thrusting echoes that must enter the story. Their final entry comes in the restaurant where Willy has joined his two sons, who then abandon him to pick up women. We have an unmistakable sense of repetition and propriety here, as the substitutions and replays come into focus. The scene closes with the final disclosure, which spells the end of Willy's relationship with Biff.

d. Biff's moment of glory on the field will thus be matched by the crowning moment of failure and betrayal: Willy's adultery in Boston.

II. The question arises: Where do we put the blame?

A. The sexual betrayal that Biff stumbles onto merely reinforces the even greater theme that time and life betray us, erode our promise.
   1. Biff and Happy represent "all our sons," and we have to ask if promise can ever be achieved, if life ever measures up to dream.
   2. Willy is a great dreamer. This is what he has to sell.

B. Hence, the currency of life is neither time nor money nor flesh, but dream.
   1. At Willy's death, Charley dares us to criticize this man. Here is the play's most eloquent depiction of Willy's virtue: He had the capacity to believe in the dream. What else is a salesman but that?
   2. But Linda, the wife, closes the play with her chilling lines about finally paying off the mortgage with the insurance policy. At last, she is "free." For what? An American story is coming to an end.

C. Miller offers us a tragic view of such arrangements, showing us that our beliefs in success and children are doomed beliefs, but perhaps the only beauty in our lives nonetheless.

Readings:
Essential: Miller, *Death of a Salesman* (Penguin, 1976)


Topics for Further Consideration:

1. Summarize how Arthur Miller uses expressionist dramaturgy in *Death of a Salesman*.
2. Describe how *Death of a Salesman* is an "anatomy" of the American dream.
Scope: Toni Morrison's masterpiece, *Beloved* (1988), completes our parade of American classics. As the preeminent American novelist of the end of the 20th century, Morrison is a richly inclusive author. She is utterly attuned to the American literary corpus, reworking Stowe, Twain, and Faulkner—not to mention Hurston, Wright, and Ellison—into her own special weave about life in this country. Her perspective as a black woman causes her to reconceive much that has been at the center of our literature: Our engagement with the past, our belief in mobility, our peculiar type of innocence, our quest for freedom, our cult of the individual. In *Beloved*, these themes reappear as fraudulent, damaged, or illusory, as a set of assumptions and goals that we have thought to be universal, but that are in fact the product of a particular cultural system. The miracle of Morrison's work, however, is that it is never merely angry or polemical, but always about human beings trying to stay alive, trying to negotiate a living space where sanity and even pleasure might be possible. Morrison's language is chewy, sassy, wonderfully muscular, and inventive. In her work, the human body looms large—so large that we realize how absent it is from most of our books, how pressing and eloquent and authoritative the body is, how much light it sheds on the cultural practices and values in which we are trapped. Her novels leave us with a renewed sense of American tragedy and American promise.

Morrison is our most recognized contemporary novelist, winner of the Nobel Prize in 1993 and author of three of the most achieved fictions of our century: *Sula*, *The Song of Solomon*, and *Beloved*. This last book demands inclusion in a course on American classics, not least because it consciously reworks so much that has gone before: The institution of slavery (with its concomitant piecing apart of the human family), as seen variously in Stowe, Melville, Twain, and Faulkner; the reality of ghosts, as seen in Poe, Hawthorne, James, and Faulkner; and the living hold of the past, as seen in so many of our writers, including those who wish to break away for some ideal free space. Yet Morrison alters many of these givens, most especially the familiar narrative project of memory and storytelling. In *Beloved*, which deals with the aftermath of the Civil War, we understand that the past is often so traumatizing, so utterly horrific, that survival consists in a form of willed amnesia. Morrison's novel is about the heroic and dangerous work of restoring full circulation to the black subject—a subject routinely treated as a commodity by slavery—and it probes the ways in which emancipation and self-ownership might become possible.

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

1. Summarize how Morrison's novel reengages the traditional American literary theme of escape,
2. Explain the role of storytelling in *Beloved*, and
3. Describe the role of amnesia in the unfolding of the novel.

Outline

I. Morrison's life and career are not over, but even now we can identify a remarkable spate of distinguished novels, some of which are already classics.

   A. Although Toni Morrison actually started writing novels late in life, she has been producing major texts from the 1970s to the present.

      1. *Sula* (1974) and *The Song of Solomon* (1977) are among her finest earlier works. Each one brilliantly breaks new ground, showing Morrison’s understanding of female maturation, as well as her keen sense of male rites of passage.

B. *Beloved* is the only contemporary book included in this series of American classics. In fifty or a hundred years, if people are still reading American literature, they will be reading *Beloved*. And it will be fresh and vital then, as well.

1. Morrison's novel is an uncanny replay and reconception of much that we have already seen, but with a difference.

2. We began our course with Irving's "Rip Van Winkle," the prophetic story of a man who slept through the war, who desired to get clear of marital responsibilities and culture altogether. This is a persistent strain in American literature: Thoreau's idyll at Walden Pond, Twain's two figures on a boat (with one of them, the white one, "lighting out for the Territory ahead of the rest" at the end), and Hemingway's Nick Adams.

3. Morrison's story takes place in rural Ohio several years after the Civil War. Like Faulkner in *Absalom*, she is revisiting a national trauma, but from the "other side"—the side of slaves and women. Her book also calls to mind the legacies of Poe, Hawthorne, and James in its obsession with ghosts, but here too she rings a new note.

4. We close our series with a book published in 1988 that focuses on 1865, because Morrison is showing us that history is real, that the past lives, not only in records, or even on the page, but in us. Morrison's novel is a wakeup call. Remember Thoreau's comment that he had never yet seen a man fully awake.

5. Morrison's treatment of slavery in general, and the pieced-apart family in particular, calls to mind the central issues in *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. Yet, what emerges most clearly from a reading of *Beloved* is not so much a curtain call of earlier authors, but a shockingly new voice and vision.

II. Morrison sets out to write the story of slavery, to make us understand what it actually meant.

A. The novel is dedicated to "Sixty Million and more."

1. One's first reaction may be to equate the dedication with "the six million," the Jews who were killed in the Holocaust. In fact, this book has the searing intensity of the stories about the camps, including mass genocide and survival at a dreadful cost.

2. But we understand that "Sixty Million and more" are the Africans brought to this country as slaves and their descendants over the many years that slavery existed in the New World. What is the human meaning of these numbers? One recalls Alex Haley's story of *Roots*, which traced African American ancestry back to the native country. Morrison explores the wound itself—the wound in the black psyche that a history of slavery constitutes. Morrison is diving into the wreck.

3. Much of what she uncovers as routine in the years following the war is almost unbearable to read today.

4. Morrison is writing about the forgotten ones, the ones who were so traumatized or undone that they left no record of their experiences.

B. Morrison begins in classic Gothic fashion by giving us a haunted house.

1. The opening lines sketch the fundamental reality that the ghost of a dead baby is haunting this place. It is destroying the remaining family.

2. Much of the plot is revealed here, even though we cannot yet truly assess it.

3. The grandmother explains that there are lots of haunted houses in the area and lots of ghosts around.

4. We could not be further from the tales of the supernatural, or the historical, or even the psychological, as we saw them in Poe, Hawthorne, and James. This baby is pure spite, pure venom. It is also the very spirit of narrative. One recalls the "raftsman episode" that Twain intended for *Huck Finn*, where we see an orphaned baby that cannot die. Morrison will go further.

5. We know that Morrison grew up in a talented family that was particularly active in storytelling, especially ghost stories. The logic of ghosts is special: Spirit outlives flesh, refuses to be silenced or die, is the very voice of history. Ghosts tell us that nothing is ever over.

C. Storytelling is the central activity of *Beloved*. It is not merely Morrison's own voice, but the project of the characters as well.

1. Remember the narrative brilliance that Faulkner exhibited—the memories in *The Sound and the Fury*, the inside chatter of the brain, the inspired recall and recreation of the past in *Absalom*. ©1998 The Teaching Company Limited Partnership
2. Faulkner's process is carefree in comparison with the issues at hand in Morrison. Her ex-slaves are inhabited by memories they cannot afford to work through. Slavery and its systemic abuses have yielded an equally systemic result—willed amnesia.
   
a. Baby Suggs, the grandmother, cannot remember her eight children.

b. Sethe, the heroine, cannot afford to go "in" where the memories are, even when she meets Paul D, a former friend and fellow escapee from the old place, "Sweet Home."

c. Paul D has been so damaged by abuse and horror that his heart has become a tobacco tin that no force on earth can open.

d. Denver, the daughter, has been so damaged by her mother's deeds that she simply went deaf when a schoolmate asked about it. Autism begins to look like a fairly normal state here.

3. This condition of having large chunks of your experience locked away somewhere, unavailable or unbearable, is given a strikingly somatic form by Morrison in the story of Sethe's giving birth to Denver (while she was escaping from "Sweet Home"). Sethe and Denver both would have died if it had not been for a runaway white girl whom they met, Amy Denver. She helps Sethe in a beautiful scene of human physical love.

4. Morrison insistently tells her story of slavery in corporal terms, in terms of the slaves not possessing their own bodies. The project at hand is one of self-ownership, but that must come from an act of wholeness and integrity, whereby the body is reassembled, its fuller articulation reestablished, its blockages overcome. Dismembering must yield to re-membering and remembering.

5. We have the moving example of Baby Suggs, the book's female oracle of sorts, who experiences selfhood at last when her slave son buys her into freedom. Self-ownership is a form of self-fertilization. It has a great deal to do also with names and language. The free person is at last capable of self-definition. Here, too, we cannot avoid thinking of the earlier projects of liberation that stud American literature.
Lecture 82

Beloved: A Story of "Thick Love"

Scope: At the heart of Morrison's novel is a hidden crime. We know about the crime from the first page, but we cannot grasp its resonance, its true horror. Early in the plot, a young woman steps out of the water; she calls herself Beloved, and her arrival at Sethe's house at 124 changes everything. Sethe herself has a shockingly visceral reaction to this strange person whose skin is without lines and smooth. Denver responds to her as a sister; Paul D is sexually moved by her. Beloved is the fluid principle, the figure who opens the sluices of human feelings, restores full circulation, reestablishes the arterial flow. Finally, we encounter the original crime of infanticide, when Sethe murdered her infant child, Beloved, to save her from the slave owner and slave catcher who had come to reclaim Sethe and her children. Now we can measure the enormity of Morrison's scheme: The young woman is living proof that Sethe did save her child through cutting her throat, because the grown woman has come back. Morrison's account of this "remade" family is strong stuff, as the mother/daughter principle proves itself to be stronger than life and death, to be indestructible. But, is Beloved beloved?

Objectives—Upon completion of this lecture, you should be able to
1. Compare Morrison's depiction of motherhood with Stowe's in Uncle Tom's Cabin,
2. Summarize how Beloved is a "composite creature," and
3. Explain how Morrison's novel is about "roots."

Outline

I. Morrison's story is a version of "returning to the scene of the crime."
   A. Remember the circular narrative in Faulkner's Absalom, whereby we finally end up with a satisfying explanation of the mysterious murder at the gate. So too does Morrison's book hold off its pivotal scene.
   B. In Beloved, we are told about the dead baby on the first page. This "haint" that will not go away, characterized as "spite," can also be thought of as narrative itself. All the major characters are closed figures, damaged figures, who have buried their terrors within.
      1. Of course, the burden of the book, its interpretive drive, is to get to these secrets. Something inexorable is at work here.
      2. It all starts when a young woman walks out of the water with "new skin, lineless and smooth."
      3. When Sethe, Paul D, and Denver seethe young woman, Sethe's reaction is astonishingly corporal. The "flow" we see here is one of the book's major motifs.
      4. The woman's name is Beloved, and she moves people. She possesses uncanny remembrances that dovetail with Sethe's own past, but she has no clear memories. She has "baby hair" and her head seems too heavy for her neck. She asks crucial questions of Sethe. She has come for Sethe's face.
      5. Beloved also bonds with Denver. Beloved is the sister Denver has lost and she has Denver tell her the story of her own birth. That story is rich in lessons for the novel.
      6. Beloved moves Paul D. He literally cannot stay put, cannot resist this young woman, and has (inappropriate?) sex with her in another astonishing scene that reestablishes circulation. Words and things, past and present, are coming together in strange ways.
      7. Finally, we make it back to the scene of the crime, now that we are "prepared" to process it, now that the channels are no longer blocked. Morrison writes this dazzling act of murder from many perspectives, including those of the white men who have come for the slaves and the black friend who saves Denver. Paul D now has to come fully to terms with Sethe the murderess, and the account of her act is signature Morrison. Sethe becomes a fabled creature trying to protect her young, her best possessions; she "saves" the child by killing it.
      8. And, of course, that is what this plot has been showing for some time now: Beloved has indeed come back from "over there," and she is not dead but saved.

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II. Yet this miraculous "return" from the dead simplifies nothing.

A. Paul D is so shocked by Sethe's story of "thick love," her willingness to go all the way to save her children, even to the tune of murder, that he leaves. Moreover, he cannot abide living with this female group of one mother and two daughters.

B. Hence, three women live together at 124 in a kind of gynecocracy, with the outside world entirely shut out. This is tantamount to a permanent return to the womb.

1. Denver realizes that she cannot manage this enclosure.

2. Sethe and Beloved, however, are there for the duration. Here, at last, is Sethe's opportunity to explain to her child that she did not murder her, that she saved her.

3. Yet Beloved is insatiable and accuses Sethe of abandoning her.

4. Finally, the monstrous transformation takes place. Mother and child change places and forms: Sethe shrinks and is eaten; Beloved grows and consumes. It is a nightmarish version of a birth that can never take place. This is Morrison's vision of what thick love looks like.

5. How do we assess this? Feminist criticism sees this as Morrison's warning about motherhood as a form of slavery.

C. The final wrinkle here is the suspicion that Beloved may not be the ghost child after all.

1. Beloved's insistent references to abandonment suggest a past unlike the one that Sethe lived with her dead child.

2. There are also references to a dead white man who kept a black girl locked up in his basement for his own pleasure. Is this Beloved?

3. Still more broadly, we may consider Beloved as a composite creature. She may be both the dead child and the spirit of all women dragged onto slave ships in Africa or all black women in America trying to trace their ancestry back to their mothers on the slave ships.

4. Morrison's book is most richly understood as all of the above. It is a meditation on "origins." It is the healing that can never be achieved but is nonetheless sought by the guilty mother and the abandoned child. It is an allegory about the psychic condition of American blacks.
Lecture 83

Beloved: Morrison's Writing of the Body

Scope: Morrison's novel deserves to be read as both a classic and as a culmination of the series, because it rings a profound change on writing itself, on the way in which a story can be told. Not as technically experimental as The Sound and the Fury, Beloved nonetheless testifies to a different view of language and coherence from the one to which we are accustomed. Morrison is showing us that a literature of the body is not only possible but long overdue. The unprecedented power of this novel comes from its insistent and unmistakable translation of slavery into somatic terms, its depiction of abuse and humiliation as crimes on the body, crimes against the tenderness and compassion that physical creatures experience and can give each other. The antagonist of the story is appropriately named Schoolteacher. This is the white slave owner who practices and preaches the religion of rational, scientific racism, of separating black and white into categories of human and animal. Schoolteacher represents the reductive, schematic, aridly cerebral powers with which Morrison's poetry and wisdom of the body are at war. It is here that she most indelibly writes and rewrites American literature.

Objectives—Upon completion of this lecture, you should be able to
1. Summarize the feminist notion of "women's writing."
2. Describe the role of the body in Morrison's depiction of slavery, and
3. Explain the unifying role of Morrison's language.

Outline

I. It is useful to consider the issue of "women's writing" in connection with Morrison's project.
   A. Feminists have long debated notions of "women's writing." The central issue concerns a "special" language that would be somehow closer to the body (some would say, to the woman's body).
      1. Some features of this kind of writing include fluidity rather than line, openness to affect and libido, suspicion of repressive order, and attention to the somatic.
      2. A corollary of such criticism is that the mainstream model we all know—rational, objective, clear, orderly, and organized—is understood to be problematic, perhaps diseased. It is sometimes called "phallogocentric."
      3. We have seen these issues throughout this course, especially in such texts as The Sound and the Fury and "The Yellow Wallpaper," but they are paramount in Beloved, particularly in connection with the role of Schoolteacher.
   B. Schoolteacher is the prime villain of the novel.
      1. Yes, he abuses and hurts black slaves, but his worst offense is his insidious "mind set," his obsession with classification and categorizing, his sharp distinction between human and animal, leading to a view of blacks as subhuman. This has a cool horror that surpasses the "Newfoundland dog" views of Melville's Captain Delano, some of Twain’s writing, or even the virulent racism in Faulkner's South.
      2. Schoolteacher carried around a book containing “human” and “animal” attributes by which he categorized people.
      3. Moreover, Schoolteacher is in control of the language itself. The power of defining belongs to the definers. This is a political principle with enormous ramifications.

II. The war at the core of this novel is against Schoolteacher's way of seeing things. It is here that Morrison scores her greatest triumph.
   A. Morrison writes the story of slavery somatically, in terms of the body.
      1. Remember Baby Suggs reclaiming the body, the whole body, for the black slave.
2. The curse of slavery is precisely its treatment of the black subject as a commodity. We saw this in Stowe's book, and we see it even more sharply here. The black person's body is owned by his or her owner, and it is graphically—horrendously—reshaped by the owners, by dint of collars and bits and torture.

3. The central trauma of Sethe's life is not only the murder of her baby, but also the abuse she suffered at the hands of Schoolteacher and his two sons. Trying to escape when she is seven months pregnant, she is caught and beaten, so that her back retains permanently a "chokecherry tree." Worse still, the white boys take her milk. How much do we understand?

4. This book is dedicated to the flow of the human body, a flow that is to be found in water, urine, and milk. We are invited to see that life can be shaped by these fluids, that our obsession with contour and line (the old ploys of phallogocentrism, the way we still teach our students to write and to think) could be rethought. This book offers an alternative philosophy.

5. We see too an ethos of physical kindness, a wisdom of creatures that espouses tenderness and compassion. The body's torture is reborn in lyrical form here.

6. "They took my milk," Sethe says. Do we understand? Milk is the fluid umbilical cord that joins and nurtures life. Fluids are the prime matter of human existence. (Our bodies are 65 percent water; our globe is mostly water.) Milk is what "joins" mother and child. We will also learn that Sethe's husband, Halle, witnessed the scene of the boys taking Sethe's milk and that it "broke him." He rubbed his face with clabber and butter and was never seen again. Compare this with the end of The Grapes of Wrath where Rose of Sharon gives her milk to an unknown man and saves his life.

7. Morrison is performing a special kind of cultural labor here: She is translating the institution of slavery back into its horrid somatic terms. She is locating the monstrous social scheme against the somatic one of nurturance and survival.

III. Beloved is ultimately about the creation of a new language, not only a language of the body, but a language of human connection and connectedness, so that we see the illusion of autonomous selfhood. This is what the mother-child bond illustrates.

A. Sethe's own mother haunts this book, and invariably she appears as some kind of foreign language. Mothers are separated from babies—this is the essence of the slave system—but Sethe's mother wants her child to know her, to recognize her. Beloved's arrival triggers key memories of Sethe's mother, as more material gets unclogged and starts to flow.

B. Sethe finally realizes that she was loved and wanted by her mother. This addresses the horrible reality of slave culture: There is no psychic grounding for the child. In Sethe's case, human love existed at the source of her life.

C. The book's most stunning achievement is in its language of connection, of "joining."
   1. We hear the language in Denver's musings about Beloved.
   2. Sethe, too, experiences it with Beloved.
   3. Most unforgettable of all is the dithyrambic song of Beloved, her "joining" with Sethe and Denver, her "return" from "over there." Morrison's language here fuses together the memories of Beloved with the archetypal stories: The voyage of the slave ships from Africa, the horrible conditions of sexual and material abuse, the entire Middle Passage through which those "Sixty Million" came, the striking fusions between womb/tomb/slave ship and sea/uterine fluid. Morrison is writing about a kind of connectedness that is prenatal, that perhaps we all yearn back to, which is the secret of true life. This is her contribution to American classics.

Readings:
Essential: Morrison, Beloved (New American Library, 1988)

Topics for Further Consideration:
1. Compare the uses of memory and storytelling in Faulkner and Morrison.
2. Make the case that *Beloved* is an example of women's writing.
Lecture 84

Conclusion to Classics of American Literature

Scope: The materials of this course are too rich, various, and bristling to be wrapped up in some neat formulas at the close. These texts will continue to inspire readings and interpretations at variance with each other and at variance with those put forth in these lectures. That is a sign of health. Yet, there is something to be said for the enriched sense of perspective, even of melody, that starts to become perceivable when the journey is finished, when the texts can be seen in relation to one another. If we revisit some of the sites on our itinerary, some gathering clusters of meaning do start to become visible. Perhaps the most salutary of all concerns the sea change that the great theme of freedom undergoes throughout this course. The hunger for inventing one's life, with us from Franklin to Fitzgerald and Miller, is no less real as hunger but more qualified, more somber, and in some sense more "expensive." When we compare Huck's maneuvering room to that of Morrison's ex-slaves, or Gilman's embattled woman to the adventurers in Crane and Hemingway, or James's monied heroes to Steinbeck's starving Joads, we acquire a more resonant, multidimensional picture of the American story. Our sense of possibility and dream is more checked and chastened, as refracted through the lenses of class, race, and gender. The commitment to the future, which is the American paradigm, becomes a more complex affair, as we learn the dark lessons of these books about origins, the shaping role of the past, and how we all live in time. Even here there are grounds for celebration, not despair. To see that our dreams come with responsibilities, or that our connection with others goes back through history, is a dazzling sight, a vital recognition that we are part of something large and real. The guiding principle of this course is that literature grants us privileged access to these discoveries and expands our sense of who we are and what life portends.

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

1. Trace the American notion of freedom in several texts considered in this course,
2. Summarize the dual perception of dream presented by several authors, and
3. Explain the "cardiac principle" and how it has functioned in American literature.

Outline

I. In a conclusion, it is appropriate to ask if there are any figures in the carpet, any gathering patterns that we can now perceive.

A. The theme that "finances" these texts and our lives is that of freedom. It is at the core of American life and literature. How does freedom fare in these texts? What about the notion of the self-made man?
   1. Benjamin Franklin starts us with our quintessential success story. Does it continue to play?
   2. Fitzgerald's Gatsby and Faulkner's Sutpen are two of the 20th century's most fascinating and disturbing examples of the self-made man. Here we are invited to see both the grandeur of the dream, as well as its potential for blindness and inhumanity.
   3. By the time of Miller's salesman, Willy Loman, we know that something in the dream is in trouble, is coming unraveled.

B. Further, these texts oblige us to question the universality of the dream, the issue of how available it truly is, even as myth. Is it meaningful to the women in these texts?
   1. Hawthorne's Hester Prynne is arguably the boldest rebel in our literature. Her radical free-thinking terrifies the authorities, and we sense that it terrifies her author as well.
   2. Gilman's anguished protagonist in "The Yellow Wallpaper" is the most disturbing of all, because her freedom is unmistakably allied to madness. It is as if the imagination can only turn in on itself when there are no avenues of social action available or no freedom to go in that direction.
3. Early 20th-century literature is saturated with male fear and anxiety concerning female freedom, authority, and pleasure. Consider Eliot's Prufrock or his maimed Fisher King; Hemingway's emasculated Jake Barnes, who is paired with the "bull," Lady Brett; Hemingway's emancipated figure of Catherine Bourne, who takes over the agenda and battles the male; or Faulkner's Quentin Compson, who manifestly fails to protect or prevent his sister Caddy in her sexual maturation and desire.

4. Other more oblique stories become readable in this light: Rip Van Winkle's escape from marriage; Wakefield's exit from marriage; the combined exits of Ishmael, Ahab, and Thoreau as they head for the seas or Walden Pond; Huck on the raft; the adventures of Crane and even James.

5. The final book of the course, Morrison's Beloved, is the text most written under the sign of female libido, "thick love," a world of feeling and emotion that is fundamentally fluid. It is here that the male projects of line and rational form are most threatened. Morrison has memorably labeled such projects as those of "Schoolteacher."

6. Morrison's book shows just how unfree black people have been, how the legacy of slavery is a devastating one. She richly completes the analysis of "self" begun by Stowe in Uncle Tom's Cabin. The self is part of a larger construct; the mother/child bond is indestructible; individuation is a fiction.

7. Faulkner is among our greatest writers in this area. He gives us some of the most unforgettable formulations for our connectedness, our (often annihilating) discovery of linkage and contingency. Faulkner reconceives the virtues of intellect and emotion, suggesting that love alone is the boosting power that takes us into the otherwise closed worlds of others and the past. Touch allows us to go beyond our natural restrictions; it is our bond with others in an "overpass to love."

C. Finally, the American dream, with its belief in a future we can make for ourselves, free of the constraints of birth and the past, remains a great dream but is nonetheless subject to scrutiny in these texts. Yes, America remains the nation of the future, but there are drawbacks.

1. Age is held in contempt, thereby reversing the value systems of all traditional cultures.

2. These books tell us, over and over, that the past is real, that all of us come from somewhere, are formed by culture and family, have origins. Nowhere is this more graphic than in the Sutpen saga.

3. Yet, even in Absalom, the story of a monomaniacal man who sacrificed everything to his design, we see the moving counter-thrust of imagination, language, and love. Quentin and Shreve are, in some crucial way, to make "good" on the tragedy of the Civil War. One of Faulkner's key images here is the blood.

4. Blood serves as a perfect figure for human connectedness, for the flow that binds and articulates. Our writers give homage to that flow, the "cardiac principle," the link between reader and text.

5. We start the course with a man falling asleep, and we close with a text of painful awakening, whereby the body is restored to full articulation.

II. We may understand reading itself as a waterway, a fluid entry into and out of worlds we could not otherwise know.

A. This liquid journey is at the core of Twain's Huckleberry Finn, as the young boy comes to understand the humanity of the black man he rescues.

B. This is also the trajectory made by the Joad family in Steinbeck's epic fiction of the 1930s. We see Ma Joad come to understand that the human family is larger than she thought.

C. Morrison's book creates for us an image of this river as no less than the Styx, suggesting that the line between the living and the dead is fictional, that it is "overpassed" all the time, just as Tom Joad tells his mother that he'll be wherever there is suffering and injustice.

D. We close with our literature's most mythic evocation of the American dream, Fitzgerald's depiction of the Dutch sailors arriving at the New World, yearning for a free future, coming from an existing past.
Timeline

17th century ....................... The “Great Migration” brings the Puritans and Pilgrims from England to America.

1692 .................................. John Hawthorne, an ancestor of author Nathaniel Hawthorne, officiates at a number of the infamous witch trials in Salem, Massachusetts.


1706 .................................. Birth of Benjamin Franklin.

1721 .................................. Benjamin Franklin, at age 15, starts his own newspaper, The New England Courant, and begins to write essays.

1730 .................................. Franklin is named the “Official Printer of Pennsylvania.”

1732–1757 ......................... Franklin writes Poor Richard’s Almanac, the first American periodical.

1736 .................................. Franklin organizes the Union Fire Co.

1737 .................................. Franklin becomes Philadelphia’s postmaster.

1741 .................................. Franklin invents the “Franklin fireplace” (stove).

1743 .................................. Franklin proposes the idea for the American Philosophical Society.

1745 .................................. Franklin begins to conduct experiments in electricity.

1747 .................................. Franklin organizes the Pennsylvania Militia.

1749 .................................. Franklin founds the Philadelphia Academy, which later became the University of Pennsylvania.

1751 .................................. Founding of Philadelphia Hospital, with the assistance of Franklin.

1752 .................................. Franklin conducts his famous experiment proving that lightning is electrical.

1753 .................................. Franklin receives honorary masters degrees from both Harvard and Yale.

1757 .................................. Franklin elected the representative of Philadelphia (Pennsylvania) to England.

1758 .................................. Jonathan Edwards dies.

1759 .................................. Franklin receives an honorary doctorate from the University of St. Andrews in Scotland.

1762 .................................. Franklin receives an honorary doctorate from Oxford University.

1771 .................................. Franklin begins writing his Autobiography.

1776 .................................. Declaration of Independence written and signed. Beginning of the Revolutionary War.

1783 .................................. End of the Revolutionary War.

1783 .................................. Birth of Washington Irving.

1790 .................................. Death of Benjamin Franklin.

1803 .................................. Birth of Ralph Waldo Emerson.

1804 .................................. Birth of Nathaniel Hawthorne.

1809 .................................. Birth of Edgar Allan Poe.


1817 .................................. Birth of Henry David Thoreau.

1819 .................................. Washington Irving publishes “The Legend of Sleepy Hollow” and “Rip Van Winkle.”

1819 .................................. Birth of Herman Melville.
1819.................................. Birth of Walt Whitman.
1821.................................. Ralph Waldo Emerson graduates from Harvard.
1829.................................. Emerson marries Ellen Tucker.
1830.................................. Birth of Emily Dickinson.
1831.................................. Emerson’s wife dies.
1832.................................. Spurred by his wife’s death, Emerson resigns his ministry.
1835.................................. Edgar Allan Poe writes “Berenice.”
1835.................................. Birth of Samuel Clemens (Mark Twain).
1836.................................. Emerson publishes his essay “Nature.”
1836.................................. Poe marries Virginia Clemm, his 14-year-old cousin.
1837.................................. Emerson makes his famous speech at Harvard, “The American Scholar.”
1837.................................. Nathaniel Hawthorne publishes his collection of stories entitled *Twice-Told Tales*.
1838.................................. Poe pens “Ligeia.”
1839.................................. Poe publishes “The Fall of the House of Usher,” considered the quintessential horror story, as well as Poe’s masterwork. Poe also publishes “William Wilson” during this year.
1841.................................. Emerson publishes several of his best-known essays, including “History,” “Self-Reliance,” and “Circles.”
1841.................................. Poe publishes “The Murders in the Rue Morgue,” considered one of the first detective stories, along with “Descent into the Maelstrom,” an early science fiction story.
1842.................................. Poe publishes “The Pit and the Pendulum.”
1843.................................. Poe publishes “The Black Cat” and “The Tell-Tale Heart.”
1843.................................. Birth of Henry James.
1844.................................. Emerson publishes the essay “Experience.”
1844.................................. Poe publishes “The Balloon-Hoax,” a piece that could be considered science fiction.
1845.................................. Poe publishes “The Raven,” as well as “The Purloined Letter,” considered one of the first detective stories, and “The Facts in the Case of M. Valdemar.”
1846.................................. Emerson publishes “The Poet,” his chief statement about the literary agenda of the future.
1846.................................. Henry David Thoreau spends one night in jail for his refusal to pay several years’ poll tax as protest against the role of Massachusetts in perpetuating slavery.
1846.................................. Poe’s wife dies of consumption.
1846.................................. Poe writes “The Philosophy of Composition, or How I Wrote ‘The Raven,’” the famous account (perhaps spoofing) of his poetic practice. Poe also publishes “The Cask of Amontillado.”
1846.................................. Herman Melville publishes *Typee*.
1847.................................. Melville publishes *Omoo*.
1848.................................. Thoreau publishes his essay “Civil Disobedience.”
1848.................................. Attempted revolutions fail in several European nations.
1849.................................. Poe publishes “The Bells,” “Eldorado,” and “Annibal Lee.”
1849.......................... Melville publishes *Mardi*.
1849.......................... Death of Edgar Allan Poe.
1850.......................... Hawthorne publishes *The Scarlet Letter*, perhaps his best-known work. Also in this year, Melville publishes *White Jacket, or The World in a Man of War*.
1850.......................... Karl Marx writes *The Communist Manifesto*.
1850.......................... Passage of the Fugitive Slave Act, which required Northerners to return runaway slaves to their former masters.
1851.......................... Thoreau becomes active in the abolitionist movement.
1851.......................... Melville meets Hawthorne in person. In this same year, he publishes his masterwork, *Moby Dick*.
1852.......................... Harriet Beecher Stowe publishes *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*.
1853.......................... Melville publishes the short story “Bartleby, the Scrivener.”
1854.......................... Thoreau publishes his masterwork, *Walden*.
1855.......................... Walt Whitman publishes the first version of *Leaves of Grass*.
1856.......................... Whitman’s poem “Crossing Brooklyn Ferry” published in a version of *Leaves of Grass*.
1856.......................... Melville publishes the short story “Benito Cereno.”
1856.......................... Birth of Sigmund Freud.
1859.......................... Thoreau reads publicly “A Plea for Captain John Brown.”
1859.......................... Washington Irving dies.
1859.......................... Petroleum is discovered.
1859.......................... Whitman writes “Out of the Cradle Endlessly Rocking.”
1860.......................... Whitman publishes the collections of poems *Children of Adam* and *Calamus*.
1860.......................... Birth of Charlotte Perkins Gilman.
1861.......................... Start of the American Civil War.
1862.......................... Death of Henry David Thoreau.
1862.......................... Emily Dickinson has her literary exchange with noted critic Thomas Wentworth Higginson.
1864.......................... Death of Nathaniel Hawthorne.
1865.......................... End of the American Civil War.
1867.......................... Mark Twain publishes the short story “The Celebrated Jumping Frog of Calaveras County.”
1869.......................... Twain publishes *Innocents Abroad*.
1871.......................... Birth of Stephen Crane.
1871.......................... Franco-Prussian War.
1874.......................... Birth of Robert Frost.
1875 .................................. Public reburial and dedication of Poe’s remains.
1876 .................................. Twain publishes *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer*.
1879 .................................. Henry James writes the first book on Nathaniel Hawthorne.
1881 .................................. James publishes *A Portrait of a Lady*.
1882 .................................. Death of Ralph Waldo Emerson.
1886 .................................. Death of Emily Dickinson.
1885 .................................. Twain publishes *Huckleberry Finn*, his acclaimed masterpiece, which was promptly banned by the Concord Public Library.
1887 .................................. Charlotte Perkins Gilman gives birth to a daughter, afterward suffering from post-partum depression.
1888 .................................. Birth of T. S. Eliot.
1888 .................................. Birth of Eugene O’Neill.
1889 .................................. Twain publishes *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur’s Court*.
1891 .................................. Death of Herman Melville.
1892 .................................. Death of Walt Whitman. Publication of “The Wound Dresser.”
1892 .................................. Gilman publishes the short story “The Yellow Wallpaper.”
1894 .................................. Twain publishes *Pudd’nhead Wilson*.
1894 .................................. Robert Frost publishes his first poem.
1895 .................................. Crane publishes *The Red Badge of Courage*.
1896 .................................. Death of Harriet Beecher Stowe.
1896 .................................. Birth of F. Scott Fitzgerald.
1896–1897 ....................... Crane is on steamship, *Commodore*, carrying arms for Cuban rebels, which sinks. Crane spends 30 hours in a small boat.
1897 .................................. Crane covers the Greco-Turkish War.
1897 .................................. Birth of William Faulkner.
1898 .................................. Crane covers the Spanish-American War.
1898 .................................. Crane publishes his short story “The Open Boat,” based on his ordeal at sea in 1897. Crane also pens the short story “The Blue Hotel.”
1898 .................................. James publishes *The Turn of the Screw*.
1898 .................................. Gilman publishes *Women and Economics*.
1899 .................................. Crane publishes “The Monster.”
1899 .................................. Birth of Ernest Hemingway.
1900 .................................. Death of Stephen Crane.
1902 .................................. James publishes *The Wings of the Dove*.
1902 .................................. Birth of John Steinbeck.
1903 .................................. James publishes *The Ambassadors*. 

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1904.................................James publishes *The Golden Bowl*.
1910.................................Death of Mark Twain.
1911.................................Birth of Tennessee Williams.
1913.................................Gilman writes “Why I Wrote ‘The Yellow Wallpaper.’”
1913.................................Frost publishes his first book of poems, *A Boy’s Will*.
1914.................................Birth of Ralph Ellison.
1915.................................Birth of Arthur Miller.
1916.................................Death of Henry James.
1917.................................F. Scott Fitzgerald joins the army.
1920.................................Fitzgerald publishes his first novel, *This Side of Paradise*.
1920.................................Eugene O’Neill publishes *The Emperor Jones*.
1922.................................Eliot publishes his most influential poem, “The Wasteland.”
1922.................................Fitzgerald publishes *The Beautiful and the Damned*.
1922.................................O’Neill publishes *The Hairy Ape*.
1925.................................Eliot publishes “The Hollow Men.”
1925.................................Fitzgerald publishes his masterpiece, *The Great Gatsby*.
1925.................................Ernest Hemingway publishes his first major work, *In Our Time*.
1925.................................O’Neill publishes *Desire Under the Elms*.
1926.................................Hemingway publishes *The Sun Also Rises*.
1926.................................William Faulkner publishes his first novel, *Soldier’s Pay*.
1927.................................Eliot becomes a British citizen.
1927.................................Faulkner publishes *Mosquitoes*.
1929.................................Hemingway publishes *A Farewell to Arms*.
1929.................................Faulkner publishes *Sartoris*, now known as *Flags in the Dust*.
1929.................................Faulkner publishes *The Sound and the Fury*, considered to be his breakthrough text.
1929.................................Beginning of the Great Depression.
1930.................................Eliot publishes “Ash Wednesday.”
1930.................................Faulkner publishes *As I Lay Dying*, the sister text to *The Sound and the Fury*.
1931.................................Faulkner publishes *Sanctuary*.
1931.................................O’Neill publishes *Mourning Becomes Electra*.
1931.................................Birth of Toni Morrison.
1932.................................Hemingway publishes his treatise on bullfighting, *Death in the Afternoon*.
1932.................................Faulkner publishes *Light in August*.
1934.................................Fitzgerald publishes *Tender Is the Night*.
1935.................................Death of Charlotte Perkins Gilman.
1935.................................. Hemingway publishes his treatise on hunting, *Green Hills of Africa*.
1935.................................. John Steinbeck publishes *Tortilla Flat*.
1936.................................. Faulkner publishes *Absalom, Absalom!*, an epic of the Civil War.
1936.................................. O’Neill wins the Nobel Prize for Literature.
1938.................................. Death of Sigmund Freud.
1939.................................. Steinbeck publishes his masterpiece, *The Grapes of Wrath*.
1940.................................. Fitzgerald writes *The Last Tycoon*, left unfinished at his death in the same year.
1940.................................. Hemingway publishes *For Whom the Bell Tolls*.
1940.................................. Faulkner publishes *The Hamlet*.
1941.................................. End of the Great Depression; the United States enters World War II.
1942.................................. Faulkner publishes *Go Down, Moses*.
1943.................................. Eliot publishes the poem “Four Quartets.”
1945.................................. Tennessee Williams publishes *The Glass Menagerie*.
1946.................................. O’Neill publishes *The Iceman Cometh*.
1947.................................. Williams publishes *A Streetcar Named Desire*.
1947.................................. Eliot wins the Nobel Prize for Literature.
1947.................................. Arthur Miller publishes *All My Sons*.
1949.................................. Miller publishes *Death of a Salesman*.
1950.................................. Faulkner wins the Nobel Prize for Literature.
1951.................................. Williams publishes *The Rose Tattoo*.
1952.................................. Hemingway publishes *The Old Man and the Sea*.
1952.................................. Ralph Ellison publishes *Invisible Man*.
1953.................................. Ellison’s *Invisible Man* receives the National Book Award for fiction.
1953.................................. Death of Eugene O’Neill.
1953.................................. Miller publishes *The Crucible*.
1954.................................. Hemingway wins the Nobel Prize for Literature.
1955.................................. The full body of Emily Dickinson’s poetic works is published posthumously.
1955.................................. Williams publishes *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*.
1955.................................. Miller publishes *A View From the Bridge*.
1956.................................. O’Neill’s *Long Day’s Journey into Night*, which he had written in 1945, is published posthumously.
1957.................................. Williams publishes *Orpheus Descending*.
1958.................................. Williams publishes *Suddenly Last Summer*.
1959.................................. Lionel Trilling pays homage to Robert Frost on his 85th birthday, saying that Frost belongs in the great iconoclastic tradition of American literature.
1959.................................. Williams publishes *Sweet Bird of Youth*.
1961.................................. Death of Ernest Hemingway.
1961............................. Williams publishes *Night of the Iguana*.
1962............................. Steinbeck wins the Nobel Prize for Literature.
1962............................. Death of William Faulkner.
1963............................. Death of Robert Frost.
1964............................. Hemingway’s *Moveable Feast* published posthumously.
1965............................. Death of T. S. Eliot.
1968............................. Death of John Steinbeck.
1970............................. Hemingway’s *Islands in the Stream* published posthumously.
1974............................. Toni Morrison publishes *Sula*.
1977............................. Morrison publishes *Song of Solomon*.
1983............................. Death of Tennessee Williams.
1986............................. Hemingway’s final novel, *Garden of Eden*, is published posthumously.
1988............................. Morrison publishes her masterpiece, *Beloved*.
1992............................. Morrison publishes *Jazz*.
1993............................. Morrison wins the Nobel Prize for Literature.
1994............................. Death of Ralph Ellison.
1998............................. Morrison publishes *Paradise*. 
Aboriginal self: A concept defined by Ralph Waldo Emerson as an existing source of universal energy in which we all partake. This self is not in us, but rather, out in the world, and we must learn to move into it.

B’hoy: An American original character, one who challenges all niceties in pieties. The female counterpart is known as the g’hal (the gal).

Boutade: French term meaning a joke, a spoof, or a setup that partially hides its true meaning.

Brahmins: Term coined in the mid-1800s by the American writer Oliver Wendell Holmes to describe a class of New England intellectuals determined on the basis of birth, education, and scholarly pursuits.

Calvinism: Christian theology of the French church reformer John Calvin. The central Calvinist tenets include belief in the absolute sovereignty of God and the doctrine of justification by faith alone.

Classic: A work of literature having lasting significance or generally recognized worth. The canonical tests of American literature stem out of vital, often unresolvable, conflicts from their own moments in history. They are bristling with ambiguities and insights that bid to challenge the reader, in their own time, in the present day, and even in the future.

Coming of age: In American literature, an event or series of events that spurs a character to reach spiritual adulthood. These stories may or may not revolve around attainment of a character’s physical adulthood.

Cosmogony: Literally, the study of the universe’s origin. In literature, the writer’s personal theory of the universe, as reflected in his or her works.

Cosmos: As defined by Walt Whitman, a brash young man, a jaunty fellow with a robust ego.

Counterculture: A subculture, especially of young people, with values opposed to that of the established culture. Henry David Thoreau is often regarded as a major American counterculture hero.

Demiurge: The deity who fashions the world, a creative force. In literature, a character of such influential personality that he or she is an overpowering force in the story being told.

Double entendre: A word or turn of phrase having double meaning, especially when the second meaning is risqué. Ernest Hemingway’s works, for instance, revel in suggestions of dual meanings and dual sexuality.

Dualism: The division of body from spirit. Whereas most religious traditions assert that spirit is superior to body, some American writers—particularly Walt Whitman—reversed that notion in their works, insisting on the naturalness and sanctity of the body.

Dysfunction: Impaired or disorderly function of a cultural system, be it a family or a larger social group.

Empowered self: Often regarded as one of America’s worst gifts to modern culture, the concept that the individual is empowered to attain all he or she desires. Ralph Waldo Emerson presents the concept of the empowered, or “imperialistic,” self in his essay “Self-Reliance.”

Epiphany: A sudden manifestation of the meaning or essence of something or a sudden intuitive realization or perception of reality.

Epistemology: A division of philosophy that investigates the nature and origin of knowledge.

Existentialism: A philosophy that emphasizes the uniqueness and isolation of the individual experience in a hostile or indifferent universe. A frequent theme in American literature, which often stresses freedom of choice and responsibility for the consequences of one’s actions.

Expressionism: An artistic movement during the late 19th and early 20th centuries that emphasized subjective expression of the artist’s inner experience. Stephen Crane and Emily Dickinson personify this approach to writing, reconfiguring the world we know by clothing it in images and metaphors.

Feminism: A doctrine advocating the same political and economic rights for women as granted to men. Charlotte Perkins Gilman was an early feminist writer, well known for “The Yellow Wallpaper.”
**Fissured self**: Essentially, an existential collapse, when all one knows of the world unravels.

**Geworfenheit**: German term meaning that we are thrust into a world not of our own making or choosing; a sense of alienation from the world around us.

**Gothic**: A style of fiction emphasizing the grotesque, mysterious, and desolate.

**Hagiography**: A biography of saints. *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, though often criticized for being overly sentimental, became a black American hagiography that was part of opera and drama.

**Impressionism**: A movement in painting that originated in France in the late 19th century. Impressionist painters found many of their subjects around them rather than in history, which was then the accepted source of subject matter. Instead of painting an ideal of beauty that earlier artists had defined, the Impressionists tried to depict what they saw at a given moment. To achieve the appearance of spontaneity, Impressionist painters used broken brushstrokes of bright, often unmixed colors. The colors in Impressionist paintings have an overall luminosity because the painters avoided blacks and earth colors. The Impressionists also simplified their compositions, omitting detail to achieve a striking overall effect.

**Individualism**: The doctrine that society is an artificial device, existing only for the sake of its members as individuals and properly judged only according to criteria established by them as individuals.

**Isolationism**: A policy in which a nation’s interests are best served if the nation secludes itself from other nations and avoids forming alliances with them. In literature, this concept often has been applied to individuals, as in Ralph Waldo Emerson’s suggestion that we must “cultivate” our own earth, our own substance.

**Ludic**: Playful in a way that is spontaneous and without any particular purpose.

**Malaise**: A vague feeling of depression or illness.

**Manself**: A term created by John Steinbeck to describe and celebrate the human species; used in place of men and women. This manself is always struggling to make a success of his or her life and will prevail, no matter how terrible circumstances are.

**Metaphor**: A figure of speech in which a term is transferred from the object it ordinarily designates to an object it may designate only by implicit comparison or analogy. Metaphor allows the writer to yoke together diverse areas of experience and thought. Yet metaphor may also be suspected of falsely domesticating the world by substituting the poet’s own projections and fantasies for the “hard facts.”

**Metaphysics**: A branch of philosophy that systematically investigates the nature of first principles and problems of ultimate reality, including ontology and often cosmology. Also, critical or speculative philosophy.

**Modernism**: The 20th century saw the emergence of Modernism, which responded to the world’s complexity by asserting that the individual had the potential to achieve a broader perspective than that offered by any one society or its history. At the beginning of the 19th century, American authors struggled to convince the world that they had a history; by the 20th century, American authors, like European authors, had to grapple with more than enough history.

**Modus operandi**: A method of operating; a particular way of doing things.

**Motif**: An important and sometimes recurring theme or idea in a work of literature. Also called motive.

**Nantucketer**: A uniquely American hero presented in Herman Melville’s works. The Nantucketer is different from familiar examples of colonial character. Homespun in his manners, he is nonetheless ruler of the sea, hence, royalty in his own way.

**Naturalism**: A system of thought holding that all phenomena can be explained in terms of natural causes and laws without attributing supernatural significance to them. Also, the doctrine that all religious truths are derived from nature, not from revelation. In literature, Naturalism attempts to apply scientific theories to art.

**Organicism**: The concept that society is analogous to a biological organism, meaning that society’s overall organization—not the functioning of its individual parts—plays the principal role in determining its processes and destiny.
Oversoul: A spiritual essence or vital force in the universe that embraces all souls, thus transcending individual consciousness.

Perspectival narration: The literary technique of viewing society from the outside. A writer may write about a historical period in retrospect, for instance, though his or her characters do not know what events are coming.

Picaresque: A literary genre in which a rogue-hero’s escapades are depicted in a context of sharp social satire. Mark Twain’s Huckleberry Finn personifies such a character.

Poet of Babel: A term used to refer to poets who make us think that poetry could be nonsense, but rather, is the sound of the brain, the fabric of consciousness. Although poetry can be a description of the world, it can also be simply the representation of the experience of living with a brain and of sensing things, thinking things, and speaking things.

Polysemy: The existence of several meanings for a single word or phrase.

Postmodernism: The literal meaning of Postmodernism is “after Modernism”; in many ways, Postmodernism constitutes an attack on Modernist claims about the existence of truth and value. In disputing past assumptions, Postmodernists generally display a preoccupation with the inadequacy of language as a mode of communication. Inaccessible ideas and impenetrable prose also characterize many Postmodern texts, although the difficulties in this case are often intentional and reflect specific claims about the nature of language and meaning.

Puritanism: Scrupulous moral sternness, especially aversions to social pleasures and indulgences. These attitudes and worldviews stem from the doctrines and practices of the Puritans.

Realism: In art and literature, an attempt to describe human behavior and surroundings or to represent figures and objects exactly as they act or appear in life. Though attempts at Realism have been made throughout history in all the arts, the term is generally restricted to a movement that began in the mid-19th century, in reaction to the highly subjective approach of Romanticism.

Rite of passage: A genre in literature based on an anthropological concept concerning rituals that a young person goes through in growing up.

Romanticism: A movement in the literature of virtually every country of Europe, the United States, and Latin America that lasted from about 1750 to about 1870, characterized by reliance on the imagination and subjectivity of approach, freedom of thought and expression, and an idealization of nature.

Self-made man: A classic hero in American literature and history, the self-made man is successful through his own actions. Benjamin Franklin personifies the concept of the wildly successful self-made man.

Semiosis: The act of translating a word or visual signal into a cultural meaning, of taking language and turning it into meaning. In literature, the concept that words are signs of natural things, which in turn, are signs of spirit.

Sentimentalism: A tendency to express obvious or powerful feelings or emotions without appealing to reason, especially self-indulgent or nostalgic writing or expression. The Sentimental tradition is the great popular literary form of the 19th century.

Social contract: A voluntary agreement among people defining the relationship of individuals with one another and with government and, by this process, forming a distinct organized society. In the 17th and 18th centuries, the theory of a social compact among individuals of a society was linked with the doctrine of natural law.

Stereotype: An oversimplified standardized image or idea held by one person or group concerning another. In literature, a character meant to typify or conform to an unvarying pattern or manner, lacking in any individuality or depth.

Stream of consciousness: A fictional narrative technique, first used in the late 19th century to evince subjective as well as objective reality. It reveals the character’s feelings, thoughts, and actions, often following an associative rather than a logical sequence, without commentary by the author.

Symbolism: The use of symbols to invest things with a representative meaning, or to represent something abstract by something concrete.
Transcendentalism: In philosophy and literature, the belief that knowledge of reality is derived from intuitive sources, rather than from objective experience. Nearly all transcendentalist doctrines stem from the division of reality into a realm of spirit and a realm of matter. Such a division is made by many of the great religions of the world. Ralph Waldo Emerson and Henry David Thoreau are considered to embody what is known as American Transcendentalism.

Trope: A word, phrase, expression, or image that is used in a figurative way, usually for rhetorical effect. Metaphor is the quintessential trope in all of poetry.

Tuition: Learned knowledge, as opposed to intuition, innate or revealed knowledge.

Un-naming: This term refers to the literary cleansing of customary labels to install fresh perception. Emily Dickinson’s poetry typifies this sort of writing.

Vagina dentata: The teethed womb that is a sexual nightmare for the male who is terrified of what it could mean to think literally about moving into the womb.

Women’s writing: Writing in a feminist vein that features language deemed to be closer to the body. Some characteristics of this kind of writing include fluidity rather than line, openness to affect and libido, suspicion of repressive order, and attention to the somatic.
Biographical Notes

**Louis Armstrong** (1901–1971): American jazz, cornet, and trumpet player, singer, bandleader, and popular entertainer. Armstrong overcame poverty, a lack of formal education, and racism to become one of the most innovative and influential musicians of the 20th century and one of the most beloved entertainers in the world. He is perhaps best known for helping to pioneer a style known as swing, which later formed the basis for most jazz and rhythm-and-blues (R&B) music. Armstrong’s music had a profound influence on Ralph Ellison’s *Invisible Man*.

**Charles Baudelaire** (1821–1867): A leading 19th-century French poet who seized on Edgar Allan Poe’s work and career as the epitome of genius, becoming Poe’s champion and translator in France. As the founder of Symbolism in poetry, Baudelaire ensured Poe’s continued impact on poetic development.

**Catherine Beecher** (1800–1878): Sister to Harriet Beecher Stowe, Catherine Beecher wrote *A Treatise on Domestic Economy*, dedicated to “the women of America in whose hands rest the real destinies of the Republic.”

**Samuel Clemens**: See Mark Twain.

**Stephen Crane** (1871–1900): American novelist and poet, one of the first American exponents of the naturalistic style of writing. Crane is known for his pessimistic and often brutal portrayals of the human condition, along with a sympathetic understanding of character.

**Emily Dickinson** (1830–1886): America’s most well known female poet and one of the foremost authors in American literature. Dickinson’s simply constructed, acutely intellectual writings examine issues vital to humanity: the agonies and ecstasies of love, sexuality, the unfathomable nature of death, the horrors of war, God and religious belief, the importance of humor, and musings on the significance of literature, music, and art.

**Thomas Eakins** (1844–1916): Regarded by most critics as the most outstanding American painter of the 19th century and, by many, as the greatest his country has yet produced, Eakins was an admirer of Walt Whitman. He was well known for his painting *The Swimming Hole*, as well as paintings of the male body and portraits of Whitman.

**Jonathan Edwards** (1703–1758): Often called the “last great Puritan,” this theologian and intellectual authored such fierce sermons as “Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God.”

**T. S. Eliot** (1888–1965): American-born writer regarded as one of the greatest poets of the 20th century. Eliot also wrote drama and literary criticism. In his plays, which use unrhymed verse, he attempted to revive poetic drama for the contemporary audience. Eliot won the Nobel Prize for literature in 1948.

**Ralph Ellison** (1914–1994): American author and educator, one of the most influential black American writers of the 20th century. Ellison uses rich, varied, and powerful language to portray the black experience in all its vitality and complexity. His best-known work, *Invisible Man*, expounds the theme that American society willfully ignores blacks and was one of the first works to describe modern racial problems in the United States from a black American point of view.

**Ralph Waldo Emerson** (1803–1882): Emerson, the guiding spirit of American Romanticism, lays the groundwork for a key tradition in American thinking and writing in his *Essays*, written from the 1830s through the middle of the century.

**William Faulkner** (1897–1962): American novelist, known for his epic portrayal, in some 20 novels, of the tragic conflict between the old and the new South. Although his intricate plots and complex narrative style alienated many readers of his early writings, Faulkner was a towering figure in American literature during the first half of the 20th century. With Ernest Hemingway, he is usually considered one of the two greatest American novelists of his era. Faulkner was particularly noted for the eloquent richness of his prose style and for the unique blend of tragedy and humor in his works.

**F. Scott Fitzgerald** (1896–1940): American writer whose novels and short stories chronicled changing social attitudes during the 1920s, a period dubbed the “Jazz Age” by the author. He is best known for his novels *The Great Gatsby* (1925) and *Tender Is the Night* (1934), both of which depict disillusion with the American dream of self-betterment, wealth, and success through hard work and perseverance.
Benjamin Franklin (1706–1790): Printer, scientist, statesman, and author in the early 18th century, Franklin personified the American concept of the “self-made man,” particularly through his *Autobiography*. Franklin is particularly well known for his experiments in electricity; his launching of *Poor Richard’s Almanac*, the first American periodical; and his role in the Revolutionary War. His is the great American story of tireless achievement, assertion, and adult responsibility in the difficult arenas of business, government, and politics.

Sigmund Freud (1856–1938): The father of psychoanalysis, Freud articulated the concepts of the unconscious and infantile sexuality and repression and proposed a tripartite account of the mind’s structure, all as part of a then–radically new conceptual and therapeutic frame of reference for the understanding of human psychological development and the treatment of abnormal mental conditions. His conclusions affected the interpretation of much American literature during and after his lifetime.

Robert Frost (1874–1963): American poet who drew his images from the New England countryside and his language from New England speech. Although Frost’s images and voice often seem familiar and old, his observations have an edge of skepticism and irony that make his work, upon rereading, never as old-fashioned, easy, or carefree as it first appears. In its embodiment of both tradition and skepticism, Frost’s poetry helped provide a link between the American poetry of the 19th century and that of the 20th century.

Margaret Fuller (1810–1850): A 19th-century feminist writer and one of the great radical women among the Transcendentalists. Fuller was a journalist and edited *Dial Magazine*, working closely with Ralph Waldo Emerson. Nathaniel Hawthorne may have modeled aspects of Hester Prynne’s character in *The Scarlet Letter* on Fuller.

Charlotte Perkins Gilman (1860–1935): American feminist and writer, best known for her book *Women and Economics* (1898), which has become a feminist classic. She was born Charlotte Anna Perkins in Hartford, Connecticut. She was educated at the Rhode Island School of Design and worked as a teacher and commercial artist before devoting herself to feminism.

Nathaniel Hawthorne (1804–1862): American novelist whose works are deeply concerned with the ethical problems of sin, punishment, and atonement. Hawthorne is considered America’s first great classical writer and is particularly known for his novel *The Scarlet Letter*.

Ernest Hemingway (1899–1961): American novelist and short-story writer, whose style is brisk, terse, cleansed of adjectives, seemingly objective, and aimed at rendering the precise moment and feeling of experience. Hemingway’s writings and his personal life exerted a profound influence on American writers of his time; in fact, Hemingway is usually considered one of the two greatest American novelists of his era (the other being William Faulkner). Many of his works are regarded as classics of American literature.

Washington Irving (1783–1859): Often called the father of the American short story, Irving is best known for two stories: “The Legend of Sleepy Hollow” and “Rip Van Winkle.” His work is considered to precede early writings of the great Transcendentalists—Emerson, Thoreau, and Hawthorne.

Henry James (1843–1916): American expatriate writer whose masterly fiction juxtaposed American innocence and European experience in a series of intense, psychologically complex works. James’s work is characterized by leisurely pacing and subtle delineation of character rather than by dramatic incidents or complicated plots. His major writings, highly sensitive examples of the objective psychological novel, deal with the world of leisure and sophistication he had grown to know intimately in Europe.

Toussaint L’Ouverture (1743–1803): Haitian general, now known as “the Precursor,” and leader of the Haitian slave revolt, a 1791 black slave uprising against the French colonial regime. After France abolished slavery in the territory in 1794, Toussaint supported the French rulers of the country against British invaders and was made a general in 1795. In 1801, he succeeded, after many struggles, in liberating Saint-Domingue from French control and became president-for-life of a new republic.

Herman Melville (1819–1891): American novelist and major literary figure whose exploration of psychological and metaphysical themes foreshadowed 20th-century literary concerns. His works remained in obscurity until the 1920s, when his genius was finally recognized.
Arthur Miller (1915–): American dramatist whose works are concerned with the responsibility of each individual to other members of society. Simply and colloquially written, Miller’s plays spring from his social conscience and from his compassion for those who are vulnerable to the false values imposed on them by society.

Toni Morrison (1931–): American writer whose works deal with the black experience and celebrate the black community. Morrison’s work features mythic elements, sharp observation, compassion, and poetic language and is often concerned with the relationship between the individual and society. In 1993, she won the Nobel Prize in literature.

Eugene O’Neill (1888–1953): American playwright whose work dramatizes the plight of people driven by elemental passions, by memory and dream, and by an awareness of the forces that threaten to overwhelm them. His early plays (1916–1920) helped initiate American theater’s shift away from elegant parlor dramas and toward gritty naturalistic plays.

Edgar Allan Poe (1809–1849): Best known for his poems and short fiction, Poe is credited with transforming the short story from anecdote to art. He virtually created the detective story and perfected the psychological thriller. He also produced some of the most influential literary criticism of his time—important theoretical statements on poetry and the short story.

Sir Walter Scott (1771–1832): Scottish novelist and poet considered to be the creator of the historical and the regional novel. He may have influenced the works of Nathaniel Hawthorne.

John Steinbeck (1902–1968): American writer and Nobel laureate, who described in his work the unremitting struggle of people who depend on the soil for their livelihood. Steinbeck’s novels can all be classified as social novels dealing with the economic problems of rural labor, but there is also a streak of worship of the soil in his books, which does not always agree with his matter-of-fact sociological approach.

Wallace Stevens (1879–1955): American poet whose works deal mainly with the individual’s interaction with the outside world. Stevens used sensuous, elaborate imagery and elevated, precise word choice to express subtle philosophical themes. He frequently contrasted the bleakness and monotony of modern industrialized life with the richness of nature.

Harriet Beecher Stowe (1811–1896): American author most famous for her anti-slavery novel, *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, one of the most influential American texts written by either man or woman and, possibly, the first American social protest novel.

Henry David Thoreau (1817–1862): American essayist, poet, and practical philosopher, renowned for having lived the doctrines of Transcendentalism, as recorded in his masterwork, *Walden*, and for having been a vigorous advocate of civil liberties, as evidenced in the essay “Civil Disobedience.”

Lionel Trilling (1905–1975): American educator and influential literary critic. For most of his career, Trilling taught at Columbia University. In his books, he used psychological and sociological methods to elucidate cultural values. One of his major concerns was the relationship between the self and society. Trilling paid homage to poet Robert Frost on Frost’s 85th birthday.

Nat Turner (1800–1831): American slave and leader of a black slave revolt in 1831. As a result of Nat Turner’s revolt, southern legislatures imposed stricter control on slaves, and the movement to abolish slavery, which had previously enjoyed some support in the South, became a northern phenomenon.

Mark Twain (1835–1910): Pen name for Samuel Langhorne Clemens, American writer and humorist, whose best work is characterized by broad, often irreverent humor or biting social satire. Twain’s writing is also known for realism of place and language, memorable characters, and hatred of hypocrisy and oppression.

Vincent Van Gogh (1853–1890): Dutch Post-Impressionist painter, generally considered the greatest Dutch painter and draughtsman after Rembrandt. He powerfully influenced the current of Expressionism in modern art. Among his masterpieces are numerous self-portraits and the well-known “Starry Night.” An admirer of Whitman, Van Gogh corresponded with the American poet.

Booker T. Washington (1856–1915): American educator who urged blacks to attempt to uplift themselves through educational attainments and economic advancement.
Walt Whitman (1819–1892): American poet whose work boldly asserts the worth of the individual and the oneness of all humanity. Whitman’s defiant break with traditional poetic concerns and style exerted a major influence on American thought and literature.

Tennessee Williams (1911–1983): American playwright and two-time Pulitzer Prize winner, whose works are set largely in the American South. As a playwright, fiction writer, poet, and essayist, Williams helped transform the contemporary idea of Southern literature. He not only paved the way for other writers but also helped the South find a strong voice, where before it had been heard only as a whisper.
Comprehensive Bibliography


